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Meeting: Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee (Additional)
Date: Monday 5th February, 2024
Time: 7.00 pm
Venue: Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, Northants, NN17 1QG



To members of the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Graham Lawman (Chair), Councillor Kevin Watt (Vice-Chair), Councillor Valerie Anslow, Councillor Melanie Coleman, Councillor Emily Fedorowycz, Councillor Philip Irwin, Councillor Mark Pengelly, Councillor Geoff Shacklock and Councillor Lee Wilkes

(Substitutes: Cllrs Carter, Currall, Dalziel, Dearing, Dell, Henson, O'Hara, Watts (1 vacancy).

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ITEM	NARRATIVE	DEADLINE
Members of the public agenda statements	Requests to address the committee must be received by 5pm two clear working days before the meeting. Speakers will be limited to speak for three minutes.	5pm Wednesday 31 January 2024
Member agenda statements	A request from a ward councillor must be received by 5pm two clear working days before the meeting. The member will be limited to speak for five minutes.	5pm Wednesday 31 January 2024

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Minutes of the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee held at 7pm on Tuesday 19th December 2023 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, Northants, NN17 1QG

Present: -

Members

Councillor Gill Mercer (Chair)

Councillor Melanie Coleman

Councillor Philip Irwin

Councillor Mark Pengelly

Councillor Kevin Watt

Councillor Geoff Shacklock

Councillor Lee Wilkes

Officers

Graeme Kane, executive Director of Place & Economy

Steve Smith, Assistant Director of Highways & Waste

Rob Harbour, Assistant Director of Growth & Regeneration

Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer, (Committees/Members)

Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Support Officer.

All present Mr Coombes and Mr Caroll from Kier Transportation.

The Chair welcomed members and the viewing public to the meeting.

20 Apologies for absence

Resolved to note that an apology was received from Councillor V Anslow.

21 Members' declarations of interest (if any)

The chair invited those who wished to do so to make a declaration as follows:

Councillor Coleman	Minute 23 – New Highways Contract Provider	Personal – Husband previously worked for Marriott's who became Kier and receives a pension.
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Resolved that the declaration be noted.

22 Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 31 October 2023 were received.

It was proposed by Councillor Wilkes and second by Councillor Coleman that the minutes be approved, on being put to the vote this was declared carried.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of 31 October 2023 be approved as an accurate record thereof.

23 New Highways Contract Provider

The circulated report of the Assistant Director Highways and Waste, Steve Smith, was received to provide a review of the performance of the council's contract with Kier Transportation to provide Highways & Maintenance works and services following the first year of operation. The report referenced performance for the period 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023.

The assistant director gave a presentation to the committee detailing the background, performance and issues over the contract period. He was accompanied by John Coombes and Rob Carroll of Kier Transportation.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix A – Contract Governance meetings;
- Appendix B – Key performance indicators and October 2023 performance;
- Appendix C – Strategic Performance Indicators

The report detailed the commencement of the contract on 12 September 2023, and the significant changes to the previous contract, previously operated by Northamptonshire County Council initially then as a shared service between NNC and West Northamptonshire Council. It was noted that the current contract was provided by Kier Transportation, a separate entity to KierWSP, and had required a significant transition of staff, systems and processes between the old service provider and the current service provision.

The assistant director clarified that Kier Transportation had generally exceeded performance target requirements within the contract. Where there had been any issues Kier had promptly put in place corrective actions to enable performance to be consistently met.

Kier had also significantly exceeded the level of social value, above and beyond operational requirements with £13.8million of added value provided in the first year of operation.

In relation to the highway network, officers were aware that the overall condition of the highway was deteriorating, increasing the level of demand for pothole repairs above that anticipated in the first year of the contract. This was a known national issue and is replicated across all highway authorities which are not subject to Private Finance initiatives (PFI).

Mr Smith, Mr Coombes and Mr Carroll were present to take any questions from the committee.

The chair thanked Mr Smith for his presentation and for the information within the report and asked members if they wished to ask any questions.

In summary members raised the following issues:

- The number of complaints from constituents had risen and all related to the poor state of the highway, issues with large potholes, causing damage to tyres and vehicle suspension and the equally poor and dangerous footpaths. Whilst there had been some evidence of improvement, members considered it would

be helpful to receive percentage numbers for the number of potholes reported and the number repaired within a given period for each ward. Concerns were also expressed about the fact that bollards, and street signs were no longer cleaned, and that vegetation was not cut back at the side of roads and around kerbs or near to street signs which made them hard to read. Gully cleaning was also needed. A question was asked about the current policies and performance measures.

Officers responded firstly to explain that there was a distinction between policy and performance and that it was the policy that reflected many of the members concerns and not Kier's performance, so for example a policy would state that defects had to meet a level deemed to be unsafe to be repaired within a given time, but each report would have to be assessed, with officers explaining the process and timescales for this, prior to it being added to the repairs list.

The current policies for NNC were being updated and would be the subject of review to committee and would consider targets for lots of issues including the cleaning of bollards, removal of vegetation for example. Some issues with overgrown vegetation took longer to resolve as often the problem could be on private land.

All issues and concerns over the highway could be logged using the 'Fix My Street' service, which was a nationally used reporting process. Complaints would then go through to the service for assessment. Updates would be provided via email along with notification of when the job had been completed.

- Reference was also made to the report and the failures highlighted therein which the committee considered to be of concern along with quality issues.

Officers explained that this was a new contract with a new culture and new systems, including technology and it had taken some time to transfer the employees over, and to provide induction training on new processes and equipment. There was also the ability for officers to manage desk top assessments, and to supervise and inspect. Kier were also now informing NNC of what was required and what problems were being found following regular inspections of roadways. The team was now in place and progressing well.

- Members asked if they could be provided with statistics about the number of potholes reported and the percentage of those repaired within the set timescales and if Kier was paid for each pothole repair.

Officers clarified that there was a target cost price to repair a set level of defects each year and this provided an incentive to Kier to carry out repairs in the same area. Funds are limited and it was becoming more and more challenging with a reduction in funding.

- Members noted the significant volume of salt that was stored and asked if this was in preparation for bad weather and whether it was expected to be enough.

Officers clarified that the storage meets national requirements and with the current weather predictions this was expected to be adequate and more could be ordered if needs be.

- The issue of funding was raised to, including the need for Section 106 Developer Contribution monies to be claimed and spent wisely and appropriately. Reference was made to individual wards which officers would need to investigate outside the meeting, should members wish to raise directly.

An example was given that £1m of funding spent on potholes would fix around 4,000 potholes, with a maximum of 6,000. On average 700 defects were reported each month. There were 10 gangs working on the defects and on average 30 were repaired per day. There was always a backlog in the system and work in progress.

Resolved that:

- (i) The contents of the report be noted;
- (ii) The issues of concern were as detailed in these minutes and would continue to be monitored.

24 Progress of Sustainable Urban Extensions across North Northamptonshire

The circulated report of the Executive Director for Place and Economy was received to provide an update on the progress of the planned sustainable urban extensions (SUEs) across North Northamptonshire to ensure that development was taking place in good time to ensure that a five-year housing land supply was available.

The committee had identified some concern relating to the progress of some of the development particularly where there may be detrimental impact on the land supply.

Mr Harbour, Assistant Director, Growth and Regeneration presented his report to committee and referenced the six SUE's and one Garden Village within North Northamptonshire's planning policy framework which are in total expected to deliver over 27,500 homes upon completion. Each SUE was at a different stage with some having planning permissions that are enabling development and housebuilding to proceed, whilst others were working through the planning process prior to any development on site.

The council had a healthy five-year housing land supply with a figure of 7.46 years (to end of March 22). During the year 2022/23 a total of 1,120 housing completions had taken place.

The report further detailed the current position, any obstacles to progress, planned mitigations, next steps and expected trajectory of future delivery, on each of the SUEs which included developments at:

Glenvale Park, Wellingborough
 Hanwood Park, Kettering
 High Hayden, Rushden
 North-East Corby (Priors Hall and Weldon Park)
 Stanton Cross, Wellingborough,
 West Corby and
 Tresham Garden Village

The report also detailed the number of completions on each site for 2022/23 and all sites apart from the three below had planning permission and were progressing.

High Hayden was currently going through the planning process.

Tresham Garden Village had seen little progress being made with lack of engagement by interested parties. Homes England had raised concern about the lack of progress with the promoter and had mooted that they may withdraw funding.

West Corby had outline planning permission approved in December 2019 for up to 4,500 dwellings. Work had been ongoing to resolve some site issues and then detailed planning permission would be applied for; it was considered that the first homes would be built in 2026.

The chair thanked Mr Harbour for his presentation and opened the item for debate and questions.

Members referred to their concerns in their own area, particularly around commitments regarding infrastructure and money for road improvements being south through section 106 funding and that there should be reviews on costs over the period of a phased development.

A question was asked about why a town council would have been made aware of an application before NNC. Mr Harbour said they would have been a consultee prior to the application coming before committee. This was normal practice. It was even possible to reconsult because of additional information. The application being referenced would probably come before committee in late Spring.

Regarding affordable housing on each site, this would determine at the developer contributions stage and agreed through the section 106 process. Often developers would argue over financial viability but NNC employed financial specialists who were independent, who would ascertain what was viable.

Comments were also made that it seemed to be increasingly popular for service charges to be levied for the upkeep of communal spaces. Mr Harbour confirmed that this was becoming more common and the local authority could not interfere with that decision.

The committee also asked that more consideration be given within the larger developments to educational needs for all levels, health and community land along with the importance of suitable highway infrastructure.

Resolved that:

- (i) The content of the report be noted for the purpose of scrutiny;
- (ii) That members be kept informed of developments through engagement and briefings.

25 Close of meeting

There being no further business the chair thanked all for their attendance and closed the meeting at 9.25pm.

Chair.....

Date.....



Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Monday 5th February 2024

Report Title	Communities Strategy and Strategic Investment into the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector
Report Author	Kerry Purnell, Assistant Director Communities and Leisure

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	Choose an item.
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Active, fulfilled lives

List of Appendices

Appendix A: North Northamptonshire Council Draft Communities Strategy
Appendix B: Climate Change Impact Assessment

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report introduces the Council's Communities Strategy. It has been co-produced with representatives from across the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector.
- 1.2. The report also sets out the proposed new VCSE strategic grants framework for period of three years from 1st April 2024, which replaces the previous strategic grant arrangements which North Northamptonshire Council inherited from the former sovereign councils.
- 1.3. It also details the proposed new VCSE Infrastructure support arrangements which will be tendered and contracted for three years from 1st September 2024.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector provides valuable support to people across North Northamptonshire. The range and geographical coverage of organisations in the sector is comprehensive. There are currently 168 VCSE member organisations connected to the VCSE locality-based networks in Kettering and Corby and 200 across Wellingborough and East Northants, many of whom operate successfully without funding from the Council. They range from small volunteer-run community groups to larger charities, some of which provide very specialised work such as debt casework, mental health counselling, support to victims of domestic abuse, and drug treatment and recovery.
- 2.2. The purpose of this strategy is to emphasise and strengthen the role the VCSE, residents and communities have in delivering the North Northamptonshire Council's Corporate Plan and the Northamptonshire Integrated Care System's Live Your Best Live Strategy, particularly within the context of the new Place-based delivery models.
- 2.3. The Communities Strategy is a North Northamptonshire Council strategy, but it also brings together the key themes which underpin a number of national and local agendas into a co-ordinated framework for effective partnership working with the VCSE. This will be achieved through mutually beneficial relationships between all Directorates within the Council, with the VCSE and Town and Parish Councils, but can also support positive relationships across all organisations, across sectors and with residents and their communities, which will drive innovation, collaboration and meaningful co-production.
- 2.4. The Strategy has five principal aims, for 2024 to 2027, which are to:
 - Emphasise and strengthen the role the VCSE sector, residents and communities have in delivering the Council's corporate objectives, and within the context of the countywide Live Your Best Life Strategy for the Integrated Care System, particularly within the context of the new Place-based delivery models;
 - Develop a co-ordinated vision and framework for effective partnership working on equal terms, and, wherever possible, co-production with VCSE organisations and groups, along with Town and Parish Councils;
 - Set out the Council's approach to financial investment into the VCSE, which promotes sustainability, through access to a range of funding sources, including strategic and small grant giving by the Council; and future infrastructure support into the sector;
 - Strengthen the ability of the VCSE sector to deliver services and connect communities through engaging residents, leading community action, supporting volunteering, supporting people in the most vulnerable situations, and brokering relationships between statutory bodies and communities;

- Provide a framework to support innovative approaches which facilitate necessary change, given the shifting needs of local communities in the wake of the pandemic and the current economic climate.
- 2.5. The Strategy introduces eight key themes, six* of which will form a significant part of the ask the Council will make of the future providers of the VCSE Infrastructure support contract, which will be tendered for delivery. The remaining two themes will be co-ordinated and delivered by Council officers.

The themes are:

- Capacity Building and back-office support for the VCSE*;
 - Funding Support for the VCSE*;
 - Co-ordination of VCSE involvement and leadership for the Integrated Care System and the Place Programme*;
 - Developing mutually beneficial relationships*;
 - Co-ordination and promotion of best practice across the VCSE*;
 - Volunteering support, promotion and best practice*;
 - Supporting communities to take on assets and services where appropriate to do so;
 - Delivery of the VCSE grants programme.
- 2.6. It is proposed that the new VCSE strategic grants framework for 2024-2027 focuses on the following themes:

- Core cost support to the Community Centres which were supported by the former sovereign Councils;
- Financial Inclusion;
- Community Transport;
- Prevention of Social Isolation for Older People;
- Community Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- Increasing resilience in the VCSE to provide support for vulnerable residents, as identified through the new Support North Northants (SNN) service;
- Promotion and Advocacy for Equalities.

3. Recommendations

3.1. It is recommended that Scrutiny reviews the recommendations being proposed to the Executive to:

- a) Approve the Communities Strategy for adoption;
- b) Approve the proposed VCSE Strategic grants framework and the proposed VCSE Infrastructure support arrangements for the period 2024-2027.

3.2. Reasons for Recommendations:

- The previous strategic VCSE grant arrangements inherited from sovereign councils end on 31st March 2024 (some have been in place since 2017, pre-Covid and pre-North Northamptonshire Council) and new arrangements are required;
- The previous arrangements for VCSE infrastructure support also come to an end on 31st March 2024 and new, more robust, arrangements are required;
- There has been a huge shift in the strategic context within which the Council and the VCSE are now working, largely due to the development of the Integrated Care System (ICS) and the new Place-based delivery models, including the Council's Levelling Up agendas for its 'left behind' neighbourhoods, all of which have already resulted in a strengthened collaboration and governance for the VCSE;
- The Place-based delivery models have also brought about emerging priorities from the new Community Wellbeing Forums and Local Area Partnerships (LAPs), and the emergence of the new VCSE-led, whole-system, early intervention service, Support North Northants (SNN), which is providing evidence of need on the ground in communities;
- The work undertaken by the Northamptonshire County Association for Local Councils (NCALC) between 2021 and 2023 which reported on the relationship between Principal and Local Councils and included approaches to devolution of assets and services.
- In summary a Communities Strategy is required to set out the Council's approach to working with and investing in the VCSE within the context of these strategic contexts.

3.3. Alternative Options Considered:

- 3.3.1 The alternative option would be to not have a Communities Strategy. However, this would not be a recommended approach as the Strategy sets out how the Council wishes to work with the VCSE, as equal partners, recognising the valuable role the sector plays in supporting the communities of North Northamptonshire.
- 3.3.2 It also identifies the key themes for the new VCSE Infrastructure contract and lays the foundation for the Council's new VCSE strategic grants programme, both of which are needed to replace legacy arrangements inherited by the Council in 2021. Without the Strategy the VCSE would not have reassurance about future funding opportunities, nor about the critical support it has stated it requires moving forward, to help the sector to grow, become more sustainable and to attract more inward investment into North Northamptonshire, for the benefit of our communities.
- 3.3.3 A number of options were considered as part of the Council's budget setting for 2024-25, in relation to the future funding envelope for the VCSE Strategic grants from 1st April 2024. This included removing all

funding and ceasing the programme, to a variety of proposals which might result in the funding being reduced to a greater or lesser extent. Ultimately the Council's Executive are committed to retaining the funding at the same levels as before, £671,771, whilst recognising that new grant arrangements would be required to replace those that are expiring on 31st March 2024.

3.3.4 In summary, not having a Communities Strategy could result in missed opportunities for VCSE organisations to collaborate effectively with one another to share knowledge, expertise and resource, and for the Council to work in effective strategic and operational partnerships with the hundreds of VCSE organisations which operate locally and add so much economic and social value to the North Northamptonshire economy and social fabric.

4. Report Background

- 4.1. The VCSE provides valuable support to people across Northamptonshire. The range and geographical coverage of organisations in the sector is comprehensive. There are currently 168 VCSE member organisations connected to the VCSE locality-based networks in Kettering and Corby and 200 across Wellingborough and East Northants, many of whom operate successfully without funding from the Council. They range from small volunteer-run community groups to larger charities, some of which provide very specialised work such as debt advocacy and casework, mental health counselling, support to victims of domestic abuse, and drug treatment and recovery.
- 4.2. Over the last 18 months the VCSE across North Northamptonshire has become stronger, largely due to the emergence of the ICS Place Programme. This has seen the VCSE strengthen its collaboration within the sector and work closely with statutory partners to influence the development of the Place Programme including leadership and co-ordination of the four new Community Wellbeing Forums (CWFs) and seven Local Area Partnerships (LAPs). A new governance for the VCSE has been embedded as part of the ICS, with a strategic Oversight Group reporting into the Place Delivery Board, the four VCSE CWF chairs sitting on the North Health and Wellbeing Board and a wider VCSE Operational Engagement group being established to complement the four locality VCSE networks that already existed.
- 4.3. It has been the ambition of the Communities and Leisure Directorate to develop a Communities Strategy for the Council since Vesting Day. This direction of travel was presented to the Council Executive in a report in March 2022 which outlined the intention to develop a Strategy which would include:
- Adoption of a corporate commitment to working in equal partnership through co-production;

- Strengthening the ability of the VCSE sector to deliver projects and connect communities through engaging residents, leading community action, supporting people in the most vulnerable situations and brokering relationships between statutory bodies and communities; and
 - VCSE Infrastructure support arrangements to improve sustainability and increase growth in the VCSE sector, developing fit for purpose, sustainable organisations able to deliver high quality projects with diversified income streams and less reliance on grants, with a more commercial focus and which are flexible and adaptable to change.
- 4.4. The Executive report dated 17th March 2022 secured approval to extend the VCSE strategic grants inherited from the former councils for a further 2 years until 31st March 2024. These grants included funding the former councils committed to VCSE infrastructure support.
- 4.5. The delay in developing this Communities Strategy, whilst not planned, has been fortuitous, as there have been some significant changes during the intervening period, to the strategic context within which the Council and the VCSE are operating.
- 4.6. Not only has the Council adopted its Corporate Plan, but it has also begun to develop its Vision50 for 2050. The VCSE has an important role to play in helping the Council to deliver almost all of its strategic objectives as they relate to outcomes for our people and places, and also align with the reason for being for many of our VCSE organisations.
- 4.7. However it is important to ensure that where the Council is grant funding VCSE delivery, the investment is demonstrably contributing to its strategic priorities.
- 4.8. Over the last 18 months the county as a 'system' of partners from across the public and VCSE sectors, has also developed its approach to integrated health and care through Integrated Care Northamptonshire (ICN). A new 10 year Live Your Best Life Strategy was adopted in late 2022, The ambition of this strategy is for residents to 'live their best life' in all aspects: health and wellbeing, education, housing and employment.
- 4.9. The ICS Strategy sets out a collaborative direction of travel for the people of Northamptonshire to achieve a shared vision over the next 10 years to deliver better outcomes for residents throughout their lifetime; from pregnancy to early years, to improved education and employment opportunities, to social connection and better access to health and care services. It also recognises that, like many areas, North Northamptonshire faces a number of challenges which continue to place pressure on the Council and on health and care services. North Northamptonshire faces significant demand from a growing older population and working age adults, as well as the children population. These are happening at a time when operating cost pressures are high, with utility costs rising and people feeling the impact of the rising cost-of-living. It is clear that organisations, and their services, must adapt to ensure that they meet the challenges ahead. Through shared working and VCSE and community involvement, we have the best opportunity to respond to these challenges.

- 4.10. During the latter half of 2022 the ICS Place Programme was developed as part of the county-wide ICS Operating Framework. The ICS approach to delivery is all about connecting strategic decision making, from the Integrated Care Board and the county-wide thematic strategic collaboratives, through to place, utilising the new CWFs and LAPs; and putting communities at the heart of what we do.
- 4.11. The seven LAPs in North Northamptonshire have used LAP profiles, based on a range of Public Health and other data, alongside of local intelligence that LAP members have brought to the table, to identify a number of priorities. The first round of priorities was identified following a series of community events held in the spring of 2023 and the second round was identified in the autumn of 2023. These priorities and the subsequent action plans that have been developed have helped inform some of the new themes for the VCSE Strategic grants programme proposed in this report.
- 4.12. In addition, as part of the ICS Place Programme, the VCSE in North Northamptonshire have introduced a new VCSE-led whole-system, early intervention service, Support North Northants (SNN). Mobilised in the second half of 2023, as a test and learn programme, SNN currently has 12 months seed funding from three different funding partners across the ICS to help the VCSE prove the concept.
- 4.13. SNN is a system-wide collaborative service model with the VCSE, statutory and other agencies to provide co-ordinated earlier intervention and prevention of escalation of issues for adults over 18 and their families. It aims to guide people to the right services, pathways and support networks quickly, and to build greater levels of community resilience by increasing capacity in the VCSE to provide wrap-around support. The key principles are:
- Don't give up on people' and catch people early;
 - Person-centred and strengths-based support, based on holistic assessments;
 - Builds personal and community resilience, invests in and builds capacity within VCSE services to meet identified local needs;
 - Help people to help themselves;
 - Effective use of public and community assets, skills, talents, resources through effective case co-ordination.
- 4.14. A small SNN team of 11 staff has been recruited, hosted across three VCSE organisations, and additional investment has been made into other VCSE organisations to provide key support services which have been identified as gaps early on, such as benefits checks for all SNN service-users, home repairs and safety modifications where needed. SNN is a practical, emerging example of the collaboration within the VCSE and across the sectors, which this Strategy seeks to foster. It is also identifying barriers which prevent residents from Living Their Best Life, which have also informed the new priorities for the VCSE strategic grants programme.

- 4.15. In 2021-22 a cross party Scrutiny Panel was established by the Council to review and understand the underlying data related to the three neighbourhood areas in Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough highlighted as 'left behind'. Engagement activity was undertaken with residents in those neighbourhoods to understand the challenges and opportunities and also to explore the views of partner agencies, including the VCSE organisations, working in those communities. Learning was also considered from programmes already delivered in those areas.
- 4.16. Recommendations were made and a Levelling Up Action Plan has been developed, to both set out the Council's strategic intent to level up these neighbourhoods and so that progress against those recommendations can be demonstrated and tracked. Many of the recommendations relate to how the Council engages and communicates with, funds and problem solves with the VCSE in those neighbourhoods and are therefore relevant to the Communities Strategy.
- 4.17. In 2021 NCALC received Community Renewal Funding to deliver a project aimed to be an investment in communities and place. Along with mapping all assets, functions, services and facilities within each parish, it aimed to start the work towards developing a devolution framework and enhancing the confidence, knowledge and skills of Parish and Town Councils to generate effective business cases to achieve successful bids through the Community Right to Bid process for community assets.
- 4.18. The work towards developing a devolution framework resulted in Local Councils across North Northamptonshire being better informed about and prepared for any future transfer of assets and services. Some of the "nuts and bolts" of devolution were put in place, but the Council through its Statement of Intent was and remains clear that it has no intention to undertake any wholesale devolution of assets and services in the near future. The Statement from North Northamptonshire Council states:
- NNC "understands that the appetite for and capacity of towns and parishes to take on increased roles in local service delivery and place-shaping varies significantly between individual local councils". NNC "wants to support communities when they wish to take on additional responsibilities; but the Council is not looking to force assets onto towns & parishes. The Community Asset Transfer Policy is there to enable NNC to respond if / when town or parish councils want to explore taking on an asset or service. **The transfer of assets or services is an opportunity and there will be a place-led approach which responds to local demand or aspirations from communities.***
- 4.19. "Listening Events" which were held with Council officers and Councillors went some way to establishing a meaningful dialogue between the Council and the Local Councils in its area.
- 4.20. There is further work to do to ensure that if there are any further transfer of assets and services, the process is well-managed, thoughtful, and fair. This will therefore form a theme for this strategy.

- 4.21. In preparing this strategy, the current VCSE Infrastructure organisations (SERVE and Groundwork Northamptonshire) have engaged with organisations across the VCSE locality networks, and the first North Northamptonshire sector-wide engagement event was held in person at the end of September 2023, where over 100 VCSE organisations were represented. These sessions highlighted the vital role the sector plays in delivering commissioned, grant-funded and voluntary services, often to people in the most vulnerable situations. The sector is seen as innovative, dynamic, flexible and responsive, making it a key partner in delivering effective and efficient services.
- 4.22. At the engagement event the sector was asked to consider the following questions, the feedback from which has informed this Strategy:
- What are the biggest challenges facing the VCSE locally currently?
 - What are the opportunities?
 - What support do you think should be offered under future VCSE infrastructure arrangements?
 - If NNC could only invest in a few strategic priorities for the sector, what would they be?
- 4.23. The North VCSE Oversight Group leaders from the sector have proactively helped to shape this Strategy, by engaging with the VCSE through their networks, specifically to influence the focus for the new VCSE Infrastructure offer. They have offered constructive comment on the initial drafts of the Strategy.
- 4.24. A series of co-production meetings have also been held with VCSE partners who deliver against the emerging themes identified as priorities for future investment through the VCSE strategic grant funding the Council distributes. These meetings have been open, frank and transparent to inform what needs to be funded and why, what is currently working and why and the challenges and opportunities for VCSE partners to collaborate even more effectively, to ensure the Council can maximise the reach and impact of its financial investment.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. The current strategic VCSE grant arrangements total £671,771 per annum. It should also be noted that the strategic grant arrangements are not the only grant funding NNC provides to the VCSE. Currently, during 2023-2024 also NNC invests in the VCSE through:
- **Discretionary (Small) grants**, up to £5,000 per grant – £120,000 p.a.
 - **Shared Prosperity Funding** – £255,000 in 2023-24 and £400,00 in 2024-25 with a focus on projects which support young people in left behind areas and supporting community/VCSE sector with bid writing

and funding support; community mental health & wellbeing; connecting communities to services & services to communities and volunteering in all areas.

- **Shared Prosperity Funding for Rural Communities** £72,000 for 2023-24 and £218,000 for 2024-25.
- **Member Empowerment Fund**- £156,000 p.a.
- **Household Support Fund 4** for 2023-24, £570,00 with a focus on supporting all Vulnerable Households in Financial Hardship through Home Improvements, Food Poverty, Tenancy Support, Benefit Advice and Budget Management.
- **£250,000 COMF funding** in 2023-24 to support the test and learn phase for Support North Northants
- **£129,000 Well Northants Programme** community grants in the three left behind neighbourhoods.
- **Multiply funding** (commissioned by Adult Learning Service), supporting residents with numeracy skills, £273,500 for 23-24.
- There will also be other commissioned contracts from NNC services into the VCSE.

5.2. The investment detailed above, including the current strategic grant agreements totals £1.82m for 2023-2024.

5.3. Part of the current VCSE strategic grant arrangements relate to Infrastructure support to the VCSE by certain VCSE partners. Infrastructure arrangements, normally funded by Local Authorities and delivered through contractual arrangements, include functions such as:

- Capacity building in the sector to ensure back-office functions and governance arrangements are robust and organisations are commissioning-ready should they wish to bid for grants and contracts;
- Improving sustainability and increasing growth in the VCSE sector, developing fit for purpose, sustainable organisations able to deliver high quality projects with diversified income streams and less reliance on grants, with a more commercial focus and which are flexible and adaptable to change;
- Funding and bid-writing support;
- Volunteering best practice;
- Supporting networking, collaboration and co-ordination across the sector and with statutory partners to ensure the VCSE has a voice in strategic and operational decision making through genuine co-production;
- Supporting the sector to promote and enable social and community action; and
- Supporting the sector to demonstrate impact and return on investment and contribute to the social value agendas.

5.4. However, the infrastructure arrangements inherited by the Council from the former sovereign councils are relatively light touch and constitute a total investment of only £58,000 across North Northamptonshire, through two providers, SERVE for Wellingborough and Groundwork Northamptonshire

across Corby and Kettering. East Northants currently has no funded Infrastructure support.

- 5.5. Under the former councils the arrangements were delivered through annual grant agreements. For a Unitary Authority with a population the size of North Northants these legacy infrastructure arrangements are not sufficient nor robust enough to build capacity in the sector as set out above, under the ambitions set out in this Community Strategy.
- 5.6. National best practice is for Councils to formally tender VCSE Infrastructure contracts, to run for at least 3 years, to ensure these contracts deliver against strategic priorities for the Council, as well as meeting the needs of the sector, and to embed collaboration across and strong leadership of the sector into these contractual requirements. It is intended that for the Council that the new Infrastructure contract will have a significant role in delivering the Communities Strategy, with and on behalf of the Council, and with the sector and wider partners.
- 5.7. This assessment of the current situation was evidenced at the engagement session with over 100 representatives from the VCSE where future Infrastructure requirements were discussed at length. There is a huge appetite for collaboration across the sector in North Northamptonshire, but VCSE organisations said they would benefit from additional support for such issues as bid writing support, shared back-office functions such as training and professional development, HR, finance, procurement, legal, insurance and transport, communications and marketing, safeguarding, risk management, volunteer management, sharing resources and best practice, workforce recruitment, development and retention, governance and policy, commerciality and financial sustainability.
- 5.8. The sector also discussed the benefit of an annual state of the North Northamptonshire VCSE report and sharing expertise in demonstrating return on investment, all to help show the impact the VCSE has locally on services and outcomes for communities.
- 5.9. The Council does not have a statutory duty to fund the voluntary sector or commission projects from organisations within it. However, in recent years, financial cuts both nationally and locally have put significant pressure on the organisations within the sector. In some cases, organisations have been forced to use their reserves to continue operating, which of course is not sustainable in the long-term.
- 5.10. It is proposed to tender a new VCSE Infrastructure contract with an annual value of £200,00 for three years from September 2024 at the latest, to significantly support the delivery of this strategy. This, in turn will provide the support to the VCSE that is both needed and has been requested, to enable the sector to continue grow in reach, depth and resilience, to become less dependent on grant funding from the Council in the future and to continue to deliver positive outcomes for our residents and communities.

- 5.11. The Infrastructure contract will be funded from the VCSE strategic grants allocation within the Council's MTFP.
- 5.12. The current strategic grant funding arrangements with VCSE organisations were inherited from the former sovereign councils and involve a mixture of grants, service level agreements and contracts. Some of those arrangements have been in place for some considerable time, since 2017 in some cases.
- 5.13. The current funding arrangements with VCSE organisations created by the sovereign councils were subject to an application process and were awarded accordingly. Whilst, overall, the current arrangements are performing well, and grant agreements are monitored, they are out of date, offer a somewhat scattergun approach to what services are funded, and where, and as such do not provide the consistency and transparency to which the Council might now aspire. In addition, they do not necessarily reflect the Council's corporate priorities, and are not aligned with other system-wide ambitions for the area such as the 10 Live Your Best Life Strategy ambitions and the emerging local priorities being determined by the Local Area Partnerships.
- 5.14. In early 2022 a review was undertaken of the funding the Council provides to support some of the core costs of some of its devolved community centres, as inherited from the sovereign councils as part of the former VCSE Strategic Grant arrangements. This is in recognition that there is a range of arrangements in place across the Council area in relation to the ownership, management and funding arrangements for community centres.
- 5.15. All centres in the East Northants locality are devolved to either Town or Parish Councils or other community organisations. The former East Northamptonshire Council did not award community grants to any organisations running community buildings.
- 5.16. In Wellingborough all community centres are devolved or have never been owned by the Council. Hemmingwell Community and Skills Centre has recently been formally asset-transferred to Greatwell Homes as it is located on their land. There is a long-term lease in place with a community organisation which runs the centre. Hemmingwell Community Centre receives £10,000 p.a. from the Council towards core costs. Two other centres, Glamis Hall and the Victoria Centre also receive core funding of £10,000 and £11,326 p.a. respectively.
- 5.17. The three devolved centres in the Kettering area, (Crescents Community Centre, Burton Latimer Community Centre and Highfields) do not receive Council funding for core costs. However, there are seven which are still operated in-house by the Communities and Wellbeing service:
- Ise Valley Pavilion
 - Melton Street Community Centre
 - North Park Pavilion
 - Northampton Road Pavilion
 - Rockingham Pleasure Park Pavilion
 - Rothwell Community Centre

- Counties Community Centre

- 5.18. They are used by a number of regular hirers as well as one-off bookings, such as for parties or celebrations. Most are regularly hired, however, due to the condition of some of the buildings, usage is limited in some, two of which (Rockingham and Northampton Road Pavilions) are being considered as part of the emerging Leisure Facilities Strategy.
- 5.19. Staffing for the Kettering area centres is covered by the Communities and Wellbeing service via a Community Services Assistant who oversees the repairs and maintenance of these centres, along with 2 part-time Site Assistants who open/close for hirers and maintain the centres.
- 5.20. The cost to the Council to manage these in-house community centres is £160,000 annually with an income targeted for them on £86,500.
- 5.21. The Council continues to look at opportunities to devolve the remaining in-house centres, for example the Counties Community Centre is being proposed for 2024-25. It was previously devolved but brought back in-house when the Community Association folded. A new Community Association is now interested in taking on the running of the centre. There are challenges with further devolution as some centres need significant capital investment in order to bring them up to a standard where they can be transferred to communities, but the Council will continue to explore these opportunities as appropriate.
- 5.22. In 2012 the former Corby Borough Council devolved 12 Council-owned community facilities to community groups, to run on behalf of the council. Leases were agreed at a peppercorn rent and grants were awarded towards the core utility and running costs previously met in house.
- 5.23. These grants were awarded annually and ten of the centres currently receive grant funding support from North Northamptonshire Council as part of the legacy grant agreements taken on by the new authority in 2021. Two of them are sports facilities not community centres*. The Autumn Centre, which receives specific council funding for providing day care services for older people and people with dementia, does not receive a separate grant towards core running costs.
- 5.24. The currently funded devolved community facilities which receive funding towards core costs from the Council VCSE strategic grants allocation are:

Devolved Community Facility	Amount Council Funded per annum
Kingswood Community Centre (Corby)	£17,200
Danesholme Communicare Centre (Corby)	£11,660
Beanfield Community Centre (Corby)	£11,660

Stephenson Way Community Centre (Corby)	£8,660
Ennerdale Community Centre (Corby)	£8,660
Oakley Vale Community Centre (Corby)	£8,330
Arran Community Centre (Corby)	£5,000
Woodsend Bowls Club* (Corby)	£3,240
Corby Olympic Boxing Club* (Corby)	£1,170
Hemmingwell Community Centre (Wellingborough)	£10,000
Glamis Hall (Wellingborough)	£10,000
The Victoria Centre (Wellingborough)	£11,326
Total	£106,906

5.25. Service Level agreements are in place which contain agreed services for each centre which receives a grant towards core costs to deliver, such as:

- Managing the Property for the benefit of all residents within the area;
- Providing access to groups and individuals who wish to hire the property;
- Actively promoting the facilities available at the property to the community;
- The Board should be actively involved in contributing to local community events;
- The Board should foster good relationships with partners, resident groups and the community;
- Maintaining an activity programme and actively encourage new activities to increase the services delivered for all ages and abilities at the Property.

5.26. The Council, as landlord, is still responsible mainly for external repairs and maintenance, as well as fixtures such as heating systems, for which there is a revenue budget of £53,160. The budget is predominantly spent on monthly maintenance checks, minor repairs, fire equipment testing and when required, replacements, gas testing and labour costs. The budget is under pressure most years.

5.27. The community organisations, as leaseholders, are mainly responsible for internal repairs and décor of the buildings.

5.28. Across the Council area, Corby is distinct in that a larger number of community organisations running council owned community facilities have the benefit of a peppercorn rent, as well as an annual grant to contribute to core costs. There are no similar arrangements in either the Kettering or East Northants localities.

- 5.29. As part of the review into the VCSE strategic grant arrangements the Council has considered harmonising its approach across geographic areas and in line with strategic context outlined in priorities as outlined in section 4 above. This applies equally to investment in community centres as it does to other grant themes.
- 5.30. There is disparity between the devolved centres where core grants are provided and those in other parts of the Council area which are not funded in the same way. If allowed to continue this could lead to the question of parity of grant funding across the Council, arising to claims from organisations in other geographic areas of the Council and potentially an increased demand for annual revenue expenditure.
- 5.31. If the Council continues to fund the community centres as it currently does, and Council funding is expected year on year, there is limited incentive for the community associations to improve their business model or to seek other external funding streams. The funding is given for core costs and not against a specific service area or project outcomes, thus paradoxically limiting the council's influence over service delivery. If the Council does not harmonise the funding of community centres, it could lead to a long-term drain on the Council's revenue budget, leading to adverse consequences for other services.
- 5.32. The proposal to harmonise investment into community centres by removing the core grants to the devolved centres was aired as part of the Council's budget setting processes during late 2022 and early 2023. It was not progressed at this time, but a consultation, by way of a survey and face to face discussions, was undertaken to ascertain feedback on any effect that a cessation or reduction of the grant arrangements would have on the organisations running the affected community centres. Specifically, they were asked:
- What effect, if any, the proposal is likely to have on operating times and services offered at the centre?
 - How any likely effects could be mitigated e.g. cost savings, income generation, other external funding opportunities, tapered support etc?
 - The level of unrestricted reserves of the organisation e.g. 3 months?
 - Whether there are any other unique factors the council should be considering?
- 5.33. The overall feedback was that a short notice, total withdrawal of grants from the centres would have a detrimental effect, with several voluntary management groups stated that without time to mitigate the potential impact, they may have no option but to cease functioning and hand the keys back to the council. The main factors cited were:
- Low level of reserves and where reserves have been built up, this has taken several years of sustained effort;
 - High utility bills, especially where just coming off fixed tariffs;
 - Heavy reliance on volunteers, with a potential over reliance on a small number of people;
 - Some responsibility for ongoing repairs and maintenance;

- High insurance costs, especially where potential vandalism is a factor;
- Where the only cost reduction is staffing, this is often caretaking staff, without whom there would be a reduction in access to the building and therefore services, and everyday health and safety checks on buildings and appliances;
- Inability to raise prices to cover the extra income needed due to the economics of the area, and the potential of losing trade patronage through overpricing;
- Difficulty of raising external income through lack of resource, not being in a priority area or, where applications are made, the competition for funds within the sector means not many bids are successful or sustained;
- All the centres highlighted the ‘social’ value of their venues and added value of a range of services within the community, often in deprived areas, offering a safe space for people across a range of ages and cultural backgrounds to meet. The impact of loss of local services and access points would be amplified in an already deprived areas;
- In many cases, the centres host or co-ordinate initiatives as a partner to the Council for example, . warm spaces, local forum meetings, public health initiatives and are working towards building community capacity and resilience which the Council is trying to promote;
- Organisations pointed out that they act as custodians and users of council buildings that would otherwise be a larger liability to the council beyond any loss of community services and goodwill.

5.34. Having a place where everyone has the best opportunities and quality-of-life is paramount to the vision of North Northamptonshire. Well run and active community centres contribute to the corporate plan by hosting activities which help people live healthier, more active, independent and fulfilled lives; as well as providing efficient, effective and affordable services that make a real difference to the local community and further afield. This was taken into account when considering the option to withdraw or reduce the funding which contributes to the core costs of these devolved community centres, especially as they are largely situated in ‘left behind’ or deprived neighbourhoods.

5.35. It is proposed by the Executive at this time, that the funding which contributes to the core costs of these devolved community centres is maintained for 2024-25 and reviewed on an annual basis.

5.36. A review of current grant allocations to cluster them against themes and assess them against the Council’s Corporate priorities, the 10 Live Your Best Life ambitions, the intelligence emerging from the new Local Area Partnerships and engagement with the VCSE networks has identified a small number of key themes. In addition to the increased investment into VCSE Infrastructure support the following themes are proposed for funding by the Council from the VCSE strategic grants allocation:

- **Financial Inclusion** (benefits checks and advice, debt and money management advice and education, intensive case work for Debt Recovery Orders, IVAs, tribunal support and advocacy);

- **Community Transport** (to contribute to community-led transport offers across all localities for medical appointments and other social and employment purposes)
- **Prevention of Social Isolation for older people** (Support for over 60s to remain independent at home and to be an active part of the local community through practical support to access local groups and activities, Volunteer recruitment and support and outreach services)
- **Community Mental Health and Wellbeing** (co-ordination and use of Community wellbeing champions to support residents struggling with anxiety and low-level mental health challenges to manage day to day activities and access services which are there to support them)
- **Increasing resilience through specific commissions to the VCSE** to provide support for vulnerable residents, as identified through the Support North Northants (SNN) service;
- **Promotion and Advocacy for Equalities** (outreach and promotion campaigns about residents' rights, advice, guidance and casework related to discrimination).

5.37. New project specifications are being co-produced with VCSE providers and expressions of interest will be sought from the sector. New grant agreements will be established to run for three years from 1st April 2024, in recognition that short term funding does not support the sector to efficiently mobilise, then embed projects and develop exit strategies for sustainable delivery.

5.38. Organisations which receive funding will be required to ensure there is delivery across the NNC area, to prevent the postcode lottery which is currently in place. They will potentially be delivered through a lead provider model whereby the Council tenders a project brief and awards a Grant Agreement to one VCSE organisation to deliver against the funding criteria, but that organisation collaborates with others to ensure efficient service delivery across all four North Northamptonshire localities. This will further foster the ethos of collaboration and leadership across the VCSE.

5.39. Rationalisation and streamlining of the current strategic grant programme will allow for more robust oversight of future agreements and therefore service delivery, to ensure NNC is securing best value, impact and outcomes for its investment.

5.40. As part of the Council's Budget Setting process for 2024-25 a series of options in relation to the £671,771 budget for VCSE Strategic Grants were carefully considered by the Council's Executive Members:

	Option	Description	Impact/Comment
1	Do Nothing	Leave as is and continue to invest £671,771 into the VCSE rolling the current grant agreements forward	Does not align with strategic priorities. Disparity and lack of consistency in what is funded and where.
2	Increase investment in Infrastructure,	Contract for Infrastructure at £200k p.a. Retain £250k for other key themes.	Will strengthen VCSE and deliver the Communities Strategy. Will fund some identified key themes. Could attract

	Option	Description	Impact/Comment
	cease funding to community centres, harmonise strategic grants into 3-4 key themes	Withdraw devolved community centre funding	negative feedback re reduced investment and withdrawal of funding to community centres.
3	Increase investment in Infrastructure, harmonise strategic grants into 3-4 key themes and retain funding to community centres but only 3 in the Left Behind neighbourhoods	Contract for Infrastructure at £200k p.a. Retain £250k for other key themes. Provide core cost grants to a community centre in Kingswood, Hemmingwell/Queensway and Avondale and Grange.	Will strengthen VCSE and deliver the Communities Strategy. Will fund some identified key themes. Provides reassurance that NNC values community centres but has to prioritise its investment in most deprived areas. Could attract negative feedback re reduced investment and withdrawal of funding to some community centres.
4	Increase investment in Infrastructure, but cease all other elements of the VCSE Strategic grants	Contract for Infrastructure at £200k p.a. Cease all other strategic grants and funding to devolved community centres	Will strengthen VCSE and deliver the Communities Strategy. Could attract negative feedback re heavily reduced investment and withdrawal of funding to community centres.
5	Increase investment in Infrastructure, and retain funding to community centres but only 3 in the Left Behind neighbourhoods	Contract for Infrastructure at £200k p.a. Cease all other strategic grants apart from core cost grants to a community centre in Kingswood, Hemmingwell/Queensway and Avondale and Grange.	Will strengthen VCSE and deliver the Communities Strategy. Provides reassurance that NNC values community centres but has to prioritise its investment in most deprived areas. Could attract negative feedback re heavily reduced investment and withdrawal of funding to some community centres.
6	Increase investment in Infrastructure, harmonise strategic grants into 6 key themes and retain funding to all currently funded devolved community centres	Contract for Infrastructure at £200k p.a. Retain £366k for other key themes. Continue to fund £107k for devolved community centres.	Will strengthen VCSE and deliver the Communities Strategy. Will fund some identified key themes. Provide reassurance that NNC values community centres. Mitigates risk of negative feedback.

5.41. Following review of a variety of options the funding envelope for the VCSE Strategic grants will remain at £671,771 as per **Option 6** above, in recognitions of the Council's continued commitment to valuing and supporting the VCSE, but

new grant arrangements will be put in place for April 2024 for the proposed new grant themes.

5.42. The aims for the Communities Strategy are:

- Emphasise and strengthen the role the VCSE sector, residents and communities have in delivering the Council's corporate objectives, and within the context of the countywide Live Your Best Life Strategy for the ICS;
- Develop a co-ordinated vision and framework for effective partnership working on equal terms, and, wherever possible, co-production with the VCSE groups and Town and Parish Councils;
- Set out the Council's approach to financial investment into the VCSE, which promotes sustainability, through access to a range of funding sources, including strategic and small grant giving by NNC; and future infrastructure support into the sector;
- Strengthen the ability of the VCSE sector to deliver services and connect communities through engaging residents, leading community action, supporting volunteering, supporting people in the most vulnerable situations, and brokering relationships between statutory bodies and communities;
- Provide a framework to support innovative approaches which facilitate necessary change, given the shifting needs of local communities in the wake of the pandemic and the current economic climate.

5.43. The outcomes for the Strategy are:

- Improve sustainability and increase growth in the VCSE sector, developing fit for purpose, sustainable organisations able to deliver high quality services with diversified income streams and less reliance on grants, with a more social enterprise focus and which are flexible and adaptable to change;
- Strengthen the ability of the VCSE sector to deliver services and connect communities through engaging residents, leading community action, supporting people in the most vulnerable situations and brokering relationships between statutory bodies and communities;
- Encourage mutually beneficial relationships across sectors and communities that use smarter ways of working and collaboration to achieve what we cannot alone;
- Provide clarity about the role of sectors in building strong communities;
- Align key themes underpinning current strategic thinking, including place-based working, asset-based community development, devolution of assets and services to communities, shifting the focus to early help and prevention; and shaping demand to reduce costs in statutory services.

5.44. The aims will be delivered through 8 strategic themes:

5.44.1. **Theme 1**

Building quality and capacity within the VCSE sector and providing back-office support to enable sustainable growth, demonstrate return on investment and social impact, maximise resources across the sector, all to achieve positive outcomes for our communities

5.44.2. **Themes 2 and 3**

Building mutually beneficial relationships across sectors, with commissioners of services, and with communities by creating equal partnerships by promoting co-production and asset-based community development best practice, sharing information, skills, assets and resources, creating spaces to come together, utilising evidence and celebrating success.

5.44.3. **Theme 4**

Innovative income generation and investment into VCSE to ensure financial sustainability in a mixed model and enterprise culture, encompassing commissioning, maximising national and regional opportunities.

5.44.4. **Theme 5**

Developing our people assets, by increasing resident action and taking a strategic approach to volunteering, providing a platform for opportunities, brokerage, data collection and impact monitoring.

5.44.5. **Theme 6**

Developing our physical assets and services through Town and Parish Councils and community involvement and through supporting communities to take on assets and services asset transfer.

5.44.6. **Theme 7**

Co-ordination of the North Northamptonshire VCSE to embed the sector in the ICS and the Place programme, through ongoing leadership and support to Community Wellbeing Forums and Local Area Partnerships and representation at Executive Board level.

5.44.7. **Theme 8**

Co-ordination of investment into the VCSE through the delivery of a range of strategic and smaller grant programmes into the VCSE, based on robust and transparent policies, procedures and governance to include:

- New VCSE Infrastructure contract arrangements, at a £200,000 investment per annum for 3 years, which will play a key role in supporting the delivery of this strategy

- Small (Discretionary grants) grants up to £25,000 per award (£120,000 per annum for 2024-2027)
- Member Empowerment Fund (£156,000 p.a)
- Shared Prosperity Funds (£618,00 2024-2025 only)
- New VCSE Strategic grant arrangements (£471,771 p.a. for 2024-2027) to cover key strategic themes of community transport, financial inclusion, equalities, older peoples' social isolation, low Level mental health support within communities, building VCSE capacity and community resilience as well as continued contribution to core costs of some devolved community centres.

5.45. This Strategy runs from 2024 to 2027 and there are a number of key Council services, partners projects that will drive delivery of the themes, and the elements within themes. For example, the Council will facilitate the VCSE grant programmes under Theme 8 but the VCSE organisations deliver against the grant agreements. Town and Parish Councils will play a lead role, along with NCALC, to help the Council to deliver against Theme 6.

5.46. There is a crucial role for the VCSE organisations as future Infrastructure contract holder/s, to lead delivery of specific themes, namely Themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7. These include capacity building, funding support, volunteering and co-ordination of the VCSE role within the ICS, to name a few. The details and scale of this contract will be explored and delivered through a robust procurement process.

6. Next Steps

6.1. To present the strategy to the Executive for approval.

6.2. To finalise the project briefs for the new strategic grant arrangements and to circulate to the VCSE for Expressions of Interest to be submitted.

6.3. To work with legal and procurement to prepare the VCSE Infrastructure contract for tender.

6.4. To establish a relevant forum with representatives from Town and Parish Councils.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

7.1.1 Funding for the delivery of this Strategy exists within the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) as part of the £671,771 allocated for the VCSE strategic grant arrangements and as part of the wider service budget for the

Communities and Wellbeing service. Some of the funding for the other VCSE grants programmes comes from external sources and is also tabled below:

Grant/Contract	Amount	Funding Source
VCSE Infrastructure contract	£200,000	NNC MTFP
Core cost grants to community centres, VCSE strategic grants	£107,000	NNC MTFP
Financial Inclusion, VCSE strategic grant	£110,000	NNC MTFP
Community Transport, VCSE strategic grant	£ 60,000	NNC MTFP
Prevention of social isolation for older people, VCSE strategic grant	£ 60,000	NNC MTFP
Community mental health and wellbeing, VCSE strategic grant	£ 60,000	NNC MTFP
Increasing resilience in the VCSE to support vulnerable people via SNN, VCSE strategic grant	£ 60,000	NNC MTFP
Promotion and Advocacy for Equalities, VCSE strategic grant	£ 15,000	NNC MTFP
VCSE Discretionary small grants programme	£120,000	Public Health
VCSE Discretionary small grants	£400,000	Shared Prosperity Funding
VCSE Discretionary small grants for rural communities	£218,000	Shared Prosperity Funding
Member Empowerment Fund	£156,000	NNC MTFP

7.2 Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. A standard grant agreement will be issued for the delivery of projects by the VCSE on behalf of the Council under the VCSE strategic grant arrangements.
- 7.2.2. The Infrastructure contract will be procured and awarded in accordance with all legal requirements, including relevant legislation and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.
- 7.2.3. A member of the Council's in-house Legal team will be an advisor throughout the process and up to execution of any resulting contracts.
- 7.2.4. All reports relating to a procurement which require legal review and/or comment to be provided to the Legal officer with conduct of the matter to which the report relates.

7.2.5. Governance of the strategy will primarily sit with the Council but from a partnership viewpoint. The new VCSE Infrastructure contract and VCSE grant arrangements will be robustly monitored. Annual Delivery Plans will be produced, and milestones, outputs and outcomes will be tracked.

7.2.6. Practical delivery of collaborative projects within communities will be delivered through the LAPs, and informed and supported by the partners at the Community Wellbeing Forums. This work is governed by the North Place Delivery Board as part of the ICS Operating Framework.

7.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1 The North Northamptonshire Councils Corporate plan adopted in 2021 has key commitments which are key to this Strategy. These include:

- **Helping people to lead active, fulfilled lives** – helping people be more active, independent, and fulfilled
- **Building better, brighter futures** – caring for young people, providing them with a high-quality education and opportunities to help them flourish
- **Develop safe and thriving places** – enabling a thriving and successful economy that shapes great places to live, learn, work and visit
- **Create a green, sustainable environment** – taking a lead on improving the green environment, making the area more sustainable for generations to come
- **Build connected communities** – ensuring communities are connected with one another so they are able to shape their lives and areas where they live
- **Develop modern public services** – providing efficient, effective, and affordable services that make a real difference to all our local communities.

[Corporate plan | North Northamptonshire Council
\(northnorthants.gov.uk\)](https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/corporate-plan)

7.4 Risk

7.4.1. There is a risk that the expressions of interests received for the new VCSE strategic project briefs will not meet the criteria for effective awards of new grant agreements. However, this is being addressed through co-production of the new project briefs with representatives from the VCSE.

7.4.2. Some existing VCSE grant recipients may no longer receive these grants from the Council. The grant recipients were informed in writing in late 2022 of the impending changes to the strategic grant arrangements and many have been

directly engaged with through the VCSE engagement undertaken to develop this strategy. Any VCSE organisations unable to apply for new VCSE strategic grants will still be able to apply for Council funding awarded through other VCSE grant programmes as outlined in 7.1.1. of this report.

7.5 Consultation

7.5.1. An extensive range of VCSE organisations of different sizes, have been engaged and consulted during the development of this strategy.

7.6 Consideration by Executive

7.6.1. The draft Strategy will be considered by the Executive on February 15th 2024.

7.7 Equality Implications

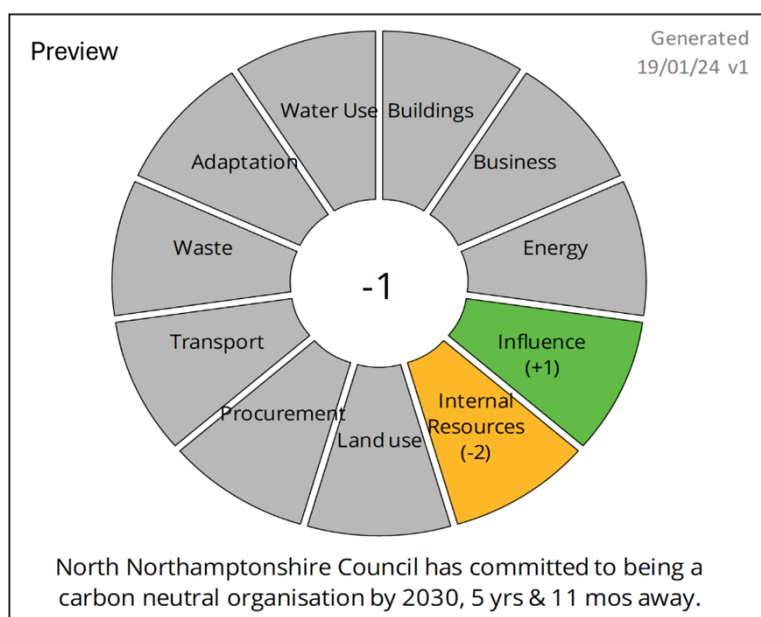
7.8.1. An initial Equality Screening Assessment (ESA) has been undertaken for both the Strategy and the new VCSE strategic grant arrangements. Both identified a positive impact as they should benefit all communities by strengthening the VCSE sector and partnerships, increasing resident involvement and advocacy, fostering good relations and seeking to eliminate discrimination by strategically targeting resources to support vulnerable people.

7.8.2. Exactly how protected groups will specifically benefit will depend largely on the grant applications the Council awards. The Council wishes for VCSE organisations to come forward with evidence of local need and how they intend to address it, however as part of the expressions of interest and the tender process for the Infrastructure contract, the Council will request that potential grant recipients explain how they will engage with/support diverse communities. This activity will then assessed through grant / contract monitoring and evaluation.

7.8 Climate and Environment Impact

7.9.1. The Council declared a climate change emergency in June 2021, and is committed to reducing its climate impact both within its own Council buildings and in working with businesses and the wider community to achieve net zero energy emissions.

7.9.2. Through the new VCSE project briefs and grant agreements the Council will seek to encourage organisations to consider the environmental and climate impact of their projects, in line with the Council's priorities in this area.



- 7.1.3. All the VCSE organisations funded by the Council are local to Northamptonshire, with many locally based in the area of delivery. In being locally based, including the use of technology for meetings, reduces the carbon footprint.
- 7.1.4. A Climate Change Impact Assessment has been undertaken with the overall assessment indicating a negative impact due to the influence the Council can bring to bear through working with communities and the VCSE.
- 7.1.5. The Climate Change Impact Assessment has identified a negative score (-2) regarding staff travel requirement with the move of officers working in the community and may increase travel. The mitigation is to encourage staff to use alternative sustainable modes of transport, such as bikes, electric vehicles or public transport.
- 7.1.6. The additional negative score was identified (-1) with regards to working with partners and the mitigation for this impact, is to encourage those partners and organisations to take them to take a similar approach to climate control in line with the Councils.

7.9 Community Impact

- 7.10.1 Delivery of this strategy will have many positive impacts for residents across North Northamptonshire. Through the new Infrastructure contract and the VCSE grant funding arrangements, the Council funds projects which demonstrate how they support the Council's priorities and in addition how they contribute to positive activities such as volunteering, community involvement,

tackle poverty, increase household income, improve social mobility, address inequality; and promote social inclusion and community resilience.

7.10 **Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.11.1 None directly identified, however a strong and vibrant VCSE often supports cohesive communities which has a positive effect on reducing crime and disorder.

8 Background Papers

8.1 Report to NNC Executive, Strategic voluntary sector grant agreements and programme of work to define the future working arrangements with Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector, 17th March 2022

**North
Northamptonshire
Council
Communities
Strategy
2024-2027**

Foreword – Councillor Mark Rowley - Executive Member for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up

North Northamptonshire's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) is vital to the life of our area. Our voluntary and community organisations, and local groups help to connect communities, support individuals, deliver services and bring people together. The sector is innovative, dynamic and resourceful. It does not just fill the gaps in between public services; it's more often the first port of call for people, where they go for friendship, support and to give something back to their local area. Which is why it's so diverse.

What does the phrase VCSE really mean? Voluntary and community groups of every shape and size, and now joined by an emerging social enterprise sector. They have seen huge changes over the last few years, positives and negatives. The pandemic, financial challenges and the cost-of-living crisis have prompted a re-focus within the sector, a fresh look at what is being delivered and achieved, what is needed and what the aspirations are. Quality and sustainability are essential not just for survival, but to thrive. Relationships have changed, but those that have emerged are stronger than ever, with more collaboration, within and across sectors, and greater recognition and valuing of voluntary and community groups.

What makes our voluntary and community groups in North Northamptonshire so special are people. An army of volunteers, staff, friends and neighbours working tirelessly to build their local community and help the most vulnerable, at risk and in need.

And we have never needed them more. Ongoing public sector austerity, the huge impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, economic, demographic and social pressures are unprecedented. Voluntary and community groups are best placed to deal with these challenges, and best placed to respond, in the right place at the right time, at the heart of our communities.

But they cannot do this alone, and nor should they simply be given money to respond. As a new and developing Council, we want to foster and enable a new spirit and culture of working together across sectors and communities, a strengths and asset-based approach where we all have a contribution to make, and resources and skills are invested collaboratively, equally and transparently.

Our new Place Development Programme, as part of the Integrated Care System (ICS), seeks to drive this way of working, bringing public services, residents and voluntary and community groups and local businesses together through the four Community Wellbeing Forums and seven Local Area Partnerships, to make positive change happen. And the Sector can play a significant role in helping to shape, influence and deliver our Vision 50 ambitions for North Northamptonshire.

The challenges we face present fresh opportunities, but we need to be brave enough to change how we work, break down our silos and sector barriers and build mutually beneficial relationships.

That is why we have produced this strategy. It's not one just for the 'VCSE', it's a vision for us all to achieve our common goals. I am delighted that North Northamptonshire Council are continuing to invest in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, not only maintaining the levels of funding from recent years, but enhancing the

offer through new funding streams such as the creation of the Member Empowerment Fund and the allocation of external investment from the Shared Prosperity Fund as well as short term funding such as the Household Support Fund. I am also pleased that through this Strategy we will be significantly increasing investment in VCSE infrastructure support, so that we can continue to raise the profile of the sector by supporting hundreds of groups and organisations to do new activities, deliver services, support volunteers and become more financially sustainable.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read this strategy and for your continuing support in our vision for to build strong communities in North Northamptonshire, 'a place where everyone has the best opportunities and quality of life'.

Cllr Mark Rowley

DRAFT

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1. About this Strategy

This purpose of this strategy is to emphasise and strengthen the role the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE), residents and communities have in delivering the North Northamptonshire Council's Corporate Plan and the Northamptonshire Integrated Care System's Live Your Best Live Strategy.

It is a North Northamptonshire Council Strategy but it also brings together the key themes which underpin a number of national and local agendas into a co-ordinated vision for effective partnership working with the VCSE.

This will be achieved through mutually beneficial relationships between all directorates within the Council, with the VCSE but also can support positive relationships across all organisations, across sectors and with residents and communities, which will drive innovation, collaboration and meaningful co-production.

2. Strategic and Operational Context

2.1. North Northamptonshire's VCSE

The VCSE provides valuable support to people across North Northamptonshire. The range and geographical coverage of organisations in the sector is comprehensive. There are currently 168 VCSE member organisations connected to the VCSE Locality based networks in Kettering and Corby and 200 across Wellingborough and East Northants, many of whom operate successfully without funding from the Council. They range from small volunteer-run community groups to larger charities, some of which provide very specialised work such as debt casework, mental health counselling, support to victims of Domestic Abuse, and drug treatment and recovery.

2.2. NNC's Strategic Priorities

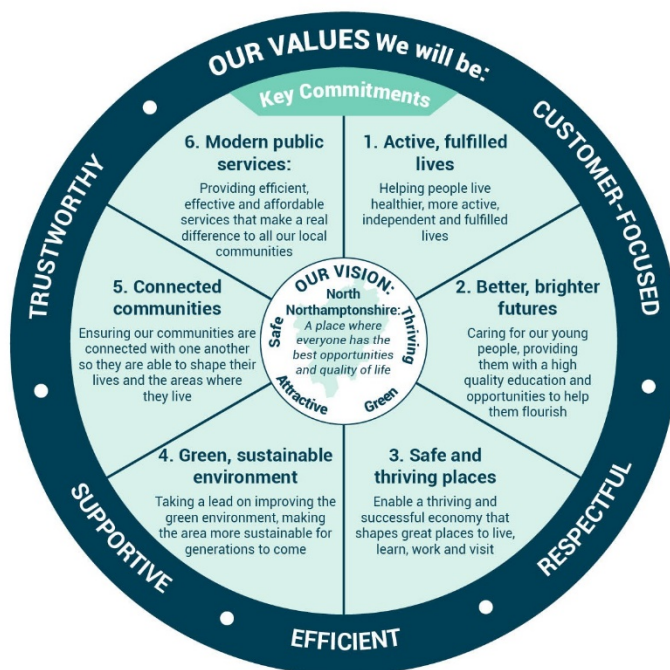


Figure 1 - NNC Corporate Plan 2021-2025

As a new Council vested in 2021, North Northamptonshire Council developed and adopted its first Corporate Plan in late 2021. The main focus for the Council is to ensure North Northamptonshire is, **‘a place where everyone has the best opportunities and quality of life’**.

During 2023 the Council has also been developing with its key partners, including the VCSE, its Big50 Future Vision which sets out the vision for 2050 for North Northamptonshire as an area, with the draft priorities for North Northamptonshire being:

- A proud place
- A prosperous place
- A proactive place

The VCSE has a role to work alongside the Council in delivering almost all of its strategic objectives as they relate to outcomes for our people and places, and align with the raison d’etre for many of our VCSE organisations. However it is important to ensure that where the Council is grant funding VCSE delivery, the investment is demonstrably contributing to its strategic priorities.

2.3. The Integrated Care System

Over the last 18 months the county as a ‘system’ of partners from across the Public and VCSE sectors, has also developed its approach to integrated health and care through Integrated Care Northamptonshire (ICN). A new 10 year Live Your Best Life Strategy was adopted in late 2022, the ambition of this strategy is for residents to ‘live their best life’ in all aspects: health and wellbeing, education, housing and employment.

It sets out a collaborative direction of travel for the people of Northamptonshire to achieve our shared vision over the next 10 years to deliver better outcomes for residents throughout their lifetime; from pregnancy to early years, to improved education and employment opportunities, to social connection and better access to health and care services.

It also recognises that, like many areas, North Northamptonshire faces a number of challenges that continue to place pressure on the Council and on health and care services. We face significant demand from our growing older population and working age adults, as well as our children population. These are happening at a time when operating cost pressures are high, with utility costs rising and people feeling the impact of the rising cost of living. It is clear that organisations, and their services, must adapt to ensure that they meet the challenges ahead. We know that through shared working and VCSE and community involvement, we have the best opportunity to respond to these challenges.

The Live Your Best Life strategic objectives are summarised below:

Ambition	Outcome
The best start in life	<p>Women are healthy and well during and after pregnancy.</p> <p>All children grow and develop well so they are ready and equipped to start school.</p>
Access to the best available education and learning	<p>Education settings are good and inclusive and children and young people, including those with special needs perform well.</p> <p>Adults have access to learning opportunities which support them with work and life skills.</p>
Opportunity to be fit, well and independent	<p>Children and adults are healthy and active and enjoy good mental health.</p> <p>People experience less ill-health and disability due to lung and heart diseases.</p>
Employment that keeps them and their families out of poverty	<p>More adults are employed and receive a 'living wage'.</p> <p>Adults and families take up benefits they are entitled to.</p>
Good housing in places which are clean and green	<p>Good access to affordable, safe, quality accommodation and security of tenure.</p> <p>The local environment is clean and green with lower carbon emissions.</p>
To feel safe in their homes and when out and about	<p>People are safe in their homes, on public transport and in public places.</p> <p>Children and young people are safe and protected from harm.</p>
Connected to their families and friends	<p>People feel well connected to family, friends and their community.</p> <p>Connections are helped by public transport and technology.</p>
The chance for a fresh start, when things go wrong	<p>Ex-offenders and homeless people are helped back into society.</p> <p>People have good access to support for addictive behaviour and take it up.</p>

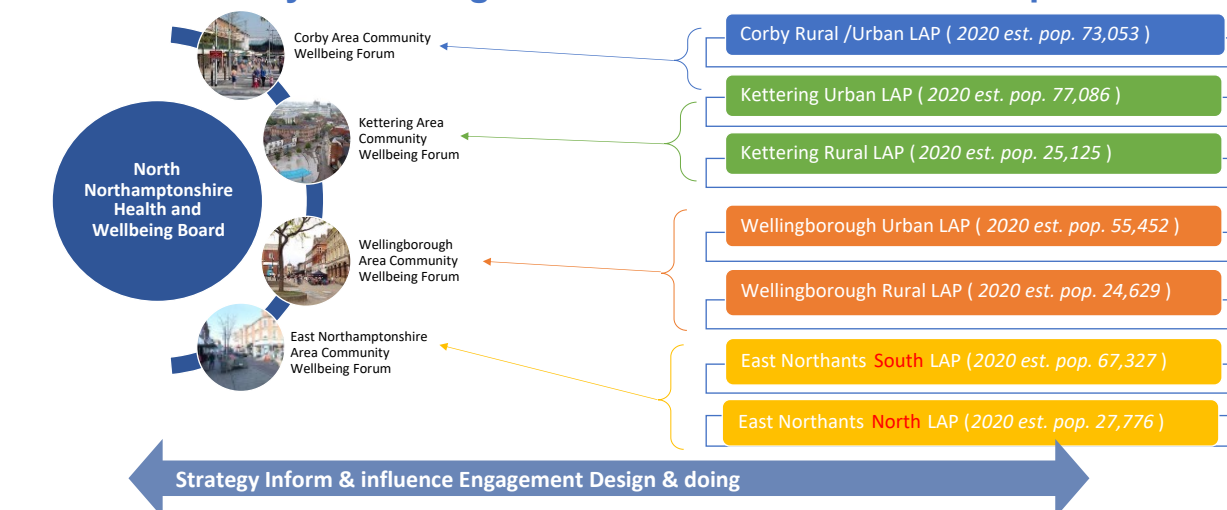
2.4. Community Wellbeing Forums

- Enable local statutory and VCSE partners to work together in a place to share organisational priorities and initiatives to improve health and wellbeing of local people through engagement and strengthened relationships with each other and communities.
- Influence and inform the North Northamptonshire health and wellbeing ambitions.
- Review evidence on local health needs, social and economic determinant of health and wellbeing and identify issues that need addressing.
- Provide partnership action to unblock challenges that LAPs feel unable to tackle and where 'at scale' solutions are needed, including joint commissioning / pooled budget arrangements.
- Provide oversight and conduit for effective community engagement.
- Enable local leaders influence policy to access the right resource and capabilities to deliver their functions.

2.5. Local Area Partnerships

- Represent local areas and give a voice to residents, translating strategy into local action.
- Build a local relationship with communities and support them to live their best lives.
- Put community involvement & engagement at the heart of improving health and wellbeing.
- Contribute to system-wide priorities by utilising strong evidence-based information and deep local insight from frontline services and communities.
- Grasp opportunities together to work together on locally identified priorities and projects to improve areas people lives to meet local needs.
- Enable local community design and doing through improved understanding of communities.

Area Community Wellbeing Forums Local Area Partnerships



The LAPs have used newly developed LAP profiles, based on a range of Public Health and other data, alongside of local intelligence that LAP members have brought to the table, to identify a number of priorities.

The first round of priorities were identified following a series of community events held in the spring of 2023 and the second round were identified in the autumn of 2023. Partnership task and finish groups have been convened to work on these priorities and actions plans have been developed for each.

Summary of LAP priorities 2023:

LAP	Priority One (Spring 2023)	Priority Two (Autumn 2023)
Corby	Community Transport (lack of medical transport offer)	Support for Cost of Living & wellbeing. Expanding education & training around mental health & wellbeing.
Kettering Urban	Improving engagement with young people who require more targeted support for mental health & wellbeing.	Public and professional awareness of available services.
Kettering Rural	Access to services in rural villages.	Support for anxiety which is a barrier to accessing services.
Wellingborough West	Young People engagement to ensure voice is heard & awareness of local services.	Access to affordable household essentials.
Wellingborough East	Young People engagement to ensure voice is heard & awareness of local services.	Navigating support for substance misuse.

LAP	Priority One (Spring 2023)	Priority Two (Autumn 2023)
East Northants North	Community Transport expansion through volunteer recruitment.	Rural Isolation & awareness of wellbeing support.
East Northants South	Community Transport expansion through volunteer recruitment.	Support for Parents & Carers of Under 18s.

LAPs have also undertaken an asset mapping programme to identify the broad range of physical assets and services across North Northamptonshire, which have been mapped using interactive GIS software.

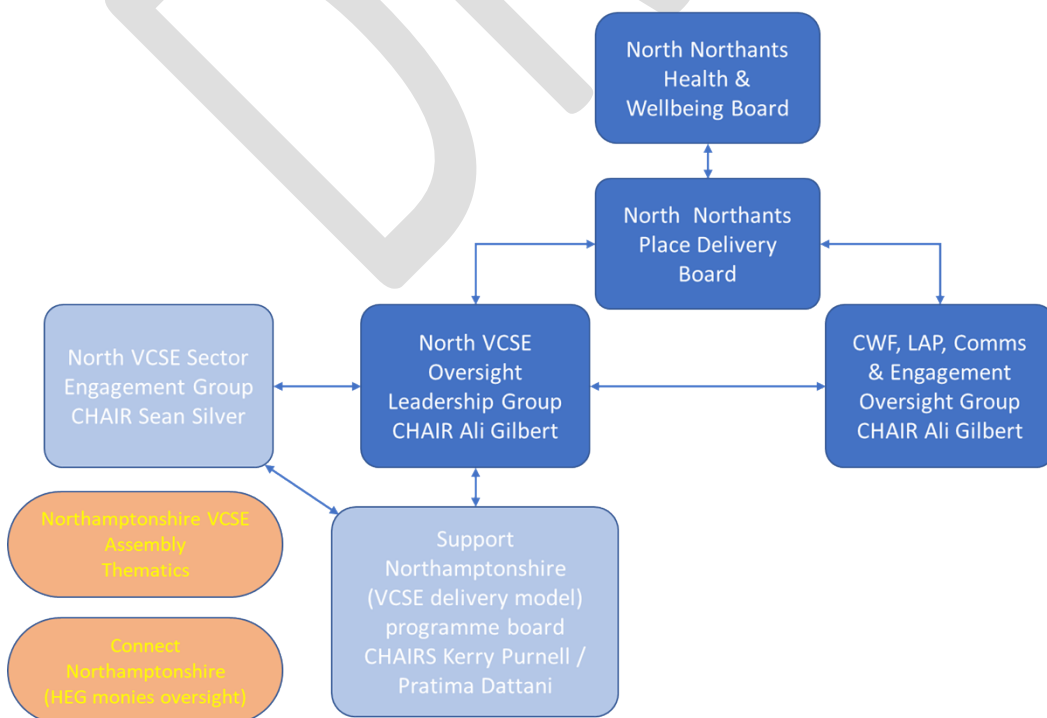
In response to the development of ICN the VCSE across North Northamptonshire has become stronger, largely due to the emergence of the Integrated Care System (ICS) Place Programme.

The advent of the ICS Place Programme has seen the sector strengthen its collaboration within and across the sector, and work closely with statutory partners to influence the development of the programme including leadership and co-ordination of the new four CWFs and seven LAPs.

A new governance arrangement for the VCSE has been embedded as part of the ICS, with a strategic Oversight Group reporting into the Place Delivery Board, the four VCSE chairs of the Community Wellbeing Forums sitting on the North Health and Wellbeing Board and a wider North ICS VCSE operational Engagement Group being established to complement the locality VCSE networks that already existed.

Figure 3 - VCSE Place Programme Governance

North Place Development Programme Governance



2.6. Shaping Demand - the role of prevention and early intervention

To reduce demand on services we must make substantial cultural changes, placing residents, communities and the VCSE sector at the heart of improving community resilience. A variety of techniques for understanding and managing demand are now emerging across a range of public services, including:

- Customer insight, using tools such as service user panels, customer journey mapping, analysis of multi-agency data sets, risk stratification, to build a clearer picture of how and why people engage with public services.
- Changing the relationship between citizen and state, empowering and enabling residents and communities to take action, devolving services and assets to Local Councils and community groups and encouraging greater community cohesion and resilience.
- Investing in prevention and early intervention, for example through social prescribing, an approach that links patients in primary care and residents with non-clinical sources of support within the community. In North Northamptonshire this includes Primary Care link workers based in GP Practices, Activity on Referral Schemes and SPRING Social Prescribing, a Health and Public Health funded outcomes focussed model delivered by a collaboration of organisations to provide interventions for residents with one or more long term health condition.
- Designing and integrating services around the user by involving users in the design and delivery of services, improving integration of delivery, co-production, increasing self-management, peer-to-peer and community support.

2.7. Support North Northants (SNN)

A new VCSE-led whole-system, early intervention service, Support North Northants (SNN), has been mobilised in the second half of 2023, as a test and learn programme. It has 12 months seed funding from three different funding partners across the System to help the VCSE prove the concept.

SNN is a system-wide collaborative service model with the VCSE, statutory and other agencies to provide earlier intervention and prevention of escalation of issues for adults over 18 and their families. It aims to guide people to the right services, pathways and support networks quickly, and to build greater levels of community resilience by increasing capacity in the VCSE to provide wrap-around support. The key principles are:

- Don't give up on people' and catch people early.
- Person-centred and strengths-based support, based on holistic assessments.
- Build personal and community resilience, invests in and builds capacity within VCSE services to meet identified local needs.
- Help people to help themselves.

- Effective use of public and community assets, skills, talents, resources through effective case co-ordination.

A small SNN team of 11 staff has been recruited, hosted across three VCSE organisations, and additional investment has been made into other VCSE organisations to provide key support services which have been identified as gaps early on, such as benefits checks for all SNN service-users and home repairs and safety where needed. SNN is a practical emerging example of the collaboration within the VCSE and across the sectors, which this strategy seeks to foster.

2.8. Levelling Up in Our ‘Left Behind’ Neighbourhoods

In 2021-22 a cross party Scrutiny Panel was established by the Council to review and understand the underlying data related to the three neighbourhood areas in Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough highlighted as ‘*left behind*’.

Engagement activity was undertaken with residents in those neighbourhoods to understand the challenges and opportunities and also to explore the views of partner agencies, including the VCSE organisations, working in those communities. Learning was also considered from programmes already delivered in those areas. Recommendations were made and a Levelling Up Action Plan has been developed, to both set out the Council’s strategic intent to level up these neighbourhoods and so that progress against those recommendations can be demonstrated.

2.9. Northamptonshire County Association for Local Councils (NCALC) Community Asset Mapping project 2021-23

NCALC received Community Renewal Funding to deliver a project aimed to be an investment in communities and place. It included:

- developing a robust devolution framework in partnership with the two new Unitary Authorities, Parish and Town Councils across Northamptonshire and NCALC;
- building capacity within the Parish and Town Council sector across Northamptonshire through capacity funding to enable them to map all assets, services, functions and facilities within their parish;
- generating a comprehensive register of all assets, services, functions and facilities owned and managed by both the Unitary Authorities and the Parish and Town Councils across Northamptonshire;
- enhancing the confidence, knowledge and skills of Parish and Town Councils to generate effective business cases to achieve successful bids through the Community Right to Bid process for community assets.

The project resulted in Local Councils across North Northamptonshire being better informed about and prepared for and future devolution of assets and services. Some of the “*nuts and bolts*” of devolution were put in place, such as the Statement of Intent from North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) which states:

- NNC “understands that the appetite for and capacity of towns and parishes to take on increased roles in local service delivery and place-shaping varies significantly between individual local councils.”

- NNC “wants to support communities when they wish to take on additional responsibilities; but the Council is not looking to force assets onto towns & parishes.”
- “The Community Asset Transfer Policy is there to enable NNC to respond if / when town or parish councils want to explore taking on an asset or service.”
- **The transfer of assets or services is an opportunity and there will be a place-led approach which responds to local demand or aspirations from communities.**

The policies on Asset Transfer and Assets of Community Value have been adopted by the Council. “Listening Events” which were held with NNC Officers and Councillors went some way to establishing a meaningful dialogue between NNC and the Local Councils in its area. There is further work to do to ensure that if there are any devolution of assets and services, the process is well-managed, thoughtful, and fair. This will therefore form a theme for this strategy.

Whilst all these strategic and operational approaches contribute to building strong communities, there is a broader recognition of what makes a strong community, beyond a specific service or theme. All people who live and work in the community can contribute, in particular the VCSE sector and residents.

This new Communities Strategy seeks to promote the whole view of what builds strong communities, and the roles different organisations, sectors and residents can play in achieving this.

3. Roles of the VCSE and Communities

3.1. VCSE

The changing financial, social and demographic environment places increasing emphasis on collaboration with and delivery by the VCSE sector to achieve the strategic goals of the Council and its strategic partners. We must continue to recognise the importance of this sector, and work with its members to ensure there is sufficient capacity and sustainability within it.

In preparing this strategy, the current VCSE Infrastructure Organisations have engaged with organisations across the VCSE locality networks, and the first sector-wide engagement event was held in person at the end of September 2023, where over 100 VCSE organisations were represented. These sessions highlighted the vital role the sector plays in delivering commissioned, grant-funded and voluntary services, often to people in the most vulnerable situations. The sector is seen as innovative, dynamic, flexible and responsive, making it a key partner in delivering effective and efficient services.

At the engagement event the sector was asked to consider the following questions:

- What are the biggest challenges facing the VCSE locally currently?
- What are the opportunities?
- What support do you think should be offered under future VCSE infrastructure arrangements?

- If NNC could only invest in a few strategic priorities for the sector, what would they be?

The feedback is summarised in the table below:

Challenges	Opportunities	Infrastructure	Investment Priorities
Funding support: longer term funding; more streamlined applications & monitoring; too short notice for bids	Libraries & other assets as core community hubs	Shared back-office functions - HR, recruitment, training, finance, admin, legal, procurement, insurance, Equality Impact Assessments, comms, marketing, PR, GIS, safeguarding, health & safety, DBS, risk management and Business Continuity	Youth Offer
Complexity of clients & struggle to get referrals to other agencies met	Collaboration across VCSE	Funding support, bid writing, funding fairs and collaborative applications	Social Isolation for older people
Sustainable workforce	Asset mapping to increase awareness of local offers	Promoting best practice	Financial Inclusion (cost of living)
Cost of back-office functions	Quality multi-purpose hubs in each town centre	Networking & information sharing	Life and employability skills. ESOL training
Increase in core costs to run	Use SNN & Social Prescribing to identify service gaps	Commercial upskilling	Family / Community hubs
Lack of commercial skills	Collate better data on sector to show impact	Leadership & co-ordination - CEO network & leadership development	Physical activity
Communication across sector & with partners	Make use of collective experience	Volunteering best practice, database, portal	Low level mental health / wellbeing
Fragmented sector, overlap and duplication of services	Release public assets to sector	More engagement events for sector and with NNC and other statutory partners / commissioners	Community Transport
Current infrastructure support not agile enough	VCSE knowledge 'hub' for local areas	Ensuring VCSE voice is heard locally & nationally	Social & affordable housing & homelessness prevention
VCSE is picking up some statutory work due to overstretched services	Customer /person-centred (empowering customers to help themselves)	Shared values, treat sector as equal partner	Equalities and Prevention/Tackling Discrimination

Getting residents voice into decision making	Confidence of sector is increasing	Policy frameworks	
Too much jargon		Governance support	
		Providing or contributing to an annual state of the VCSE report in North Northants	

The engagement also identified the important role the sector plays in enabling engagement with the people of North Northamptonshire, often acting as broker between public services and communities. Through its proximity to local people, the sector can build more trusting, open and strong relationships.

Relationships are regarded as relatively strong between the VCSE and public sector agencies, but the need to strengthen partnership working and to provide more clarity on organisational aims and priorities, given the Council and the ICS are still relatively new, was identified.

However, relationships between the VCSE and private sector are not perceived to be as strong, nor is there as much investment in the VCSE from businesses as might be possible. To date there has not been much reach by the Local Area Partnerships into local business communities and greater problem solving with businesses is one of the recommendations made in the Levelling Up Scrutiny report. This all reinforces the need for this to remain as an area of focus for the new strategy.

Overall, Council officers and VCSE partners identified the need to work more collaboratively, building better relationships and making better use of assets, funding and resources, better understanding of expertise and mapping of services, alongside increasing volunteering, developing social enterprise and improving communication.

The North VCSE Oversight Group leaders from the sector have proactively helped to shape this strategy, by engaging with the VCSE through their networks, specifically to influence the focus for the new VCSE Infrastructure offer. They have offered constructive comment on the initial drafts of the Strategy.

In addition, a series of co-production meetings have been held with VCSE partners delivering across the emerging themes identified as priorities for future investment through the VCSE Strategic grant funding the Council distributes. These meetings have been open, frank and transparent to inform what needs to be funded and why, what is currently working and why and challenges and opportunities for VCSE partners to collaborate even more effectively, to ensure the Council can maximise the reach and impact of its financial investment.

3.2. Role of Communities

There is a joint role for public services, the private sector and the VCSE, alongside individual residents and other local stakeholders, in building strong communities. When we refer to community, we see this as everyone who lives and works in that place, regardless of 'sector' or as a collective group of individuals with commonality i.e. the BAME community or refugee

Strong communities are ones where individuals and families have opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing, achieve their aspirations through education and employment, feel safe, can enjoy their environment and can play an active part in their local community.

Local people are often best placed to support each other and take positive action to improve their area. Individual residents can take action that has a huge impact on their family, friends and neighbours, from volunteering with a local group, improving their own health and wellbeing, or just by being neighbourly.

We have a strong network of VCSE groups working with all ages, in all areas, on a wide range of issues. They offer the activity, advice, information and support that help individuals and families stay strong, recover from crisis, and thrive. Communities, in the broadest sense, provide the first response to challenges, often long before statutory agencies are asked for or are required to help.

In recognising that community resilience delivers strategic outcomes, the Council's role is to encourage and enable residents and communities to take action, in addition to delivering core services. It makes people safer, healthier and wealthier and as such reduces demand on public services enabling them to focus on those most in need.

The private sector also benefits from a strong community, in terms of access to an educated, skilled and healthy workforce, a safe and attractive environment surrounding its premises and a stronger consumer base, and as such has a role in supporting local community action. We see this through the increasing use of Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Value, employee volunteering and business engagement.

Again, mutually beneficial relationships across organisations and sectors and with communities will be vital to success. Strong communities cannot be achieved by working alone or in silos.

4. Aims and Outcomes of the Strategy

4.1. Aims

- Emphasise and strengthen the role the VCSE sector, residents and communities have in delivering the Council's corporate objectives, and within the context of the countywide Live Your Best Life Strategy for the ICS;
- Develop a co-ordinated vision and framework for effective partnership working on equal terms, and, wherever possible, co-production with the VCSE groups and Town and Parish Councils;
- Set out the Council's approach to financial investment into the VCSE, which promotes sustainability, through access to a range of funding sources, including strategic and small grant giving by NNC; and future infrastructure support into the sector;
- Strengthen the ability of the VCSE sector to deliver services and connect communities through engaging residents, leading community action, supporting volunteering, supporting people in the most vulnerable situations, and brokering relationships between statutory bodies and communities; *and*

- Provide a framework to support innovative approaches which facilitate necessary change, given the shifting needs of local communities in the wake of the pandemic and the current economic climate.

4.2. Outcomes

- Improve sustainability and increase growth in the VCSE sector, developing fit for purpose, sustainable organisations able to deliver high quality services with diversified income streams and less reliance on grants, with a more social enterprise focus and which are flexible and adaptable to change;
- Strengthen the ability of the VCSE sector to deliver services and connect communities through engaging residents, leading community action, supporting people in the most vulnerable situations and brokering relationships between statutory bodies and communities;
- Encourage mutually beneficial relationships across sectors and communities that use smarter ways of working and collaboration to achieve what we cannot alone;
- Provide clarity about the role of sectors in building strong communities; *and*
- Align key themes underpinning current strategic thinking, including place-based working, asset-based community development, devolution of assets and services to communities, shifting the focus to early help and prevention; and shaping demand to reduce costs in statutory services.

4.3. What Will Success Look Like:

- All organisations, businesses, voluntary, community and social enterprise groups and individual residents see themselves as having a valued role in maximising community assets, taking positive action within communities and providing solutions to local challenges, creating and maintaining strong communities;
- North Northamptonshire has a thriving voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, with a significant role in achieving strategic priorities by delivering services and connecting communities; and
- There are strong relationships between people across sectors and communities, based on equality, trust and effective collaboration, not defined by sector or service, which ensure we are working together in partnership for the benefit of North Northamptonshire and all its residents.

5. Current VCSE Infrastructure Arrangements and Grant Programme

5.1. Current VCSE Infrastructure Arrangements

Part of the current VCSE strategic grant arrangements relate to infrastructure support to the VCSE by certain VCSE partners. Infrastructure arrangements, normally funded

by Local Authorities and delivered through contractual arrangements, include functions such as:

- Capacity building in the sector to ensure back-office functions and governance arrangements are robust and organisations are commissioning-ready should they wish to bid for grants and contracts;
- Improving sustainability and increasing growth in the VCSE sector, developing fit for purpose, sustainable organisations able to deliver high quality projects with diversified income streams and less reliance on grants, with a more commercial focus and which are flexible and adaptable to change;
- Funding and bid-writing support;
- Volunteering best practice;
- Supporting networking, collaboration and co-ordination across the sector and with statutory partners to ensure the VCSE has a voice in strategic and operational decision making through genuine co-production;
- Supporting the sector to promote and enable social and community action; *and*
- Supporting the sector to demonstrate impact and return on investment and contribute to the social value agendas.

However, the infrastructure arrangements inherited by NNC from the former sovereign councils are relatively light touch and constitute a total investment of only £58,000 across North Northamptonshire, through two providers, SERVE for Wellingborough and Groundworks across Corby and Kettering. East Northants currently has no funded infrastructure support.

Under the former Councils the arrangements were delivered through annual grant agreements. For a Unitary Authority with a population the size of North Northants these legacy infrastructure arrangements are not sufficient nor robust enough to build capacity in the sector as set out above, under the proposed ambitions of this Community Strategy.

National best practice is for Councils to formally tender VCSE Infrastructure contracts, to run for at least three years, to ensure these contracts deliver against strategic priorities for the Council, as well as meeting the needs of the sector, and to embed collaboration across and strong leadership of the sector into these contractual requirements. It is intended that for NNC, that the new Infrastructure contract will have a significant role in delivering the Communities Strategy, with and on behalf of the Council, and with the sector and wider partners.

5.2. Current VCSE Grant Programmes

The Council does not have a statutory duty to fund the voluntary sector or commission projects from organisations within it. However, in recent years, financial cuts both nationally and locally have put significant pressure on the organisations within the sector. In some cases, organisations have been forced to use their reserves to continue operating, which of course is not sustainable in the long-term.

The current strategic grant funding arrangements with VCSE organisations were inherited from the former District and Borough Councils and involve a mixture of grants, service level agreements and contracts. Some of those arrangements have been in place for some considerable time (since 2017 in some cases) and most have extensions to the original agreement periods to support their transfer into NNC from 1 April 2021.

In March 2022, the Council’s Executive agreed to extend the grants inherited from the former sovereign councils for a further two years until 31st March 2024, when the current arrangements come to an end.

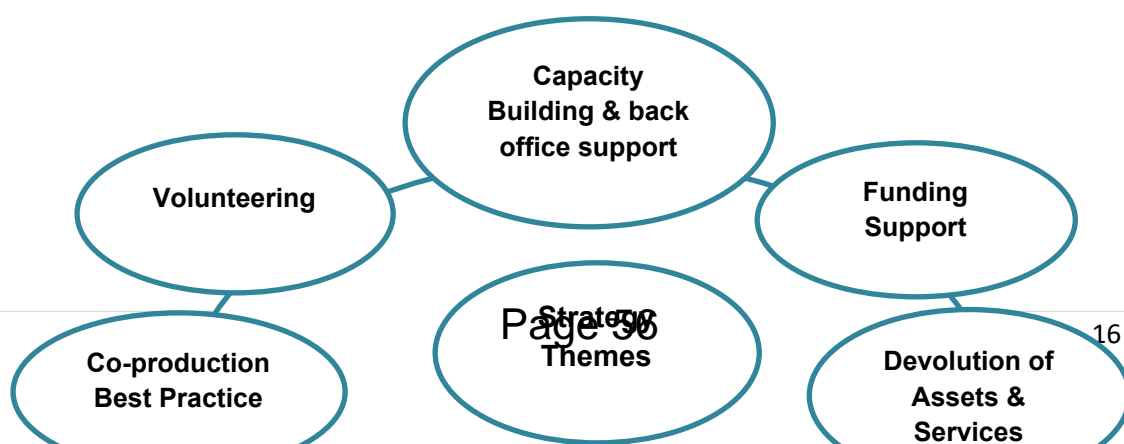
The current funding arrangements with VCSE organisations created by the sovereign councils were subject to an application process and were awarded accordingly. Whilst, overall, the current arrangements are performing well, and grant agreements are monitored, they are out of date, offer a somewhat scattergun approach to what services are funded, and where, and as such do not provide the consistency and transparency to which the Council might now aspire. In addition, they do not necessarily reflect the Council’s corporate priorities, and are not aligned with other system-wide ambitions for the area such as the 10 Live Your Best Life Strategy ambitions and the emerging local priorities being determined by the Local Area Partnerships.

The current strategic VCSE grant arrangements total £671,771 per annum. It should also be noted that the strategic grant arrangements are not the only grant funding NNC provides to the VCSE. Currently also NNC invests in the VCSE through programmes such as Discretionary Small grants, Shared Prosperity grants, the Member Empowerment Fund, Household Support Fund, Multiply and the Well Northants programme, The Council’s investment into the VCSE during 2023-2024 will be circa £1.82m.

The funding envelope for the VCSE Strategic grants will remain at £671,772 in recognitions of the Council’s continued commitment to valuing and supporting the VCSE, but new grant arrangements will be put in place for April 2024.

6. Communities Strategy Themes

To achieve our vision of strong communities, through a thriving and sustainable VCSE sector, improved partnership working across sectors, and empowered and active residents, we have identified eight key themes:



6.1. Theme 1

Building quality and capacity within the VCSE sector and providing back-office support to enable sustainable growth, demonstrate return on investment and social impact, maximise resources across the sector, all to achieve positive outcomes for our communities.

Outcomes

- Increased sustainability, skills, quality, governance and capacity within the VCSE sector to meet community needs;
- A VCSE sector which can demonstrate its impact on residents and communities in North Northamptonshire and is valued by other sectors and stakeholders;
- Increased understanding of the size and scale of the sector, creating a vision for growth and optimising collaborative networking, communications and marketing across a range of media;
- A robust governance within the sector at appropriate levels, to build strength, consistency, trust and confidence; A co-ordinated approach to business continuity planning in preparation to support the Council's Emergency Planning;
- An established VCSE CEO Network and improved support for Trustee recruitment and retention (introducing and encouraging wider breadth of experience and diversity); *and*
- The VCSE are able to evidence Social Return on Investment (SROI).

6.2. Themes 2 & 3

Building mutually beneficial relationships across sectors, with commissioners of services, and with communities by creating equal partnerships by promoting co-production and asset-based community development best practice, sharing information, skills, assets and resources, creating spaces to come together, utilising evidence and celebrating success.

Outcomes

- Improved understanding of local needs and assets, opportunities and challenges, and ways to address them;

- Provision of an annual State of the VCSE report for North Northamptonshire to inform gaps in support and barriers to excellence across all parts of the sector, so that this strategy and delivery plans can remain agile and fit for purpose;
- Reduced barriers to engagement and participation by residents, businesses and organisations;
- Infrastructure support provided to the Sector is inclusive, and demonstrably covers all localities and all-inclusive communities across North Northamptonshire;
- Robust projects that bring together a range of organisations and people from across sectors and communities and deliver long term outcomes for North Northamptonshire;
- Information and resources are shared across the North Northamptonshire VCSE and wider System;
- Delivery of a clear vision, inclusive culture, and inspiring messages, through effective structures for communication;
- Ensuring statutory partners understand the structures, routes to engage, work with and support the VCSE;
- VCSE organisations state they are treated as equal partners;
- Strategic priorities are aligned with local communities to deliver joint action; *and*
- Local people have the tools and support to take action.

6.3. Theme 4

Innovative income generation and investment into VCSE to ensure financial sustainability in a mixed model and enterprise culture, encompassing commissioning, maximising national and regional opportunities.

Outcomes

- Effective, and where appropriate collaborative, bid writing and project development which levers in new funding into North Northamptonshire and delivers innovative solutions to local issues;
- Innovative and creative responses to opportunities and challenges are embraced and encouraged;
- The grants, funding and commissioning delivered by NNC addresses inequalities and ensures that all our inclusive communities are served, and that when VCSE organisations are funded or commissioned that they meet equality outcomes and can evidence this;
- Increased involvement of the private sector in supporting local communities and the VCSE sector and in delivering against North Northamptonshire's strategic and local area priorities;
- Increased inward investment into the Council area from external sources;
- Increased number of collaborative applications for funding;
- A VCSE sector that is responsive to outsourcing of public services, personalisation, co-production, integration and has an enterprise culture;

- Increased partnership, co-ordination and collaborative working within the VCSE sector to maximise value, efficiency, resources and skills;
- Reduction in the number of organisations that face financial difficulty which puts residents and communities at risk;
- Increased third sector growth in terms of mutuals, cooperatives and social enterprises; *and*
- Strong connectivity between the VCSE and public sector commissioners, co-design and production of services, to ensure that services, which are developed and delivered, focus on improving outcomes for individuals and communities, not organisational structures.

6.4. Theme 5

Developing our people assets, by increasing resident action and taking a strategic approach to volunteering, providing a platform for opportunities, brokerage, data collection and impact monitoring.

Outcomes

- Increased numbers of VCSE organisations and residents participating in local decision making and co-production of services and evidence of their involvement making a clear impact;
- A co-ordinated best practice support offer for volunteering, which meets the needs of volunteers, organisations and businesses across the Council area;
- Increased amount and quality of volunteering and social capital within our communities;
- Establishment of employee volunteering schemes across public and private sector organisations; *and*
- Improved range of positive activities and vocational opportunities which support personal & vocational development.

6.5. Theme 6

Developing our physical assets and services through Town and Parish Councils and community involvement and through asset transfer.

Outcomes

- An established working group with Town and Parishes Council representatives, NCALC and NNC officers to discuss opportunities, challenges, risks and dependencies relating to the transfer of assets and services and challenges relating to devolution and town twinning;
- A co-produced process map which details the necessary steps to be taken for the transfer of assets and services to Town or Parish Councils, should there be a wish in the future for devolution to take place.
- Improved awareness and valuing of community ownership and resilience; *and*
- Increased numbers of community groups managing community assets, where appropriate.

6.6. Theme 7

Co-ordination of the North Northamptonshire VCSE to embed the sector in the ICS and the Place programme, through ongoing leadership and support to Community Wellbeing Forums and Local Area Partnerships and representation at Executive Board level.

Outcomes

- A strong network of VCSE engagement with the ICS, through attendance at LAPs and active contribution to LAP projects, events and activities, creating a new way of working into the future;
- CWF's and LAP's remain with VCSE at the heart, advocate, trouble shoot and motivate a continued engagement; *and*
- Increased representation in ICS structures where VCSE contribution is beneficial.

6.7. Theme 8

Co-ordination of investment into the VCSE through the delivery of a range of strategic and smaller grant programmes into the VCSE, based on robust and transparent policies, procedures and governance to include:

- New VCSE Infrastructure contract arrangements, at a £200,000 investment per annum for 3 years, which will play a key role in supporting the delivery of this strategy;
- Small (Discretionary grants) grants up to £25,000 per award (£120,000 per annum for 2024-2027);
- Member Empowerment Fund (£156,000 per annum);
- Shared Prosperity Funds (£618,00 2024-2025 only); *and*
- New VCSE Strategic grant arrangements (£671,771 per annum for 2024-2027) to cover emerging strategic themes such as community transport, financial inclusion, race equality, older peoples' social isolation, low level mental health support within communities, building VCSE capacity and community resilience.

Outcomes for this investment (outside of Infrastructure which is covered in this strategy) will be set out in the relevant Grant Application processes and/or project briefs to be funded and will be monitored through robust Grant Agreements.

7. Delivering the Strategy

There are a number of key NNC services, partners projects that will drive delivery of the themes, and elements within themes. For example, NNC facilitates the VCSE grant programmes under Theme 8 but the VCSE organisations deliver against the grant agreements. Town and Parish Councils will play a lead role, along with NCALC to help NCC deliver against Theme 6.

There is a crucial role for the VCSE organisations as future Infrastructure contract holder/s, to lead delivery of specific themes, namely Themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7. These include capacity building, funding support, volunteering and co-ordination of

the VCSE role within the ICS, to name a few. The details and scale of this contract will be explored and delivered through a robust procurement process.

8. Governance

Governance of the strategy will primarily sit with the Council, but from a partnership viewpoint.

The new VCSE Infrastructure contract and VCSE grant arrangements will be robustly monitored. Annual Delivery Plans will be produced, with milestones, outputs and outcomes tracked by the Communities and Wellbeing team at the Council.

Practical delivery of collaborative projects within communities will be delivered through the Local Area Partnerships, and informed and supported by the partners at the Community Wellbeing Forums. This work is governed by the North Place Delivery Board as part of the ICS Operating Framework.

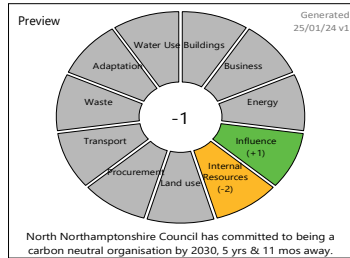
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Climate Change Impact Assessment Tool (v1)



Directorate & Service Area	Hierarchy: Communities & Wellbeing Service Communities & Leisure Public Health & Wellbeing
Report Name	North Northamptonshire Council Communities Strategy
Report date	17/01/2024
Report author & role	Kerry Purnell Assistant Director - Communities & Leisure
Proposal Summary	This purpose of this strategy is to emphasise and strengthen the role the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE), residents and communities have in delivering the North Northamptonshire Council's Corporate Plan and the Northamptonshire Integrated Care System's Live Your Best Live Strategy.
Export filename	North Northamptonshire Council Communities Strategy - CCIA 17.01.2024.png



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Category	Impact	Notes / justification for score / existing work (see guidance sheet or CCIA detailed notes for more information)	Score (-5 to +5)	Mitigations (If the impact is negative, please provide a mitigating action for reducing the impact going forward)
Buildings	Building construction	As part of the proposal, no construction will be undertaken		
Buildings	Building use	Not applicable		
Buildings	Green / blue infrastructure	Not applicable		
Business	Developing green businesses	Not applicable		
Business	Marketable skills & training	Not applicable		
Business	Sustainability in business	Not applicable		
Energy	Energy efficiency	Not applicable		
Energy	Reducing energy demand	Not applicable		
Energy	Switching to low-carbon energy supply	Not applicable		
Influence	Communication & engagement	Not applicable		
Influence	Wider influence	Not applicable		
Influence	Working with communities	Through the work aligned to the Community Strategy, gives the council an opportunity to encourage residents to consider their approach to climate change and there is the possibility that some of the projects that are identified through our work to consider greener approaches.	+2	
Influence	Working with partners	By only working with partners who have a similar approach to climate change as us, could have a negative effect with regards to our relationship with the VCSE. Ideally we would encourage organisations, when for example they are applying for funding to be asked about their approach and encourage a positive approach to the climate agenda.	-1	Encouraging all organisations to consider there approach, in line with the council's to climate change
Internal Resources	Material / infrastructure requirement	Not applicable		
Internal Resources	Staff time requirement	There are no changes to staffing resources to deliver the strategy		
Internal Resources	Staff travel requirement	There is the possibility that staff will have increased travel requirements due to working out in the community.	-2	
Internal Resources	External funding	Not applicable		
Land use	Carbon storage	Not applicable		
Land use	Improving biodiversity adaptation	Not applicable		
Land use	Natural flood management	Not applicable		
Procurement	Food & Drink	Not applicable		
Procurement	Products	Not applicable		
Procurement	Single-use plastic	Not applicable		
Procurement	Services	Not applicable		
Transport	Decarbonising vehicles	Not applicable		
Transport	Improving infrastructure	Not applicable		
Transport	Demand reduction	Not applicable		
Transport	Supporting people to use public transport	Not applicable		
Transport	Supporting people to use active travel	Not applicable		
Waste	End of life disposal / recycling	Not applicable		
Waste	Waste volume	Not applicable		
Adaptation	Drought vulnerability	Not applicable		
Adaptation	Flooding vulnerability	Not applicable		
Adaptation	Heatwave vulnerability	Not applicable		
Water Use	Improving water-use efficiency	Not applicable		
Other	Other 1			
Other	Other 2			
Other	Other 3			
Other	Other 4			

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Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 5th February 2024

Report Title	Bus Service Improvement Plan and funding
Report Author	<p>Graeme Kane, Assistant Director – Highways & Waste graeme.kane@northnorthants.gov.uk</p> <p>Chris Wragg, Head of Strategic Transport chris.wragg@northnorthants.gov.uk</p>

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	Choose an item.
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Green, sustainable environment

List of Appendices

- Appendix A – North Northamptonshire Bus Service Improvement Plan**
- Appendix B – North Northamptonshire Enhanced Partnership Plan**
- Appendix C – North Northamptonshire Enhanced Partnership Scheme**
- Appendix D – List of proposed new/improved bus services**
- Appendix E – CCIA report**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. Following Scrutiny Management Board requesting officers to attend the Place & Environment Scrutiny Committee to provide information on, and answer Member questions around, the Bus Service Improvement Plan, the following report and appendices provide reference material for Members to aid the scrutiny discussion.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Following the publication by Government in March 2021 of Bus Back Better, the National Bus Strategy for England (outside London), the Council published a Bus Service Improvement Plan which was agreed by Executive in

November 2021. The Council also formed an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators, with the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme being 'made' by Executive in April 2022. In common with many other local authorities, the Council did not receive any of the initial round of Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding despite making a request for funding from the Department for Transport (DfT).

- 2.2. In place of funding paid directly to operators to support bus services by Government since the start of the pandemic, the Council has been allocated £569,412 of Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus (BSIP+) grant funding for each of the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. Executive agreed the approach for spending this funding in September 2023.
- 2.3. In October 2023 the Council received an indicative allocation of £2.045m of BSIP revenue funding for 2024/25. This is a significantly higher allocation than the level of revenue funding sought in the BSIP and unless further funding is allocated for future years, will represent a significant peak in expenditure for one year. This presents a risk that funding may be available to increase bus services for a year, but then the Council would have to withdraw the funding and the service may also be withdrawn. This would not be helpful for residents or conducive to establishing viable bus services over the long-term.
- 2.4. Spending plans are therefore being drawn up which focus on service improvements where it is possible that enhancements can become financially viable in a short timescale or which can access alternative funding sources beyond 2025/26.
- 2.5. In January 2024 the Department for Transport asked local authorities to produce an updated BSIP by 12th June 2024.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Place & Environment Scrutiny Committee:
 - (a) Note the contents of this report and the proposal to develop an updated Bus Service Improvement Plan to include proposals for spending the £2.045m BSIP revenue funding indicatively allocated to the Council for 2024/25
 - (b) Consider any areas that Members would wish to discuss, ask questions of, and provide feedback to officers in the meeting in relation to the information provided
- 3.2. Reason for Recommendations – To undertake effective scrutiny of a significant area of the Council's work.

- 3.3. Alternative Options Considered – The Council could choose not to accept the external funding or to spend it in ways which were inconsistent with the terms and conditions of the grant. This would not be in the best interest of the community and would jeopardise future funding allocations. Proposals could be adopted which would be unlikely to represent value for money in achieving the objectives of the funding, and not appropriate with no long-term funding certainty.).

4. Report Background

- 4.1. The majority of bus services in England are provided commercially by operators, who decide the times, routes and fares to be charged. Under the Transport Act 1985 local authorities can supplement the commercial bus network with subsidised services.
- 4.2. The restrictions on travel introduced at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic necessarily resulted in such a large drop in fare income that the majority of bus services would have become financially unviable and ceased to run had the Government not stepped in with emergency funding to ensure that key workers could continue to travel and other essential journeys continue. The majority of that funding was paid directly to commercial operators, although a proportion was paid to local authorities to compensate for the loss of fare income for their subsidised services.
- 4.3. The Government published Bus Back Better, the National Bus Strategy for England (outside London) in March 2021. Backed with additional funding, the strategy set out a vision to make bus services more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper so that increased passenger numbers would lead to reduced congestion, carbon and pollution, and that encourages motorists to use a bus rather than their cars.
- 4.4. In order to receive this funding, local authorities were required to commit by the end of June 2021 to forming either an Enhanced Partnership or introducing bus franchising across the whole of their area. The Executive agreed, in June 2021, to form an Enhanced Partnership, which is a statutory arrangement under the Bus Services Act 2017. The Enhanced Partnership can specify, for example, timetables and multi-operating ticketing and allows the Council, as Local Transport Authority, to take over the role of registering bus services from the Traffic Commissioners, the government body responsible for licensing bus and heavy goods vehicle operators.
- 4.5. Having committed to forming an Enhanced Partnership, the Council had to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), detailing how we proposed to use our powers to improve services, by 31st October 2021. This was agreed by the Executive on 11th November 2021, having been previously submitted under delegated authority in order to meet the timescales set by Government. A copy of the BSIP is included at Appendix A.
- 4.6. According to the requirements laid down by Government in the National Bus Strategy, the Council then had to form an Enhanced Partnership by 31st March 2022. This requires the preparation, consultation and publication of

both an Enhanced Partnership Plan and an Enhanced Partnership Scheme. In January 2022 the Government advised that they now only required a draft Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme to be submitted to them by the end of April 2022. In common with many other councils who had reached a similar stage, it was decided to continue to progress the Enhanced Partnership, and Executive 'made' the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme in April 2022. Copies of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme are included at Appendices B and C.

- 4.7. As part of the BSIP submission, the Council made a request to Government for funding to implement elements of the plan. In common with many other local authorities, the Council did not receive any funding in the initial allocations of funding to support the BSIP
- 4.8. While bus patronage has recovered significantly, it remains at around 90% of pre-Covid levels. What was originally envisaged as short-term emergency Government funding was progressively extended, although the level of financial support was progressively reduced as passengers returned, and a reduced commercially viable network has been sought.
- 4.9. On 17 May 2023, the Government announced a longer-term funding deal for the bus industry covering the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. £160 million will be provided to local transport authorities to improve fares, services and infrastructure while £140 million will go directly to operators to help protect essential services across England. The £160 million for local transport authorities will be provided as Bus Service Improvement Plan plus (BSIP+) funding. Of this funding £80 million will be provided in 2023/24 and £80 million in 2024/25. The Council has been allocated £569,412 of BSIP+ funding for each of the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- 4.10. The BSIP+ funding which has been allocated to the Council is intended to be targeted on actions which the Council - and local operators through our Enhanced Partnership (where relevant) - believe will deliver the best overall outcomes in growing long term patronage, revenues and thus maintaining service levels, while maintaining essential social and economic connectivity for local communities.
- 4.11. An Executive Report in September 2023, accepting the additional BSIP+ funding, set out the following initial criteria for spending the funding:
 - To continue to fund existing bus services where they represent value for money or maintain essential connectivity for local communities;
 - To increase service frequency or restore services withdrawn since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic where there is a reasonable prospect of the service becoming commercially viable within the period of BSIP+ funding; and
 - To forward fund improvements where S106 developer funding is due before the end of the BSIP+ funding period to increase the time period for the service to achieve commercial viability.
- 4.12. Eligibility for future funding, including 2024/25 BSIP+ funding, is dependent on the Council's overall bus budget being maintained at least at the same level. For example, if concessionary travel reimbursements are

reduced, the corresponding budget must be reinvested into other bus measures (e.g. tendered services).

- 4.13. In October 2023 the Government announced new funding of over £1 billion for better buses in every part of the North and Midlands, as a result of the redistribution of HS2 funding. The Council has received an indicative allocation of £2.045m of BSIP revenue funding for 2024/25. This will be subject to local transport authorities continuing to work with Government to deliver ambitious improvements through up-to-date BSIPs, as well as continuing to deliver Enhanced Partnerships with operators in their local areas or pursuing franchising.
- 4.14. In November 2023, the Department for Transport issued new guidance on the calculation of reimbursement of bus operators for carrying concessionary bus pass holders free of charge under the statutory English National Concessionary Travel scheme. Such updates are issued from time to time, and the latest reflects the reduction in concessionary travel volumes since the Covid pandemic. The financial implications of the new guidance are still being assessed.
- 4.15. In December 2023 the Council submitted a Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) funding bid for the introduction of Zero-Emission Buses on service X4 (Northampton – Wellingborough – Kettering – Corby - Oundle – Peterborough). The Council is waiting for a response to this bid.
- 4.16. In January 2024 the Department for Transport asked local transport authorities such as the Council to submit updated BSIPs in accordance with new guidance by 12th June 2024.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. The BSIP (Appendix A), published in October 2021, contained inter alia a bid for significant funding to improve bus services in North Northamptonshire:

	Resource (Revenue) funding	Capital funding	Total funding sought
2022/23	£310,000	£128,000	£438,000
2023/24	£450,000	£1,889,000	£2,339,000
2024/25	£300,000	£2,420,000	£2,720,000
Beyond 2025	-	£118,000	£118,000
Total	£1,060,000	£4,550,000	£5,615,000

- 5.2. Relevant elements of the BSIP were included as commitments of the Council and/or bus operators in the Enhanced Partnership Plan (Appendix B) and Enhanced Partnership Scheme (Appendix C) subject to funding being secured. Some elements, such as additional subsidised bus services, were not included as they need to follow a formal procurement route rather than be an Enhanced Partnership commitment.
- 5.3. In the absence of the funding which was sought, it has not been possible to pursue most of the improvements in the BSIP to date.

5.4. The allocation of BSIP and BSIP+ funding will significantly increase the bus funding available to the Council during 2023/24 and 2024/25. The table below compares the funding which is currently expected to be available over the period 2022/23 – 2026/27. It excludes Section 106 funding for bus service improvements, which is not tied to specific financial years, and also funding for concessionary fares.

	Base revenue budget	Bus Subsidy (Revenue) Grant ¹	BSIP+ funding (revenue)	Indicative BSIP funding (revenue)	Total
2022/23	£275,000	£105,654	-	-	£380,654
2023/24	£275,000	£110,728	£569,412	-	£955,410
2024/25	£275,000	£110,728	£569,412	£2,045,000	£3,000,140
2025/26	£275,000	£110,728	-	-	£385,728
2026/27	£275,000	£110,728	-	-	£385,728

5.5. While it is likely to be possible to carry forward some of the grant funding to future years, the table demonstrates the scale of the short-term increase in revenue funding available. By comparison with the table at 5.1 above, it can also be seen that the level of revenue funding allocated for 2024/25 is significantly in excess of that sought in the BSIP.

5.6. Recent Government announcements would indicate that there could be further additional funding for 2025/26 and subsequent years. However, currently this is not certain, and is likely to be dependent on the outcome of the forthcoming general election.

5.7. Short-term increases in revenue funding are difficult to manage when there is no certainty of continued funding. They can mean that services or initiatives are introduced which have to be withdrawn when there is no further funding available. It is also likely to be challenging for bus operators, who will not have additional drivers and vehicles readily available, and also for the Council's public transport and wider highways team, as neither have the certainty to invest in additional capacity.

5.8. Plans are currently being developed for the expenditure of the BSIP+ and BSIP funding in line with the criteria set out at section 4.11 above. Appendix D contains details of the service improvements which are currently being considered. Dependent on affordability and value for money, it is anticipated these services will be introduced on a phased basis from April 2024.

6. Next Steps

6.1. As outlined in section 5.8 above, work will continue to develop proposals for use of the BSIP+ and BSIP funding, with the intention to introduce additional services from April 2024.

¹ Bus Subsidy (Revenue) Grant is an annual grant paid by the Department for Transport. While the amount has been paid to the Council and its predecessors for more than ten years, the annual grant is only confirmed after the start of each financial year, leading to some uncertainty for budgeting purposes. From 2024/25, the figure includes £5,074 formerly paid to Kettering Borough Council in addition to £105,654 which is the North Northamptonshire share of the grant formerly paid to the County Council.

6.2. The Department for Transport have requested that proposals for use of the £2.045m BSIP funding are returned to them by 29 February 2024. The expenditure of this grant funding is also a key decision which will need to be agreed by Executive.

6.3. As noted in section 4.15 the Department for Transport has requested that an updated BSIP is submitted to them by 12th Jun 2024. The practicability of doing this, including the alignment with Council governance processes, is currently being considered.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

7.1.1. This report relates primarily to the spending of Government grant funding. As noted in section 5 above current funding allocations lead to a significant increase in funding levels for 2024/25, with no certainty about future funding at similar levels. This will need to be carefully managed to ensure that ongoing commitments are not entered into and that value for money is secured.

7.1.2. Proposals for the spending of £569,412 BSIP+ revenue grant allocated to the Council for each of the financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25 were agreed by Executive in September 2023.

7.1.3. It is proposed that spending of the £2.045m indicative allocation of BSIP revenue funding for 2024/25 will be considered by Executive at a future date.

7.1.4. Approval for any other funding secured will follow the appropriate governance processes.

7.1.5. It should be noted that future bus funding, including the BSIP+ funding for 2024/25, is dependent on the Council's overall bus budget not being reduced.

7.2. Legal and Governance

7.2.1. This report relates to the improvement of bus services. The Council has powers to carry out such actions pursuant to the Transport Acts 1985 and 2000 and related secondary legislation, while other legislation such as the Highways Act 1980 gives it powers to undertake associated improvements to the highway. Any proposals for improvements will need to be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the various Acts.

7.2.2. The Enhanced Partnership with operators is a binding legal agreement under the Transport Act 2000 and related secondary legislation, and the Council has a legal obligation to undertake the measures ascribed to it in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme over the three-year period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2025. The Enhanced Partnership Scheme includes Bespoke Variation Arrangements to enable changes to the Scheme to be made, and it is anticipated that these will be used to incorporate proposals regarding the

spend of the BSIP funding allocation once an updated BSIP has been agreed.

7.2.3. Grant funding must be spent in accordance with the terms and conditions of the various grants, and approval for expenditure of such funds must follow the governance processes set out in the Council's constitution.

7.2.4. Any procurement exercise for goods, works or services must be conducted in accordance with the Council's governance and legal obligations, specifically in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, the Public Contract Regulations 2015 (PCR2015), s.89-91 of the Transport Act 1985 and The Service Subsidy Agreement (England) (Tendering) Regulations 2002. Legal Services, where instructed, will advise and assist officers with regard to the conduct of any procurement process and the resulting contractual arrangements.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. The proposal will assist the Council in meeting the priorities in the Corporate Plan around:

- Safe and Thriving Places
 - Enable people to travel across North Northamptonshire and beyond
- Green, sustainable environment:
 - Promote sustainable, active travel

7.3.2. The proposal will assist the Council in developing and delivering Council's Local Plan and Local Transport Plan, which the Council has a statutory duty to deliver. The proposal will also help to deliver the Council's BSIP.

7.4. Risk

7.4.1. The significant short-term increase in revenue funding for bus services/improvements introduces a risk that services or initiatives will be introduced which cannot be funded in the medium-term, and thus withdrawn. Selecting proposals that work in the short-term may not produce the value for money if further funding for future years subsequently becomes available. Possible solutions will need to be carefully considered and selected to try and minimise any abortive spend and maximise value for money, but without certainty of future funding, the Council's ability to do this is limited.

7.4.2. Unless further Government funding is provided for 2025/26 and beyond, the Council will face the reputational risk of a decision to withdraw them if they have not become commercially viable.

7.4.3. The condition that future bus funding is dependent on the Council not reducing its overall bus budget has introduced a new factor for the Council to consider in setting a balanced budget. The proposed budget for 2024/25, subject to Council approval on 22nd February 2024, does not propose any reductions in the Council's budget for buses.

7.5. Consultation

- 7.5.1. No consultation has been undertaken on this proposal as it involves the spending of external funding in accordance with terms and conditions set by the funder.
- 7.5.2. The timescales for operators notifying the Council of proposed commercial bus service changes or withdrawals do not permit public consultation to be undertaken when assessing alternative provision. However, the consultation undertaken on the Council's BSIP in 2021 did seek ideas for service improvements and it may be possible to undertake further consultation on some longer-term proposals.

7.6. **Consideration by the Executive**

- 7.6.1. The BSIP was approved by the Executive in November 2021 and the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme were 'made' by Executive in April 2022. Proposals for spending the BSIP+ funding were agreed by Executive in September 2023.
- 7.6.2. It is proposed that an updated BSIP and proposals for spending the BSIP funding are considered by Executive at future dates

7.7. **Equality Implications**

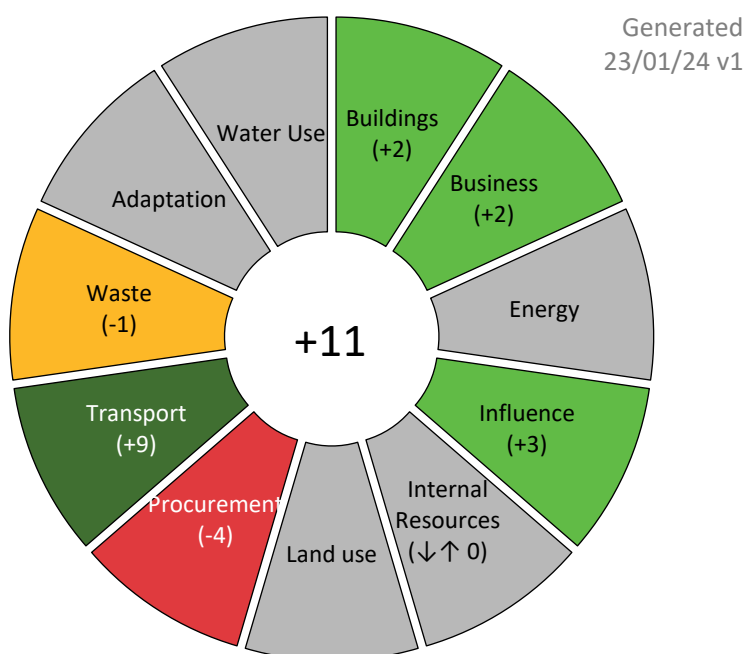
- 7.7.1. Equalities Screening Assessment have been completed for the various elements of past work covered by this report and will be completed for future proposals. Generally, improvements to bus services have a positive benefit for those with protected characteristics, although it is possible that particular proposals may have potential negative impacts. All vehicles used on local bus services are required to meet disability standards as set out in The Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000 and The Public Services Vehicles (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023.

7.8. **Climate Impact**

- 7.8.1. This report outlines a series of proposals for improvements to bus services which are generally positive from a climate change viewpoint and can be considered key actions in terms of tackling the climate change emergency from a transport perspective.
- 7.8.2. The elements which have been scored are as follows:
- Buildings (+2): The ZEBRA bid would equip Stagecoach's Kettering depot with electric charging points.
 - Business (+2): The ZEBRA bid would see Stagecoach introduce its first electric buses in North Northamptonshire
 - Influence (+3): The ZEBRA bid would introduce zero-emission branded buses which would be a very visible advert. Other proposals involve the Enhanced Partnership with bus operator, although many initial improvements will be contracted.
 - Internal Resources (+/- 0): The proposals make use of significant grant funding, which will use resources focused on a key area of climate change activity.

- Procurement (-4): The proposals will increase the overall number of buses operating in North Northamptonshire, and the Council's role in the operation of those services.
- Transport (+9): The ZEBRA bid would introduce the first electric buses in North Northamptonshire; other proposals will increase the number of bus services and the frequency of others; this will increase the number of people walking to access the bus. Improvements to public transport infrastructure will also feature.
- Waste (-1): If successful, the ZEBRA bid will see some older buses scrapped, or cascaded to replace older vehicles which will be scrapped.

The overall score is +11.



North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 11 mos away.

7.8.3. In terms of the negative impacts, while more procurement is being undertaken this is for proposals that form a key part of tackling the climate change emergency. The scrapping of older buses is inevitable if older buses are to be replaced with newer zero-emission vehicles. There are well established processes to maximise the recycling of the materials from old buses.

7.9. Community Impact

7.9.1. Improving bus services should have a positive impact for local communities by reducing isolation and supporting local economies. The proposed new bus services will help to address the concerns of Local Area Partnerships about rural accessibility.

7.10. Crime and Disorder Impact

- 7.10.1. Improvements to bus stops and shelters may have scope to reduce incidences of crime and disorder at these locations and increase perceptions of safety. .

8. Background Papers

Transport Act 1985 [Transport Act 1985 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

Transport Act 2000 [Transport Act 2000 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

Report to Executive – 18th November 2021 – Bus Service Improvement Plan (Minute 94 refers)

Report to Executive – 14th April 2022 – North Northamptonshire Enhanced Partnership (Minute 200 refers)

Report to Executive – 14th September 2023 – Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus (BSIP+) Funding (Minute 497 refers)

Appendix A

Bus Service

Improvement Plan

October 2021

www.northnorthants.gov.uk

Document Version Control

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NB: Draft versions 0.1 - final published versions 1.0

Consultees

Internal	External
EAP	
Cabinet Member	

Distribution List

Internal	External
	Public

Links to other documents

Document	Link
Bus Passenger Survey (Autumn 2019)	https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/bus-passenger-survey-autumn-2019-report/
North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031, the Part 1 Local Plan	http://www.nnjpu.org.uk/publications/docdetail.asp?docid=1573

Document	Link
Northamptonshire Transportation Plan (March 2012) - the current Local Transport Plan for North Northamptonshire	https://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/northamptonshire-highways/transport-plans-and-policies/Pages/local-transport-plan.aspx
Northamptonshire Bus Strategy (April 2018)	https://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/northamptonshire-highways/transport-plans-and-policies/Documents/Northamptonshire%20Bus%20Strategy.pdf

Additional Comments to note

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1.0 Overview

1.1 This is North Northamptonshire Council’s first Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). It is produced in accordance with guidance published by the Department for Transport.

1.2 The Plan covers the whole of the North Northamptonshire Council area. The map below shows the area covered.

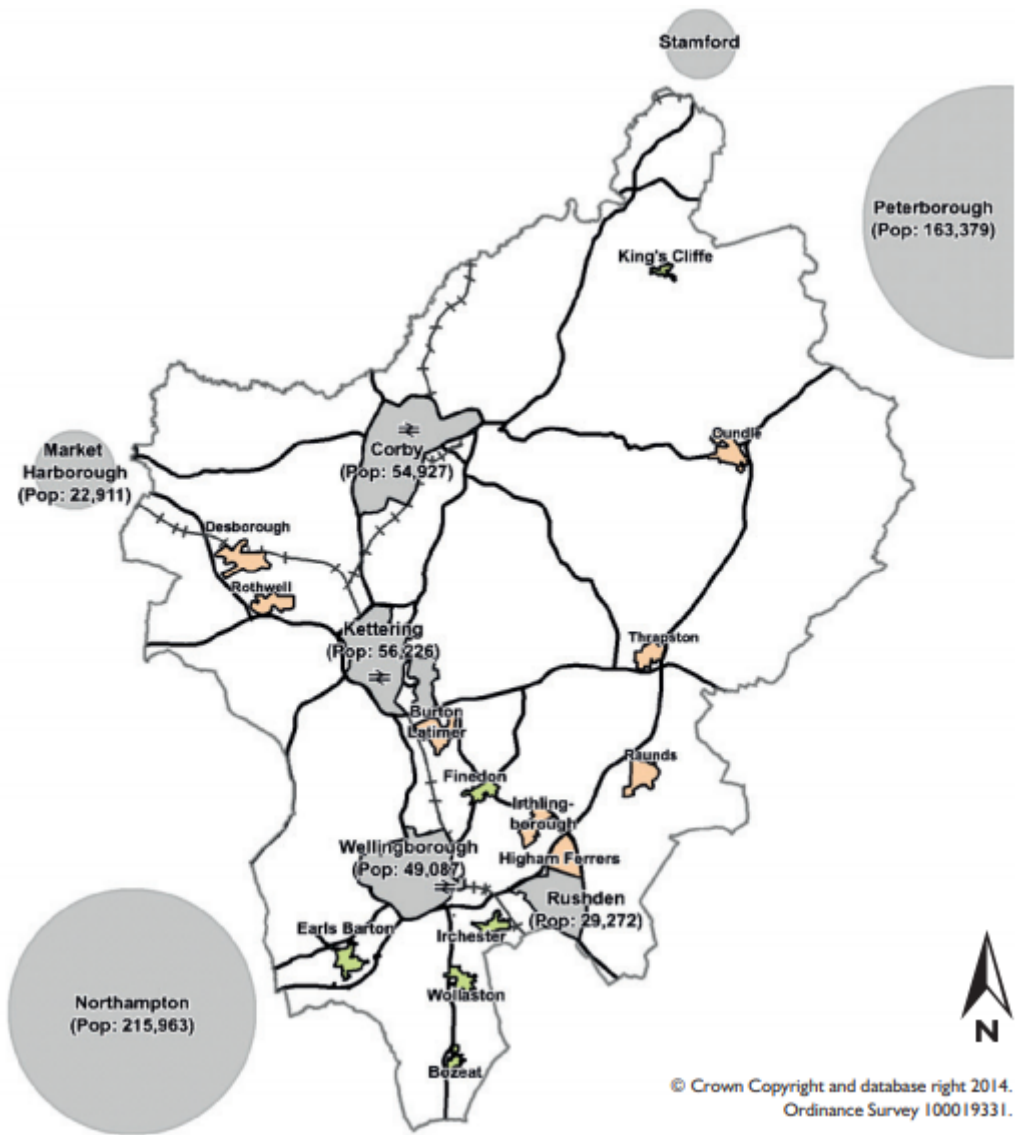


Figure 1 - The North Northamptonshire Council area

1.3 This Bus Service Improvement Plan has been produced following the publication of the Government’s National Bus Strategy for England ‘Bus Back Better’ in March 2021. The Plan sets out North Northamptonshire Council’s policies for improving bus services in its area and will be implemented through an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators, which is to be formed by April 2022.

1.4 North Northamptonshire Council is a new unitary authority, only formed in April 2021. North Northamptonshire Council is the local transport authority (LTA) for its area and the local highway authority responsible for the majority of the area’s roads. Whilst we have inherited the Local Transport Plan of our predecessor, Northamptonshire County Council, we intend to review those policies in light of our own emerging wider policies and key issues, such as transport decarbonisation. The timescales which have been set for production of this first Bus Service Improvement Plan mean that it precedes that wider review of our transport policies.

1.5 This first Bus Service Improvement Plan therefore represents our initial proposals over a medium-term timeframe of around three to five years. It has been informed by the results of a public consultation during September and October 2021 which also provides detailed comments for used in the further study work which is proposed in this plan. While the plan explores funding options with regard to the restoration of a bus subsidy budget, formal decisions on these will need to be taken through our budget setting process.

1.6 This plan will be developed further through annual reviews alongside the development of our Local Transport Plan and other policies, with the intention of placing the improvement of bus services within a much longer-term, wider-ranging policy context. Future Plans will also reflect the ongoing development of our Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators and the development of detailed implementation plans for bus service improvements.

2.0 Current bus offer to passengers

2.1 The population of North Northamptonshire is 354,477 (mid-2019 estimate). The area is polycentric, with more than half the population in the four largest towns of Kettering (population 56,266, 2011 census), Corby (54,297), Wellingborough (49,128) and Rushden (29,272). The remainder of the population live in smaller towns and villages.

2.2 Reflecting the polycentric nature of the area, less than half of North Northamptonshire's bus patronage is on urban services within the main towns, with the majority of passengers being conveyed on the inter-urban and rural services which link the various towns and the surrounding villages. Many of the villages do not have access to a bus service.

Analysis of existing local bus services compared to BSIP outcomes

2.3 The modest size of even North Northamptonshire's larger towns means that the prospective catchment of any one urban service is relatively small and consequently only in Corby are town services found with a more than half-hourly frequency. Few of these routes have an evening or Sunday service.

2.4 The commercial core of the North Northamptonshire bus network is really represented by the inter-urban routes, which includes services crossing the local authority boundary to Bedford, Northampton, Market Harborough and Peterborough. This is a reflection of both the polycentric nature of the area, and the heritage of urbanised small towns and villages along the A6 corridor, which were the historic home of the boot and shoe industry.

2.5 The majority of the inter-urban links in North Northamptonshire have at least a half-hourly service frequency, although this is often achieved by two inter-worked services which allow for variation in the villages served en route. Many of these routes have a Sunday service, although evening services are more limited.

LTA financial support for bus services

2.6 North Northamptonshire Council does not currently have a budget for subsidising public bus services. The financial difficulties which faced its predecessor, Northamptonshire County Council, in 2018/19 meant that councillors were forced to remove bus subsidy budget, despite an initial desire to retain it in part following the results of the budget consultation. The ongoing financial pressure and the transformation surrounding the formation of a new unitary authority mean it has not previously been possible to consider reinstating a bus subsidy budget.

2.7 Mindful of the opportunities created by the National Bus Strategy and the public desire to see bus services return to communities which have lost them, the Council is exploring the restoration of a bus subsidy budget as one of the options for consultation in its draft budget proposals for 2022/23 and beyond.

2.8 Despite the loss of a bus subsidy budget, a number of services have continued to be supported through a combination of town and parish council funding, Section 106 developer funding and government grant funding and we will want to, where we can, continue with this approach. With the Section 106 funding coming to an end, a number of these services have only continued to operate thanks to the Supported Bus Service Funding received from the Department for Transport in 2020-21 and the Council funding the remaining small shortfall in 2021-22 using one off monies from other transport budgets.

2.9 The services which are currently supported are as follows:

- 8 Kettering – Geddington – Corby
- 16 Brambleside – Kettering – Thrapston – Raunds
- W8 Wellingborough – Bozeat (from November 2021)

- Welland Wanderer Corby – Market Harborough
- X3 Corby – Thrapston (continues to Cambridge commercially)
- X46 Northampton – Wellingborough – Raunds (evening and Sunday journeys)

2.10 In addition, the Village Hopper service between Wollaston and Northampton is currently procured by a consortium led by Cogenhoe & Whiston Parish Council.

Other factors which affect the use of local bus services

2.11 North Northamptonshire has both large towns and small market towns, offering a range of retail and convenience stores, which are supported by local parking, most of which is operated by North Northamptonshire Council. The table below shows the number of spaces in town centre off-street car parks, together with an indication of the charging policy which applies:

Town	Number of Council owned spaces	Number of Privately owned spaces	Monday to Friday daytime parking charge
Burton Latimer	181	-	Free
Corby	858	474	Free - £10.00
Desborough	101	-	Free
Irthlingborough	59	-	Free
Kettering	715	305	£1.00-£6.00
Oundle	85	-	Free
Rothwell	96	-	Free
Rushden	663	-	Free
Thrapston	290	-	Free
Wellingborough	1637	-	Free

Table 1 - Town centre car parking

2.12 Current local transport authority spending on parking enforcement is £0.176m. Enforcement is mostly provided by West Northamptonshire Council pending the splitting of the service. In addition, parking enforcement within Kettering is provided by North Northamptonshire Council Civil Enforcement Officers as part of their wider enforcement role, and separate spending figures for their time spent on parking enforcement are not available.

3.0 Headline targets

Targets for journey times and reliability improvements

3.1 Transport Focus’s national Bus Passenger Survey in Autumn 2019 found punctuality to be the third highest priority for passengers. In the Autumn 2017, Northamptonshire Bus Passenger Survey, described in section 3.7 below, whereas 85% of passengers were satisfied with the journey time of the bus, only 68% of passengers were satisfied with the punctuality of their bus services. Despite this, in 2020/21, buses in Northamptonshire were only late on average less than 8% of the time taking into account punctuality both at the origin and intermediate timing points indicating that, whilst having room for improvement, buses can be said to be reliable in most parts of this area.

3.2 Data from our Real Time Passenger Information system shows that journey time reliability is an issue on certain corridors, meaning that it would be difficult for operators to schedule a more reliable service by increasing journey times due to the variability of journey times from one day to the next. Not only will addressing journey time reliability influence punctuality, but it enables a more efficient scheduling of services and will increase customer confidence and satisfaction, which in turn increases the attractiveness of the bus network to current and potential passengers.

3.3 We will use data from our Real Time system to monitor both journey times and journey time reliability. As explained in Section 4 below, we will focus our initial measures around bus priority on improving journey time reliability. The table below shows our targets for journey times and journey times reliability, based around the service level tiers described in section 4.9 below.

Target	Baseline	Target for 2022/23	Target for 2023/24	Target for 2024/25
Journey time - % change in end-to-end journey time of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Services indexed at 100% in 19/20	100% (2019/20)	+/- 0%	+/- 0%	+/- 0%
Reliability - % of days on which journeys can be completed within 10% of the average journey time of Tier 1 and Tier 2 services	92.31% (2019/20)	92.31%	93.5%	94.5%

Table 2 - Journey Time and Journey Time Reliability Targets

Targets for passenger growth and customer satisfaction

3.4 The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031, the Part 1 Local Plan for the area, was adopted in July 2016 in order to alleviate the effects on the transport network of the significant new developments, including Sustainable Urban Extensions, proposed, it includes challenging, but realistic, targets to increase levels of modal shift away from the private car towards other forms of travel, including public transport, cycling and walking. The following modal shift targets, based on 2001 census data, are set for 2031:

- A reduction of 5% in single occupancy car journeys to work from the existing built-up areas of the Growth towns (Corby, Kettering, Rushden, Wellingborough) and Market towns (Burton Latimer, Desborough, Higham Ferrers, Irthlingborough, Oundle, Raunds, Rothwell, Thrapston); and
- A reduction of 20% in single occupancy car journeys to work from new developments compared to adjoining wards.

3.5 These targets are embedded in the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan (March 2012), which forms the current Local Transport Plan for North Northamptonshire. The Northamptonshire Bus Strategy (April 2018), which forms part of the Local Transport Plan suite of documents, identifies that to meet these

targets it would be necessary for bus patronage to rise by 50% from the 2012 baseline figure of 20.5m passengers per annum. As bus use actually declined 15% overall between 2012/13 and 2019/20, to achieve these targets will require a 70% increase between the pre-Covid baseline of 2018/19 and 2031/32.

Year	Northamptonshire Bus Patronage (million passenger journeys per annum)
2003/04	15.5
2004/05	16.8
2005/06	17.7
2006/07	18.9
2007/08	19.2
2008/09	19.4
2009/10	19.7
2010/11	19.1
2011/12	19.8
2012/13	20.5
2013/14	19.5
2014/15	18.3
2015/16	18.5
2016/17	19.2
2017/18	18.5
2018/19	18.0
2019/20	17.4

Table 3.2 – Northamptonshire Bus Patronage 2003/04 – 2019/20

3.6 Because North Northamptonshire is a newly-formed unitary authority, historic data for bus patronage is not readily available at authority level. Pending the disaggregation of former Northamptonshire data sets, we have initially expressed our targets as a percentage based on the 2018-19 baseline, the last year before figures were affected by Covid (albeit that the impact on 2019-20 data was quite small). Going forward, we intend to use the patronage data which we already collect for concessionary fares as our measurement of patronage growth, which will necessitate adding child data to the data on concessionary travellers and adult fare-payers we already collect. This should minimise the additional data-gathering burden on operators.

Year	North Northamptonshire Bus Patronage Targets (as % of 2018-19 baseline)
2018/19 (baseline)	100
2021/22	64
2022/23	76
2023/24	88
2024/25	100
2025/26	110
2026/27	120
2027/28	130
2028/29	140
2029/30	150
2030/31	160
2031/32	170

Table 3 - Bus Patronage Targets

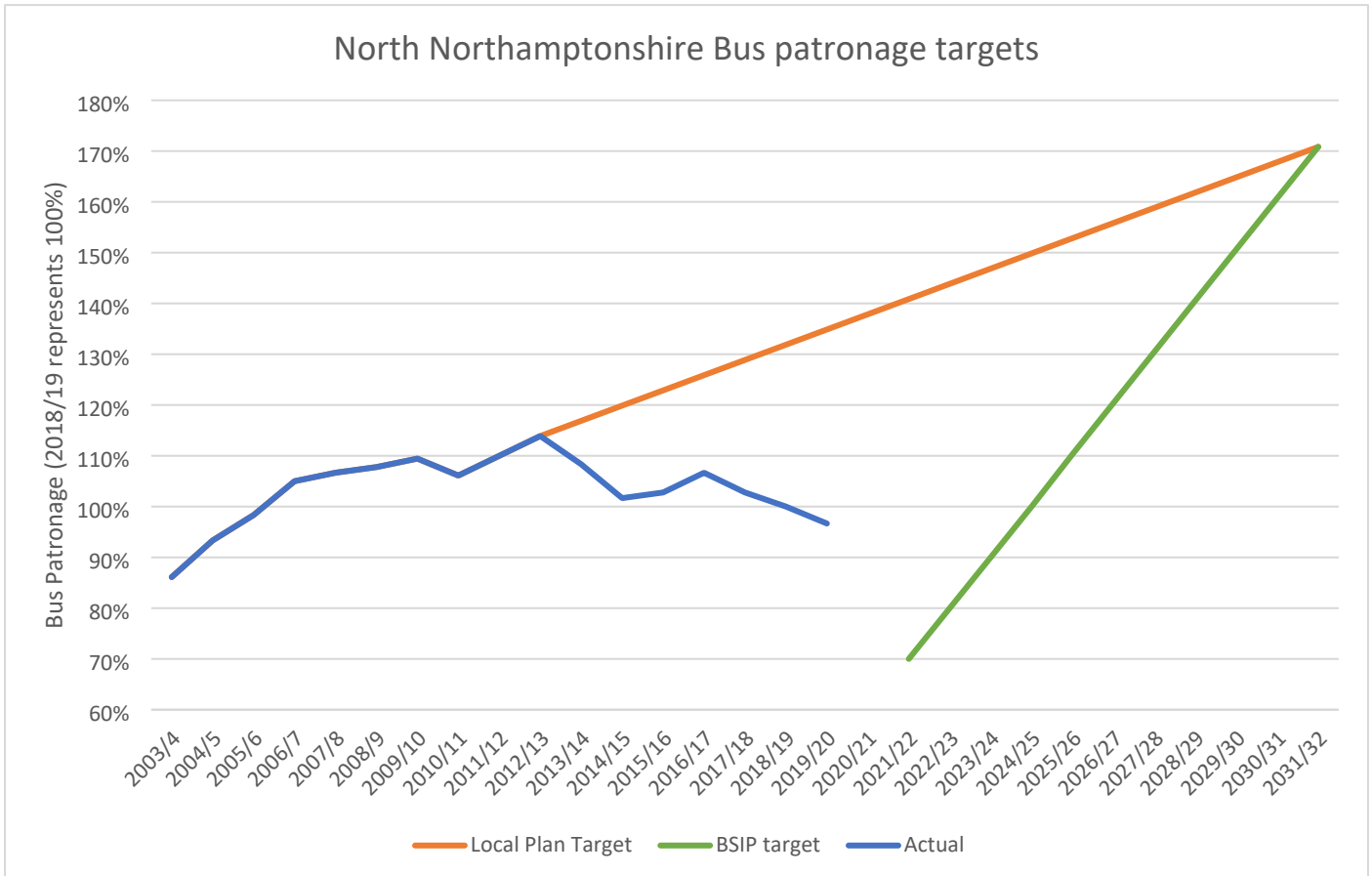


Figure 2 - Bus Patronage Targets

3.7 The most recent service of bus passenger satisfaction covering North Northamptonshire formed part of the Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey in Autumn 2017. The results, which were for the whole of the then Northamptonshire County Council area, showed that:

- 87% of passengers were satisfied with their overall journey
- 68% of passengers were satisfied with the punctuality of the bus
- 85% of passengers were satisfied with the journey time of the bus
- 64% of passengers were satisfied with the value for money of their journey

3.8 We intend to participate in future similar surveys undertaken by Transport Focus, which are intended to be undertaken six-monthly to tie in with the reporting on Bus Service Improvement Plans. Our overall target for bus satisfaction is for this to reach 90% by 2024/5 and for it be maintained at or above this level going forward.

Year	North Northamptonshire Passenger satisfaction targets (% of passengers)
Autumn 2017 (baseline)	87 (Northamptonshire)
2022/23	88
2023/24	89
2024/25	90

Table 4 - Passenger Satisfaction Targets

4.0 Delivery

4.1 The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy and Northamptonshire Transportation Plan contain ambitious targets for increasing bus use that would see bus patronage rise by 50% between 2012 and 2031. As bus use actually declined overall between 2012 and 2019, to achieve these targets will require a 70% increase between the pre-Covid baseline of 2018/19 and 2031/32.

4.2 Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the bus industry. At the height of the first lockdown in spring 2019, the number of people using local bus services declined to 15% of normal passenger numbers. Since that time passenger numbers have increased, reduced and increased again during the various cycles of relaxation and restriction. At the time of writing, October 2021, overall patronage on local bus services has recovered to around 65% of pre-Covid levels. However, this figure disguises significant variation among different types of passenger, with around 68% of fare-paying adults, 84% of child passengers and 53% of concessionary pass holders compared to the pre-Covid situation.

4.3 To date, the number of passengers being carried has remained below the level required for bus services to be financially viable. In order to allow a comprehensive network of services to continue operating, Government has provided financial support to the local bus industry, initially through the Covid-19 Bus Service Support Grant and currently through the Bus Recovery Grant. In addition, Northamptonshire County Council (until March 2021) and North Northamptonshire Council (since April 2021) have continued to reimburse local operators for concessionary fares at pre-pandemic levels.

4.4 The current government support through the Bus Recovery Grant will continue until March 2022. By that time, it is hoped that there will have been a further significant recovery in patronage, however, the risk remains that services will not have returned to commercial viability by that date. It is likely that support will still be required from Government beyond March 2022. Based on the patronage targets we have set in section 3 above, which aim to achieve a return to pre-Covid patronage levels during 2024/5, we have estimated that the following sums would be required.

Funding	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Estimated revenue requirement for Government support for loss of patronage	£2.300m	£1.200m	£0.150m	-

Table 5 - Estimated requirement for Government support for loss of patronage

Service network review

4.5 This section of the plan reviews the existing service network, and the likely scope for expansion of commercial services to serve new developments. The potential restoration of services to communities which do not currently have one is dealt with in sections 4.63 to 4.71 below.

4.6 The current bus service network in North Northamptonshire reflects the results of a number of service reviews over the last twenty years. In addition to historically strong corridors such as the A45 - Raunds – Higham Ferrers – Rushden – Wellingborough – Northampton and through the A6 towns north and south of Kettering, the X4 corridor linking Northampton and Peterborough via Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby has been developed using initial Government kick-start funding as a principal link between the largest three North Northamptonshire towns. New commercial links, such as Desborough to Corby and Burton Latimer to Wellingborough, have been established – sometimes using initial S106 developer funding – to provide regular services where one had not previously existed, either for many years or possibly ever.

4.7 Most of the minor route variations which once existed have been removed, producing a simpler service network, with most commercial services operating to a standard route at least hourly. Where variations do exist, they strike a good balance between simplicity and ensuring communities receive the service they need. A good example of this is services 17-19, which pre-Covid provided a 20-minute frequency Monday –

Saturday daytime service between Kettering, Rothwell and Desborough, with service 18 continuing hourly to Market Harborough and service 19 continuing hourly to Corby.

4.8 Since deregulation in 1986, North Northamptonshire has seen very little head-to-head competition between operators on the same route, and currently there has been no such competition for some years. The only competition which exists is where two operators share a common section of route as part of a service to different destinations.

4.9 Having reviewed the current network, we consider that it strikes an appropriate balance between costs of operation and likely patronage levels over the 3-5 year timeframe of the current Bus Service Improvement Plan. Likewise, we consider that the current Monday – Saturday daytime frequencies, with some adjustments to return services to pre-Covid levels, will be sufficient although we do consider that there are some gaps in evening and Sunday services on both urban and inter-urban routes which are worth filling.

4.10 We have defined services standards for the urban and inter-urban route networks, reflecting what we consider to be a reasonable level of evening and Sunday service provision relative to different levels of Monday to Saturday daytime service. It is likely that all Rural Tier 4 and some Rural Tier 3 or Urban Tier 3 services would need to be wholly subsidised.

Service level	Monday to Saturday - daytime	Monday to Saturday - evening	Sunday - daytime
Urban Tier 1	At least every 15 minutes	At least every 30 minutes	At least every 30 minutes
Urban Tier 2	At least every 30 minutes	Based on evidenced need	Based on evidenced need
Urban Tier 3	Hourly or infrequent or Demand Responsive Transport	None	None
Inter Urban Tier 1	At least every 30 minutes	At least hourly	At least hourly
Inter Urban Tier 2	At least hourly	Based on evidenced need	Based on evidenced need
Rural Tier 3	At least 2-hourly	None	None
Rural Tier 4	Infrequent or Demand Responsive Transport	None	None
Industrial Estate service	As justified	As justified	As justified
Academic service	Monday to Friday term time only	None	None

Table 6 - Commercial service level tiers

4.11 The classification of commercial services into these categories is given in Appendix B.

4.12 For the commercial network, this represents the current daytime frequency, except in a number of instances where frequency has reduced (particularly on Saturdays) since the onset of the Covid pandemic, and we would expect frequencies to return to pre-Covid levels as patronage returns to former levels:

- 1 Welland Vale – Corby Town Centre – Taunton Avenue (Monday to Saturday)
- 2 Priors Hall – Corby Town Centre – Great Oakley – Kettering Town Centre (Saturdays)
- 3 Shire Lodge – Corby Town Centre – Danesholme (Monday to Saturday)
- 47 Wellingborough – Finedon – Kettering (Saturdays)
- 48 Wellingborough – Irthlingborough – Finedon – Kettering (Saturdays)
- X4 Northampton – Wellingborough – Kettering – Corby – Oundle – Peterborough (restore half-hourly frequency over Kettering – Corby section)
- X46/X47 Northampton – Wellingborough – Rushden – Raunds (Saturdays)

4.13 There are a number of instances, however, where the services standards would require the introduction of evening or Sunday services where these do not currently exist. We will work with operators to determine whether these service enhancements can be delivered through the Enhanced Partnership or will require subsidy:

- 1 Welland Vale – Corby Town Centre – Taunton Avenue (evening services)
- 3 Shire Lodge – Corby Town Centre – Danesholme (evening and Sunday service)
- X47 Northampton – Wellingborough – Raunds (evening service to operate over whole route)
- 49/50 Kettering – Rushden (enhance Sunday service to hourly)

As no wholly urban route in North Northamptonshire currently has an evening service, we consider that a half-hourly frequency on any new routes that are introduced is the most that could be justified at present.

4.14 We will examine the public transport accessibility of tourist destinations within North Northamptonshire, and any improvements needed, through our forthcoming Visitor Economy Strategy.

4.15 While we consider that that the current commercial network and frequencies are appropriate in the short-term, North Northamptonshire is a growing area and much housing development is underway which will require either the urban bus networks to be extended beyond their current boundaries or inter-urban routes to be diverted. This will be done through a combination of existing and new services. Where existing services are extended or diverted, this may often require service frequencies to be increased to accommodate the additional patronage and provide an attractive option for those living in the new developments. The need for additional services in addition to the current commercial network is dealt with in sections 4.63 to 4.71 below.

4.16 We have secured very significant Section 106 developer funding obligations towards these bus service improvements, with more than £8 million secured from developments across North Northamptonshire. Such funding has already been used to provide services to new developments such as Priors Hall at Corby and Glenvale Park and Stanton Cross in Wellingborough, while services will be introduced to the Corby West urban extension and Hanwood Park at Kettering as development progresses at those locations.

4.17 Services to the smaller towns will also benefit from service improvements. In partnership with the operator, the Council has been developing a corridor between Corby, Thrapston and Huntingdon with Section 106 contributions. Whilst Covid-19 has clearly hampered its performance, this is already showing signs of recovering back to its pre-Covid position and we intend to continue promoting this service. In general, the Council considers links to regional destinations outside the Council area to be worth exploring where Section 106 or other funding gives us the opportunity to do so and we have been keeping an interested eye on work being undertaken by England's Economic Heartland on regional bus service opportunities.

4.18 On the funding table which forms Appendix A, we have assumed a nominal £900k of Section 106 contributions in each of the years 2022/23-2024/25 for new services, together with £136k in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and £106k in 2024/5 and 2025/26 for 'socially necessary' services (see also Table 10 below) , with the remaining funding after that date.

4.19 Further such sums may be expected from other developments which have yet to secure their planning permissions. The receipt of this money will be dependent of the progress of development, particularly the pace of construction and sale of new housing and can be difficult to forecast. In some cases, the funding is expected to extend into the late 2020s or early 2030s given the expected build-out rates for the larger developments.

4.20 As patronage levels increase further beyond immediate pre-Covid levels towards our target for 50% growth from the 2018/19 baseline by 2031, we would expect service levels to increase. Typically, we would expect a daytime 15-minute frequency might increase to every 10 minutes, a half-hourly frequency to every 20 minutes, while many hourly services might become half-hourly. This would be dependent on the level of patronage growth on individual services.

Bus priority

4.21 Bus punctuality continues to be one of the top priorities for bus passengers. As noted in section 3.7, in the Autumn 2017 Northamptonshire Bus Passenger Survey, whereas 85% of passengers were satisfied with the journey time of the bus, only 68% of passengers were satisfied with the punctuality of their bus services. Despite this, in 2020/21 buses in Northamptonshire were only late on average less than 8% of the time taking into account both the origin and intermediate timing points indicating that, whilst having room for improvement, buses can be said to be reliable in the most part in this area.

4.22 Roadworks are a major source of extended journey times and issues with journey time reliability. What may be considered a significant road closure from general traffic management perspective might not be so concerning from a public transport perspective and vice-versa. What may seem like a minor road in highway network terms may actually be crucial to serving certain communities by bus, and some roads may not have suitable diversion routes which can be used by buses, resulting in the impact of their closure felt far more widely.

4.23 Getting relevant and timely travel information out to the public is crucial, as is ensuring that bus companies are fully aware of what is going on. While some works are emergencies and cannot be avoided, it is generally found that, where there are major schemes taking place over many weeks or months that are of strategic importance, that information flows well in advance, however, works which fall between these two extremes can escape attention, with the appreciation of the impact not grasped or works being scheduled at short notice on the assumption that they will not have a major impact.

4.24 Often, dates and times of works have to change, particularly where they are weather dependant. The result can be buses diverting unnecessarily or coming across a diversion they were not expecting, with resulting confusion and dissatisfaction from bus users and operators alike. This can be particularly prevalent where there are internal works, such as road surfacing, re-lining or gully cleansing.

4.25 The Council is therefore working with internal and external partners to develop a system of grading disruption from a public transport perspective. This will take into consideration the severity of the impact on bus movements but also the scale of upheaval that the passengers themselves would face. The intention of developing this system is that it will simplify the communication process with contractors or works promoters, simply categorising works based on the amount of care they need to take when planning and scheduling their work, or when they are publicising this to the population:

- Red works will be extremely disruptive to buses. This could be because of the duration of the works, regularity of the buses or the unavailability of diversion routes.
- Yellow works, whilst still very disruptive, have a workable diversion for buses and it can be managed. Works in this category will still result in buses being diverted and passengers needing to be informed about what is being planned, but they are generally not as disruptive as the Red Tier.
- Green works will generally not impact buses at all, but there may be some limited examples where the disruption is so minor it does not require significant advanced publicity.

4.26 Further details of these categories can be found in Appendix C.

4.27 In terms of wider bus priority measures, data from the real-time tracking of buses (covering almost all services in North Northamptonshire) has been used to analyse the performance of services in North Northamptonshire with a view to identifying the key targets for intervention. This has allowed the identification of corridors on which journey time reliability is a concern, and where it would be difficult for operators to schedule a more reliable service by increasing journey times due to the difficulty of predicting journey times from one day to the next. Not only will addressing journey time reliability influence punctuality, but it enables a more efficient scheduling of services and the associated benefits both bring.

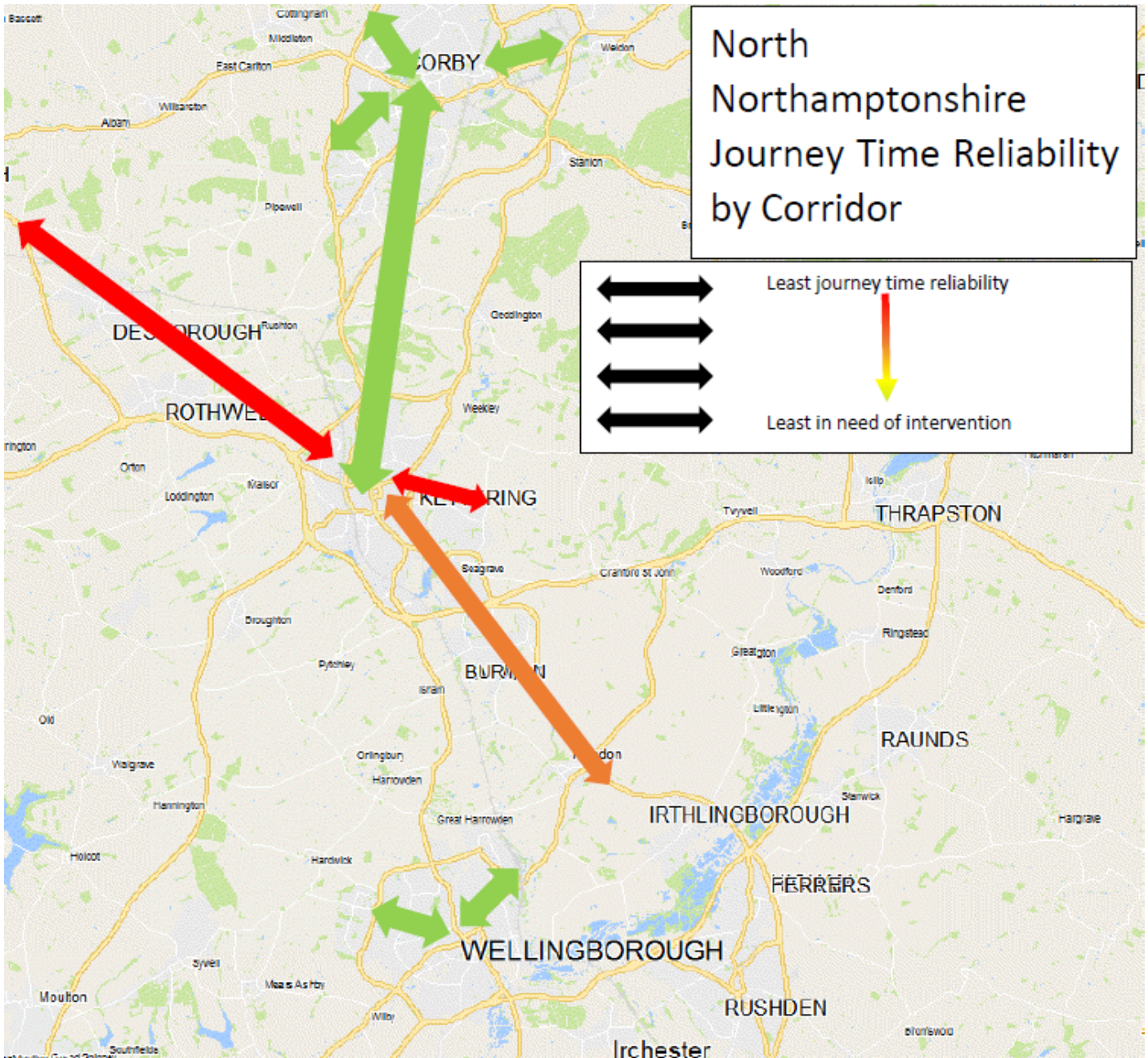


Figure 3 - Journey Time Reliability by Corridor.

4.28 In North Northamptonshire, data from autumn 2019 before the onset of the Covid pandemic shows corridors on which buses suffer more from variable journey times and have the least journey time reliability. We are identifying the key hotspots for journey time reliability issues where intervention may be required. Initial work has identified that the Kettering to Desborough and Kettering to Burton Latimer corridors are the likely priorities for intervention. Further analysis will be undertaken to validate these results and examine the causes of delay so that appropriate interventions can be considered, and a suitable scheme(s) developed for inclusion in our second Bus Service Improvement Plan. Such interventions may include improving co-ordination of roadworks, clearing obstructive parking, improving bus stop facilities, use of traffic signal technology to aid passage of buses or allocating road space more favourably to buses in certain key areas.

4.29 The study will be funded from £75,000 of the bus capacity funding which has been received by the Council. While the costs of implementation will not be known until the study is completed, we have assessed a nominal £1.5million in each of 2023/24 and 2024/25 in the funding table in Appendix A.

Fares

4.30 Among existing bus users, the Autumn 2019 Transport Focus survey of Bus passengers' priorities for improvement identifies that getting better value for money from fares is among the top five priority measures, and it is a top three consideration for non-users, particularly young and working age people (Transport Focus, Sept 2020).

4.31 North Northamptonshire is no different to many other areas in that the bus network is organised around a zonal commercial fare system. The table below shows the impact that this can have on the cost of example journeys based on 22 return trips during a month:

Journey	Ticket zone	Straight line distance (miles)	Total travel distance over 22 days (miles)	1 month Fare	£ per mile over 1 month
Finedon High Street to Kettering town centre	Megarider Gold	5.17	227.48	£110.00	£0.48
Great Harrowden to Kettering town centre	Megarider Gold	4.82	212.08	£110.00	£0.52
Corby George Street to Kettering town centre	KC Megarider	5.92	260.48	£89.00	£0.34
Burton Latimer High Street to Kettering town centre	Kettering Megarider	3.25	143	£53.50	£0.37
Isham Minstrel Close to Kettering town centre	Kettering Megarider	2.99	131.56	£53.50	£0.41

Table 7 - Example monthly fares

4.32 The commercial bus network in this Authority is operated almost exclusively by Stagecoach Midlands, with some operators providing a single service in some areas. There is a vast community transport network operating under Section 22 permits, however, and an additional number of services operating under contract. Therefore, whilst perhaps less essential than in some areas of the country, it would still be of benefit to introduce inter-operator ticketing.

4.33 When surveyed by the Council, operators broadly agreed that tickets should be available across all services without a premium and that fare-capping is desirable.

4.34 A subject of correspondence the Council has received from a number of members of the public has been fare structure; most commonly that once outside of the urban fare zones, fares can increase markedly, and that neighbouring communities can be priced differently.

4.35 North Northamptonshire, in general, along with other locations on the A14 and A45, has become a hub of warehousing and distribution and many of the industrial areas are not served by existing routes. All towns in North Northamptonshire are experiencing growth and development. Major housing developments are being built across the Council area and a number of major employment areas have been constructed over recent years. A major leisure and retail centre, Rushden Lakes, sits on the A45, a short distance from other towns such as Burton Latimer and Wellingborough, creating a major destination in the area.

4.36 A key consideration in accommodating the needs of workers in the area is the affordability of fares. Whilst fare level clearly plays a part in this, affordability is a slightly different metric that also takes an individual's cash flow into account. If, for example, a worker on the National Living Wage begins employment in logistics at the North Kettering Business Area, they are required to pay over £50 up front or by direct debit in order to secure the best-value bus ticket when travelling within Kettering, and over £80 if travelling from nearby Corby. Being on the National Living Wage, the outlay of this before even commencing employment may be too much of an ask. Whilst a month's unlimited travel for a little over £50 is, in many ways, good value, price capping to enable an individual to outlay no more than a daily fare upfront in order to secure the best value ticket is something that the Council is committed to exploring.

Integrated ticketing

4.37 We will work with bus and other transport operators to develop multi-modal multi-operator ticketing solutions for journeys within and to/from North Northamptonshire. Pending the development of a suitable back-office technical solution, we will look to define the broad parameters for such a scheme and understand the journeys for which it will provide the greatest value. Once the back-office solution has been developed (assumed in accordance with the National Bus Strategy to be developed nationally on behalf of Government) we will develop our plans in further detail and determine whether it is appropriate to roll such a scheme out area-by-area or product-by-product, or to introduce with a 'big-bang' approach.

4.38 Given the number of cross-border services in North Northamptonshire, we do not consider that a common brand identity for buses in our area would be appropriate, as it would tend to introduce more not fewer liveries. However, we intend to establish a branding via our multi-modal multi-operator ticketing system which will emphasise the network identity of the bus services themselves and the ease with which passengers can make journeys.

4.39 We have included a bid for £60,000 of DfT funding to develop these proposals in our funding proforma at Appendix A, with a nominal £500,000 of capital funding for rollout assumed in 2024/25.

Integrated services

4.40 Through the development of our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans and other initiatives we will seek to improve the accessibility of bus stops by walking and cycling. Through our Development Management policies, we will seek to ensure that bus stops are well-located within new developments in order to maximise the accessibility of the bus stops while ensuring that the bus does not have an unduly circuitous route through the development.

4.41 There are no bus stations within North Northamptonshire. Instead, bus services/interchanges are focused on on-street locations close to the main shopping facilities in the main towns.

4.42 There are three railway stations in North Northamptonshire: at Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough. All are located at some distance from the town centres, and none are located on through-roads which buses would naturally use en route to other places. Residents living in out-lying parts of the authority may also use the stations at Market Harborough, Peterborough, Bedford and Northampton, so cross-area services may need to consider these.

4.43 A key part of the vision for the Stanton Cross development, located to the east of the Midland Main Line railway near Wellingborough railway station, has been the creation of a new route past the frontage of Wellingborough railway station, involving the construction of a new bridge over the railway, which as the development progresses and bus services are developed, will place the station on the main bus route connecting the Stanton Cross development with the town centre; not only ensuring good access to the station from the new development, but also improving access from the rest of the town.

4.44 Corby railway station, opened in 2009, incorporates bus interchange facilities, but these are only used by a limited number of services. Kettering railway station has a limited service from nearby stops, although there are aspirations to build a bus interchange adjacent to the station as part of redevelopment of the Station Quarter. We will examine the possibilities to increase the range of services serving these two stations.

Information

4.45 Developments in Information Technology mean that there are an increasing number of ways in which passengers can gain information about bus services. While most commercial bus operators produce leaflets and maintain websites to advertise their services, the Council can help to ensure that comprehensive information is available to passengers for all operators' services. Subject to further discussions and availability of budget, we are intending to make information available through the following formats:

- Website – timetable information for all registered local bus services operating in North Northamptonshire.
- Printed leaflets for supported services where these are not produced by the bus operator.
- Maps, available on our website, and possibly in printed form, showing all bus services in North Northamptonshire, including summary information on service frequencies.
- Bus stop publicity – We are considering the reintroduction of real time information displays for bus stops with timetable cases, which show in a consistent manner the times, routes and destinations of all bus services using that stop.
- Apps – We will further develop our Smart Move Northamptonshire app and also ensure that relevant information is made available as open-source data.

4.46 North Northamptonshire has a leading Bus Real Time Information system, which gives us access not only to an accurate on-street information system but also a sophisticated reporting package that drives and supports the push towards better punctuality and reliability. More information on this reporting capability is discussed under our aspirations for improving reliability - the provision of information is also a key deliverable of this system. Better information at bus stops is a top 10 bus passenger priority (Transport Focus, Sept 2020) nationwide and a 2017 Transport Focus survey commissioned jointly by Northamptonshire County Council and Stagecoach Midlands gave a below-average rating of 63% satisfaction with information at bus stops. This indicates that, whilst net satisfaction is convincingly positive, there is room for improvement against our statistical neighbours.

4.47 Currently, there are 41 real-time displays in North Northamptonshire, mainly concentrated around the Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and Oundle town centres and key arteries into those towns. A number of these displays, whilst functional, have been superseded and replaced by newer technology. The more modern displays allow for multi-media messaging to relay information about service delays, road closures and upcoming timetable changes. However, this has also been especially useful to generate messaging around social distancing and information about Covid-19.

4.48 The Council therefore seeks funding through the Bus Service Improvement Plan to improve the provision of on-street real time information through a three-tiered plan:

- Level 1 seeks to replace all of the remaining older generation of so-called "Classic" in-shelter displays with thin-film-transistor (TFT) liquid-crystal super-widescreen multimedia displays during years 1 and 2 of the Enhanced Partnership.
- Level 2 seeks to install new displays at key stops where there are none at the moment. At high usage stops, such as Rushden Lakes and Skinners Hill in Rushden, these will take the form of additional in-shelter TFT displays to be ordered during years 1 and 2, for installation concurrently with the Tier 1 roll-out. At less busy stops where real-time displays would still be of tremendous benefit, the intention is to use solar or battery powered displays to make these more sustainable. An example of this could be outside Kettering General Hospital. Due to the additional survey and installation work likely to be required, roll-out of these would commence in years 2 and 3.

- Level 3 seeks to expand on Tier 1 by replacing all other in-shelter displays that are not currently Tft with these newer displays. Beyond this, Tier 3 also seeks to expand the provision of solar or battery-powered displays to key stops in smaller towns where there is no provision of at-stop real-time information at present and will also target key stops at out-of-town employment areas. Tier 3 would commence in year 3 of our programme.

Replacement priority programme	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Level 1: Replacement of older "Classic" RTI units with super-wide Tft displays	£0.040m	£0.040m	£0.030m	-
Level 2a: Install super-wide Tft displays at unequipped stops	£0.013m	£0.012m	-	-
Level 2b: Install solar or battery displays at unequipped stops	-	£0.012m	-	-
Level 3a: Install super-wide Tft displays in place of all "LCD" displays	-	-	£0.050m	£0.028m
Level 3b: Install solar or battery displays at additional unequipped stops	-	-	£0.090m	£0.090m
TOTAL funding	£0.053m	£0.064m	£0.170m	£0.118m

Table 8 - Funding for Real Time Information Display Replacement.

Modern buses and decarbonisation

4.49 As the financial stability of our bus network is regained, we will work with operators to resume their investment in new, more environmentally friendly vehicles with an improved passenger environment.

4.50 Although North Northamptonshire does not have any designated Air Quality Management Areas, the encouragement of sustainable transport and increased use of electric vehicles are seen as important to the achievement of overall climate change and decarbonisation objectives.

4.51 We intend to use some of the capacity funding received from the Department for Transport to undertake a feasibility study of potential electric or hydrogen vehicle schemes in our area, in order to inform our strategy for zero-emission buses and to form the basis of future bids for Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas or similar funding. We are particularly aware, from experience in other parts of the country, that the costs of upgrading the electrical supply to operators' depots has the potential to be a major determinant in whether or not a scheme will represent value for money, and this will form a key part of our study, along with the suitability of different fuel types for different duty cycles, given the distances travelled, and the balance of additional capital and revenue costs in both the short and long-term.

4.52 We intend to use £50,000 of the bus capacity funding received by the Council to undertake the study work and have included a nominal £6million of ZEBRA funding in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Giving bus passengers more of a voice and say

4.53 We will work with bus operators and passengers or passenger advocacy groups to develop a Bus Passenger Charter. This will set out for passengers how to use bus services and what passengers can expect from bus operators delivering local bus services across North Northamptonshire.

4.54 The Charter will describe how passengers provide feedback to the Council and operators who are not meeting their commitments in the Bus Service Improvement Plan and allow us to address the concerns of passengers.

4.55 We will use the Bus Passenger Charter to help ensure we are complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty and are developing transport provision in a manner which eliminates unlawful discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity.

4.56 We will use the feedback we receive from passengers through the Bus Passenger Charter to help shape our priorities in future Bus Service Improvement Plan updates.

Making passengers feel safer

4.57 Bus Services should be both safe and perceived to be safe by all.

4.58 We will undertake an audit of all bus stops across North Northamptonshire and, subject to obtaining the necessary funding, undertake an upgrade programme to install raised bus boarders and timetables cases at appropriate locations, along with new bus shelters at selected locations. As part of this audit, we will consider whether the location of the bus shelter is well-lit and has natural surveillance and consider the relocation of bus stops that do not meet these criteria. We will also consider whether any additional CCTV is needed at key locations.

4.59 To support this programme, we are incorporating in this plan a bid for the following funding:

Funding	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Revenue	£0.050m	-	-	-
Capital	-	£0.250m	£0.250m	-

Table 9 - Funding for Bus Stop Upgrade Programme.

4.60 We will work with bus operators to ensure that drivers have appropriate passenger safety training to deal with emergency situations on or off the bus. Drivers should be able to contact depot staff at all times and operators have proper 'code red' procedures with the emergency services so that help can be summoned quickly. Vehicles themselves should have working CCTV.

4.61 We will encourage bus operators to include safety in the marketing and customer charter – with clear and publicised procedures to deal with complaints or suggestions on how to improve passenger safety. Bus operators should liaise with local police and other stakeholders such as local schools to address safety concerns.

4.62 Good quality passenger information can also help to reassure passengers about safety issues such as when the bus will arrive at the stop and where individual passengers will board and alight for their journey, especially important for those that may be unfamiliar with the local area. Our proposals for improving passenger information are set out in paragraphs 4.45 to 4.48 above.

More demand-responsive services and 'socially necessary' transport

4.63 It is clear from the consultation undertaken to support the preparation of this Bus Service Improvement Plan, and from regular correspondence to the Council and local MPs, that local communities which lost their bus service through budgets cuts in 2018 wish to see their services return. Along with continuation of the Bus Service (Ring Fenced) Grant currently received from Government, additional funding will also be required to continue support for existing subsidised services listed in section 2.9 above as existing sources of developer funding are exhausted.

4.64 In 2017/18, the last full year of the former subsidy budget, approximately £0.55m was spent in North Northamptonshire, there then being no necessity to disaggregate the costs of what are now cross-border services to West Northamptonshire. Restoring what was withdrawn will cost more than that figure because of inflation in the interim and because of a reduction in the number of operators available to tender for services and the time taken to rebuild former patronage, meaning the net cost of contracts will increase, at least in the early years.

4.65 The services which were withdrawn in in 2018 were:

- 34 Lake Avenue – Kettering – Wellingborough
- 35 Great Cransley – Kettering
- 37 Mears Ashby – Northampton
- 39 Kettering – Mawsley – Old – Sywell – Northampton
- 67 Gretton – Corby
- Call Connect demand responsive service – restoration in Thrapston and Oundle areas
- W3 Wellingborough Town Centre – Berrymoor
- W4 Wellingborough Town Centre – Gleneagles Drive

4.66 The review of the commercial service network referred to in section 4.13 above has also highlighted the need for improved evening and Sunday services on some routes, and it is expected that this will require an element of subsidy support while services are re-established.

4.67 The Council is currently exploring the possibility of reintroducing a bus subsidy budget as part of its wider budget setting process. It is forecast that a total budget of £1.1m would be required to support the existing subsidised services, reinstate withdrawn services and introduce enhancements to the commercial network. The Council will need to consider the extent to which it can contribute to such a budget, alongside match funding which may be available from the Department for Transport. The table below demonstrates how local funding could be built up, alongside match funding, to produce a local budget in the medium term.

Funding	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
Bus Service (Ring Fenced) Grant	£105k	£105k	£105k	£105k	£422k
S106 developer contributions	£136k	£136k	£108k	£106k	£486k
Possible NNC funding	£245k	£495k	£695k	£895k	£2330k
Bid to DfT through BSIP	£250k	£400k	£300k	-	£950k
Total	£736k	£1136k	£1208k	£1106k	£4188k

Table 10 - Proposed funding for 'socially necessary' transport

4.68 Further work and consultation will be needed to determine what sort of service can be provided once funding levels are known. Options will include providing a lower frequency service than previously, running on fewer days of the week or different service routeings. The use of demand responsive transport is also vital to achieving our goals.

4.69 Community Transport provides a valuable service for those who are unable to use conventional bus services, whether because of difficulty in getting to or from the bus stop, because the bus service does not provide a link to local facilities, such as the doctor's surgery in a neighbouring village, or because there is no bus serving their area. Because of the need to provide door-to-door transport, such community transport schemes are effectively specialised taxi services. Such services are generally operated by voluntary, non-profit-making organisations.

4.70 The Council provides grant funding to support community transport operations, and we expect to provide a minimum of £15k per annum in such support for each year covered by this Plan. In addition, those community transport operators providing services through permits issued under Section 22 of the Transport Act 1985 will be eligible for reimbursement of concessionary fares.

4.71 The finances of many community transport operators have suffered through the Covid pandemic, as they have often not been eligible for the same support as the larger commercial operators. To support their continued operation, we propose, subject to securing funds through this Plan, to provide capital grant funding for the operators to purchase or lease new vehicles during 2022/23 and 2023/34.

Funding sought	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Community transport capital grant	£75k	£75k	-	-

Table 11 - Community transport capital grant

Longer term transformation of networks through Bus Rapid Transit and other measures

4.72 A study was undertaken some years of the potential for an inter-urban bus rapid transit network linking the main towns of North and West Northamptonshire. Such a proposal does not currently feature within local investment plans, but we may wish to revisit such proposals in the longer term.

5.0 Reporting

5.1 As well as annual update of this Bus Service Improvement Plan, we will publish six-monthly performance reports on the plan. As targets are set for financial years, the first performance report, which will contain data for the first half of the 2022/23 financial year (i.e. April – September 2022) will be published by December 2022 and further updates will be published six-monthly thereafter.

5.2 To provide the additional resources needed to undertake this work, we are proposing (through our budget process) to fund an additional post at a cost of £40,000 per annum, as shown in the funding table in Appendix A.

5.3 We anticipate that these reports will appear on our website at [Bus timetables and passes | North Northamptonshire Council \(northnorthants.gov.uk\)](#) although as the new authority website is still developing as information is transferred from the former sovereign council websites, this may be subject to change.

6.0 Overview table

Question	Answer
Name of authority or authorities:	North Northamptonshire Council
Franchising or Enhanced Partnership (or both)	Enhanced Partnership
Date of publication:	October 2021
Date of next annual update:	October 2022
URL of published report:	https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/bus-timetables-and-passes

Targets	2018/19	2019/20	Target for 2024/25	Description of how each will be measured (max 50 words)
Journey time	-	100%	+/-0%	% change in end-to-end journey time of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Services.
Reliability	-	92.31%	94.5%	% of days on which journeys can be completed within 10% of the average journey time of Tier 1 and Tier 2 services
Passenger numbers	100%	tbc	100%	Return patronage to 2018/19 levels by 2024/25. To be measured via concessionary fare returns, by collecting child data in addition to adult and concessionary boarding data.
Average passenger satisfaction	87% (2017)	-	90%	Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey

Make improvements to bus services and planning

More frequent and reliable services

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Review service frequency	Yes	Service network reviewed and enhancements identified to return frequencies to pre-Covid levels and enhanced evening and Sunday services. (4.5-4.20)
Increase bus priority measures	Yes	Minimise disruption and undertake study to identify further bus priority measures (4.21-4.27)
Increase demand responsive services	Yes	Proposal to restore previously withdrawn demand responsive services and invest in community transport (4.63-4.71)
Consideration of bus rapid transport networks	Yes	There have been historic studies, and while not considered appropriate to take forward currently, may be suitable in longer term (4.72)

Improvements to planning/integration with other modes

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Integrate services with other transport modes	Yes	Improved walking and cycling connections to bus stops and improved links with railway stations (4.40-4.43)
Simplify services	Yes	While we consider the network generally satisfactory, there will be some ability to simplify if evening services are enhanced (4.5-4.20)
Review socially necessary services	Yes	Exploring reinstatement of a bus subsidy budget (4.63-4.71)
Invest in Superbus networks	No	

Improvements to fares and ticketing

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Lower fares	Yes	We will use price capping to make fares more affordable (4.30-4.36)
Simplify fares	No	We do not consider simplifying fares to be a priority or that it would bring significant benefits for passengers.
Integrate ticketing between operators and transport	Yes	We will start developing the parameters of a scheme pending the availability of a back-office technical solution (4.37-4.39)

Make improvements to bus passenger experience

Higher spec buses

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Invest in improved bus specifications	Yes	We will work with operators to invest in improved vehicles (4.49)
Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services	Yes	We propose an upgrading programme for bus stops (4.58-4.59)
Protect personal safety of bus passengers	Yes	We will work with operators to improve passenger safety (4.60-4.62)
Improve buses for tourists	Yes	We will examine this through our Visitor Economy Strategy (4.14)
Invest in decarbonisation	Yes	We will undertake a study of potential electric or hydrogen bus schemes (4.50-4.52)

Improvements to passenger engagement

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Passenger charter	Yes	We will develop a passenger charter (4.53-4.56)
Strengthen network identity	Yes	We will strengthen network identity as part of the roll-out of a multi-modal multi-operator ticketing system (4.38)
Improve bus information	Yes	We will improve bus information, including upgrading our real time displays (4.45-4.48)

Other

Delivery – Does your BSIP detail policies to:	Yes/No	Explanation (max 50 words)
Other	-	-

7.0 Glossary of terms

Use this section to give definitions to any words that require explanation – especially if this is a public document. If you can't avoid jargon or technical terms, this is the place to explain them.

Term	Definition
Adopted highway	A highway maintainable at public expense. When new roads are constructed by developers, the council requires them to be brought up to a suitable standard before they are adopted.
Local highway authority	The local authority responsible for rights of way and adopted highways within an area, except trunk roads and motorways which are the responsibility of National Highways.
Local transport authority	The local authority responsible for transport planning and certain public transport functions within an area.
Local Transport Plan	A statutory document prepared by a local transport authority setting out its policies for the encouragement of safe, integrated efficient and economic transport within its area and its proposals for implementation of those policies.
Section 106 developer funding	Funding secured by an obligation placed upon a developer under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.

Appendix A – Outline funding template for BSIP

Funding category	Title of scheme	Detail on aspiration	Priority ranking	2022/23 Resource (£ nominal)	2022/23 Capital (£ nominal)	2023/24 Resource (£ nominal)	2023/24 Capital (£ nominal)	2024/25 Resource (£ nominal)	2024/25 Capital (£ nominal)	Beyond 2025 Resource (£ nominal)	Beyond 2025 Capital (£ nominal)	Total Resource Funding (£ nominal)	Total Capital Funding (£ nominal)
Bus priority infrastructure	Identify and deliver priority projects	Undertake study using DfT capacity funding and deliver identified priority projects	7	£75,000 from DfT capacity funding	-	-	£1,500,000 from DfT £3bn	-	£1,500,000 from DfT £3bn	-	-	£75,000	£3,000,000
Other infrastructure	Bus Stop Upgrade Programme	Install raised bus boarders and timetable cases at appropriate locations, along with new bus shelters at selected locations	6	£50,000 from DfT £3bn	-	-	£250,000 from DfT £3bn	-	£250,000 from DfT £3bn	-	-	£50,000	£500,000
Ticketing reform	Multi-operator ticketing	Develop multi-modal multi-operator ticketing schemes and deliver one technical back office available	8	£10,000 from DfT £3bn	-	£50,000 from DfT £3bn	-	-	£500,000 from DfT £3bn	-	-	£60,000	£500,000
Bus service support	Enhanced commercial services through developer funding	Extend or enhance services to serve new housing and commercial developments	4	£900,000 from S106	-	£900,000 from S106	-	£900,000 from S106	-	£4,500,000 from S106	-	£7,200,000	-
Bus service support	Restoration of bus subsidy budget	Explore budget to maintain existing services and reintroduce withdrawn services. (NNC funding being explored as part of budget setting process)	2	£250,000 from DfT £3bn; £136,000 from S106; £105,654 from Bus Service (Ring-Fenced) Grant; £245,000 from NNC	-	£400,000 from DfT £3bn; £136,000 from S106; £105,654 from Bus Service (Ring-Fenced) Grant; £495,000 from NNC	-	£300,000 from DfT £3bn; £108,000 from S106; £105,654 from Bus Service (Ring-Fenced) Grant; £695,000 from NNC	-	£106,000 from S106; £105,654 from Bus Service (Ring-Fenced) Grant; £895,000 from NNC	-	£4,188,616	-
EP/franchising delivery: LTA costs	EP delivery additional staffing costs	One additional post for additional work required	1	£40,000 from NNC	-	£40,000 from NNC	-	£40,000 from NNC	-	£40,000 from NNC	-	£160,000	-
Zero emission buses	Develop and deliver electric bus strategy	Undertake study using DfT capacity funding and then develop and deliver identified priority projects through ZEBRA funding	4	£50,000 from DfT capacity funding	-	-	£3,000,000 from ZEBRA	-	£3,000,000 from ZEBRA	-	-	£50,000	£6,000,000

Funding category	Title of scheme	Detail on aspiration	Priority ranking	2022/23 Resource (£ nominal)	2022/23 Capital (£ nominal)	2023/24 Resource (£ nominal)	2023/24 Capital (£ nominal)	2024/25 Resource (£ nominal)	2024/25 Capital (£ nominal)	Beyond 2025 Resource (£ nominal)	Beyond 2025 Capital (£ nominal)	Total Resource Funding (£ nominal)	Total Capital Funding (£ nominal)
Information	Upgrade and installation of real time displays	Upgrade of real-time displays and roll out to more locations across area	5	-	£53,000 from DfT £3bn	-	£64,000 from DfT £3bn	-	£170,000 from DfT £3bn	-	£118,000 from DfT £3bn	-	£405,000
Community transport	Capital grant for new vehicles	Capital grant for new vehicles to help sustain community transport post-COVID alongside ongoing revenue support from NNC	3	£14,892 from NNC	£75,000 from DfT £3bn	£14,892 from NNC	£75,000 from DfT £3bn	£14,892 from NNC	-	£14,892 from NNC	-	£59,568	£150,000
-	-	Total	-	£1,876,546	£128,000	£2,141,546	£4,889,000	£2,163,546	£5,420,000	£5,661,546	£118,000	£11,843,184	£10,555,000

Appendix B – Classification of commercial services by service level tier

Urban Tier 1

- 1 Welland Vale – Corby Town Centre – Taunton Avenue (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 3 Shire Lodge – Corby Town Centre – Danesholme (Stagecoach Midlands)

Urban Tier 2

- 2 Priors Hall – Corby Town Centre – Great Oakley – Kettering Town Centre – Venture Park (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 17/18/19 Kettering Town Centre – Ise Lodge (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 47/48 Kettering Town Centre – Burton Latimer (Stagecoach Midlands)
- W1 Wellingborough Town Centre – Queensway (Stagecoach Midlands)
- W2 Wellingborough Town Centre – Nest Farm Road (Stagecoach Midlands)

Urban Tier 3

- RHL Rushden Higham Link

Inter-Urban Tier 1

- 17/18/19 Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough combined frequency (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 49/50 Kettering – Burton Latimer – Irthlingborough – Rushden combined frequency (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X4 Corby – Kettering – Wellingborough – Northampton (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X46/X47 Raunds – Rushden – Wellingborough – Northampton combined frequency (Stagecoach Midlands)

Inter-Urban Tier 2

- 17 Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 17A Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 18 Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough – Market Harborough (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 19 Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough – Corby (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 47 Wellingborough - Finedon – Kettering (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 48 Wellingborough – Irthlingborough - Finedon – Kettering (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 49 Kettering – Rushden – Wellingborough (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 50 Kettering – Rushden – Bedford (Stagecoach Midlands)
- RF1 Corby – Uppingham – Oakham (Centrebus)
- X4 Peterborough – Oundle – Corby (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X10 Kettering – Northampton (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X46 Raunds – Rushden – Wellingborough – Northampton (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X47 Raunds – Rushden – Wellingborough – Northampton (Stagecoach Midlands)
-

Rural Tier 3

- 25 Rushden – Sharnbrook – Bedford (Grant Palmer)

Rural Tier 4

- No commercial services

Industrial Estate Service

- 2A Weldon Industry – Priors Hall – Corby Town Centre (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 2B Kettering – Corby – Weldon Industry (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 2C Corby Estates – Town Centre – Weldon Industry (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 4 Corby Estates – Earls tree Industry (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X44 Wellingborough – Brackmills (Stagecoach Midlands)

Academic Service

- 276 Burton Latimer – Latimer School (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 278 Burton Latimer – Latimer School (Stagecoach Midlands)
- Stanion – Kettering Buccleuch Academy (Hamiltons & Buckbys)

Appendix C – Reducing the impact of roadworks

Further details of the proposals for improving the impact of roadworks on bus journey times, outlined in sections 4.19 to 4.23 are set out below:

Red Works

These works will be extremely disruptive to buses. This could be because of the duration of the works, regularity of the buses or the unavailability of diversion routes, for example. As a rule of thumb, they would meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Have 10-or-more buses per hour operating on them
- Be of a duration of over one week
- Have a diversion route deemed unworkable or with the consequence of omitting a significant community or destination by the Bus & Rail time unilaterally or in discussion with bus companies
- Lane or bus stop closures or turning movement bans may also be considered “Red Tier” if they result in similar consequences.
- No alternative stop

When Red Works are identified they should:

- Have early proactive engagement with the Bus & Rail team to enable early proactive engagement with bus operators
- Be planned not to clash with other significant road closures or bus disruptions
- Be planned in conjunction with the weather forecast to make best endeavours not to have it disrupted by inclement weather
- Not to be scheduled or re-scheduled at less than 48-hours’ notice
- Signage advising of the closure and disruption should be prepared and displayed by the contractor, giving clear advice on what disruption is taking place and what the intending passengers should do.

Yellow Works

Whilst still very disruptive, there is a workable diversion for buses and it can be managed. Works in this category will still result in buses being diverted and passengers needing to be informed about what is being planned, but they are generally not as disruptive as the Red Works.

Generally, these would meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be of duration up to 10 days
- Not have more than 9 buses per hour running on them
- Have a diversion route which is workable albeit with some planning
- Residents affected have an option to get to an alternative service or stop as long as they have the relevant information

Yellow Works would require the following:

- Have early proactive engagement with the Bus & Rail team to enable early proactive engagement with bus operators
- Be planned not to clash with other significant road closures or bus disruptions
- Signage advising of the closure and disruption should be prepared and displayed by the contractor, giving clear advice on what disruption is taking place and what the intending passengers should do

Green Works

This road closure will generally not impact buses at all, or where the disruption is so minor it does not require significant advanced publicity.

Generally, these would meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be of duration up to 10 days
- Not have more than 9 buses per hour running on them
- Have a diversion route which is workable and not in need of significant rescheduling
- Residents affected have an option to get to an alternative stop simply on the day

Green Works should require the following:

- Have early proactive engagement with the Bus & Rail team to enable early proactive engagement with bus operators
- Be planned not to clash with other significant road closures or bus disruptions
- Signage advising of the closure and disruption should be prepared and displayed by the contractor, giving clear advice on what disruption is taking place and what the intending passengers should do



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Appendix B

Enhanced Bus

Partnership Plan

April 2022

www.northnorthants.gov.uk

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Issue	Date	Comments
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0.2	10/11/21	Client amends and general update
0.3	17/11/21	Guidance published so alignment updates
0.4	09/12/21	Council amends made
0.5	17/12/21	Consultation amends
1.0	21/12/21	Draft for operator consultation
2.0	25/01/22	Minor amends for Stakeholder consultation
3.0	01/03/22	Final amends on start date
3.1	17/03/22	Minor changes
4.0	15/04/22	Approved by Executive

NB: Draft versions 0.1 - final published versions 1.0

Consultees

Internal	External
Cabinet	Bus operators
	Wider Stakeholders

Distribution List

Internal	External
	Bus operators
	Wider Stakeholders

Links to other documents

Document	Link
Bus Service Improvement Plan	Enhanced partnerships for buses North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)
Enhanced Partnership Scheme	Enhanced partnerships for buses North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)

Additional Comments to note

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Part 1 – EP Plan

The North Northamptonshire Council Enhanced Partnership Plan for buses has been prepared in accordance with Section 138H of the Transport Act 2000 and is Made in accordance with Section 138G by North Northamptonshire Council

Executive Summary

North Northamptonshire Council is a new Unitary Authority. Alongside other modes, the Council sees bus as an important travel option for local people, the relative importance of bus will be considered further when the Council develops its own Local Transport Plan. Bus, alongside rail, walking and cycling has a role to play in providing people with an option to the car, and bus a more inclusive mode of transport, accessible to most people regardless of whether they can drive, have mobility limitations or age.

This Enhanced Partnership Plan has been developed for North Northamptonshire Council to drive bus improvements for passengers over the three years until 31 March 2025. It fulfils the statutory requirements set out by the Bus Services Act 2017 of an Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP) for North Northamptonshire. In doing so, it covers the following legally required aspects:

- specifies the area and the period to which the plan relates,
- sets out an analysis of the local services provided in that area,
- sets out policies relating to local services in that area,
- sets out objectives as regards the quality and effectiveness of local services provided in that area by reference to that period,
- describes how the related enhanced partnership scheme or schemes is or are intended to assist in implementing those policies and achieving those objectives,
- describes the intended effect of the related enhanced partnership scheme or schemes on areas neighbouring the area to which the plan relates, and
- how the plan is to be reviewed and, including how it is reviewed and the specific dates by which reviews are to be completed.

This EPP builds on the Bus Service Improvement Plan agreed in October 2021, and puts in place binding commitments on the Council and partner organisations to provide the necessary enhancements to make bus attractive and easier to use and contribute to delivery of our vision for buses, which is:

Our vision for buses

The bus network will meet community need, it will be delivered reliably and efficiently, and the bus offer is understood by the wider community not simply bus users, finally bus use is affordable and easy to use by all.

Alongside this EPP is a single Enhanced Partnership Scheme which sets out in greater detail the actions to be taken to deliver this EPP over the next 3 years.

In summary this EPP proposes the interventions set out in the Table of Actions, over.

Table of Actions

BSIP Objectives	EP Approach
1. Bus priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Address bottlenecks impacting bus services (quick wins) by utilising real time data where appropriate b) Identify opportunities for bus priority packages, especially at traffic lights c) Mitigate the impact of roadworks d) Deliver faster journey times and reliability improvements
2. Modern buses and decarbonisation and making passengers feel safer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Lock in current bus standards b) Develop a plan to raise bus standards during this EPP timescale c) Develop and implement a three-year marketing plan for local bus services d) Undertake a review of bus stops to ensure their position and layout is safe and reasonably attractive to users, bringing forward a plan to address the more significant shortcomings.
3. Fares and integrated ticketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Introduce capped fares b) Agree standard fare stages with the operators c) Commence plans for a smart ticket offer to be delivered for the next EPP
4. Service network improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Require all-day services to operate across common core hours (0730 to 1900hrs Monday to Fridays, except Bank Holidays) b) Review the bus network serving visitor attractions and work with operators on opportunities for network improvement.
5. Integrated services and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Require all operators to produce paper timetables and make these available in adequate quantity through agreed outlets b) Bus service maps are to indicate, with equal prominence all bus services operating in the area shown on the map, regardless of operator, and such information kept up-to-date at least every 6 months. c) Improve access to Real Time information d) All maps and timetables are to include prominent information explaining to passengers how to access Real Time information, using the form set out by the Council.
6. Giving passengers a say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Working with operators and passenger advocacy groups we will develop a Bus Passenger Charter and require operators to abide by its commitments.

1.0 Overview and Governance

- 1.1 The Government has set out its plan to support Local Transport Authorities improve bus services through the National Bus Strategy: Bus Back Better.
- 1.2 North Northamptonshire Council have welcomed and considered the options available to respond to Government's challenge 's and have resolved to follow the Enhanced Partnership route as the best means to locally improve bus services for passengers.
- 1.3 The Enhanced Partnership builds on the longer term strategy set out in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which set out the Council's plans over the next 3 to 5 years and longer. The BSIP was formally approved by the Council on 29 October 2021.
- 1.4 As required and set out in section 138F of the Transport Act 2000, notification of intent to introduce an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme was published by the Council on the 30 June 2021 following approval at the Council's Executive meeting on 22 June 2021.
- 1.5 This Enhanced Partnership Plan has been prepared in accordance with S138 of the Transport Act 2000 as amended by Section 9 of the Bus Services Act 2017, as well as Guidance published by the Department for Transport. Supporting this Enhanced Partnership Plan is an Enhanced Partnership Scheme which sets out the steps to be taken to deliver the vision set out below and the supporting actions.

Duration

- 1.6 This Enhanced Partnership Plan sets out the high level vision and objectives for bus services in the area over the 3 year period until 31 March 2025, it is based on the BSIP, which itself was the subject of public consultation and was produced in accordance with guidance published by the Department for Transport on BSIP's. The timescale also aligns to the funding support requested from Government.
- 1.7 The Enhanced Partnership Plan should be read alongside the accompanying Enhanced Partnership Scheme which sets out in precise detail how the BSIP will be delivered and commitments made by North Northamptonshire Council, as well as standards to be met by bus operators operating services in the area.

Governance and Reviews

- 1.8 The BSIP is itself subject to an annual Review. This Enhanced Partnership Plan and accompanying Scheme will also be reviewed annually and the results of the Review published within 6 months of the anniversary date on which this Enhanced Partnership Plan was made. This approach will ensure that the three documents remain aligned.
- 1.9 The review will be led by a Management Forum comprising the Council and involving local bus operators and passenger representatives as a minimum, it will consider the effectiveness of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and accompanying Scheme in increasing bus patronage and delivery of the underlying actions to improve bus reliability and drive up passenger satisfaction.
- 1.10 The Management Forum will also review the Plan and Scheme in the light of any new Local Transport Plan for North Northamptonshire, as it moves away from the LTP inherited from the former Northamptonshire County Council. If required this may necessitate triggering the legal processes to vary or revoke this EPP and Scheme, replacing these with newer versions reflecting the new Policy.

- 1.11 The Management Forum, comprising the following, have helped develop this Plan, and will be consulted as part of any review:

Management Forum

- North Northamptonshire Council (50% voting rights)
- Bus operators or their nominated representative(s) with services registered in this EPP area. One representative for each operator. (50% total voting rights, split in proportion to mileage of services falling within the EPP/EPs)

Wider Stakeholder Group

- Local Transport Groups (one representative per User Group)
- Business improvement districts (one representative per BID)
- Major employers (one representative per employer, employers to be agreed between the Essential members)
- Neighbouring local transport authorities
- Traffic Commissioner
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Parish Councils
- FE Colleges
- Transport Focus
- Confederation of Passenger Transport
- Bus Users UK

- 1.12 Bus performance data will be published every 6 months.

- 1.13 The results of the reviews and the performance data will be made available to the public on the Council's website [Enhanced partnerships for buses | North Northamptonshire Council \(northnorthants.gov.uk\)](http://northnorthants.gov.uk)

2.0 Area Covered by this Plan

- 2.1 This Enhanced Partnership Plan covers the whole of the North Northamptonshire Council area. Figure 1 below, shows the area covered. The area chosen has been determined by the bus network which largely connects the local towns and villages, with cross-boundary travel to Bedford and Market Harborough provided by bus or rail and to Northampton and Peterborough by bus.
- 2.2 The nature of the bus network does not lend itself to joining with an adjacent area, especially as the neighbouring area's bus networks are characterised by being focused on single town hub (for example Northampton Town, or Bedford) with a very limited number of services crossing the border.



Figure 1 - The North Northamptonshire Council Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme area (within Grey Council boundary line).

3.0 Analysis of Local Bus Services

Network and use

- 3.1 The bus services across North Northamptonshire carried approximately 6.5m passengers per annum prior to Covid-19, in October 2021 patronage was running at 64% of this level. Around 30% of bus users travel under the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme.
- 3.2 In North Northamptonshire 82.4% of households have access to at least a car or van. Of households that own a car, 40.9% have 1 car available, and a further 31.5% have 2 cars available. 17.5% of households have no vehicle according to the 2011 Census.
- 3.3 Travel to work is dominated by private car use. Only 2.01% of all usual residents aged 16 to 74 travel to work by bus according to the 2011 Census.
- 3.4 This suggests that if the right bus offer can be put in place there is considerable opportunity to achieve modal shift. In doing so we support existing bus users, the bus companies as well as reduce congestion, harmful emissions and road safety risk.

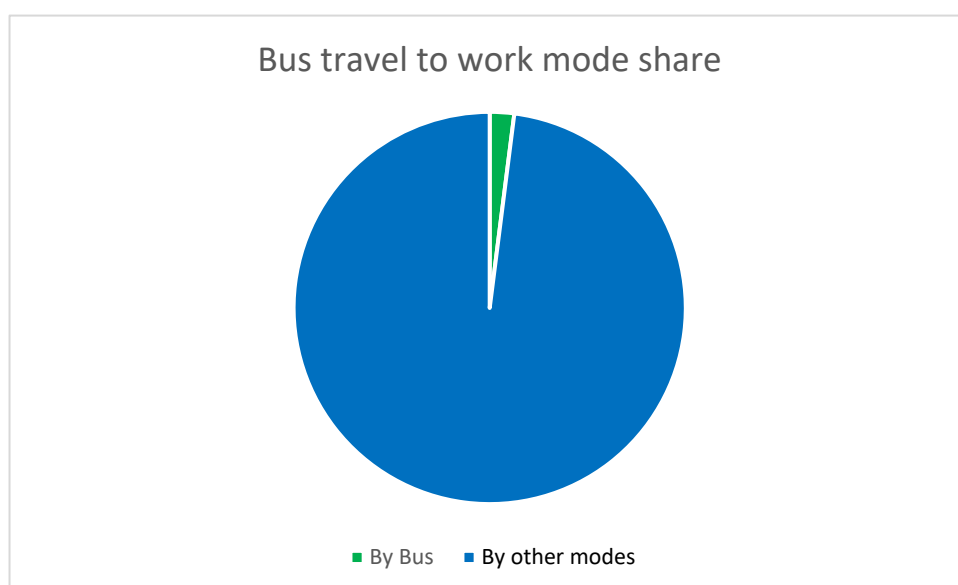


Figure 2 - Travel to work by bus in North Northamptonshire (2011 census data).

- 3.5 The dominant operator across North Northamptonshire is Stagecoach, delivering most services in Wellingborough, Kettering and Corby, with:
- Whippet Coaches providing a limited weekday daytime service to Stanion and Little Stanion into Corby. This is tendered between Corby and Thrapston. Commercial from Thrapston
 - Expresslines providing community services, away from the main roads into Rushden and Higham Ferrers, on weekdays off-peak.
 - A number of other operators typically provide cross-boundary services from further afield.
- 3.6 As well as local bus services there is a vast community transport network operating under Section 22 permits. This community transport network serves the rural communities, and those with mobility challenges, for whom a traditional bus network is neither accessible or viable.
- 3.7 The 2017 Northamptonshire Bus Passenger Survey undertaken by Transport Focus, reported that overall satisfaction with bus travel across Northamptonshire stood at 85%. However, only 68% were satisfied with the punctuality of the bus services.

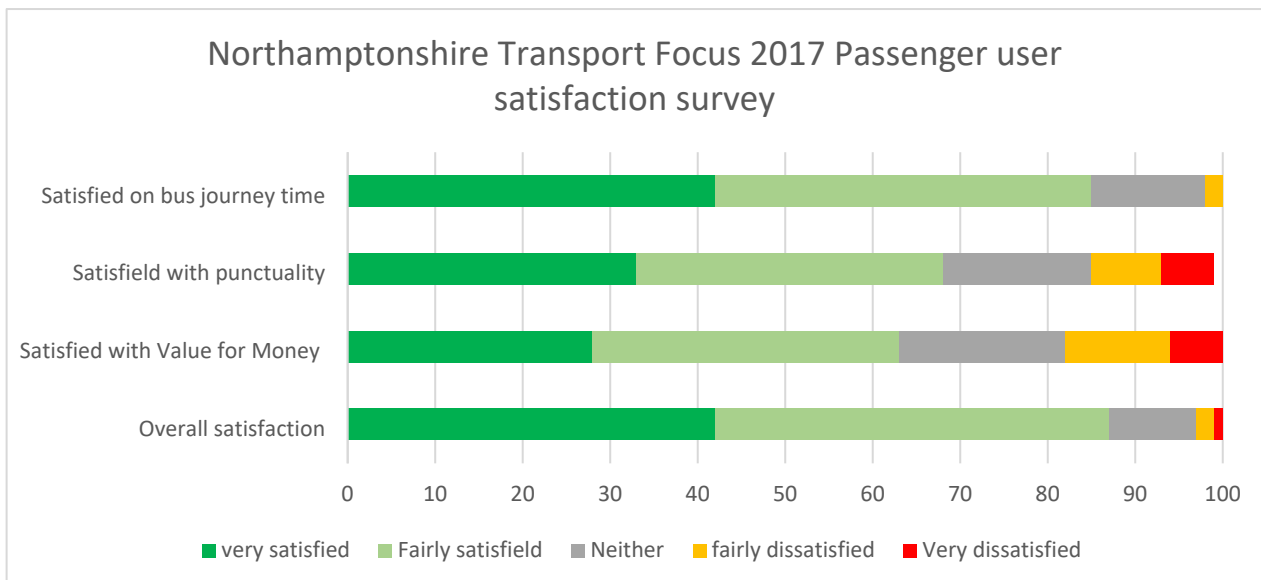


Figure 3 - Transport Focus passenger satisfaction data.

Bus priority

3.8 Analysis of bus corridors using Realtime data (see Figure 4), shows that prior to Covid-19 services largely operated reliably to timetable into Wellingborough and Corby, but there were delays into Kettering from the north-west, east and south-east directions, especially the Kettering to Desborough and Kettering to Burton Latimer corridors. The journey time variability is not fully understood but is considered to be linked to commuter congestion and other local impacts.

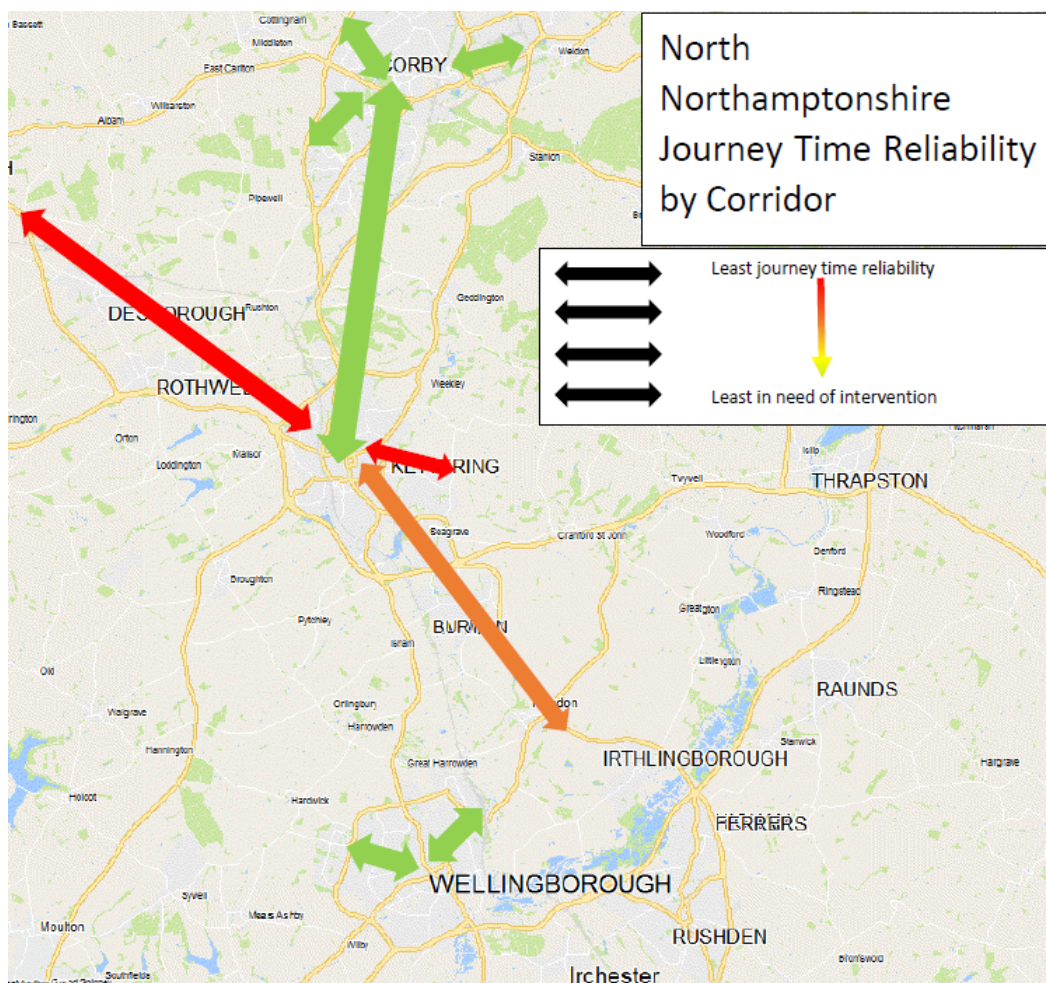


Figure 4 - Bus reliability by corridor

Modern Buses, decarbonisation and user safety

- 3.9 North Northamptonshire Council has a stated commitment towards lessening the impact of climate change. The Council declared a climate and environment emergency at its Full Council meeting held on Wednesday 28 July 2021.
- 3.10 51% of the bus fleet operating in North Northamptonshire are Euro III and IV buses, see Figure 3.4 over. The first step is to replace these by Euro V or VI (or equivalent) and then move to an electric or hydrogen fleet. This first EPP takes steps to make sure that bus standards are progressively improved, whilst we work on a longer term plan with operators to move towards a carbon neutral solution.
- 3.11 We also want passengers to feel safe at bus stops and on buses, this requires good lighting levels at bus stops, attractive stops and shelters with natural surveillance, and on bus CCTV.

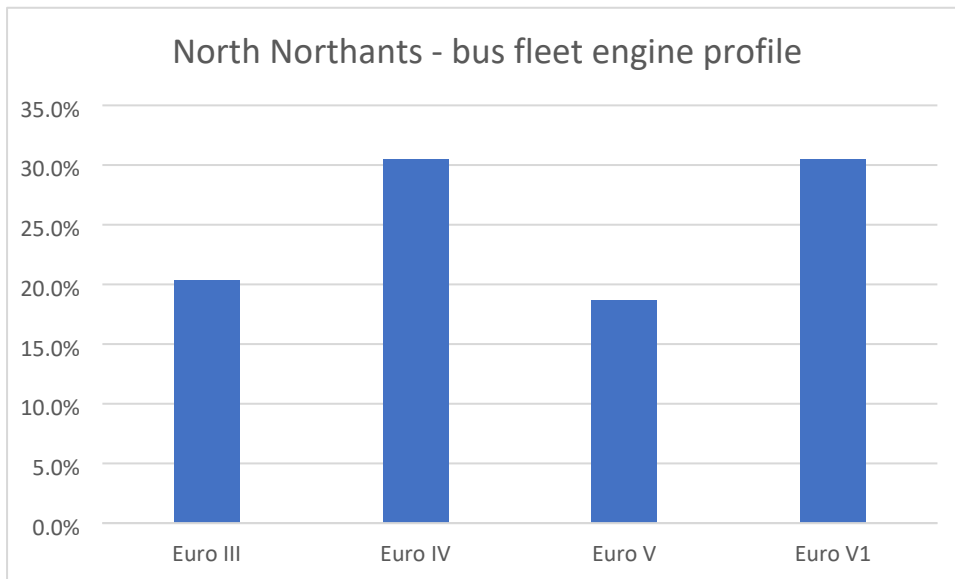


Figure 5 - Bus Fleet Engine Profile, Autumn 2021.

Fares and integrated ticketing

- 3.12 Passengers and non-bus users raise concerns about the cost of travel and perceived value for money. When surveyed by the Council, operators broadly agreed that tickets should be available across all services without a premium and that fare-capping is desirable.
- 3.13 The Council and its predecessor have received a number of complaints about the operators fare structure; most commonly that once outside of the urban fare zones, fares can increase markedly and that neighbouring communities can be priced differently.
- 3.14 The nature of the bus network is that passengers are restricted to single operator ticket products, by way of example this is a disadvantage to those living in Rushden who need to make a two-legged bus journey to work or college, and also an inconvenience to people who wish to travel along corridors with more than one operator.
- 3.15 This EPP needs to address the issue of high-cost return fares, this is proposed through fare-capping.
- 3.16 The high level of affordable and free parking availability in town centre off-street car parks also contributes to peak period traffic congestion and associated travel unreliability, together with problems of poor air quality.

Service network improvement

- 3.17 The analysis of the bus services set out in the BSIP concludes that the bus network itself is largely fit for current needs but will need to evolve as new developments bring forward housing and job opportunities, in particular. The area of weakness is the lack of connections to Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough railway stations, both key commuter stations into London, as well as for local trips between the towns.
- 3.18 The network does not however provide services when people need them, especially during the evening and on Sundays. This EPP therefore needs to address gaps in timetable across the wider week and see services returned to pre-covid frequencies.
- 3.19 Other than on shared sections of main roads the local bus network does not see any on-street operator competition. Therefore, at the time of drafting, there are no issues of over-bussing which need to be addressed by this EPP.
- 3.20 Table 3.1 sets out the core service frequency during the daytime. During peak times minor changes to the frequencies quoted to ensure accurate timetabling are acceptable.

Service level	Monday to Saturday daytime	Monday to Saturday evening	Sunday daytime
Urban Tier 1	Typically every 15 minutes or more frequent	Typically every 30 minutes or more frequent	At least every 30 minutes
Urban Tier 2	Typically every 30 minutes or more frequent	Unlikely	Unlikely
Urban Tier 3	Hourly or infrequent or Demand Responsive Transport	None	None
Inter Urban Tier 1	Typically every 30 minutes or more frequent	At least hourly	At least hourly
Inter Urban Tier 2	At least hourly	Unlikely	Unlikely
Rural Tier 3	At least 2-hourly	None	None
Rural Tier 4	Infrequent or Demand Responsive Transport	None	None
Workers service	As justified	As justified	As justified
Academic service	Monday to Friday term time only	None	None

Table 1 - Desired commercial service level tiers.

- 3.21 The network offer for the passenger is not predictable and Urban Tier 1 and 2 services should also operate core hours and frequencies which fully cover the extended peak hours (arriving/departing the town centre between 0730 through to 1900hrs Monday to Friday except bank holidays).

Integrated services and Information

- 3.22 Based on local feedback, the Council considers that the bus network is poorly communicated, with operators promoting only the services they operate, rather than the wider bus network available, this hinders users and especially not-yet-users understanding of the bus network as a whole. Additionally printed timetables are not produced by every operator. This EPP therefore needs to address gaps in essential passenger information.
- 3.23 There is already a good Real-time passenger information system in place and is working well, but passengers do not know how to access it, away from the 41 stops with Real-time displays. This EPP therefore needs to improve passenger understanding of how to access this information by increasing the number of displays and upgrading older displays.

- 3.24 We will also work with passenger advocacy groups and operators to agree a Passenger Charter, which once agreed Operators will be obliged to operate in accordance with its commitments.
- 3.25 Better information at bus stops is a top 10 bus passenger priority (Transport Focus, Sept 2020) nationwide and a 2017 Transport Focus survey commissioned jointly by Northamptonshire County Council and Stagecoach Midlands gave a below-average rating of 63%. This indicates that, whilst net satisfaction is convincingly positive, there is room for improvement against our statistical neighbours and this EPP seeks to improve passenger understanding on hard to access the real time information.

Giving passengers a say

- 3.26 Through this EPP, the Management Forum and Wider Stakeholder Group, we want passengers and local employers to have the opportunity to influence the delivery of bus services across North Northamptonshire.
- 3.27 We will also work with passenger advocacy groups and operators to agree a Passenger Charter, which once agreed Operators will be obliged to operate in accordance with its commitments.

Summary

- 3.28 The above gaps and result in the Table of Actions, set out at the end of the Executive Summary on page 5 of this document. The Enhanced Partnership Scheme sets out in more detail how these interventions are going to be delivered.

4.0 Policies and Influences on Local Bus Services

4.1 This EPP and the supporting scheme will support local policy, informed by an assessment of local opportunities and risks, through acting on the passenger and community areas of concern discussed above. Equally Policies are themselves supportive of bus use and will generate Section 106 funding and put in place measures like Travel Plans to promote and encourage bus use, alongside other more sustainable travel options.

Local Policies supporting Bus Use

4.2 Local Policy is supportive of the Bus, this will help to maximise sustainable delivery of development plans in the area and minimise the detrimental impact of vehicular trips in terms of safety, congestion and pollution.

4.3 The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031, the Part 1 Local Plan for the area, was adopted in July 2016. In order to alleviate the effects of the significant new development proposed on the transport network, it includes challenging but realistic targets to increase levels of modal shift away from the private car towards other forms of travel including public transport, cycling and walking. The following modal shift targets, based on 2001 census data, are set for 2031:

- A reduction of 5% in single occupancy car journeys to work from the existing built up areas of the Growth and Market towns; and
- A reduction of 20% in single occupancy car journeys to work from new developments compared to adjoining wards.

4.4 These targets are embedded in the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan (March 2012), which forms the current and inherited Local Transport Plan for North Northamptonshire. The Northamptonshire Bus Strategy (April 2018), which forms part of the Local Transport Plan suite of documents, identifies that to meet these targets it would be necessary for bus patronage to rise by 50% from the 2012 baseline figure. As bus use actually declined overall between 2012/13 and 2019/20, to achieve these targets will require a 70% increase between the pre-COVID baseline of 2018/19 and 2031/32.

4.5 As North Northamptonshire brings forward its own Local Transport Plan and Bus Strategy, the actions set out in this EPP will need to be reviewed and potentially updated. This will form part of the Review programme outlined in Section 1 above.

Local influences on bus use

4.6 As well as considering the local Policy position it is also important to consider the other local factors which influence whether or not people choose to use the bus.

4.7 Supporting more local bus trips is:

- New development in the area, increasing demand for trip making
- Development of Travel Plans linked to planning permissions granted
- Parking enforcement
- Population growth
- A low base for travel to work, suggests scope to build trip making
- Road congestion making car use less attractive
- Increases in funding to maintain current and increased services and times of operation
- Improved information and whole network marketing, to raise awareness of bus travel opportunities.

4.8 Against the opportunities supporting increased bus use, are the following local risks:

- The availability of free car parking in town centres
- Online retail and other services
- Cost of bus use if making a journey using more than one bus, or as a group
- Taxi or car sharing, especially is traveling as a group
- Car ownership levels, whilst being high could increase further
- The winter emergence of further Covid-19 restrictions in response to rising levels of hospitalisation, or new variants of the virus emerging, all of which limit or deter people from travelling communally by bus or train
- To restore patronage to pre-Covid levels, depends on maintaining the bus network, to do this we estimate that it will take 3 years to restore patronage to pre-pandemic levels. This will require funding support across this period to offset lost fare-box revenue
- We consider that the service frequency offered across the network does not meet current largely rural community needs, especially in the evening and on a Sunday
- Growth in car use creates added congestion causing delay and bus timetable unreliability
- Roadworks are a known cause of bus network delay
- Perception of safety at and ease of use of bus stops – bus stop upgrades
- Understanding of the bus network – Information one may, expend real-time offers
- Bus driver shortages

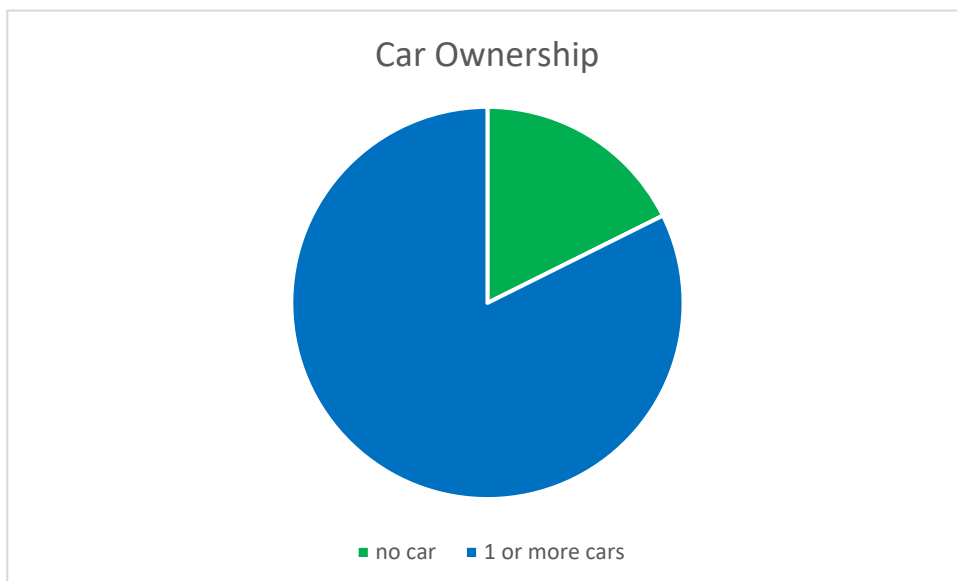


Figure 6 - Car ownership levels in North Northamptonshire (2011 census data)

5.0 Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
National Bus Strategy - Bus Back Better (BBB)	<p>This is the Governments Bus Strategy, published in 2021, setting out how the Government wish to see bus services improved and requiring Local Transport Authorities to either follow the bus Franchising Route or the Enhanced Partnership route to improve bus services.</p> <p>There is always the do-nothing option, but this has been discounted as it would result in the immediate loss of funding to support bus services in the area.</p>
Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)	<p>A document setting out how buses are to be improved in North Northamptonshire over the new 5 years or so. This is prepared in line with Guidance published by the Council and is linked to the Councils declaration to pursue an Enhanced Partnership</p>
Enhanced Partnership	<p>A Partnership approach set out in the Transport Act 2000 and amended by the Bus Services Act 2017, where the Council can impose requirements on bus operators to be able to run services in the area.</p>
Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP)	<p>EP plan - this is a high-level vision and objectives for bus services in the local area and closely follows or replicates relevant sections of the BSIP</p>
Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EPS)	<p>EP scheme - this sets out the precise detail of how the BSIP vision and objectives will be achieved, including any commitments made by the local authority or standards to be met by bus operators</p>
Local transport authority	<p>The local authority responsible for transport planning and certain public transport functions within an area</p>
Local Transport Plan	<p>A statutory document prepared by a local transport authority setting out its policies for the encouragement of safe, integrated efficient and economic transport within its area and its proposals for implementation of those policies.</p>
Section 106 developer funding	<p>Funding secured by an obligation placed upon a developer under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990</p>

Appendix C

Enhanced Bus

Partnership Scheme

April 2022

www.northnorthants.gov.uk

Document Version Control

****Complete this section, making sure to include the following information**:**

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2.0	25/01/22	Version for Stakeholder Consultation
3.0	01/03/22	Competition test updated and finalised post consultation stages
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NB: Draft versions 0.1 - final published versions 1.0

Consultees

Internal	External
Cabinet	Bus Operators
	Wider Stakeholders

Distribution List

Internal	External
	Bus Operators
	Wider Stakeholders

Links to other documents

Document	Link
Bus Service Improvement Plan	Enhanced partnerships for buses North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)
Enhanced Partnership Scheme	Enhanced partnerships for buses North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)

Additional Comments to note

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Part 2 – EP Scheme

The North Northamptonshire Council Enhanced Partnership Plan for buses has been prepared in accordance with Section 138H of the Transport Act 2000 and is Made in accordance with Section 138G by North Northamptonshire Council

1.0 Enhanced Partnership Scheme Content

- 1.1 This document fulfils the statutory requirements for an Enhanced Partnership Scheme. In accordance with statutory requirements laid down in Section 138 of the Transport Act 2000, this Enhanced Partnership Scheme document sets out:
- Section 2** – Scope of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme and commencement date
 - Section 3** – obligations on North Northamptonshire Council
 - Section 4** – obligations on Bus Operators
 - Section 5** – Governance arrangements
- 1.2 The Enhanced Partnership Scheme can only be put in place if there is an associated Enhanced Partnership Plan. Therefore, this document should be considered alongside the associated Enhanced Partnership Plan for North Northamptonshire
- 1.3 This Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme shall come into effect from the 30 April 2022 and last for 3 years until 31 March 2025, with the option to extend for a further year at the discretion of the North Northamptonshire Council after consultation with Operators and agreed by the Variation process in Section 5.0. This is to allow the planning needed to be developed further and the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme developed to meet the longer-term local needs. In part this is a response to the newness of the Unitary Authority.
- 1.4 The Enhanced Partnership Scheme has been jointly developed by North Northamptonshire Council, and those bus operators that provide local bus services in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme area. It sets out obligations and requirements on the Council as both Local Transport Authority and Local Highway Authority and operators of local services in order to achieve the intended improvements, with the aim of delivering the objectives of the associated Enhanced Partnership Plan.
- 1.5 The Enhanced Partnership Scheme aims to contribute towards meeting the six objectives set out in the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Enhanced Partnership Plan, which in summary are:
- To deliver faster and more reliable journey times on the two corridors broadly to the east and west of Kettering;
 - Lock in the current bus fleet standards and progressively deliver improved quality of buses linked to infrastructure improvements, to reduce harmful emissions and improve passenger comfort and safety;
 - Introduce fairer fares, with more predictable and easier to use ticketing;
 - Provide common hours of operation and better serve larger visitor attractions in the area;
 - Improve the way the bus network is promoted to users and non-users, in particular communicate the whole bus offer and improve user and potential user access to information; and,
 - Put in place a passenger charter which gives passengers more influence over bus services and delivery.

2.0 Scope of the Scheme and Commencement Date

Map of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme area

2.1. This Enhanced Partnership Scheme will support the improvement of all local bus services operating throughout the North Northamptonshire Council area other than those exempt as set out in paragraph 2.5 below. The area of this Enhanced Partnership Scheme is illustrated in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1 - The North Northamptonshire Enhanced Partnership area (within grey Council Boundary line).

Commencement Date

2.2. The Enhanced Partnership Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme were made on 14 April 2022 and will start on 30 April 2022, with subsequent milestone dates by which certain facilities and measures (Section 3) and bus service operator obligations will be introduced (Section 4). The Enhanced Partnership Scheme will have no specific end date but will be subject to a review by North Northamptonshire Council at least annually (see Section 5).

2.3. North Northamptonshire Council confirm that they have provided the required notices under S138F and G providing the full details of the scheme to the parties directly affected by this Plan and Scheme.

Exempted Services

- 2.4. With the exceptions detailed in 2.5, below, this Enhanced Partnership Scheme covers all registered Local Bus Services with three or more stopping places (in each direction) operating within the Enhanced Partnership Scheme area, these are classed as “qualifying local services”.
- 2.5. This Enhanced Partnership Scheme will exclude from the “qualifying local services” obligations, the bus services falling within the following locally-agreed exemptions:
- Services run under sections 89 to 91 of the Transport Act 1985 where North Northamptonshire Council retains all the revenue;
 - Registered local services that are excursions or tours or operate for a limited period of up to 7 days to allow people to access a sporting, concert or similar event;
 - Services operated under section 22 of the Transport Act 1985 (community bus services);
 - Registered local bus services that have 10% or less of their overall distance within the Enhanced Partnership Scheme area;
 - Services which operate on 2 or less days per week (excluding Sundays and Bank Holidays), that is unless these services operate in coordination with one or more other services such that they offer substantially similarly routed services on more than 2 days per week;
 - Services operated by vehicles that by law do not permit standing;
 - Services operating under contract to local transport authorities outside of the area of the North Northamptonshire, where the adjoining authority supports the majority of journeys; and,
 - **Academic Services or Industrial Estate Services** operating a limited number of services timed at shift start/end times and not timetabled to operate throughout the day. The primary purpose of these services is to provide either home to school journeys, or home to work at defined shift times and they are typically funded by the Council or employers/developers. Workers services will be agreed between the Operator and Council, if not recorded as such in Schedule E.
- 2.6. Bus services procured under Sections 89-91 will not need to comply with the vehicle requirements set out in this document for the duration of the current contract period. Any services procured after the making of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme must comply with these requirements through the contract terms and conditions.

3.0 Requirements of Local Authorities

- 3.1 This section lists the specific interventions that North Northamptonshire Council will deliver as its part of this Enhanced Partnership Scheme. It details when it will be provided, for how long, mindful that the Enhanced Partnership lasts for 3 years until 31 March 2025, and what it will involve.
- 3.2 North Northamptonshire Council as the Local Authority, Local Transport Authority and Local Highway Authority are responsible for the delivery of the facilities and measures set out below.

Facilities and Measures

- 3.3 Through this Enhanced Partnership Scheme North Northamptonshire Council will continue to provide and maintain the facilities and undertake the measures as outlined in **Table 1**, for the duration of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme:

Facility/location	Measures	Responsibility
Market Street, Wellingborough bus gate	Enforcement through number-plate recognition cameras	North Northamptonshire Council
Eskdall Street, Kettering, bus-only street	Enforcement through number-plate recognition cameras	North Northamptonshire Council
Newland Street, Kettering, bus-only street	Enforcement through number-plate recognition cameras	North Northamptonshire Council
41 Realtime Information displays	Maintain at-stop Realtime information displays	North Northamptonshire Council
Street lighting	Maintain street lighting at current levels in the vicinity of bus stops	North Northamptonshire Council
Concessionary travel	This will be maintained in line with DfT Guidance and related legislation.	North Northamptonshire Council
Bus Interchanges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Street, Corby • Horsemarket, Kettering • Newland Street, Kettering • Church Street, Wellingborough 	Manage and maintain the site, including departure displays.	North Northamptonshire Council
Parking and traffic offence enforcement	The Council will use its powers and resources to enforce Traffic Regulation Orders, to improve compliance and make journey times for bus reliable.	North Northamptonshire Council
Bus timetable information	Website – timetable information for all registered local bus services will continue to be provided.	North Northamptonshire Council
Bus Service Mapping	Maps will continue to be made available on the Council's website, including summary information on service frequencies.	North Northamptonshire Council
Road work management	To report Road works see Schedule B	

Table 1 - Existing facilities and measures

3.4 Through this enhanced Partnership North Northamptonshire Council will work to provide new and upgraded facilities and additionally undertake the measures outlined in **Table 2**. These the new facilities and additional measures will form part of this Enhanced Partnership Scheme only when the funding has been confirmed, when they will be introduced into the Enhanced Partnership via the Variation process outlined in Section 5.0 below, at which point delivery dates shall be agreed:

Facility/location	Measures/interventions	Responsibility
<p>Measures to reduce delays and unreliability along the following corridors (see Schedule C for definitions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kettering - Desborough • Kettering to Burton Latimer 	<p>Within funding limits, and as agreed with Operators a programme of works and measures to reduce delays in the listed corridors will be implemented, subject to advertisement and due process. Potential interventions include (but is not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRO's to address on-street parking • Pedestrian crossing detection • Traffic signal detection utilising Scoot to speed buses up and hurry call buses behind time. 	<p>North Northamptonshire Council in consultation with Operators</p>
<p>Concessionary fares and bus services will be funded in line with the DfT "Covid-19 Recovery Guidance"</p>	<p>Concessionary Travel and bus support will be funded at pre-covid levels, subject to the step down arrangement set out by DfT from 6 April 2022.</p>	<p>North Northamptonshire Council</p>
<p>A review will be undertaken of all bus stops</p>	<p>Within funding limits, and as agreed with Operators, the review will lead to an agreed rolling annual upgrade programme to install raised bus boarders and timetables cases at appropriate locations, along with new bus shelters at selected locations and CCTV at locations where safety is a concern.</p>	<p>North Northamptonshire Council in consultation with Operators</p>
<p>Improved Realtime Information displays will be provided and also improving access and awareness of the information.</p>	<p>Subject to funding limits, and at stops agreed with Operators and local representatives, the on-street Realtime information will be upgraded in line with the phasing plan summarised below.</p> <p>Older generation "Classic" in-shelter displays will be replaced with thin-film-transistor (Tft) liquid-crystal super-widescreen multimedia displays during years 1 and 2 of the Enhanced Partnership.</p>	<p>North Northamptonshire Council in consultation with Operators and others</p>

Facility/location	Measures/interventions	Responsibility
	<p>New displays will be installed at key stops where there are none at the moment. Concentrating on high usage stops, roll-out during years 1 and 2 of the Enhanced Partnership. These will use solar, or battery powered displays to attempt to make these more sustainable. Due to the additional survey and installation work likely to be required, roll-out of these would commence in years 2 and 3.</p> <p>All existing in-shelter displays that are not current TfT will be replaced with these displays and at key stops in smaller towns where there is no provision at the minute. Starting in year 3 of programme.</p>	
Reducing the Impact of Roadworks	Reduce the effect of road works on bus services by improving the disruptive impact of road works on bus services, and where this is not possible, then put in place better planning to minimise impacts on users. For further details see Schedule D.	North Northamptonshire Council
Undertake a review of bus stop safety.	Subject to funding limits, and at stops agreed with Operators and local representatives, stop locations, their position and layout will be reviewed to address accessibility barriers, actual and perceived safe risks and to make stops attractive to users. This review will bring forward a phased plan to address the more significant shortcomings.	North Northamptonshire Council in consultation with Operators
Promote bus use	Develop and implement a three-year marketing plan for local bus services.	North Northamptonshire Council in consultation with Operators
Develop a passenger charter	Working with operators and passenger advocacy groups we will develop a Bus Passenger Charter and require operators to abide by its commitments. This will set out for passengers how to use bus services and what passengers can expect and offer compensation where operators fail to deliver, or to reimburse taxi costs where the last bus fails to operate.	North Northamptonshire Council in consultation with Operators and bus user representatives

Facility/location	Measures/interventions	Responsibility
Planning for the future	Work with bus operators to develop a strategy for replacing diesel buses with electric (or alternative) bus with implementation to be agreed.	North Northamptonshire Council in consultation with operators

Table 2 - Additionally proposed facilities and measures

- 3.5 The measures in Table 2 will be provided subject to due process such as consultation, approvals, Traffic Regulation Orders being successfully Made, and funding being made available by the DfT.
- 3.6 Where the actions set out in Table 2 are first to agree what is to be provided, this will be followed up by using the bespoke variation process to embed the agreed actions into this Enhanced Partnership Scheme.

Monitoring of Bus Journey Times

- 3.7 North Northamptonshire Council will monitor bus journey times in the EP Scheme area by collecting and analysing Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) data and reporting these on a quarterly basis. The following measures will be made and compared with a first quarter baseline (after the EP Scheme is made).
- 3.8 This data will be published on North Northamptonshire Council’s website and used to identify the need for further possible measures, facilities and influence on the management of roadworks in the EP Scheme area.

4.0 Requirements relating to Bus Operators

4.1 This section describes the standards of service that those operating registered local bus services in the EP Scheme area must meet. This section sets out what standards are to be met, by when and for how long. Where the actions are first to agree what is to be provided, this will be followed up by using the bespoke variation process to embed the agreed actions into this Enhanced Partnership Scheme.

Network and frequencies

4.2 The network offer for the passenger is currently not predictable. Urban Tier 1 and 2 “Qualifying Local Services” are required to operate core hours (arriving/departing the town centre between 0730 through to 1830hrs Monday to Friday except bank holidays) and retain normal daytime frequencies between these hours

4.3 Operators will work constructively with North Northamptonshire Council to:

- Enhance the bus network to better serve visitor attractions and work with operators on opportunities for network improvement.
- Undertake a joint network review by April 2023 and changes implemented as agreed.

Vehicle Standards

4.4 Operators and the Council will constructively work together to phase out Euro III and IV engine buses and bring forward plans to upgrade bus fleet linked to grant funding for new/improved buses, or defined corridor improvements, and agree deployment of the new buses and associated cascade. Such investment in corridors and buses will trigger a variation of this Enhanced Partnership.

- Notwithstanding the above, from 1 April 2025 80% of each operator’s bus fleet operating on “qualifying local services” shall have digital recording CCTV installed for safety and security. This will record images of all passenger areas inside the vehicle for safety and security and also facing forwards from the vehicle to help identify traffic issues.
- Notwithstanding the above, from 1 April 2023 Automatic Vehicle Location equipment installed that will feed into North Northamptonshire Council’s real time information system.
- All operators with fleets over 20 buses operating in North Northamptonshire Council area will be required to work with North Northamptonshire Council to develop investment plans to move to a non-fossil fuel fleet and agree a future implementation plan linked to a funding plan.

Ticketing Schemes

4.5 Regardless of fleet size from 1 April 2023, all buses will provide passengers the option to pay for the full ticket range offered for sale on board the bus through contactless payment.

4.6 For 1 April 2023 all operators will explore the introduction of common fare stage boundary points with the desire to align fare stages, this is to help communicate fares to passengers. For clarity an agreed fare stage does not mean an operator has to alter their fares at that location, fare stages shall not be more frequent than every 5 stops (regardless of whether a bus stops at every stop or not) and this fare charged will remain the operators own commercial decision. If the Enhanced Partnership is varied to adopt common fare stages, this will be binding as part of this Enhanced Partnership.

- 4.7 A multi-operator ticket shall be developed and provided across the full North Northamptonshire Council area commencing from year two onwards.
- 4.8 The Partnership will work to put in place fare capping to allow passengers to use their smart card or other contactless travel options and only be charged up to the maximum fare for day, week or month/4-week travel, with a date to be agreed aligned to technology roll-out.

Providing Information to the Public

- 4.9 Operators accepting multi-operator tickets will display the full range of such tickets and prices with equal prominence to their own products where these are communicated.
- 4.10 Operators will display details of relevant planned route changes and timetable changes on vehicles at least 2 weeks prior and 1 week following the change.
- 4.11 Operators must produce in both printed and on-line format either or both timetables or summary timetable(s) of all "qualifying local services" they operate or as otherwise agreed on a Partnership wide consistent basis.
- 4.12 Where operators provided publicity and information (at December 2021) they shall continue to maintain the production of the publicity and information, furthermore they shall work with the Management Forum to explore options to provide information on all other "qualifying local services" in the area shown on Figure 2.1 or of the map product produced. This is so that a more complete bus offer communicated in a way which is readily understood by the public. The Forum shall agree how best to do this and ensure reasonable currency of the information whilst not incurring excessive cost to those operators that produce such material. The option may be agreed to jointly pool funds and procure common mapping and summary timetable information at overall reduced cost.
- 4.13 Operators producing maps and timetables must prominently include details of the Realtime system and how to use it, using text shall be provided by North Northamptonshire Council and agreed at the Management Forum.
- 4.14 Operator producing maps and timetables/summary timetables must provide the North Northamptonshire Council with copies of the current maps and timetables for their "qualifying local services" at sites agreed between Council and operators, and adequate stock provided at all times.
- 4.15 Notwithstanding the above clause about promoting all operator services in an area, through this Enhanced Partnership Operators are encouraged to work with the Council to pool information and financial resources to produce shared information at lower overall cost, with any and all savings jointly reinvested in improved passenger information and marketing to promote bus, as jointly agreed between those parties pooling funding.

Customer Charter

- 4.14 In collaboration with North Northamptonshire Council and bus user representatives, operators will put in plans a Passenger Charter covering as a minimum "qualifying local services", this shall set out what passengers might expect from a good bus operator, who to contact if the service falls short of these standards along with a contact email address, and fair compensation for failure to deliver to the standards set out, including reimbursement of a taxi ride home in the event that the last bus home failed to run, as a result of operator failures. Exception examples: compensation might be avoided due to very include weather, emergency utility works, industrial action, and other cases where the changes have been pre-notified to customers in advance (road works, planned utility works etc.).

Exceptions

- 4.16 It is understood that from time to time temporary and short-term exceptions may be needed to the above standards, where it is better to operate a sub-standard service than not run a

service, examples include bus-factory recall, industrial action, ticket machine failure, passenger incident. In such circumstances the Operator shall agree with the Council the variation needed, duration and reason. The Operator will agree reasonable and proportionate customer communications with the Council, and these shall be funded by the Operator. The Council will also notify the Enhanced Partnership Board.

5.0 EP Scheme Management and Governance

- 5.1 The future governance arrangements after the Enhanced Partnership is 'made' are set out below.

Governance

- 5.2 The Enhanced Partnership will be overseen and managed by a Management Forum who will also review the Plan and Scheme in the light of any new Local Transport Plan for North Northamptonshire, as it moves away from the LTP inherited from the former Northamptonshire County Council. If required this may necessitate triggering the legal processes to vary or revoke this EPP and Scheme, replacing these with newer versions reflecting the new Policy.
- 5.3 The Management Forum, comprising the following group(s), have helped develop this Plan, along with the Wider Stakeholder Group who will be consulted as part of any review or future Enhanced Partnerships or variations to this one:

Management Forum

- North Northamptonshire Council (50% voting rights)
- Bus operators or their nominated representative(s) with services registered in this EPP area. One representative for each operator. (50% total voting rights)

Note: Operator voting rights are to be split in proportion to "qualifying local services" mileage of services falling within the EPP/EP, measured on a typical weekday on or close to 1 April each year, and only varied mid-year where:

- An operator of "qualifying local services" joins or leave the market
- An operator of "qualifying local services" adjusts their network such that it would change their vote level by 2% or more, be it upwards or down.

Wider Stakeholder Group

- Local Transport Groups (one representative per User Group)
- Business improvement districts (one representative per BID)
- Major employers (one representative per employer, employers to be agreed between the Essential members)
- Neighbouring local transport authorities
- Traffic Commissioner
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Town and Parish Councils
- FE Colleges
- Transport Focus
- Confederation of Passenger Transport
- Bus Users UK

- 5.4 Bus performance data will be published every 6 months and the Management Forum shall not meet less than every six months, allowing it opportunity to consult with and consider the Wider Stakeholder Group's comments on published performance data. Meeting dates shall be set a minimum of month in advance, except for emergencies. The declaration of an emergency is determined by the majority vote of those eligible to do so by email. Chair of the Forum and Group shall be determined by the members.
- 5.5 Once considered by the Management Forum, the results of the reviews and the performance data will be made available to the public on the Council's website [Enhanced partnerships for buses | North Northamptonshire Council \(northnorthants.gov.uk\)](https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/enhanced-partnerships-for-buses)

Future changes and Enhanced Partnerships

- 5.6 Under the powers at Section 138E of the Transport Act 2000, this Enhanced Partnership Scheme has chosen to include Bespoke Variation Arrangements. Variations discussed in this section are subject to the voting mechanism as set out below, and have been prepared in line with the statutory objection mechanism as set out in The Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes (Objections) Regulations 2018.
- 5.7 The powers to vary and future changes to the Enhanced Partnership are subject to operators own internal investment approvals processes, in the same way the Council will need to secure its own internal approvals, be they funding, planning consent, highway and traffic Orders and approvals etc. These Bespoke Variation processes will follow and not be used to circumvent these approvals.
- 5.8 The Management Forum will be responsible for considering requests for variations and revocation to the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme and oversee the timely preparation of the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme to replace this one, mindful of its initial 3-year timeline.
- 5.9 Consideration will be given to potential Enhanced Partnership Scheme variations put forward in writing, at least 1 week prior to a notified Management Forum meeting. This can be done by any one of the organisations represented on the Management Forum or an operator of qualifying local bus services. The proposer of a variation should demonstrate how this might contribute to achieving the objectives set out in the Enhanced Partnership Plan and current local transport policies. Such requests should be set out in writing and submitted to:
- chris.wragg@westnorthants.gov.uk
- 5.10 If there is not full agreement of all partners present, then the proposed variation will be put to the vote with a majority vote determining the outcome. Always provided that 2 or more operators having a combined voting right or at least 4% do not object. The Chairperson does not have a casting vote. In this case the Variation can be agreed under the bespoke arrangements allowed under Transport Act 2000 section 138E.
- 5.11 Whilst moving forward all partners are expected to use best endeavours to work together in a spirit of Partnership if an unresolvable difference is reached, it is noted that North Northamptonshire Council wish to trigger a variation and agreement cannot be reach under the above bespoke powers, it is always open to the Council to bring forward a formal Variation under the process set out in Part 2 of the Transport Act 2000 section 138L (2) (c). The proposed variation will be advertised on the NNC website and emailed to operators of qualifying local services in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme area. If the proposed variation passes the operator objection mechanism, North Northamptonshire Council will make the Enhanced Partnership Scheme variation, subject to the approval of Elected Members.

5.12 Variations might include:

- Exercising the option to extend the Enhanced Partnership by the additional year.
- Introducing measures set out in Table 3.2 and associated service enhancements in line with Table 4.1
- It can also include other variations as agreed, and be used to trigger the Revocation process as set out in S138 O

Review of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme

5.13 Once the Enhanced Partnership Scheme is made, it will be reviewed by the Enhanced Partnership Scheme Management Forum at least annually, commencing no later than on the anniversary of the scheme commencement date. North Northamptonshire Council will initiate each review and it will take no longer than 6 months to complete.

5.14 The review may suggest variations for adoption including:

- Definition of operators;
- Processes for variations;
- The Management Forum structure.

5.15 The Wider Stakeholder Group can also decide to review specific elements of the scheme on an ad-hoc basis. Wider Stakeholder Group members should contact North Northamptonshire Council using the following email address chris.wragg@westnorthants.gov.uk explaining what the issue is and its urgency. North Northamptonshire Council will then decide whether to table at the next scheduled meeting or make arrangements for all or the necessary Management Forum members to gather more quickly, using the Emergency Arrangements set out above.

Revocation of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme

5.16 An Enhanced Partnership Scheme can only exist if an Enhanced Partnership Plan is in place. If, for any reason, the Enhanced Partnership Plan is revoked, it would automatically mean that the Enhanced Partnership Scheme would cease. Equally, if all Enhanced Partnership Scheme(s) ceased, the Enhanced Partnership Plan would be revoked.

5.17 If, for some reason, it becomes necessary for the Enhanced Partnership Scheme to be revoked, the Enhanced Partnership Scheme Wider Stakeholder Group will be reconvened and follow the same process as outlined above.

5.18 If at any point in the future, any area covered by this Enhanced Partnership Scheme is included in a bus franchising scheme, the relevant requirements set out in this Enhanced Partnership Scheme document will cease to apply to areas covered by the franchising scheme, in line with the arrangements set out in the franchising scheme.

Dispute Resolution

5.19 If there is a dispute about the interpretation of the specification and application of any of the obligations set out in this EPS (as amended), and agreement cannot be reached at the Management Forum, then the matter under dispute will not be voted upon, until the matter has been discussed by the line managers of the most senior person representing each partner organisation that is eligible to vote (unless that person is the Managing Director or equivalent).

5.20 This senior group will discuss the matter in dispute, work to reach an agreed position, then refer their recommendation back to the Management Forum to implement as advised.

5.21 If this senior group cannot themselves reach agreement, then the matter shall be referred to arbitration, to a body or person agreed between the parties.

6.0 Consideration of Effect of the EPP

Neighbouring areas

- 5.1. As described the local bus network is largely self-contained, with some cross boundary serves providing links to adjacent towns. The impact of this EPP has been discussed with local operators and cross-boundary Councils consulted on these plans. Where services operate with material support from a cross-boundary authority we feel that it is for that authority to specify the services operated, although we would work with that authority to ensure that services followed the fares and ticketing arrangements set out in this Enhanced Partnership, where they operate in North Northamptonshire.
- 5.2. The EPP does not seek to alter service routes or tackle over bussing as this is not an issue locally. Therefore in terms of bus routes and service frequency there is no impact on adjoining areas.

Small and medium-sized operators

- 5.3. The needs of small and medium-sized operators (SMOs) have been considered in the development of the Enhanced Partnership, with opportunities for all bus operators to participate in its preparation. This has either been done through individual discussions or through consultation. The Plan seeks to support improvements in all aspects of bus provision, regardless of the size of operators providing services. With the Enhanced Partnership area, smaller operators have been given extended periods to comply with the improved bus quality standards.

Competition

- 5.4. The Enhanced Partnership has been subject to the Competition Test as set out in Part 1 of Schedule 10 of the Transport Act 2000. The assessment is included in Schedule F and, undertaken by Consultants SCP, supporting North Northamptonshire Council and shared with the Competition and Markets Authority, concluded that there will be no adverse impact on competition and that the EP Plan and Scheme is justified because:
- (a) it is with a view to achieving one or more of the following purposes:
- securing improvements in the quality of vehicles or facilities used for or in connection with the provision of local services;
 - securing other improvements in local services of benefit to users of local services; and
 - reducing or limiting traffic congestion, noise or air pollution.
- (b) its effect on competition is or is likely to be proportionate to the achievement of that purpose or any of those purposes. The Competition and Markets Authority has also been consulted on the proposals as required by section 138F of the Transport Act 2000

Consultation

- 5.5. The BSIP was itself the subject of public consultation, engagement with stakeholders, including operators, adjoining authorities. Use was also made of Transport Focus survey data for the whole of Northamptonshire to help develop our ambitious BSIP.
- 5.6. This Enhanced Partnership does not itself change routes, alter frequencies or fundamentally change buses, therefore the immediate impact on passengers is modest and positive. However, if BSIP funding is provided this will have a very material impact for example by improving bus corridors, hubs and rural service provision. However, public consultation on these changes would be more appropriate at the time the schemes are being planned when their impact can be more fully assessed and meaningful dialogue undertaken.
- 5.7. With this in mind the consultation undertaken on the Enhanced Partnership has been firstly focused around bus operators and statutory consultees.

- 5.8 Once in place this EPP, the Board and Wider Stakeholder Group, we want passengers and local employers to have the opportunity to influence the delivery of bus services across North Northamptonshire.
- 5.9 Also we will work with passenger advocacy groups and operators to agree a Passenger Charter, which once agreed means Operators will be obliged to operate in accordance with its commitments.

7.0 Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Adopted highway	A highway maintainable at public expense. When new roads are constructed by developers, the council requires them to be brought up to a suitable standard before they are adopted.
National Bus Strategy - Bus Back Better (BBB)	This is the Governments Bus Strategy, published in 2021, setting out how the Government wish to see bus services improved and requiring Local Transport Authorities to either follow the bus Franchising Route or the Enhanced Partnership route to improve bus services. There is always the do-nothing option, but this has been discounted as it would result in the immediate loss of funding to support bus services in the area.
Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)	A document setting out how buses are to be improved in North Northamptonshire over the next 5 years or so. This is prepared in line with Guidance published by the Council and is linked to the Councils declaration to pursue an Enhanced Partnership
Enhanced Partnership	A Partnership approach set out in the Transport Act 2000 and amended by the Bus Services Act 2017, where the Council can impose requirements on bus operators to be able to run services in the area.
Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP)	EP plan - this is a high-level vision and objectives for bus services in the local area and closely follows or replicates relevant sections of the BSIP
Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EPS)	EP scheme - this sets out the precise detail of how the BSIP vision and objectives will be achieved, including any commitments made by the local authority or standards to be met by bus operators
Local highway authority	The local authority responsible for rights of way and adopted highways with an area, except trunk roads and motorways which are the responsibility of National Highways.
Local transport authority	The local authority responsible for transport planning and certain public transport functions within an area
Local Transport Plan	A statutory document prepared by a local transport authority setting out its policies for the encouragement of safe, integrated efficient and economic transport within its area and its proposals for implementation of those policies.
Section 106 developer funding	Funding secured by an obligation placed upon a developer under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990

Schedule A: List of qualifying bus services (as of 26/11/2021)

Schedule A1: Kettering to Desborough Corridor

Service	Description	Operator
2	Corby Business Academy – Kettering	Stagecoach
X4	Northampton – Corby	Stagecoach
10	Kettering – Northampton	Stagecoach
X10	Kettering – Northampton	Stagecoach
16	Kettering – Raunds	Stagecoach
17A	Desborough – Kettering	Stagecoach
18	Market Harborough – Kettering	Stagecoach
19	Kettering – Corby	Stagecoach

Schedule A2: Kettering to Burton Latimer Corridor

Service	Description	Operator
8	Corby – Kettering	Go-Whippet
X3	Corby – Huntingdon	Go-Whippet
X4 Gold	Northampton – Corby	Stagecoach
10	Kettering – Northampton	Stagecoach
16	Kettering – Raunds	Stagecoach
18	Market Harborough – Kettering	Stagecoach
19	Kettering – Corby	Stagecoach
47	Wellingborough – Kettering / Stamford Road	Stagecoach
48	Wellingborough – Kettering / Stamford Road	Stagecoach
49	Rushden – Kettering	Stagecoach
50	Rushden – Kettering	Stagecoach
276	Burton Latimer – Latimer School	Stagecoach
278	Spinney Road – Latimer School	Stagecoach

Schedule B: Reporting Mechanisms to North Northamptonshire Council

Highway Issues

All highway defects reported to North Northamptonshire Council will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's current highway maintenance and management service contract requirements. Highway defects should be reported through: <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/report-highway-problem>

Issues are reported via Street Doctor. By using Street Doctor, reports are logged appropriately, go to the right team and updates are sent.

This includes:

- Potholes (or other road and pavement issues)
- Faulty or broken streetlighting;
- Abandoned vehicles;
- Flooding or drainage issues;
- Fly tipping;
- Litter and street cleaning (leaf litter, dead animals, graffiti or glass)

Issues reported will be looked at initially within 5 working days to determine what further action may be required.

Parking Issues

Information on how to request a new parking restriction can be found on our website <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/request-new-parking-restrictions>

For abandoned vehicles call ELVIS on 08456 121 999 or email: elvis.recovery@northants.police.uk

Roadwork Notifications

Information about roadworks being planned in the coming weeks and months is available on the KierWSP website: <https://www.kierwsp.co.uk/news>

Live updates about roadworks in Northamptonshire via the national one network website is also available at: <https://one.network/uk/northamptonshire>

Schedule C: Corridor Boundaries and potential upgrade works

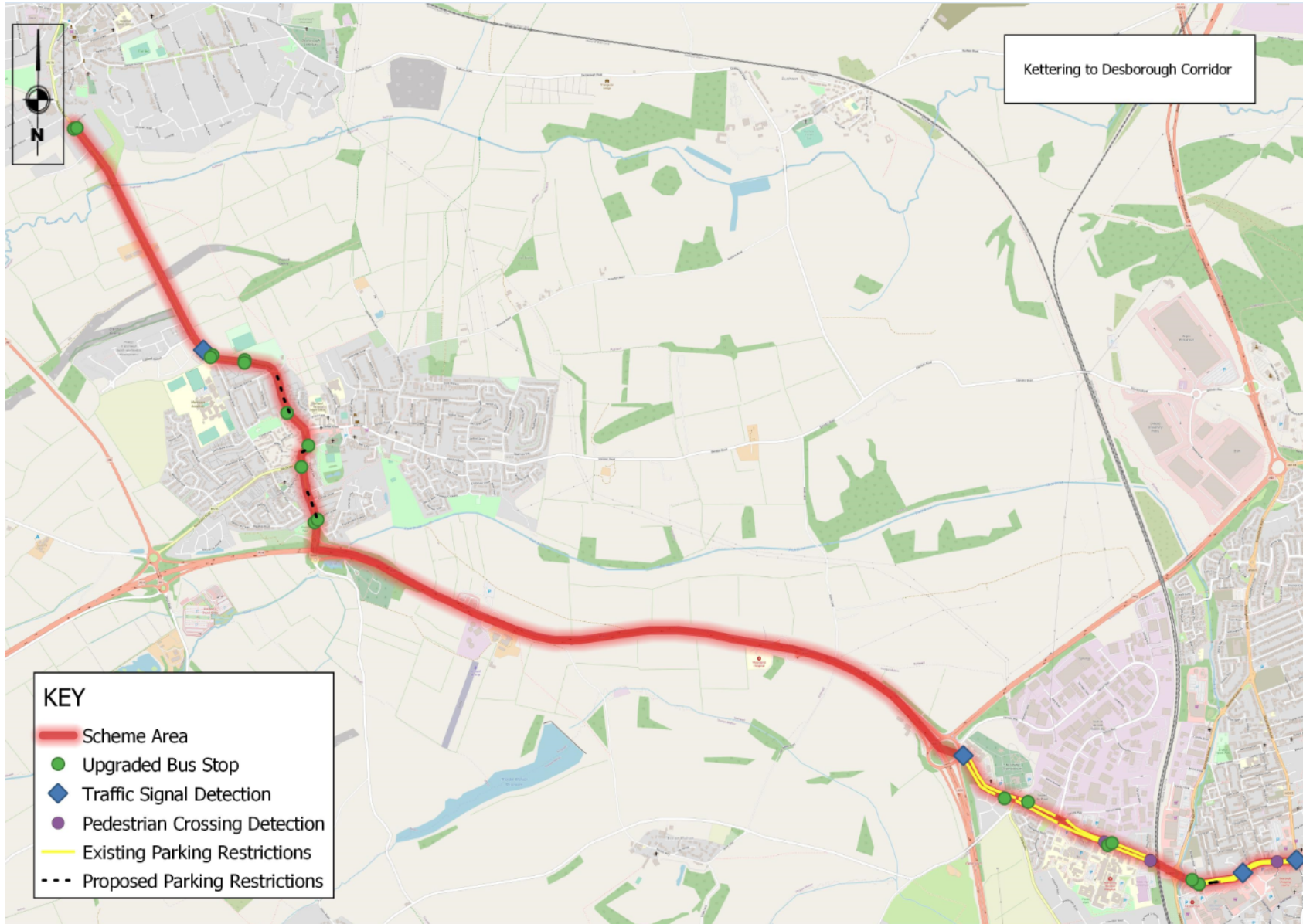


Figure 2 - Map of Kettering to Desborough corridor showing potential upgrade works.

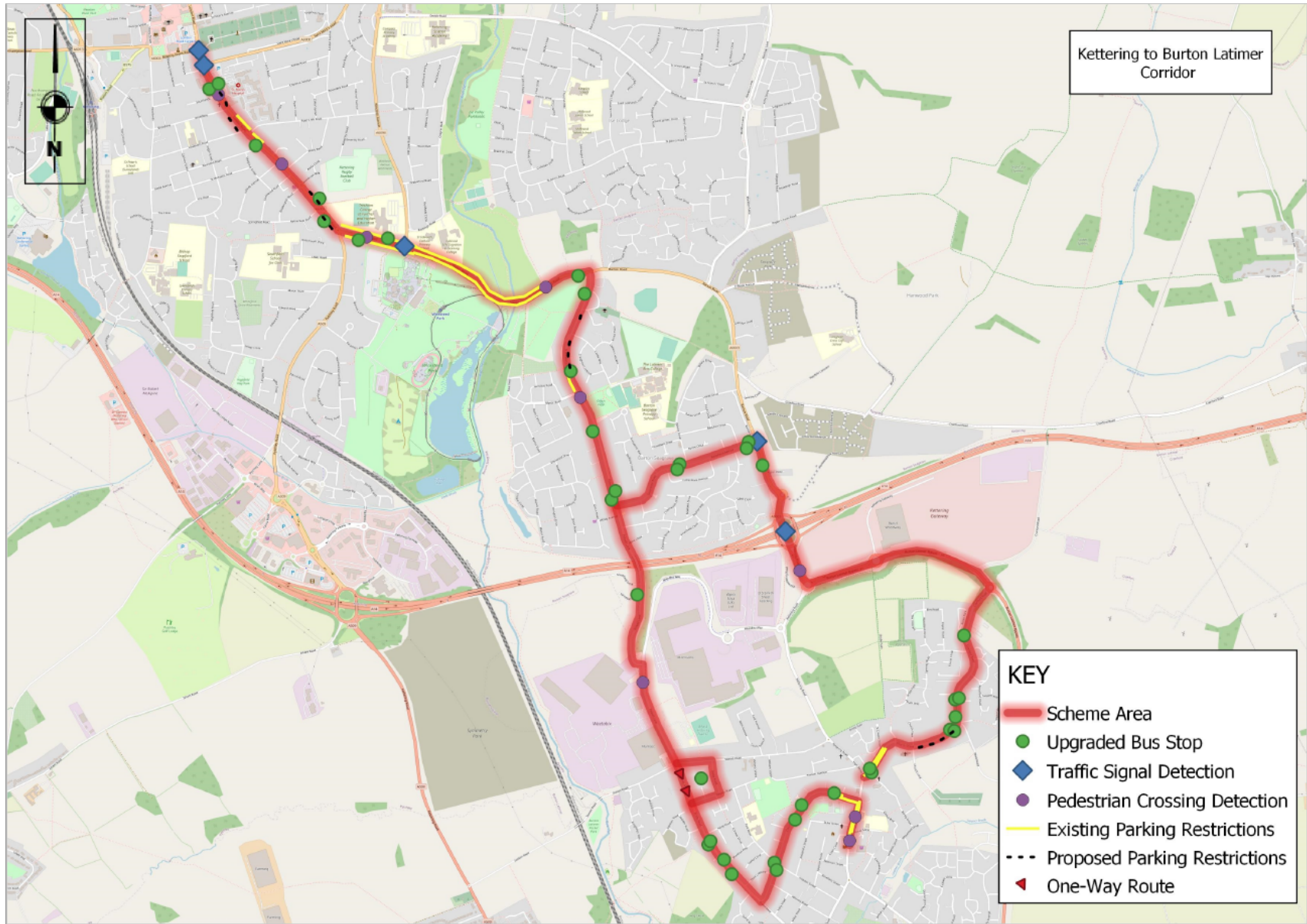


Figure 3 - Map of Kettering to Burton Latimer corridor showing potential upgrade works.

Schedule D: Reducing the impact of roadworks

Red Tier

These works will be extremely disruptive to buses. This could be because of the duration of the works, regularity of the buses or the unavailability of diversion routes, for example. As a rule of thumb, they would meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Have 10-or-more buses per hour operating on them
- Be of a duration of over one week
- Have a diversion route deemed unworkable or with the consequence of omitting a significant community or destination by the Bus & Rail team unilaterally or in discussion with bus companies
- Lane or bus stop closures or turning movement bans may also be considered "Red Tier" if they result in similar consequences.
- No alternative stop

When Red Works are identified they should:

- Have early proactive engagement with the Bus & Rail team to enable early proactive engagement with bus operators
- Be planned not to clash with other significant road closures or bus disruptions
- Be planned in conjunction with the weather forecast to make best endeavours not to have it disrupted by inclement weather
- Not to be scheduled or re-scheduled at less than 48-hours' notice
- Signage advising of the closure and disruption should be prepared and displayed by the contractor, giving clear advice on what disruption is taking place and what the intending passengers should do.

Yellow Tier

Whilst still very disruptive, there is a workable diversion for buses and it can be managed. Works in this category will still result in buses being diverted and passengers needing to be informed about what is being planned, but they are generally not as disruptive as the Red Works.

Generally, these would meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be of duration up to 10 days
- Not have more than 9 buses per hour running on them
- Have a diversion route which is workable albeit with some planning
- Residents affected have an option to get to an alternative service or stop as long as they have the relevant information

Yellow Works would require the following:

- Have early proactive engagement with the Bus & Rail team to enable early proactive engagement with bus operators
- Be planned not to clash with other significant road closures or bus disruptions
- Signage advising of the closure and disruption should be prepared and displayed by the contractor, giving clear advice on what disruption is taking place and what the intending passengers should do

Green Tier

This road closure will generally not impact buses at all, or where the disruption is so minor it does not require significant advanced publicity.

Generally, these would meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be of duration up to 10 days
- Not have more than 9 buses per hour running on them
- Have a diversion route which is workable and not in need of significant rescheduling
- Residents affected have an option to get to an alternative stop simply on the day

Green Works should require the following:

- Have early proactive engagement with the Bus & Rail team to enable early proactive engagement with bus operators
- Be planned not to clash with other significant road closures or bus disruptions
- Signage advising of the closure and disruption should be prepared and displayed by the contractor, giving clear advice on what disruption is taking place and what the intending passengers should do

Schedule E: Classification of commercial services by service level tier

Note: the services allocated to the tiers below are those operating at the required frequency and falling with the definitions, as at November 2021. New services or service changes may result in services moving between Tiers during the life of the Enhanced Partnership. The definitions of tiers define the service Tier.

Urban Tier 1 – defined as a higher frequency service substantially serving one town and for the majority of the route travels within the one urban area the typical frequency for buses along the main corridor is 15 minutes or better in the weekday daytime.

- 1 Welland Vale – Corby Town Centre – Taunton Avenue (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 3 Shire Lodge – Corby Town Centre – Danesholme (Stagecoach Midlands)

Urban Tier 2 - defined as a medium frequency service substantially serving one town and for the majority of the route travels within the one urban area the typical frequency for buses along the main corridor is 30 minutes or better in the weekday daytime.

- 2 Priors Hall – Corby Town Centre – Great Oakley – Kettering Town Centre – Venture Park (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 17/18/19 Kettering Town Centre – Ise Lodge (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 47/48 Kettering Town Centre – Burton Latimer (Stagecoach Midlands)
- W1 Wellingborough Town Centre – Queensway (Stagecoach Midlands)
- W2 Wellingborough Town Centre – Nest Farm Road (Stagecoach Midlands)

Urban Tier 3 – defined as less frequent than hourly throughout the weekday daytime

- RHL Rushden Higham Link

Inter-Urban Tier 1 – defined as travelling between towns and serves the rural community between – higher frequency (around 30 minutes on most parts of the route (daytime weekday)

- 17/18/19 Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough combined frequency (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 49/50 Kettering – Burton Latimer – Irthlingborough – Rushden combined frequency (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X4 Corby – Kettering – Wellingborough – Northampton (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X46/X47 Raunds – Rushden – Wellingborough – Northampton combined frequency (Stagecoach Midlands)

Inter-Urban Tier 2 - lower frequency (around hourly on most parts of the route (daytime weekday)

- 17 Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 17A Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 18 Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough – Market Harborough (Stagecoach Midlands)

- 19 Kettering – Rothwell – Desborough – Corby (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 47 Wellingborough - Finedon – Kettering (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 48 Wellingborough – Irthlingborough - Finedon – Kettering (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 49 Kettering – Rushden – Wellingborough (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 50 Kettering – Rushden – Bedford (Stagecoach Midlands)
- RF1 Corby – Uppingham – Oakham (Centrebus)
- X4 Peterborough – Oundle – Corby (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X10 Kettering – Northampton (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X46 Raunds – Rushden – Wellingborough – Northampton (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X47 Raunds – Rushden – Wellingborough – Northampton (Stagecoach Midlands)

Rural Tier 3 – predominately serves rural villages

- 25 Rushden – Sharnbrook – Bedford (Grant Palmer)

Industrial Estate Service

- 2A Weldon Industry – Priors Hall – Corby Town Centre (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 2B Kettering – Corby – Weldon Industry (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 2C Corby Estates – Town Centre – Weldon Industry (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 4 Corby Estates – Earls tree Industry (Stagecoach Midlands)
- X44 Wellingborough – Brackmills (Stagecoach Midlands)

Academic Service

- 276 Burton Latimer – Latimer School (Stagecoach Midlands)
- 278 Burton Latimer – Latimer School (Stagecoach Midlands)
- Stanion – Kettering Buccleuch Academy (Hamiltons & Buckbys)

Schedule F: Competition Test

Note - this is not part of the EPS, it is included for information. It is owned by the Council who will review and amend, as necessary, without recourse to the Bespoke Variation arrangements. However, every time the bespoke arrangements are proposed to be used this Competition Test will need to be reviewed to see if the changes proposed have any implications.

SCP on behalf of North Northamptonshire Council has undertaken an assessment of the impacts of the EP Plan and Scheme to be Made to come into effect on 30 April 2022 on competition and believes it will not or is unlikely to have a significantly adverse effect on competition, for the purposes of Part 1 of Schedule 10 of the Transport Act 2000.

The Competition and Markets Authority has also been consulted on the proposals as required.

The legislative test, as it applies to Enhanced Partnerships and Ticketing Schemes says (in Part 1 of Schedule 10 Clause 2):

- (1) For the purposes of this Part of this Schedule the exercise or proposed exercise of a function to which this Part of this Schedule applies meets the competition test unless it —
 - (a) has or is likely to have a significantly adverse effect on competition, and*
 - (b) is not justified by sub-paragraph (2).**
- (2) The exercise or proposed exercise of a function is justified if —
 - (a) it is with a view to achieving one or more of the purposes specified in sub-paragraph (3), and*
 - (b) its effect on competition is or is likely to be proportionate to the achievement of that purpose or any of those purposes.**
- (3) The purposes referred to in sub-paragraph (2) are —
 - (a) securing improvements in the quality of vehicles or facilities used for or in connection with the provision of local services,*
 - (b) securing other improvements in local services of benefit to users of local services, and*
 - (c) reducing or limiting traffic congestion, noise or air pollution.”**

The following sections break down the test into the above 3 component parts. Firstly exploring what is the impact on competition. Secondly is it justified by Step 2.

Stage 1 – Does the EPS have a potential impact on competition?

The Council considers that EPS has a potential influence on Competition in the following ways, in reaching these conclusions it has considered the effect on existing operators and potential new operators joining the market. The rationale for each intervention flow from the Bus Service Improvement Plan, and are being brought forward through the Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EPS):

- The EPS seeks to require Urban Tier 1 and 2 “Qualifying Local Services” to operate core hours (arriving/departing the town centre between 0730 through to 1830hrs Monday to Friday except bank holidays) and retain normal daytime frequencies between these hours.
The Council are seeking make the bus offer more predictable to users.
Does this have a potential impact on competition – **no**.
Why? These are the high frequency services and services in these tiers already operate across these times. Less frequent and longer distance services in other Tiers are not covered by this requirement so it is not a barrier to entry.
Without the EP, there would be no obligation on operators to run buses throughout the hours specified, however as already stated services in these tiers already comply with the specification and as such it is likely the higher frequency urban routes would continue to voluntarily comply.

- Vehicle standards this covers the provision of CCTV and the fitting of automatic vehicle location technology.
The Council considers that CCTV is required to reassure passengers about the safety of using the bus and reduce crime and incidents that might cause buses to be taken out of operation. AIL is discounted from this test as it is already a legal requirement for operators.
Does this have a potential impact on competition – **no**
Why might it impact on competition? – the specification of the bus to a high standard may be a barrier to entry to the market for new operators. Retrofitting CCTV on buses is not costly to the point of being a barrier to entry.
Without the EP automatic vehicle location technology is still required by law but emissions may not be reduced and North Northamptonshire might be vulnerable to larger operators swapping out newer buses for other areas. CCTV is already fitted on many buses in North Northamptonshire, and can be affordably making retrofitted, so is not seen as a barrier to entry.

- Common fare stage boundaries will enable journey cost information to be provided to bus users. Does this have a potential impact on competition – **no**
Why might it impact on competition? – the setting of common fares stages does not mean operators have to change fares at every fare stage, it also does not influence the fares charged.
In the absence of an EP it would continue to be up to operators to choose the locations at which fares change, this would make it hard to communicate fares information to customers in a simplified form.
- Fare capping and multi-operator ticketing could have an impact on competition. However at this stage the obligation is to work and deliver a scheme for fare capping and multi-operator ticketing. The details and the arrangements for reimbursement need to be developed and agreed. Multi-operator ticketing is permitted under the block-exemption, but needs to be set up in such a way that it does not favour one operator above another and that new operators can enter the market fairly. Fare capping is designed to make sure passengers travel on the most cost effective ticket for their trip making, this does not set fares, as such it does not impact on competition.
Fare capping and multi-operator ticketing will need to be subjected to their own competition test at the time they are being considered for introduction. Therefore there is no action for now, but this is one to note for the future.

Does this have a potential impact on competition – **potentially but the details of each will need to be developed and a further competition test undertaken on the details in line with legislation.**

Why might it impact on competition? – Fare capping and multi-operator ticketing can both undercut commercial fares making an operator unviable. If the allocation on multi-operator revenue is not apportioned fairly or excludes a new operator, then this can have a direct impact on competition and act as a barrier to entry.

Stage 2 – Does each intervention proposed contribute towards the specified purposes?

The interventions are justified if they support delivery of one or more of the objectives set out in paragraph 3 Part 1 of Schedule 10 Clause 2(3), above, but repeated below for clarity:

- a) securing improvements in the quality of vehicles or facilities used for or in connection with the provision of local services,
 - b) securing other improvements in local services of benefit to users of local services, and
 - c) reducing or limiting traffic congestion, noise or air pollution.
- The EPS seeks to set minimum hours of operation for high frequency Tier 1 and 2 services. This will allow users to enjoy a more consistent bus offer and plan journeys with greater predictability, **it achieves purpose #b**
 - Vehicle standards including the provision of CCTV and the fitting of automatic vehicle location technology. CCTV on board buses reassures bus users that buses are safe to use and will reduce incidents and issues which might delay or cause buses to be cancelled, **it achieves purposes #a and b**

- Common fare stages will allow improved fares information to be made available to users, **it achieves purpose #b**
- Fare capping and multi operator ticketing will both ensure that bus users are not over charged on parts of the network where there is limited or no competition. Multi operator tickets will allow bus users to travel on more than one operator's service at a fair cost, which may be less than purchasing multiple single tickets, **it achieves purpose #b**

The Council believes that in all areas the Stage 2 test is met, as each intervention addresses one or more of the specified purposes.

Stage 3 – Is the adverse effect on competition proportionate?

This stage considers whether the effect of each intervention (singularly and collectively) on competition is proportionate.

Only the fare capping and multi-operator ticketing proposals have a competition issue. However the EP first requires the schemes to be developed and then introduced. The effect on competition can only be assessed once the scheme has been developed. At that stage a further Competition Test will be required based on the scheme specifics. However in principle both are permitted in law.

Furthermore, the Competition Commission's report into local bus services in the UK found that carefully designed and implemented multi-operator ticketing products can help increase competition between bus operators – delivering further benefits for passenger.

Fare capping is permitted through the Bus Services Act 2017.

Appendix

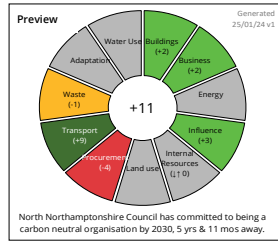
Appendix D

List of proposed new/improved bus services

New services include:		
	Rushton Lakes/Raunds – Oundle	Mondays Saturdays. Six buses per day.
	Stamford to Oundle	Monday to Fridays. Peak and shopping bus journey.
	Weldon Airfield – Kettering via KGH	Mondays to Saturdays. Hourly bus.
	Corby Shopping bus from Weldon	Mondays to Fridays. Shopping bus journey.
	Kettering – Brambleside – Kettering	Mondays to Saturdays. Hourly bus.
	Demand responsive transport (DRT)	Mondays to Saturdays services. Covering rural areas without a bus service: Oundle North, Oundle South and Thrapston.
Service enhancements:		
3	Corby – Danesholme & Welland Vale	Mondays to Saturdays. Improve frequency from three to four buses an hour.
3	Corby late evening service	Mondays to Fridays. 23:00 Corby departure.
16	Kettering - Thrapston	Mondays to Saturdays. Hourly peak journeys. Mondays to Saturdays. 23:00 Kettering departure.
17A to 19	Desborough - Ise Lodge	Improvement of frequency to three buses an hour. Diversion of services in Rothwell to serve Fallow Road. Improved evening service. Extension of services to Sulgrave St.
W1	Wellingborough - Queensway	Improvement of frequency from two to three buses an hour.
W2	Wellingborough – Burrows Bush	Improvement of frequency from two to three buses an hour.
X4	Northampton - Peterborough	School journey to Oundle. Improvement of afternoon and evening journeys.
Service replacements		
W8	Bozeat – Wellingborough	Entire service Mondays to Saturdays. (Existing contract surrendered)
X10	Northampton – Kettering	Tendering of alternate journeys between Overstone Grange and Kettering to maintain hourly service. (Replacement of Mondays to Saturdays.
WWE	Stoke Albany - Corby	Tuesdays. (Continuation of Welland Wanderer)
WWW	Market Harborough - Gretton	Fridays. (Continuation of Welland Wanderer)

Climate Change Impact Assessment Tool (v1)

Directorate & Service Area	Place & Economy/Strategic Transport
Report Name	Bus Service Improvement Plan
Report date	5.2.24
Report author & role	Chris Wragg, Head of Strategic Transport
Proposal Summary	Following Scrutiny Management Board requesting officers to attend the Place & Environment Scrutiny Committee to provide information on, and answer member questions around, the Bus Service Improvement Plan CCIA 5.2.24
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Category	Impact	Notes / Justification for score / existing work (see guidance sheet or CCIA detailed notes for more information)	Score (-5 to +5)	Mitigations (If the impact is negative, please provide a mitigating action for reducing the impact going forward)
Buildings	Building construction	N/A		
Buildings	Building use	The referenced ZEBRA Bid includes the provision of electric bus charging points at Stagecoach's Kettering depot.	+2	
Buildings	Green / blue infrastructure	N/A		
Business	Developing green businesses	N/A		
Business	Marketable skills & training	N/A		
Business	Sustainability in business	The referenced ZEBRA Bid would see stagecoach introducing its first electric buses in North Northamptonshire	+2	
Energy	Energy efficiency	N/A		
Energy	Reducing energy demand	N/A		
Energy	Switching to low-carbon energy supply	N/A		
Influence	Communication & engagement	The referenced ZEBRA Bid would include buses which would be branded for their zero-emission characteristics and would be a visible (and moving) advert for zero emission technology	+1	
Influence	Wider influence	N/A		
Influence	Working with communities	N/A		
Influence	Working with partners	The Enhanced Partnership with bus operators is intended to increase the partnership working with bus operators, although many initial improvements will be contracted.	+2	
Influence				
Internal Resources	Material / infrastructure requirement	The current proposals largely use existing resources, but may involve some additional infrastructure or new Buses .	-2	Expanding bus services will inevitably require more buses. As electric buses are new technology, they are necessarily new vehicles.
Internal Resources	Staff time requirement	The Council has already increased its public transport staffing to enhance the resources in this area. This is partly funded by Government grant	-1	This is a priority area in climate change terms
Internal Resources	Staff travel requirement	The proposals would have a negligible impact on staff travel.		
Internal Resources	External funding	The proposals make extensive use of Government grant funding which has been obtained by the Council for	+3	
Internal Resources				
Land use	Carbon storage	N/A		
Land use	Improving biodiversity adaptation	N/A		
Land use	Natural flood management	N/A		
Land use				
Procurement	Food & Drink	N/A		
Procurement	Products	The proposals will increase the overall number of buses operating in North Northamptonshire/	-2	Increasing the number of buses operating it essential to increasing public transport use, which is a key climate change objective.
Procurement	Single-use plastic	N/A		
Procurement	Services	The proposals will increase the Council's procurement of public transport services, including the Council taking on services which were previously commercially provided.	-2	Using public funding (and procurement) to increase the number of buses is key to increasing public transport use, which is a key climate change objective.
Procurement				
Transport	Decarbonising vehicles	The ZEBRA Bid, if successful, will introduce the first electric buses in North Northamptonshire. This is on the principal X4 service which is responsible for around 25% of all bus travel in the Council area	+3	
Transport	Improving infrastructure	While improved public transport is not currently a priority, due to lack of capital funding, it will form some part of the proposals.	+1	
Transport	Demand reduction			
Transport	Supporting people to use public transport	The proposal includes a number of new bus services and increased frequency on others	+4	
Transport	Supporting people to use active travel	As most people access bus services on foot, the proposals will inter alia increase walking.	+1	
Transport				
Waste	End of life disposal / recycling	If successful, the ZEBRA Bid will mean some older buses are superseded and will be scrapped. (or replace other vehicles which will be scrapped) This involves some recycling of suitable components/materials	-1	Techniques for recycling buses are well established. Most buses go for scrap in South Yorkshire because that is the centre of the metal recycling industry.
Waste	Waste volume			
Waste				
Adaptation	Drought vulnerability	N/A		
Adaptation	Flooding vulnerability	N/A		
Adaptation	Heatwave vulnerability	N/A		
Adaptation				
Water Use	Improving water-use efficiency	N/A		
Other	Other 1			
Other	Other 2			
Other	Other 3			
Other	Other 4			

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Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Monday 5th February 2024

Report Title	Surplus Asset Disposals
Report Author	Jonathan Waterworth, Assistant Director of Assets & Environment

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Modern public services

List of Appendices

EXEMPT Appendix A	Land off Shelton Street, Raunds
EXEMPT Appendix B	Land off Thorpe Street, Raunds
EXEMPT Appendix C	Former Care Home, Beech Close, Desborough
Appendix D	CCIA report

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. North Northamptonshire Council has a diverse and extensive service delivery requirement. This service need requires the Council to own a varied property and land portfolio held by the general fund. This asset base is regularly reviewed to ensure it meets the corporate strategies and continues to remain value for money. Therefore, at times, the Council will dispose of surplus and underutilised sites.

- 1.2. The policy and process regulating the review of underutilised assets was determined by Executive in December 2022. Assets that are identified as potentially being underutilised are reviewed through the Asset Management Review Group (AMRG) using the process identified in the policy and where there is no service requirement or financial value in retaining the site, they are considered surplus and recommended for sale.
- 1.3. This report details the sites that have recently been through this process and confirmed as not required to be retained. Accordingly, they will be recommended to Executive for disposal per the Council's Asset Disposal Policy.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The asset management function is to align the Council's property portfolio to meet service strategies, to contribute to the Corporate Plan and carbon neutral commitments. Part of this function is to review sites to ensure they continue to have a beneficial purpose. Where this does not appear to be the case sites are shared through the Asset Management Review Group (AMRG).
- 2.2. Capital receipts are an important funding source for the capital programme, as where sites are surplus the sale of the assets provides funding for capital projects, and this is more beneficial than financing the programme through borrowing. With interest rates higher than in the recent past, it is important that the Council releases underutilised assets.
- 2.3. The AMRG has considered the sites detailed in the appendices and confirmed that there is no longer a requirement the Council to retain them.
- 2.4. The asset management team, therefore, have a responsibility to identify options to progress them to the open market, to ensure compliance with Council governance and statutory obligations.
- 2.5. This report lists the sites that are recommended for disposal, together with a supporting summary for each site.

3. Recommendations

3.1. It is recommended that:

- i) The Place & Environment Scrutiny Commission review the sites detailed in the appendices to the report and provide any comments in relation to the report.

3.2 Reasons for Recommendations:

- These sites have been confirmed as underutilised and surplus through the Asset Management Review Group and provide opportunities to sell on the open market to obtain capital receipts. These capital receipts contribute to the funding of the capital programme.
- There are controls through the planning process, including consultation associated with the planning process, for the community to be engaged in the outcome of the development.
- Bringing sites forward for development contributes to North Northants area housing supply and to regeneration of their respective areas.
- Progressing these sites will result in the Council reducing the revenue holding costs.
- Any developments will be regulated with building regulations including those supporting accessibility and the requirement for adherence to energy and sustainability requirements.

3.3 Alternative Options Considered:

- The sites could be retained but they are not contributing to the corporate plan, and Councils are encouraged not to retain sites unless they achieve a return on the holding, ie a service use or an income on the investment.
- Alternative uses have been considered through the AMRG, which includes service area representatives, who confirmed the sites will not meet their needs and/or are not financially viable for their requirements.
- A review of the markets including land values and planning policy shows that there are viable options for development of these sites and, once developed, these uses will contribute to employment and community opportunities for North Northamptonshire

4. Report Background

- 4.1. Asset management includes a process of review to ensure the portfolio achieves the Council's objectives and the property and land holding remains value for money.
- 4.2. The Council adopted a Disposal Policy in December 2022, this included a process whereby underutilised and surplus sites are systematically reviewed to determine whether the holding should be retained. Councils are encouraged to bring underutilised sites forward to the wider economy, to enable external parties to utilise them for economic, social and environmental opportunities.
- 4.3. The sites identified in this report have been through the adopted review process and confirmed not to be contributing to the Corporate Plan and therefore are being recommended for disposal on the open market.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. The Council has an extensive general fund portfolio which has a book value over £660m and includes leisure centres, schools, social services facilities, parks and open spaces. The portfolio must adapt to meet service requirements; to meet higher standards of environmental regulations and our carbon reduction commitment.
- 5.2. Energy surveys and condition surveys continue to be received and these identify that substantial investment will be required in retained assets in order for them to continue to meet service outputs in a safe and energy efficient manner.
- 5.3. This requirement to continue to invest in projects requires the Council to release sites that are not significantly contributing to a service requirement or, in the case of the investment portfolio, are not providing a good return of income.
- 5.4. The Council has set a draft budget including capital receipt targets of £2,759,400 for 24/25 and £2,628,400 for 25/26, so it is important to release underutilised sites to contribute to these receipts; failure to do so would put the capital receipt targets at risk.
- 5.5. The issue for the Council therefore is to continue to identify sufficient sites to obtain the capital receipts, and if these receipts are exceeded this will lead to less requirements for borrowing. Sites such as these being recommended for sale are not providing a valuable return on the holding but will obtain a capital receipt.
- 5.6. The land sites, appendix A & B will be brought forward marketed as sales conditional upon planning, which will ensure the Council obtains best consideration for the sites. The closed care home is also likely to be a

conditional sale. The recommendation to Executive provides for the exact terms to be agreed with the Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. Feedback from the Scrutiny Commission will be considered as part of the Executive Paper due to be reported in February 2024.
- 6.2. Subject to Executive approval, the sites recommended for progression to sale will be processed by the asset management team to procure professional advice on marketing and valuation; they will ensure the sites are marketed widely. The land sites will be conditional sales to ensure the Council obtains maximum value from the sites. Beech Close will be further analysed to identify the best way of maximising the sale whilst balancing this against the substantial holding costs.
- 6.3. Sites recommended for disposal will be prepared for market including a sale guide price and a marketing period will be determined in consultation with agents. The agents are procured following a tender process.
- 6.4. The agents will ensure marketing is completed for a minimum of two months and make recommendations to the asset team who will review the offers before making a recommendation to the Council.
- 6.5. The Executive Member for Highways, Travel & Assets and Assistant Director for Assets & Environment will review the recommendation and determine the bid to progress through to conveyance.
- 6.6. The Asset Team, working with Legal and Finance, will progress the sites through to completion.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1. These sites incur revenue holding costs, direct costs particularly Beech Close, including security, inspections, business rates or council tax, and reactive repairs. The sites are not secured as long-term holdings. If the Council were to retain longer term, then insurance representatives would need to be consulted on additional security measures, so costs would increase further.
- 7.1.2. None of these sites achieve any revenue income.
- 7.1.3. Professional fees will be recovered from the capital receipt, to include legal, disposal consultant, agency, planning permission fees and any other costs directly incurred as a result of bringing the site forward.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. The Local Government Act S123 requires a council to obtain best consideration that can reasonably be obtainable and marketing these sites for

a minimum of two months through relevant agency methods will ensure the opportunity is widely advertised and bidders have the to submit a commercial bid for the site(s).

7.2.2. Legal will be instructed for the conveyance.

7.2.3 The Council's financial procedure rules require assets to be marketed on the open market unless there are exceptional circumstances specific to the site whereby the only reasonable option is to sell by private treaty. A council may dispose of a site in this way subject to obtaining market value.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. HM Treasury Guide, Managing Public Money, Annex 4.15 Asset Management, sets out best practice to ensure disposals achieve market price and further, that surplus corporate assets should be disposed within three years.

7.3.2. The Housing and Planning Act 2016 (2) S208 sets a limit of two years from determination of surplus.

7.3.3. These proposals will assist the Council in delivering its fiduciary responsibilities and assist the Council in meeting its commitments in the Corporate Plan including Safe and Thriving Places and Modern Public Services.

7.4. Risk

7.4.1. The recommendations above ensure the Council mitigates the risks associated with holding vacant property surplus property.

7.4.2. A marketing campaign for all relevant sites provides transparency and gives opportunity for the wider market to tender. This mitigates the risks of challenge.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. Ward Members feedback on the sites has been sought as part of the disposal process.

7.6. Consideration by the Executive

7.6.1. This report has not been considered by an Executive Advisory Panel.

7.7. Equality Implications

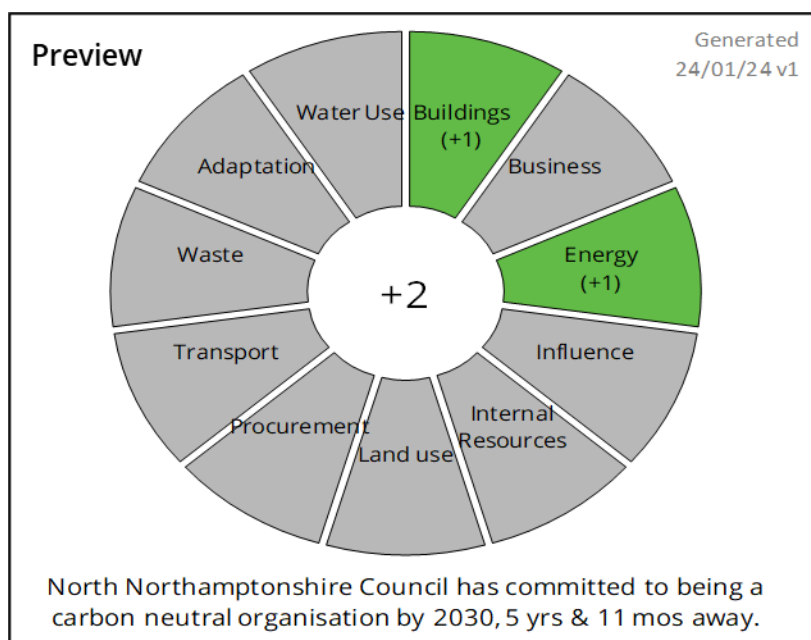
7.7.1. An Equality Screening Assessment has been completed and confirms there are no negative impacts on one or more equality groups.

7.8. Climate Impact

7.8.1. The Council, having declared a climate change and environment emergency in June 2021, is committed to reducing its climate impact both within its own

Council buildings and in working with businesses and the wider community to achieve net zero energy emissions. Disposal of the sites with buildings would directly reduce the Council's carbon footprint. Any developments would be required to meet the energy standards contained within the building regulations.

7.8.2. The Council's Climate Change Impact Assessment Infographic is provided below:



7.8.3. Two sites are fields, the other site is a closed care home, unfit for occupation. The closed care home cannot be retrofitted and is not viable for the service to develop. This reduction in sites will support the carbon reduction commitment due to the council using less energy supplies. The closure of the site and discontinuance of using the carbon boiler will reduce the Council's energy demand.

7.9. Community Impact

7.9.1. This proposal has no direct community impact.

7.10. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.10.1. Vacant sites can be the target of antisocial behaviour and vandalism. These proposals will facilitate development, and this will have a positive impact on crime and disorder.

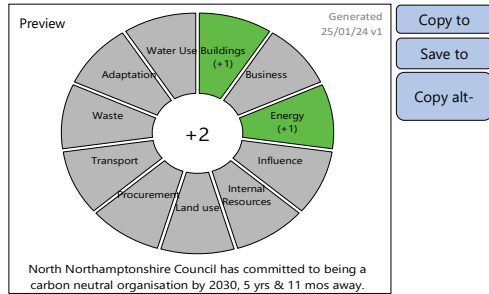
8. Background Papers

8.1. Asset Disposal Policy and Process:
<https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/communities-assets-and-grants/asset-disposal-policy>

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Climate Change Impact Assessment Tool (v1)

Directorate & Service Area	A&E, Assets
Report Name	Surplus Asset Disposals (Executive Report)
Report date	Thursday 15th February
Report author & role	Edwina Crowley Head of Asset Management
Proposal Summary	Disposal of sites that are surplus and have been through the AMRG policy and process.
Export filename	Surplus Asset Disposals (Executive Report) CClA Thursday 15th February .png



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Category	Impact	Notes / justification for score / existing work (see guidance sheet or CClA detailed notes for more information)	Score (-5 to +5)	Mitigations (If the impact is negative, please provide a mitigating action for reducing the impact going forward)
Buildings	Building construction			
Buildings	Building use	Two sites are fields, the other site is a closed care home, unfit for occupation. The closed care home cannot be retrofitted and is not viable for the service to develop. This reduction in sites will support the carbon reduction commitment due to the council using less energy supplies.	+1	
Buildings	Green / blue infrastructure			
Business	Developing green businesses			
Business	Marketable skills & training			
Business	Sustainability in business			
Energy	Energy efficiency			
Energy	Reducing energy demand	The closure of the site, and the discontinuance of using the carbon boiler will reduce the council's energy demand.	+1	
Energy	Switching to low-carbon energy supply			
Influence	Communication & engagement			
Influence	Wider influence			
Influence	Working with communities			
Influence	Working with partners			
Internal Resources	Material / infrastructure requirement			
Internal Resources	Staff time requirement			
Internal Resources	Staff travel requirement			
Internal Resources	External funding			
Land use	Carbon storage			
Land use	Improving biodiversity adaptation			
Land use	Natural flood management			
Procurement	Food & Drink			
Procurement	Products			
Procurement	Single-use plastic			
Procurement	Services			
Transport	Decarbonising vehicles			
Transport	Improving infrastructure			
Transport	Demand reduction			
Transport	Supporting people to use public transport			
Transport	Supporting people to use active travel			
Waste	End of life disposal / recycling			
Waste	Waste volume			
Adaptation	Drought vulnerability			
Adaptation	Flooding vulnerability			
Adaptation	Heatwave vulnerability			
Water Use	Improving water-use efficiency			
Other	Other 1	Any development of these sites will be controlled by planning and building control including ensuring government statutory requirements are part of the development		
Other	Other 2			
Other	Other 3			
Other	Other 4			

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Agenda Item 7a

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