

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive

At 10.00 am on Thursday 12th October, 2023 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Jason Smithers (Leader of the Council) (Chair)

Councillor Matt Binley

Councillor David Brackenbury

Councillor Lloyd Bunday

Councillor Scott Edwards

Councillor Helen Harrison

Councillor David Howes

Councillor Harriet Pentland

Councillor Mark Rowley

Also in attendance – Councillors Wendy Brackenbury, Matt Keane, Lyn Buckingham, Valerie Anslow, Ross Armour and Dorothy Maxwell

508 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of the Deputy Leader of the Council, Cllr Helen Howell.

Apologies were also received from:

- Monitoring Officer, Adele Wylie
- Executive Director of Finance, Janice Gotts

509 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 14th September 2023

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2023 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

510 Members' Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

511 Notifications of requests to address the meeting

The Chair, Councillor Jason Smithers reported that there were requests to address the meeting as set out below:

Agenda Item	Speakers
Item 5 - Performance Indicator Report 2023/24 (Period 5 –August 2023)	Cllr Valerie Anslow
Item 6 - North Northamptonshire Future Vision – Big50 Progress Update	Cllrs Dorothy Maxwell, Matt Keane and Valerie Anslow
Item 7 – Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022-23	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 8 - Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Funding	Cllrs Matt Keane and Dorothy Maxwell
Item 9 – NNC Development Services and Regulatory Services Case Management Systems (CMS) Replacement	Cllr Matt Keane
Item 10 – Procurement of a Heating Contractor for Housing Stock	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell and Lyn Buckingham
Item 11 – Home to School Transport Dynamic Purchasing System	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 12 - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report 2022-23	Cllrs Dorothy Maxwell, Valerie Anslow and Lyn Buckingham
Item 14 - Partnership Governance Framework and Register of Significant Partnerships	Cllr Lyn Buckingham
Item 15 - National Non-Domestic Rates and Housing Benefit Overpayment Write-Offs	Cllr Lyn Buckingham
Item 16 - Capital Programme Update 2023/24	Cllr Lyn Buckingham
Item 17 - Budget Forecast 2023-24 at Period 5	Cllr Lyn Buckingham and Dorothy Maxwell

Cllr Dorothy Maxwell opted not to speak in relation to agenda items 8, 10 and 12

Cllr Lyn Buckingham opted not to speak in relation to agenda item 16.

512 Performance Indicator Report 2023/24 (Period 5 - August 2023)

The Chair invited Cllr Valerie Anslow to address the meeting. Cllr Anslow noted the overall improvement in figures for children missing from education but stated that figures for absenteeism needed monitoring with support provided to schools, children and parents in relation to this issue.

The Chair then invited the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, Cllr Lloyd Bunday to introduce a report that sought to provide an update on the performance of the Council across a range of services as measured by performance

indicators (PIs), as well as setting out the progress that was being made in the development of the Council's performance monitoring arrangements.

Cllr Bunday reported that four quarterly indicators had been missing from the report submitted to the September meeting of Executive and for completeness these were now included as part of the report before members; two of the indicators were moving in a positive direction, with two well inside tolerance levels.

The meeting heard that despite the ongoing cost of living crisis, Council Tax and Business Rates collections remained strong, with the situation continuing to be monitored closely.

The Period 5 report showed 18 indicators on or exceeding their target, with eight inside tolerance levels and seven performing below target levels. Of the PIs reported for the period, 22 had shown improvement with 11 deteriorating since the previous reporting period.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to welcome the indicators as providing a valuable position of the Council's performance across a number of key areas. Cllr Brackenbury referred to the positive figures relating to the Planning Service with performance above target in most areas, although further improvement work was still required.

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to reference Cllr Anslow's comments regarding absenteeism from schools, noting that there were some very complex individual cases to take into account, although absenteeism figures would be presented to the next meeting of Executive having been considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee two days previously. Cllr Edwards also stated that staffing issues within the Children's Trust were behind the low figures of current cases detailed within the relevant indicator, although a plan was in place to increase the number of cases being dealt with.

RESOLVED

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the performance of the Council as measured by the available indicators at Period 5 (August) 2023/24, set out in the appendix to this report.

Reason for Recommendations – to better understand the Council's performance as measured by Key Performance Indicators as at Period 5 (August) 2023/24.

Alternative Options Considered: Reporting performance data on a less frequent basis is an option but monthly reporting is considered useful at this stage of the Council's existence, reporting alongside budget information.

513 North Northamptonshire Future Vision - Big50 Progress Update

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the meeting. Cllr Maxwell stated that more councillors would have appreciated the opportunity to attend the Big50 conference held in July and hoped for the opportunity to attend the next event and be part of discussions, noting the importance of developing the future vision for the area.

The Chair then invited Cllr Matt Keane to speak on the item. Cllr Keane welcomed the report, recognising the importance of planning for the future in relation to health care for an ageing population as well as looking to grow local businesses and employment. Cllr Keane queried whether there needed to be additional focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and green considerations within the vision. Concluding, Cllr Keane queried how the Council would be held accountable for the actions detailed in the report.

Cllr Valerie Anslow was then invited to address the Executive. Cllr Anslow stressed that housing was a key theme missing from those identified by conference delegates. Cllr Anslow noted that decent and affordable homes needed to be given greater priority to allow for a prosperous, proactive local population.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their comments before introducing a report that sought to provide a progress update on work carried out on creating a vision for North Northamptonshire up to the year 2050. The report also provided feedback from the Big50 Conference that took place in July 2023 and recommended the development of actions to help further develop the Big50 vision and to ensure its delivery on a short, medium and longer-term timeframe.

The Chair noted the success of the Big50 conference held in July, with engagement from across the political spectrum, voluntary sector, business community, education providers and retailer sectors all feeding in to develop the Big50 vision. The work of the Big50 Steering Group was highlighted, the group overseeing development and delivery of the action plan and ensuring broader ownership and navigation critical to the success of the future vision in the short, medium and long-term timeframes.

The Chair noted that for the vision to work it required traction at this formative stage, providing an example of the work of the Principal of Tresham College in organising a skills conference for March 2024 to look at skills development in critical areas such as AI. A further Big50 conference was planned for early February 2024, which many of the attendees of the initial conference had requested.

The Chair concluded by noting that the report before members comprised an inspiring and bold vision and sought the views of the Executive.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to endorse the sentiments expressed by the Chair, noting that in terms of placemaking the Big50 vision would become an important strand of policies and ideas going forward. The findings of the Big50 would be reflected in the North Northamptonshire Strategic Local Plan to ensure residents had the necessary housing, jobs and infrastructure required. Cllr Brackenbury noted as an example the recent opening of the new sixth form college in Corby and thanked all those involved in the production of the vision to date.

Cllr Helen Harrison spoke to welcome the report and the progress made since the July conference, noting the importance of being able to influence the development and growth of North Northamptonshire alongside partner organisations and delivering better health and wellbeing outcomes for residents.

Cllr Mark Rowley stated that it was positive to see organisations that had not been at the Big50 conference now actively wanting to be involved in the production of the Big50 vision.

Cllr Harriet Pentland noted the vast array of attendees at the Big50 conference and the benefits of receiving such wide-ranging input on the day and via post-conference feedback. One of the key themes of the vision was to focus on looking after the environment and climate, an area that was clearly important to the wider community. Cllr Pentland stated that the vision was not Council-owned but was for everyone in North Northamptonshire and welcomed the contributions made to date.

Following debate, the Chair thanked all those who had spoken, reiterating the point that the vision was not a Council vision, but one for the whole area to buy into. The process to date had brought in a number of good ideas and stakeholders had embraced the vision which was gaining momentum. The Chair also welcomed the support of the opposition leader on the subject.

RESOLVED

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the progress that has been made on developing an area-wide vision for North Northamptonshire up to 2050.
- b) Acknowledged the positive contribution made towards the development of the vision through the work of the Big50 Steering Group, the Big50 conference and all who took part in it.
- c) Endorsed the co-design of a short, medium and longer-term action plan with the Steering Group.

Reason for Recommendations – Local councils are ideally placed to act as place shapers and enablers of change in their area. North Northamptonshire Council, in its Corporate Plan adopted in December 2021, made a clear commitment to work in partnership with a wide range of organisations from public, private and voluntary sectors to help improve the quality of life in North Northamptonshire. The work on setting out a broader, longer-term vision for North Northamptonshire represents the next natural step in the achievement of this aim. A shared vision for the future of North Northamptonshire will help focus the efforts of organisations working locally on achieving a common set of priorities and goals for the area. The recommendations ensure that the work carried out to date by all entities involved progresses in a transparent, inclusive and engaging way.

Alternative Options Considered:

- i) Continue 'as is' without a wider area vision – In practical terms, this would mean continuing to focus on the Council's own vision and leave partner agencies to focus on theirs. There is nothing wrong with this approach. Indeed, there is already a lot of activity focused on aligning approaches and target outcomes which are embedded in the current ways of working. It would however leave a gap in terms of a cross-cutting, widely adopted vision for the area. Given the clear support for a wider area vision evident at the Big50 conference, failure to pursue the opportunity would represent a suboptimal position

514 Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Strategy Annual Report 2022/23

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the Executive. Cllr Maxwell stated that whilst the Corporate Parenting Board annual report was welcome, the Council still had a long way to go towards improving its work with the most deprived children in North Northamptonshire. Cllr Maxwell made reference to a historic lack of qualified social workers, noting that 25 newly qualified social workers had started since May 2023 which was considered to be a step in the right direction in ensuring every child counted. Cllr Maxwell concluded by noting that the Council needed to be more effective in ensuring it met the needs of all children, regardless of their background and hoped for an improvement to be identified in the annual report for 2023/24.

The Chair thanked Cllr Maxwell for her comments before inviting Cllr Scott Edwards, Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills to introduce a report that provided the Executive with an update on the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022/23. The report offered an overview of the work of the board during the previous financial year and set out four key priorities of Northamptonshire Children's Trust Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-25, with an update submitted on the progress of each area.

In response to Cllr Maxwell's comments, Cllr Edwards noted that the report represented only looked-after children and that the 25 newly qualified social workers did not represent a total addition to staffing levels. Cllr Edwards noted the positivity of the Corporate Parenting Board report, specifically the criminal justice element and provided an open invitation to Cllr Maxwell and any interested elected member to attend future Corporate Parenting Board meetings.

The meeting heard that annual report before them would be the final joint report, the board having now disaggregated to cover North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire respectively with effect from May 2023. Cllr Edwards stated that the Council and its partner agencies all held responsibility for corporate parenting, putting the needs of looked-after children, young people and families at the heart of every action and decision that was taken.

It was reported that work was underway to improve health-related indicators for looked-after children, and this aspect was a key priority moving forward. In addition, it was heard that two young people had been invited to sit on the board to provide details of their experiences of the care system.

Cllr Edwards noted the proactive nature of the board and provided an overview of the meetings held, including the latest which had considered the issue of unaccompanied children arriving in the United Kingdom.

Cllr Edwards concluded by stating that the board was positive in both its intentions and commitment to its legal obligations and had produced a constructive report. Cllr Edwards also drew attention to the four priorities that formed the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2025.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to welcome the report, noting the amount of work that had gone into its production. Cllr Brackenbury stated that a North Northamptonshire specific report would be received for 2023/24 and praised the excellent

communication and involvement of young people in the findings of the report before members.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- i) Approved the content of the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report which gives an overview of the Corporate Parenting Board's activities.
- ii) Noted that the Northamptonshire Children's Trust Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-25 sets out four key priorities and the update on each areas progress contained in the annual report.

Reasons for Recommendations:

- To promote and monitor the Northamptonshire Children's Trust Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- To encourage all Members and employees to recognise their role as corporate parents.
- Provides members with an overview of the work of Northamptonshire Children's Trust and supports the discharge of their Corporate Parenting duties.

Alternative Options Considered – Do Nothing – The Council has statutory duties as Corporate Parent for children in care and care leavers. Whilst the role of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member is defined in legislation there are wider corporate responsibilities on all staff and elected Members. Not approving the Corporate Parenting Annual Report would mean that the Council may fail to deliver all or parts of its statutory responsibilities in this area.

515 Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Funding

The Chair invited Cllr Matt Keane to address the Executive. Cllr Keane noted the important for the Council kept up with demand for electric vehicles and ensure that there were sufficient charging points locally. Cllr Keane queried whether using a single service provider would provide the most cost-effective electricity tariff for users of charging points and how the Council would control this tariff. Cllr Keane also queried how the Council would balance demand with utilising the most appropriate locations for charging points.

The Chair thanked Cllr Keane for his comments before inviting Cllr Matt Binley, Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets to present a report that outlined the details of Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Funding of £2.895m provisionally awarded to the Council by the government. This funding was primarily aimed at residents who did not have access to off-street parking.

The Executive noted that the Council was required to submit a business case to government prior to 30th November 2023 to qualify for the funding. Subject to approval

of the business case, 90% of the total awarded funding would be provided to the Council.

It was reported that the Council had drafted its own Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure Strategy, with a consultation on the subject having closed on 11th October. The strategy set out a blueprint for the development of EV infrastructure by the Council and other stakeholders and proposed a target of 250 public EV charging points by March 2025.

The LEVI funding, if awarded, would help to support the delivery of that strategy, with a supplier procured and appointed to supply, install, operate and maintain the EV charging points. It was noted that the successful supplier would be responsible for providing electricity, repairs, maintenance and all ongoing costs. Once this procurement had been checked by government it would result in the final 10% of funding being released.

The meeting heard that the Council had been allocated LEVI capability revenue funding to increase internal resources for planning and delivery of the strategy, with £77,220 received to date and a further payment of £175,890 expected in each of the next two financial years

Cllr Binley reported that there were currently 139 publicly available EV chargers in North Northamptonshire, below the UK average per 100,000 people, with details of an ongoing installation project were provided to the meeting.

Members heard that the Sustainable Communities Executive Advisory Panel had supported the proposed approach for LEVI funding and the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy was due for consideration by the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee at the end of October.

Cllr Binley highlighted the wide-ranging environmental benefits associated with the proposal and thanked the government for its support in helping to fund the delivery of this vital infrastructure within North Northamptonshire.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive

- i) Welcomed the award for LEVI Capital Funding and identification of North Northamptonshire as a Tranche 1 area
- ii) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets, in consultation with the Executive Directors for Place & Economy and Finance, to agree the submission of a LEVI Business case to Government following the approach set out in this report and the principles outlined in Appendix A of the report
- iii) Subject to Government approval of the LEVI Business Case, delegated authority to Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets, in consultation with the Executive Director for Place and Economy and Executive Director for

Finance and Performance, to procure a provider to supply, install, operate and maintain a network of publicly available electric vehicle charging points across North Northamptonshire

- iv) Following Government review of the tender process and contract documents, delegated authority to the Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets, in consultation with the Executive Director for Place and Economy and Executive Director for Finance and Performance, to agree appointment of a preferred supplier and signing of related contracts and agreements
- v) Noted the recent public consultation on the Council's draft Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy which closed on 11th October 2023
- vi) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets, in consultation with the Executive Member for Climate Change & the Green Environment and the Executive Director for Place & Economy to consider the responses to the recent consultation on the draft strategy and approve the final version for publication

Reasons for Recommendations: The recommendations will enable the Council to submit a business case to Government which will secure the provisional LEVI Capital allocation, undertake a procurement process using the capital funding to secure private sector investment to install, operate and manage a publicly accessible EV chargepoint (EVCP) network across North Northamptonshire, and appoint a successful supplier. The recommendations will also enable the council's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy to be approved following consideration of responses to the recent public consultation.

Alternative Options Considered: There are two main alternatives to the recommended approach. Firstly, the Council could decide to delay submitting a business case beyond 30th November 2023. This would mean that it would be submitted at a later date and NNC would be moved to Tranche 2 rather than Tranche 1. A delayed procurement could place NNC in a more difficult procurement environment as the capacity of Charge Point Operators could be more limited by local authority contracts already awarded elsewhere. Secondly, the Council could decide not to submit a business case. It is likely that this approach would result in the funding allocation being directed to other local authority areas. This would mean that there would be very little opportunity for the Council to attract additional investment to expand the provision of publicly accessible EVCPs beyond areas which are commercially attractive.

516 NNC Development Services and Regulatory Services Case Management Systems (CMS) Replacement

The Chair invited Cllr Matt Keane to address the Executive. Cllr Keane stated that it was essential for the Council to have a Case Management System (CMS) for Development and Regulatory Services that was fit for purpose and future-proof, allowing the Council to undertake detailed data analysis, especially in relation to complaints. Cllr Keane queried how future-proofing opportunities could be recognised during the procurement process and how the Council would implement testing of the new system to ensure a smooth introduction.

The Chair thanked Cllr Keane for his contribution before inviting Cllr David Brackenbury, Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration to introduce a report that sought to appraise the Executive of the options available to procure and implement a new single CMS, to replace the Council's seven legacy systems due to the current contracts expiring, without further opportunity to extend, on 31st March 2024.

The proposal before the Executive was to procure a single cloud-hosted Idox solution with the contract in place by 31st March 2024. Implementation of the system would then commence in a phased approach over the following 18-to-24-month period, during which time testing would be undertaken.

The meeting noted that the report contained a recommendation to Full Council to approve use of Transformation Reserves specifically set aside to cover one-off implementation costs of up to £600,000.

Cllr Brackenbury noted that the new system would allow the Council to work more efficiently, providing data accuracy on a single system rather than the complex current position of seven legacy systems.

The Chair spoke to welcome the proposal and the opportunity to bring additional efficiency to the organisation. Cllr Matt Binley also spoke to welcome the report.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved the commencement of the procurement process via the Crown Commercial Services Vertical Application (VAS) Framework, reference Page 162 RM6259, using a Direct Award to purchase and implement a single cloud hosted Idox Case Management System for North Northamptonshire Council.
- b) Recommended to Full Council:
 - i) The approval of the use of the Transformation Reserve to fund the one-off implementation costs of up to £600,000
 - ii) The approval of the inclusion of the ongoing annual revenue savings of £40,400 resulting from the implementation of the new Case Management System in the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP)
- c) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Growth & Regeneration in consultation with the Executive Director of Place and Economy and the Chief Information Officer to take any further decisions and/or actions required to conclude this procurement process. This will include, but not be limited to:
 - Approving award of the contract to the preferred supplier
 - Finalising the Terms and Conditions of the service
 - Enter into a contract with the preferred supplier for the provision of the service

Reasons for Recommendations:

- Expiry of the incumbent contracts – the current system contracts expire 31st March 2024.
- NNC will gain significant benefits from having a single CMS. Levels of service will be improved, and process efficiencies implemented.

Alternative Options Considered:

- Do Nothing
- Do Minimal - Replacement Solution for Kettering
- New supplier single solution

All the alternative options shown above have been discounted as they do not provide an effective solution, for reasons set out in section 5 of this report.

517 Procurement of a Heating Contractor for Housing Stock

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the meeting. Cllr Buckingham queried apprenticeships within the gas servicing area with a view to the Council producing its own technicians. Cllr Buckingham also made reference to the checking of fire and carbon monoxide alarms in Council properties and the possibility of adopting a risk register to be updated by contractors entering properties to ensure tenants were safe and warm and allowing the Council to better understand the condition of its properties.

The Chair thanked Cllr Buckingham for her contribution before inviting Cllr Mark Rowley, Executive Member for Housing, Communities and Levelling-Up to introduce a report that sought approval for the procurement of a contractor for the delivery of the servicing, repairs and maintenance of heating systems for Housing Property Services.

Cllr Rowley reported that historically the Corby housing stock had used external heating contractors, with Kettering housing stock heating systems maintained internally. The proposal before the Executive would see an external contractor procured for servicing, repairs and maintenance for the Council's entire housing stock, while the installation of new boilers and void heating works would continue to be delivered in-house.

It was reported that gas safety apprentices took three to four years to train, not a process that could be sped up for safety reasons, but the Council did offer apprenticeships in this regard. It was heard that carbon monoxide checks already formed part of annual safety checks.

Cllr Edwards spoke to note that apprenticeships offered a great opportunity for those in care and care-leavers, referring to the fact that this was now a protected characteristic.

Evonne Coleman-Thomas, Assistant Director of Strategic Housing, Development and Property Services spoke to note that contractors would raise any safeguarding issues identified at Council properties and also that a three-year programme would be

undertaken to enter and assess all properties to identify any works or support required.

Cllr Matt Binley spoke to note the difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff in the service area and welcomed the proposal as a positive step at the current time.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive delegated authority to the Executive Member for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up in consultation with the Executive Director for Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing, to procure, negotiate, award, and enter into a contract for the servicing, repairs and maintenance of the Council's Housing Heating Systems, to ensure that the Council's housing stock is maintained and that the legal obligation to annually service gas and oil appliances is met.

Reasons for Recommendation: By approving this recommendation, Council officers will be able to: -

- Closely align services with Government legislation, regulation and initiatives, through the use of a procured contractor across the two Housing Property Services team areas.
- Ensure a fully compliant procurement process is conducted in the most efficient and timely manner and a new contract is in place for the delivery of the services.
- Provide better value for money to the Council.
- Ensure tenants benefit from the delivery of this statutory service in the housing stock across North Northamptonshire.

Alternative Options Considered:

- Continue with existing separate systems for both Corby and Kettering teams. This option is not recommended as it would not result in a joined-up team working across North Northamptonshire.
- Set up an in-house Gas team covering all NNC Council Homes. This option is not recommended due to the current difficulties in recruiting to vacant posts within the in-house Kettering team. Operating an in-house service with an even higher number of agency staff than at present would come with significant risks to delivery.
- Procure a contractor to provide a service to all NNC Council Homes for all of the different parts of the Gas service. This option is not recommended as there were a number of benefits identified to retaining the installation of new boilers and void gas works in-house. Mainly, that there was no identified financial benefit from new boiler installations being contracted out as opposed to being completed in-house and the loss of direct control of void works, that could lead to an impact on voids performance

518 Home to School Transport Dynamic Purchasing System

The Chair invited Cllr Matt Binley, Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets to introduce a report that sought approval to make a direct award to procure a standalone contract for the Home to School Transport dynamic purchasing system known as “adam” with effect from 1st April 2024.

It was reported that the system, provided by the Access Group, was utilised to allocate qualifying children free home to school transportation, the transport being delivered by external suppliers. The Council also provided transport for the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust, paid for by the Trust.

The current arrangement was a shared Dynamic Purchasing System led by West Northamptonshire Council (WNC), with the contract due to end on 31st March 2024, with the option to extend for two further one-year periods. However, as this was a joint contract with WNC as the lead, only that authority could seek a contract extension and it was not known whether WNC would seek to do so.

Cllr Binley outlined challenges faced by the current shared system, noting that by procuring a contract specifically for North Northamptonshire Council there would be a number of advantages, including area specific suppliers and no requirement to disaggregate invoices each month. A single system for the Council would also provide improved monitoring of forecasting and spend for the service.

It was heard that by awarding the contract to the current supplier through a Direct Award under the YPO Framework, staff would already be familiar with the system, preventing the need for additional training or downtime and allowing adequate time to prepare and develop requirements that would provide a smooth transition prior to the current contract expiring.

The meeting noted that there were currently no other current packages listed on the framework meeting the Council’s needs, undertaking a full procurement exercise would take longer than the remaining contract time and require extensive development and data migration.

The Executive heard that increased costs for a standalone service could be absorbed within the current budget, but there were also possible savings to be realised from utilising local service providers. The overall cost to award to Access Group over a 3-year period would be a total of £153,395, with any increased use of local service providers helping reduce the Council’s carbon footprint. The Council would also have the opportunity to operate its own contracts and therefore could include maximum emission targets for supplier vehicles.

Cllrs Lloyd Bunday and Scott Edwards spoke in support of the recommendations, noting that the time was right for the Council to move forward with its own contract that was localised and focussed on environment benefits.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to welcome the genuine financial savings that had been identified as part of the proposal and the reduction of the Council’s carbon footprint resulting from improved working practices.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- i) Authorised a Direct Award of a contract with the Access Group under the YPO Framework for the Dynamic Purchasing System known as “adam”, to facilitate ongoing procurement of home to school transport and related services.
- ii) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets in consultation with Executive Director of Place and Economy to take any further decisions and/or actions required to conclude the procurement process, appoint the preferred supplier and enter into respective contracts for the delivery of Home to School transport and related services.

Reasons for Recommendations:

- a. This proposal will facilitate the disaggregation of the financial processes from WNC, giving the Council better monitoring of forecasting and spend and is a key part of the Transformation of the service to meet the needs and requirements of the Council.
- b. Taking its own contract under a Direct Award from the YPO Framework would allow the Council to work with the DPS provider to further optimize the system to meet the specific needs of North Northamptonshire as a standalone Council, rather than compromise to meet needs of the two councils together.
- c. Taking this decision at this time allows sufficient time to prepare and develop the market and ensures that there is an ongoing process and platform for procurement after the expiry of the current term of the DPS contract. This gives a degree of certainty to both the Council and the service providers contracting with it and helps to ensure that the Council can continue to meet its statutory obligations after April 2024.
- d. Alternative procurement provisions would need extensive development and potentially data migration to similarly meet the Council’s needs. There is no guarantee that the current service providers would be prepared to sign up to a different platform, or that the potential new platform can replicate the levels of operational service provided within the current DPS platform.
- e. Transitioning to a new system without sufficient lead in time to support providers is likely to lead to procurement and service issues. Providers will need to be supported in changing their processes to support the new ways of working which could lead to greater engagement from officers to ensure effective service delivery and contract management. The launch of a new system without adequate support may deter providers from bidding for routes in the future.
- f. The increased cost of the proposal is minimal against the overall budget for Home to School Transport and can be absorbed within it. There is potential for

savings from utilising more local service providers to off-set the additional costs.

- g. Re-development of the current service to include more local service providers and resolve current finance issues would incur additional costs which need to be considered against the time remaining in the current contract.

Alternative Options Considered:

- a) Do nothing: The current contractual arrangement under the DPS will expire at the end of March 2024, subject to any extensions undertaken by WNC. If the contract is allowed to expire without any action being taken, the Council will have no process for procuring Home to School and social care transport. This will leave the Council unable to meet its statutory responsibilities in this area.
- b) Undertake a full procurement exercise to identify an alternative system that may meet the Council's needs. Soft market testing has not identified a system that would be able to immediately meet the Council's needs without further development of both the system and Council's processes and internal systems within the timescales required.

519 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report 2022-23

The Chair invited Cllr Valerie Anslow to speak. Cllr Anslow made reference to areas that the Council needed to improve upon in order to reduce the number of complaints, noting comments from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to the timetables of complaints not being adhered to and a total of 12 complaints being upheld against the Council which resulted in reputational damage. Cllr Anslow queried how the Council would respond to the Children's Trust in regard to complaints made against the Trust

Cllr Lyn Buckingham was then invited to address the meeting. Cllr Buckingham spoke to note that the basics needed to be in place to prevent complaints and referred to the LGSCO joining with the Housing Ombudsman to produce a joint report going forward.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their comments before introducing a report the purpose of which was to present the annual letter of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman that detailed complaints that had been received as a final stage for complaints regarding councils and social care after the Council's own complaints procedure had been exhausted.

It was reported that Children's Services was the area showing the largest increase in complaints that reflected the complex nature of the national situation regarding this service area

The Chair stated that although the level of complaints received by the Ombudsman was low in the context of the authority's scale, the Council had a duty to reduce these instances as far as possible. To this end, corporate awareness of complaints had been raised and training undertaken with a view to reducing the number of complaints going forward.

The Chair stated that the report had been considered by the Council's Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 10th October 2023 and referred to the Executive without comment.

Cllr Helen Harrison spoke to note that it would be unrealistic to expect no complaints to be raised to the Ombudsman given the number of residents the Council served. Adult Social Care complaints were low compared to comparable authorities which provided a small level of assurance that complaints were being managed well.

Cllr Scott Edwards noted the increase in complaints relating to Children's Services and referenced the amount of work the team undertook to deal with questions and queries relating to its service area with a view to reducing the number of complaints received.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to note that the Council could not be complacent in regard to complaints and praised the work of staff in resolving issues prior to escalation to the Ombudsman.

RESOLVED

That the Executive noted the content and recommendations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual review letter, and the outcomes of its investigations completed in 2022-23 that relate to the Council.

Reason for Recommendation: To appraise the Executive of the annual review letter and relevant information. Receipt of regular complaints data demonstrates good governance.

Alternative Options Considered: It would not be considered good practice to not provide the annual Ombudsman report to the Executive and as such there are no alternative options to be considered.

520 Oakley Vale Infrastructure Works

The Chair invited Cllr Matt Binley, Executive Member for Highways Travel and Assets to present a report that sought approval to progress the adoption of the roads and infrastructure in Oakley Vale, Phase 5 in Corby. The report detailed the risks to the Council and why the works were required to bring the roads up to required standard to be adopted and how this would be funded.

It was noted that the former Corby Borough Council (CBC) had entered into an infrastructure stakeholder agreement with various parties. As a result of the contractor going into administration, CBC had entered into a supplemental agreement to fulfil the contractor's obligations.

The majority of the infrastructure works had been completed, the Council needing to complete works to the highway so that the roads could be adopted. The Council therefore intended to recover the full cost of the works by drawing down the £971,350 from the work deposit account held by a third-party solicitor, and for this to be added to the Capital Programme.

It was reported that a number of remedial works needed to be completed at the site including repairs to the drainage and a redesign of an existing roundabout. Once completed a further inspection would be undertaken to confirm any other outstanding works before the final resurfacing of the roads.

The current budget costs from the Council's contractor were less than that currently held in the works deposit, consequently there should be no financial impact to the Council. As part of the adoption process a commuted sum would be paid from the works deposit for the future maintenance of streetlighting and verges

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the obligations on NNC to progress the adoption of roads and infrastructure on the Oakley Vale development.
- b) Approved that the budget of £971,350, as per the value of the external works deposit held, be added to the Capital Programme to allow works to road adoptions at Oakley Vale Phase 5.
- c) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets in consultation with the Executive Director for Place & Economy to procure the necessary remedial works to the road and infrastructure at Oakley Vale Phase 5 and recover these costs from the external works deposit.

Reasons for Recommendations:

- To fulfil the obligations entered into by CBC, completing the works and spending the external monies in accordance with the Infrastructure Works Agreement and supplemental agreements to progress the adoption of roads and infrastructure.
- To procure and undertake the required works in line with the Council's constitution and financial regulations in relation to governance.

Alternative Options Considered: The only other option available is to do nothing, however given the legal obligations on the Council, as the works deposit covers the budget cost of the works and because of the negative public perception if adoption was not progressed, this option is not recommended.

521 Partnership Governance Framework and Register of Significant Partnerships

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the Executive. Cllr Buckingham spoke to welcome the approach taken in regard to the Partnership Governance Framework and the clarity around partnerships with the Council, although slight concerns were raised as to which bodies or organisations might partner with the Council going forward.

The Chair then invited Cllr Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation to introduce a report that sought approval of the Partnership Governance Framework and provided an update on the progress of creating the Register of Significant Partnerships.

It was noted that the Council was a key member of a number of partnerships with other public sector bodies, as well as the private and voluntary sectors, with these partnerships supporting the delivery of the Council's corporate strategy. To maintain an overview of these partnerships and to aid officers and members involved in such arrangements, the framework had been drafted and a register created.

Cllr Mark Rowley spoke to support the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved the adoption of the Partnership Governance Framework as a policy that forms part of the assurance framework for the Council; and
- b) Approved the proposed next steps with regard to progressing the work on the Register and ensuring an annual cycle of self-assessment.

Reason for Recommendations: These recommendations are made to support improved assurance around partnerships as part of the Council's assurance framework.

Alternative Options Considered: The alternative option of not introducing the Partnership Governance Framework has been rejected as it will not improve assurance or support risk management in areas where the Council has significant risks because partnership services are delivering statutory obligations/key objectives and/or overseeing the expenditure of significant resources.

522 National Non-Domestic Rates and Housing Benefit Overpayment Write Offs

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the Executive. Cllr Buckingham spoke to note the level of work that would have been undertaken prior to a decision being made to approve debt write-offs. A number of the cases were legacy issues dating back before unitarisation and the cost implications of chasing debts such as those contained within the report was understood.

The Chair then invited Cllr Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation to introduce a report that requested approval for the write-off of eight debts considered unrecoverable despite numerous attempts at collection. It was noted that the Council had a duty to maximise revenue collection, however, there were circumstances where debts were deemed unrecoverable.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to note the level of work that went into attempting to collect debts prior to any decision being made to write-off the debt and thanked officers involved for their efforts.

RESOLVED

That the Executive reviewed and approved the proposed write off of outstanding debts as summarised in Appendix A of the report.

Reason for Recommendation: The Council's Constitution (Financial Procedure Rules) requires the approval of Executive to write off debt in excess of £25,000. It is considered that this debt cannot be recovered.

Alternative Option Considered: The alternative option would be to periodically review and pursue the debt. However, following the action already undertaken and the status of the organisations, it is considered irrecoverable at this time and would not be economical to continue to pursue.

523 Capital Programme Update 2023/24

The Chair invited Cllr Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation to introduce a report that requested approval for capital schemes that had come forward for inclusion in the Council's Capital Programme. Approval of the funding would allow the schemes to move forward to procurement and delivery.

Three schemes were highlighted as per the report and recommendation below.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- i) Approved the following changes into the capital programme:
 - a. Oakley Vale, Corby Highway Adoption - £971k – budget approval for £971k, £495k in 2023/24, £476k in 2024/25 which is to be funded from external funds as part of the initial Infrastructure Agreement.
 - b. North Northamptonshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Project (NNEVI) £2.90m - £285k in 2024/25, £810k in 2025/26 and £1.8m in 2026/27 which is to be funded from an external grant.
 - c. Integrated Transport Block 2023/24 – reduction to existing capital scheme of £184k to align the scale of the programme with the confirmed grant funding from the Department of Transport.

Reasons for Recommendations: These are set out in greater detail within section 5 of the report but can be summarised as:

- To support the statutory delivery of school places and SEND school places across North Northamptonshire.
- To meet corporate plan objectives, for instance in leading in improving the local environment

Alternative Options Considered:

- As all the schemes in this report are grant funded/S106 funded, the use of the funding is in line with the agreements, so there are no alternative option proposed in this report.
- Where individual schemes are over £500k, individual reports are presented elsewhere on the agenda that set out the wider options that were considered before reaching the proposed schemes identified for grant funding.

524 Budget Forecast Update 2023-24 - Period 5

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the meeting. Cllr Buckingham spoke to raise concerns regarding efficiency savings listed as part of the report and the specific services areas relating to these.

Cllr Dorothy Maxwell was then invited to address the Executive. Cllr Maxwell spoke to make reference to the budgetary pressure of £129,000 in relation to educational psychologist trainees and increased bursary payments. Cllr Maxwell queried what happened once trainees qualified and how long they were expected to remain working for the Council following qualification.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their attendance before inviting Cllr Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation to introduce a report that set out the forecast outturn position for the Council based on the Period 5 monitoring forecasts for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Dedicated Schools Grant. The meeting heard that the overall forecast for the General Fund, as at Period 5, was a forecast overspend of £7.821m based on the emerging data for 2023/24.

Cllr Bunday noted that there remained uncertainty regarding the staff pay award that was yet to be agreed for 2023/24. Cllr Bunday reported on a number of budgetary movements across the Council's service areas, noting that the biggest financial risk to the Council was the challenge of demand-led services.

Cllr Bunday stated that the annual budget for the PPP Shaw contract for the provision of six residential care homes across North Northamptonshire for the over 65s was £9.8m. A pressure was forecast of £970,000 in relation to this contract. A further pressure of £2.25m was reported in regard to independent care spend including residential and nursing care for both 65+ year old and 18-64 years old clients.

The meeting noted that the Children's Trust overspend for the current year had risen to £23.089m, with the Council's share being £10.196m. Although the Trust continued to look at mitigations there was a risk that the position could worsen before the end of the financial year.

The Council's overall outturn forecast for the Housing Revenue Account was reported as being an overspend of £15,000.

It was also reported that the Dedicated Schools Grant had a forecast pressure of £4.955m, with pressures relating to the high needs funding block that supported SEND provision. The remaining reserves of £700,000 had been utilised to mitigate this.

Cllr Helen Harrison spoke to reference the pressures building within Adult Social Services, with inflation affecting PPP contracts and an unprecedented increase in service demand. It was noted that there was a need to understand whether the increase was a temporary occurrence or permanent and how this could be managed in future.

RESOLVED

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the Council's forecast outturn position for 2023/24 as summarised in Section 4, alongside the further analysis, risks and other considerations as set out in Section 5 to Section 7 of the report.
- b) Noted the assessment of the current deliverability of the 2023/24 savings proposals in Appendix A.

Reason for Recommendations – to note the forecast financial position for 2023/24 as at Period 4 and consider the impact on this year and future years budgets.

Alternative Options Considered: The report focuses on the forecast revenue outturn against budget for 2023/24 and makes recommendations for the Executive to note the current budgetary position as such there are no specific choices within the report.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 12.04 pm