

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive

At 10.00 am on Thursday 16th January, 2025 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Jason Smithers (Leader of the Council) (Chair)	Councillor Helen Howell (Deputy Leader of the Council)
Councillor Matt Binley	Councillor Helen Harrison
Councillor David Brackenbury	Councillor David Howes
Councillor Lloyd Bunday	Councillor Gill Mercer
Councillor Scott Edwards	Councillor Mark Rowley

Also in attendance – Councillors Jim Hakewill and Dorothy Maxwell

747 Executive Member for Climate and Green Environment

The Chair, Councillor Jason Smithers welcomed Councillor Helen Harrison to the Executive as the new Executive Member for Climate and Green Environment, replacing Councillor Harriet Pentland.

The Chair thanked Cllr Pentland for her services to the Executive and acknowledged the benefits of the work she has undertaken for North Northamptonshire.

748 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Assistant Chief Executive, Guy Holloway.

749 Members' Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

750 Notifications of requests to address the meeting

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

Agenda Item	Speakers
Item 4 – Post-Financial Settlement Budget Update	Cllr Jim Hakewill
Item 6 - Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy	Cllr Jim Hakewill

Item 7 - Active Communities Strategic Framework	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 8 - Knights Farm, Rushden – Overage Agreement	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 10 - Green Hill Solar Farm	Cllrs Jim Hakewill & Dorothy Maxwell
Item 11 - Capital Programme Update 2024/25	Cllrs Jim Hakewill

751 Post-Financial Settlement Budget Update

The Chair invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to address the meeting. Cllr Hakewill queried what provision had been made for Executive Members to explain the impact of the local government financial settlement on Council Tax levels for 2025/26 in face-to-face meetings with the public. Cllr Hakewill also queried how the Council justified raising Council Tax levels by the maximum of 4.99% in light of the loss of winter fuel payments for many vulnerable pensioners. In relation to scrutiny of the budget, Cllr Hakewill questioned why budget scrutiny sessions had been poorly attended by members, with a recent meeting postponed at short notice.

The Chair then invited the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, Cllr Lloyd Bunday to introduce a report that updated the Executive following the publication of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 18th December 2024.

In response to Cllr Hakewill, Cllr Bunday noted that the budget scrutiny process was public facing, with meetings recorded and papers publicly available and that it was not possible to meet with all residents in face to face meetings. Regarding the proposed increased in Council Tax levels for 2025/26, central government expected local authorities to raise Council Tax levels by the maximum allowable (4.99%) and based its local government financial settlement figures on this assumption.

It was noted that the draft General Fund Budget proposals for 2025/26 had been presented to the Executive at its meeting on 19th December 2024, with the provisional local government financial settlement having been received only the day prior to that meeting.

It was noted that the Council's draft budget proposals had assumed funding of £400.927m. Following the announcement of the provisional local government finance settlement, funding has been reduced by £1.197m, offset by an improved funding position of £956,000 based on the latest modelling for Business Rates Growth resulting in a net adverse movement of £241,000.

The key changes in funding were detailed as follows:-

- New Homes Bonus – The grant had increased by £136,000 from the original draft budget proposals of £3.087m to £3.223m.
- Business Rates Funding Baseline - The draft budget had modelled funding from Business Rates at £114.924m. Following the provisional finance settlement, funding for Business Rates has moved favourably by £956,000 to £115.880m.

- Revenue Support Grant – The grant had increased by £365,000 from the original draft budget proposals of £6.223m to £6.588m.
- Recovery Fund – The draft budget was based on the grant being allocated using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and had assumed funding of £3.384m. However, the provisional settlement announced a cap on the grant whereby those authorities who had an increase greater than 3% of core spending power did not receive any funding, resulting in the Council not receiving any funding via the Recovery Fund.
- Social Care Grant - The grant has increased by £1.048m against the draft budget proposals, from £26.719m to £27.767m
- Children’s Services Prevention Grant - The draft budget proposals had assumed funding of £1.380m. The provisional settlement announced a grant of £2.018m, meaning an increase in funding of £638,000 with potential further increases in the final settlement.

Cllr Bunday reported that the reduction in funding of £241,000 would be funded following a review of the original inflationary assumptions for the Waste Management Contract. It was noted that while these adjustments presented challenges, the overall budget remained balanced without the requirement to cut any frontline services or using the Council’s reserves.

Cllr Bunday noted that the Public Health Grant sat outside the Core Spending Power calculation for councils, with indicative allocations still to be announced, although this was expected shortly. The ringfenced grant in 2024-25 was £18.906m, with any changes in funding reflected in how the grant had been spent. The ringfenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) had seen a £12.720m increase from indicative initial allocations.

The consultation period for the draft budget proposals had commenced on 19th December 2024 and would close on 24th January 2025. The publication of the final local government finance settlement was anticipated in early February 2025, alongside confirmation of the Council’s Employer National Insurance Contributions.

The Chair offered his thanks to the Council’s Section 151 officer and her team, noting the balanced budget position without resort to reducing service provision or utilising reserves.

Cllr Gill Mercer noted that details of the Public Health Grant had yet to be provided by government and it was hoped that this figure would be as expected. Cllr Mercer also referenced the potential impact on external service providers in regard to Employer National Insurance Contributions.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to note the unintended impacts of changes to National Insurance and offered his thanks to the Finance Team for their work on the budget and their response in providing updated figures in light of the provisional settlement. Cllr Brackenbury spoke to welcome the budget scrutiny process and suggested that all councillors had a duty to explain the budget to their constituents and to put this into context when considering the financial settlement.

Cllr Helen Howell spoke to note engagement in regard to budget scrutiny, with specific reference to engagement with Town and Parish councils.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the funding changes to the draft budget as set out in Table 2.
- b) Approved the reduction in the waste management inflationary increase from £756k, as presented in the draft budget report to the Executive at the meeting on 19th December 2024 by £241k to £505k.

Reason for Recommendations; To ensure that the Council complies with its Constitution and legislative requirements in setting the budget for North Northamptonshire Council from 2025-26.

Alternative Options Considered – The formal budget consultation commenced on 19th December 2024 when the draft budget report was presented to the Executive. This report provides an update following the announcement of the provisional financial settlement and any comments from this report and the report presented to the Executive at the meeting on the 19th December 2024 will be considered as part of the consultation process.

752 Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

The Chair invited the Executive Member for Housing and Communities, Cllr Mark Rowley to introduce a report that sought approval of a suite of recommendations to be included in a revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy. These recommendations proposed to increase the amount and type of discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) assistance the Council could offer residents of North Northamptonshire with an aim to improve the health and well-being of disabled people and help them to live safely and independently in their homes for longer.

Cllr Rowley noted that the proposals had undergone significant consideration by both the Place and Economy Scrutiny Committee and Prosperous Communities Executive Advisory Panel as well as stakeholder consultation. A summary of the policy recommendations was provided to the meeting.

The Chair welcomed the report, the proposals of which would help benefit North Northamptonshire's most vulnerable residents by fast tracking applications for equipment to help them live their lives.

Cllr Gill Mercer spoke to welcome the work and level of detail that had gone into production of the policy before members, noting the benefits and importance of keeping residents in their own homes for as long as possible.

Cllr Scott Edwards also spoke welcome the report, with specific reference to the removal of means testing for children's equipment and no land charges associated with grants for those involved in long-term fostering.

Cllr Matt Binley thanked officers for their hard work, noting that the proposals broadened the spectrum of people that could receive assistance and added additional governance to offer reassurance to residents.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to welcome the report and commended the hard work of officers in making thoughtful changes to the policy.

Cllr Rowley concluded debate by thanking all those involved in producing the policy, noting that the proposed offer was significantly beyond statutory requirements and would increase the number of residents eligible for assistance.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive approved the proposals detailed within the report at a) - m) to be incorporated into North Northamptonshire Council's revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy:

Proposal 1: Discretionary DFG Grant (Top-Up)

The current maximum Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant is £30,000. The current maximum Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (Top-Up) is £10,000.

It is recommended that the Discretionary DFG Grant (Top-Up) is increased from £10,000 to £20,000.

Reasons for recommendation - This proposal will:

- Provide extra funding for those cases that have increased labour and materials costs.
- Provide extra funding for those complex cases with extensive scope of works.
- Reduce Officer time of involvement (Surveyor and OT) and reduce MP complaints by frustrated applicants.
- Reduce timescales required from start to project completion.

Alternative recommendation considered: According to Foundations (The National Body for Disabled Facilities Grants and Home Improvement Agencies in England), the Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant (Top-Up) should be £30,000. This figure has been considered and assessed against data based on research on various recently published Housing Assistance Policies from several Councils, including Unitary Authorities from various geographical areas - excluding London Boroughs - with similar or lower Annual Disabled Facilities Grants Funding Allocations for 2023/2024 – in addition to the £30,000 mandatory grant funding. The proposal of £20,000 is in line with the figure implemented by other Unitary Councils and it is proposed that this will be annually reviewed and always subject to funding availability.

Proposal 2: Means Test Equipment

According to the current policy, all DFG works are means tested, excluding children's applications and applicants with passporting benefits.

It is recommended that there be no means test for equipment cases (installation of a stair-lift, or a ceiling track hoist (CTH), not associated with any other DFG funded building works), up to a maximum cost of £10,000 is introduced.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Reduce Officer time (approx. 45 minutes - 1 ½ hours) and benefit the applicant.
- Assist the applicant by removing the requirement for paperwork/evidence submission (bank statements etc.).
- Reduce timescales required from start to project completion (4-8 weeks).

Alternative recommendation considered – At EAP, members suggested that the original figure of £8,000 is increased to £10,000. When the initial figure to be put forward (£8,000) was considered, this was on the basis that a curved stair-lift or an H-shaped ceiling track hoist (which are the most expensive types of equipment included in this proposal) can be fully covered. It has since been reconsidered and the revised proposal for this is £10,000.

Proposal 3: Means Test (Discretionary Top up - Children's cases)

The current policy does not allow for all means tested applicants with a confirmed client's contribution to be eligible for a Discretionary DFG Grant (Top-Up). Applicants with passporting benefits and children's applications are eligible for a Discretionary DFG (Top-Up), as the parents are not means tested.

This proposal is no longer going forward, i.e. to means test parents for children's applications with regards to the Discretionary DFG Grant (Top-Up) only, so it is now disregarded.

Proposal 4: Land Charges

The current policy stipulates for the following land charges to apply:

- Mandatory £30K grant: Maximum land charge £10,000 (from £5,000K to £15,000)
- Same terms apply on the Discretionary Grant of £10,000: Maximum land charge £5,000.

The two grants are treated as separate awards with a total maximum land charge of £15,000 (£10,000 on mandatory and £5,000 on discretionary)
No land charge on tenant's applications (private Landlords or Housing Associations)

It is recommended that Executive approve the following:

No land charge placed on Through Floor Lift (TFL) cases, including enabling works.

No land charge placed on stair-lifts.

No land charge placed for any amount below £200.

No land charge placed for a child applicant on long-term foster placement.

Land charge waived due to financial hardship and/or if moving properties is to receive care from others.

Reasons for recommendation -

It is recommended that land charges do not apply on the above works because they do not add financial value to the property and/or the proposals are reasonable.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members felt that the amount of £200 – mentioned under item 3 above – was too low to justify the expense of registering a land charge. It was suggested that a higher amount of £1,000 could be considered.

Proposal 5: Fast Track Adaptations

Under the current policy, there is a single North Northamptonshire Waiting List for DFGs. The cases are prioritised based on the priority grading system set by the Occupational Therapist (OT) - standard, urgent or critical - and the date on the OT recommendation.

It is recommended that a “Fast Tracking” process is introduced, outside of the OT priority grading system mentioned above, to assist with hospital discharge cases, terminally ill applicants and palliative care.

Reasons for recommendation -

Bureaucracy will be minimised where possible and alternative equipment / construction solutions will be explored.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and made no further recommendations.

Proposal 6: Dementia Grants

Dementia Grants are not covered by the current policy.

It is proposed that these grants are based on the initial dementia diagnosis and prior to the disease escalating to the stage when major DFG adaptations are recommended. The following adaptations would be covered:

- Safer flooring.

- Labels and signs on doors and cupboards.
- Contrasting colour decorations between walls and floors.
- Installation of contrasting coloured fixtures such as grab rails and toilet seats.
- Task focused lighting in bathrooms and kitchens.
- Assistive technology for monitoring activity or to inform if it is day or night.

It is recommended that the dementia grants are covered by the policy as proposed above with works with a cost value of over £1000. Note that any works below this amount can be covered by the Minor Adaptations budget held by Community Occupational Therapy.

Reasons for recommendation

This proposal will:

Postpone or eliminate the need for more costly adaptations, re-housing, social care due to its preventative nature.

Promote independent and safe living.

Alternative recommendation considered - At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and made no further recommendations.

Proposal 7: Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Grants

Motor Neurone Disease Grants are not covered by the current policy. Applicants with an early MND diagnosis can continue and will choose to carry on working until no longer able to work. Applying for a DFG at this stage will most likely deem them as non-eligible for the grant through the means testing process due to their earnings.

It is recommended to introduce this grant on the basis of disregarding their earnings. This will ensure the adaptations can be in place for when they no longer work and are unable to manage daily activities.

Reasons for recommendation

This proposal will:

- Provide a fast-track process.
- Ensure no means test is carried out for cost of works up to £5K.
- Ignore the applicant's earnings when means testing is carried out at an early stage.
- Enable major adaptations before the disease escalates rapidly.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and made no further recommendations.

Proposal 8: Independent Panel

The current policy, subject to eligibility, allows for applicants to be entitled to a £30,000 mandatory grant and a £10,000 discretionary grant. If the cost of work exceeds the

maximum £40,000 grant, the applicant is required to meet the shortfall, or the works cannot progress.

It is recommended for the introduction of an independent member/officer Panel to review cases on an ad-hoc basis, understand needs and approve further discretionary grants to meet the cost difference over the approved mandatory and discretionary limits, subject to evidence that the applicant is unable to raise the necessary funds themselves.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Enable major adaptations to proceed.
- Potentially provide some savings on Adult Social Care budgets as residents remain in their homes.
- Eliminate cases being put on hold until a resolution to the financial shortfall is found.
- Prevent time consuming conversations on alternative solutions.
- Ensure adaptations are completed for the benefit of the applicant.

This recommendation needs to be formalised by including it in the revised policy. At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and agreed that there will be no need for a monthly set date for the panel members to meet. Instead, these meetings will be called on an ad-hoc basis, and the conversations/decisions can be made over Teams.

Alternative recommendation considered – The current arrangement of exceptional approval via the Assistant Director for Regulatory Services and Executive Member for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up has been informally in place for a while and to maintain this status quo could be considered as an alternative to the proposed Independent Panel.

Proposal 9: Equipment Maintenance

The current policy stipulates that all equipment is covered by the standard 12-month warranty offered by the supplier. After completion of the work, any ongoing maintenance, servicing, repairs, or warranties are the responsibility of the grant recipient. The grant recipient can request a quote for extending the manufacturer's warranty (normally up to 5 years) and purchase this service at their own cost.

It is recommended that all extended warranties are covered by the grant for all equipment for 5 years. Additionally, it is proposed that the grant covers the call out fees, if contacted by the applicant, including any repairs up to £500.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will:

- Provide a better service.
- Assist old applicants with broken equipment up to value of £500.
- Reduce the need for an OT recommendation for new equipment, which will be a saving to the DFG budget.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were keen to ensure the clients' statutory rights are safeguarded. Consideration will be, therefore, given in training the Council's relevant Officers on consumer rights. This training would enable the Council to provide the necessary advice to the applicants.

Proposal 10: Private Landlords (LL) and Housing Associations (HA)

The current policy does not allow for any special provisions for private or social housing tenants. The same DFG eligibility criteria and conditions apply to tenants as owner / occupiers.

It is recommended that the policy will allow to expediate the grant application process for private and social tenants, if: the private LL or HA make the application and manage the works, including provision of drawings / specification for Council's approval and / or carrying out the works.

Reasons for recommendation -

This proposal will

- Provide a positive change for tenants – shorter waiting times.
- Assist with Officer time being able to be spent on other cases.
- Support landlords to make their portfolios more accessible for current and future disabled tenants.

Alternative recommendation considered –

At EAP, members were satisfied with the above proposal and made no further recommendations.

Proposal 11: Non-mandatory works

The current policy makes no special provisions for non-mandatory DFG works not covered by the legislation e.g. safe play space and/or play equipment, sensory space, or study space. There are several variables to set a fixed policy on awards for non-mandatory works.

It is recommended that the following changes are approved with respect to non-mandatory work:

All proposed non-mandatory work will be reviewed between the Lead Officer for DFGs, Surveyor, OT, carers, special support, GP etc. before confirming them as reasonable, practicable and required by the applicant.

All non-mandatory work up to an estimated cost value of £1,000 will be approved by the Disabled Facilities Grants Manager.

All non-mandatory work, of a more extensive design proposal, will be subject to a feasibility visit by a surveyor to identify the estimated cost of works. If in excess of £1,000 and subject to the approval in principle by the Disabled Facilities Grants Manager, the case will be reviewed by the Independent Panel before approval or rejection can be confirmed.

Reasons for recommendation -

To assist more people, even those not necessarily covered by the legislation.

Alternative recommendation considered -

At EAP, members wished to know whether the above proposal will affect different groups of people differently, and if social housing tenants or leaseholders for flats or communal areas would be excluded. This proposal will apply to all groups of people deemed as eligible for a DFG in line with the relevant legislation. It is confirmed that the following applies:

Leaseholders are eligible for DFGs, provided they meet the grant's criteria related to disability and income assessment.

The remaining lease term is not less than a period of five years.

Communal areas are included, subject to receipt of the owner's permission.

Proposal 12: Unchanged Policy: HomeMove Grants

**It is recommended that there is no change to the following grant conditions:
To fund more cost-effective alternatives to providing a mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant.**

Maximum grant £6,000.

Cost of adaptations (maximum £5,000).

Relocation costs (maximum £1,000).

Alternative recommendation considered – At EAP, members questioned whether the cost of moving properties has risen due to inflation and whether £6,000 is still adequate assistance. The following has since been determined:

A person who lives in England or Wales and is in receipt of Housing Benefits, could apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to help with moving costs.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Moving House Grant amounts vary based on an individual's circumstances and are generally intended to cover moving-related costs like removal charges, rent deposits, and related expenses. The maximum grant available is £5,000 but could be as low as £500.

Given that the Government provides this £5,000 for eligible residents, it has been deemed unnecessary to increase the Council's HomeMove grant.

Proposal 13: Other Policies: Home Repair Grant

It is recommended that all grants included in the current policy, namely Renovation Grants (maximum grant £10,000), Landlord Renovation Grants (maximum grant £10,000) and Home Repair Assistance Grants (maximum grant £5,000) are replaced with one Home Repair Grant.

This grant will offer a maximum £15,000 assistance to eligible owner-occupied residents, on a means tested benefit and/or low income. This grant aims to prevent Category 1 hazards in the property, address safety improvements, electrical works, thermal insulation, affordable warmth, energy efficiency or lack of a heating system.

753 Highways Asset Management Policy and Strategy

The Chair invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to speak on this item. Cllr Hakewill suggested that residents were driving on the worst roads in living memory and questioned why the strategy before the Executive would do anything to improve this experience.

The Chair thanked Cllr Hakewill for his contribution before inviting the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets, Cllr Matt Binley to introduce a report that presented and sought adoption of the Council's new Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy. The documents set out how the Council would best manage the Highway Network, taking into consideration customer needs, local priorities, asset condition and best use of available resources, and the impact this would have on the future delivery of highway maintenance.

Cllr Binley reported that, as detailed within the strategy, the highway asset management plans would be reviewed and developed for each highway asset, which would detail service levels, performance targets and other relevant aspects as detailed in the report.

The meeting heard that it was important that the Council adopt these documents to replace the previous Northamptonshire County Council versions dating from 2019. It was noted that these documents formed part of a suite of documents that managed how the highways network was maintained, with the policy and strategy being more focused strategic documents that linked in with the Council's corporate commitments and followed national best practice.

It was noted that both the policy and strategy had been considered and revised by both Prosperous Communities Executive Advisory Panel and the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive approved the Highway Asset Management Policy and Strategy.

Reasons for Recommendations – The updates to these documents are the first step in refreshing the wide suite of documents that govern how the Council manages and maintains its highway network. By adopting these new documents the Council will:

- Establish a clear strategic position that supports ongoing operational requirements and the Council's duties under the Highways Act 1980.
- Enact a rebrand of key documents under the North Northamptonshire Council banner
- Set the basis for the cost effective management of highway assets
- Improve its decision making in terms of budget disaggregation and future investment.
- Provide a framework that gives clarity to service users as to what its priorities and service standards are.

Alternative Options Considered – The alternative option is not to adopt the revised Policy and Strategy. The Council would continue to deliver its highway services

through its contract with Kier and the overarching guidance governing these activities would continue to be the 2019 Northamptonshire County Council documents. However, the previous guidance does not reflect the specific needs of North Northamptonshire, nor does it present a credible approach to the way the Council makes decisions on how it prioritises the funds available for highway maintenance across its highway network. For these reasons, this option is not recommended.

754 Active Communities Strategic Framework

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the meeting. Cllr Maxwell spoke of the need for people to be active to avoid future health problems and welcomed the all-age element of the documents. Cllr Maxwell made reference to the need for improved sporting and leisure facilities in the former East Northamptonshire area, while activities such as sailing, volleyball and urban sports required promotion.

The Chair thanked Cllr Maxwell for her comments before inviting the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism, Cllr Helen Howell to present a report that introduced the North Northamptonshire Active Communities Strategic Framework.

It was heard that the Active Communities Strategy was the overarching document within the framework for North Northamptonshire and set out the active communities' strategic outcomes and priorities for the next five years which would feed into and influence a number of other strategic plans set out by the Council.

Cllr Howell noted that the framework had been under development for approximately a year, the Council working with consultants, Max Associates to undertake a detailed and comprehensive programme of work. The framework comprised the Active Communities Strategy that aimed to get people more active and two National Planning Policy documents, the Leisure Facilities Strategy and the Playing Pitch Strategy that had been drafted following nationally defined technical methodology.

Members noted that an Active Communities Strategic Partnership had been established, chaired by the Chief Executive of Northamptonshire Sport, and including representatives from across the Council, leisure providers and other relevant stakeholders to oversee the delivery of the strategy and to deliver the Keeping Active priority of the new North Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Cllr Howell reported on the significant stakeholder and public engagement undertaken in relation to the strategy, with a focus on the shift from a traditional leisure strategy to one all about active wellbeing and enabling residents to make being active an easy feature of their everyday lives. Engagement had also focussed on the usage of the current leisure offer and barriers to participation. Outcomes identified within the strategy were outlined to the meeting and it was noted that detailed action plans were currently being co-produced with the Active Communities Strategic Partnership

Details of the Leisure Facilities Strategy were provided to the meeting, with it being heard that the aim of this strategy was to improve the health and wellbeing of residents by planning for the appropriate facilities to meet the needs of an increasing population. The strategy informed the Council on where and when to maximise investment opportunities to improve its leisure facilities, provided documented evidence of current use and future needs for sports/leisure facilities within the

authority; focusing on the quantity and quality issues in relation to supply and demand until 2041.

It was reported that development of this strategy included a detailed assessment of the Council's leisure estate. The findings of this assessment indicated that some of the Council's leisure assets were ageing and required investment and the associated action plan was summarised within the report.

Cllr Howell reported that the strategy and action plan provided the Council with the detailed evidence-base required for engagement with potential funding bodies to protect and enhance the leisure offer in North Northamptonshire, with examples of successful funding bids being detailed to the meeting.

It was heard that an investment plan for the Council's leisure estate would be developed taking a number of different aspects into account alongside the recommendations in the strategy and details of these were provided to the meeting.

The Executive noted that the final strategy within the framework was the Playing Pitch Strategy which replaced outdated strategies from the former sovereign council areas. The new strategy had assessed the supply and demand of pitches across the Council area to identify ways that any shortfalls could be addressed to meet current and future demand. This strategy had been developed in line with Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance and included a full audit of pitches and demand across North Northamptonshire.

The action plan for this strategy provided a clear set of recommendations that were prioritised for each sport and site and would be used by all stakeholders involved in its development when looking at the future provision of outdoor sports facilities. It was noted that it would be used to identify where investment needed to be prioritised for each sport in order to meet any of the shortfalls that had been identified.

Cllr Howell offered her thanks to all those involved in producing the draft strategies, noting the lengthy production process and the valuable information contained within the documents.

The Chair welcomed the framework and associated strategies as setting the active communities agenda for years to come.

Cllr David Brackenbury noted that the documents before members were extremely comprehensive, with a significant level of work having gone into their production and impacting all Council directorates. It was heard that healthier outcomes for residents were beneficial for the Council, with a need to target areas of inactivity going forward. Cllr Brackenbury thanked all those involved in the production of the documents.

Cllr Gill Mercer spoke to welcome the report and commended all those involved in producing the strategies, noting the beneficial health outcomes from people being active.

Cllr David Howes spoke to specifically reference works at Desborough Leisure Centre and the need to unlock further provision for leisure facilities.

Cllr Scott Edwards also spoke to welcome the report and acknowledged the work that had gone into the production of the strategies. It was heard that evidence gathered as

part of the production process would allow the Council to apply for grant funding for leisure facilities, with active lifestyles being positive for mental health.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved the Active Communities Strategy;
- b) Approved the Leisure Facilities Strategy;
- c) Approved the Playing Pitch Strategy;
- d) Delegated authority to the Assistant Director, Communities and Leisure in consultation with the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism to take any actions necessary to further develop detailed action plans and investment plans which will support delivery of the strategies.

Reasons for Recommendations: To support the Council and its partners to prioritise activities which will increase physical activity levels, which in turn will help to improve health outcomes, reduce health inequalities, improve community connectedness and cohesion and promote a sense of pride in place. In addition to inform future investment plans which will assist the Council to secure developer contributions and other external funding to deliver the recommendations in the Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategies.

Alternative Options considered:

- The alternative option would be to not develop an Active Communities strategic framework and instead to develop separate Leisure, Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch strategies in isolation of each other. The Facilities and Playing Pitch Strategies are legally required under the National Planning Policy Framework and so there is no other option than to produce them for North Northamptonshire.
- The option to develop a separate Leisure strategy is not recommended because a traditional leisure strategy would have focussed simply on the Council's leisure service offer. It would not have taken a whole systems approach to increasing physical activity, working with our partners, our sports clubs and our communities and taking the broadest view possible of the sorts of activity and the environment and infrastructure which helps make being active the easy choice for our residents, workforce and visitors. This would have considerably limited the opportunities and impact of this strategic framework, not just on physical activity levels but on the population health and wellbeing and reduction in health inequalities outcomes for the residents and communities of North Northamptonshire.
- The Active Communities strategic framework, based on comprehensive data, evidence and intelligence, will inform such things as future partnership

activity and feasibility studies which are required to secure external funding and developer contributions to enable investment into the North Northamptonshire assets and infrastructure. It will also ensure a co-ordinated approach to the Council's corporate and Big 50 Vision and to the Integrated Care System strategic objectives.

755 Knights Farm, Rushden – Overage Agreement

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to speak in relation to this item, however, the subject of Cllr Maxwell's comments did not relate specifically to the subject of the report before members.

The Chair then invited the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets, Cllr Matt Binley to introduce a report that sought authorisation for the variation of the long stop date on the deed of variation for Knights Farm, Rushden, originally approved by Executive on 20th April 2023 and subsequently extended at Executive on 18th April 2024.

It was noted that the deed of variation was due to expire at the end of April 2025, however, it was requested that the long stop date be amended to 30th April 2026, with delegated authority approved to further extend the date should it be required.

An overview of the history of the overage agreement was provided to the meeting as background information to the recommendations.

It was reported that the site formed part of the Rushden East Sustainable Urban Extension, which included houses, offices, schools, a park, community facilities and cemetery land. The request for the extension had arisen due to planning matters; this delay was not due to the landowner, developer or Council, however further negotiations with a statutory consultee were required.

Cllr Binley stated that the deed of variation of the overage provision should result in a significant capital receipt to the Council and were the overage agreement not extended, this would then revert to the original 1998 agreement and the owners had indicated they would not proceed for the disposal of the land. The original agreement was due to expire in 2038 at which time the owners would be free to dispose of the land without having to pay any capital receipt to the Council.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- i) Agreed to a further extension to April 2026 of the Planning Longstop date in the Promotion Agreement and consequently an extension to the Deed of Variation on the same terms approved by the Executive in December 2023.
- ii) Delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Assets and Environment in consultation with the Executive Member for Highways, Travel &

Assets, to approve further extensions to the Promotion Agreement and Deed of Variation, should that be required.

Reasons for Recommendation: The reasons for recommending the extension of the Planning Longstop date in the Promotion Agreement is that it will:

- a) Provide a more definite timeframe for Planning to be resolved as April 2025 is now looking unlikely.
- b) It will provide the Council with the most certainty that the scheme will be brought forward for housing.
- c) The Deed of Variation to the overage provision on the title to the land will continue as long as there is a valid Promotion Agreement. Agreeing to extend the Planning Longstop date is the most cost-effective way to ensure that the Deed of Variation to the overage provision continues and significantly reduces the amount of legal and other professional fees potentially payable by the Council.
- d) The decision supports the corporate plan and the Rushden East Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE).

Alternative Options Considered: If the Council does not consent to extend the Planning Longstop Date in the Promotion Agreement, the Deed of Variation to the overage provisions on the Land's Title will expire after 30th April 2025 and any subsequent change of use or planning consent would be subject to the original (unvaried) transfer terms as set out in the original overage agreement. This would hypothetically result in a larger capital receipt for the Council; however, the Landowner and Promotor have stated that if they cannot obtain an extension from the Council, they will not pursue the Promotion Agreement and Planning Application and will let it lapse. This would result in the site not being developed and would create issues for the Rushden (SUE) because it sits in the centre of the site, and the Council would not receive a capital receipt.

756 Earls Barton Primary School Expansion - Additional Funding

The Chair invited the Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills, Cllr Scott Edwards to introduce a report that sought to provide the Executive with an update on the Earls Barton Primary School expansion project and further sought approval for additional funding funded primarily by S106 funding and supplemented by the Department for Education 'Basic Needs Grant'.

Cllr Edwards stated that the expansion works at the site were well underway with the maximum pupil roll increasing from 525 to 630 once complete. Complications at the site arising from the removal of significant quantities of contaminated soil that had only been identifiable once works had commenced and flooding over the Christmas period had resulted in additional £761,000 of funding being required to complete works at the site. It was anticipated that these works would be finished prior to the September 2025 intake.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the request contained in the Capital Update Report elsewhere on the agenda for budget approval for £761.3k of additional funding from DFE Basic Needs Funding to complete the Earls Barton Primary School Expansion scheme.
- b) Delegated to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Executive Member of Children, Families, Education and to take all necessary actions to deliver the project.

Reasons for Recommendations: The recommendations set out above allow the Council to move forward with the Expansion of Earls Barton Primary School by:

- Adopting the most cost-effective course of action.
- Minimising financial risk to the Council of further increased costs and liabilities to stop works.
- Supporting the Council in delivering its statutory duties to provide a sufficient supply of school places.

Alternative Options Considered: The only other option available to the Council is if we do not provide the additional funding, this would therefore stop the construction and termination of the contract:

- a) There would be significant costs to the Council to shut down the works, as the site is currently a construction site and would need to be returned to a useable state and council has entered a contract therefore there could be legal costs relating to contract terminations.
- b) The S106 funding was directly attributed to Earls Barton Primary School and if it cannot be spent on this school would have to be discussed by with the developers and may need to be handed back.
- c) There would be significant reputational damage to abandon a school project after construction works have started.
- d) NNC have a duty to provide sufficient school places.

757 Green Hill Solar Farm

The Chair invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to address the Executive. Cllr Hakewill stated that most people would be opposed to covering farmland with solar panels when siting panels on buildings would be less damaging for the environment. Cllr Hakewill queried the Council's policy for such installations and queried why reports on Green Hill Solar Farm were not being tabled at the Council's Planning Committee (North) as well as Planning (South), with plans sought for a joint committee to convene to consider the proposal. Queries were also raised regarding resourcing the Council's involvement in the Development Consent Order and the report not having been presented to the Council's scrutiny function.

The Chair then invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to speak on this item. Cllr Maxwell referenced the vast scale of the proposal and the potential impact in terms of environmental damage, flooding, air quality, noise and vibration considerations.

The Chair thanked speakers for their comments before inviting the Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration, Cllr David Brackenbury to introduce a report that advised the Executive of the proposed Green Hill Solar Farm development, the Development Consent Order planning process it was subject to; and sought appropriate delegations to the Executive Director of Place and Economy in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration, to respond to consultations and engagement from the developer and the Planning Inspectorate.

Cllr Brackenbury noted that the scheme, that could generate up to 500MW of power, was deemed to be a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and was therefore subject to approval by the Secretary of State.

The scheme proposed the creation of 1200 hectares of solar panels running across nine sites from Lavendon in Buckinghamshire to near the village of Old in Northamptonshire. As the majority of the proposal was sited within Northamptonshire, as hosting authority the Council would have to work with the developer in all aspects of pre-application and determinations. As a consultee, the Council would also be making representations as part of the lengthy planning inquiry when the application was considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

Cllr Brackenbury confirmed that representations for all areas impacted by the proposal were welcome to be submitted to the Council's Planning Committee (South) when it was time to consider the application.

It was noted that the proposal had been brought forward as Development Consent Order by the Secretary of State and the Council had to engage with process in order to articulate the concerns of residents affected by the proposal so these could be considered as part of the proposal examination. It was noted as being important that the views of the Council and residents were considered as part of the process.

Cllr Brackenbury noted that permission for the development to proceed was not guaranteed and it was of vital importance that the Council engaged at every step of the lengthy planning process.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Endorsed the Regulation 11 Notice to submit a draft statutory consultation response on the Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) in regard to the proposed Green Hill Solar Farm.
- b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place and Economy, in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration, to respond to consultations and engagement from the developer and the Planning Inspectorate (including the Examining

Authority) during the following Development Consent Order stages: Pre-application; Acceptance; Pre-Examination; Examination; and Post-Examination.

- c) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place and Economy to deal with post-decision matters (if development consent is granted) including matters such as determination of applications under the Development Consent Order consenting regime and enforcement in respect of any Development Consent Order granted by the Secretary of State.

Reason for Recommendations –

- To adhere to the guidance set down by the Planning Inspectorate to ensure adequate delegations are in place to enable the Council to represent the interests of North Northamptonshire Council as ‘Host Authority’ and participate in the Development Consent Order stages within the tight formal timeframes.

Alternative Options Considered –

- It has been considered whether the authority of the Executive should be sought at each of the different stages of the Development Consent Order process. This has been rejected due to the need to meet statutory timescales and the risk that the impacts of the development on North Northamptonshire’s local communities would not be fully considered.
- The Council could also decide not to respond further to the Development Consent Order process. This course of action is not recommended due to the risk that the impacts of the development on North Northamptonshire’s local communities would not be fully considered and any opportunity to secure mitigation for the impacts would be lost should consent be granted. Furthermore, this option is likely to be reputationally damaging to the Council, especially given its status as a ‘Statutory Consultee’ and ‘Host Authority’.

758 Capital Programme Update 2024/25

The Chair invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to address the Executive. Cllr Hakewill queried how the community could have confidence in management of capital expenditure in relation to an overspend regarding Earls Barton School expansion and questioned what contingency had been built into the project.

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

Cllr Bunday noted that a full explanation had been provided by Cllr Scott Edwards regarding the overspend in relation to Earls Barton School expansion as part of the introduction to item 9 on the agenda.

The Leader spoke to welcome the Council's continued investment in leisure facilities and schools as evidenced by the report before members.

Cllr Helen Howell welcomed the leisure funding within the recommendation and noted that the Council continued to seek funding pots for further investments.

Cllr Scott Edwards stated that the overspend position for Earls Barton school expansion had been explained earlier in the meeting and the community could have faith in the maintenance of capital expenditure given the overspend was over and above the Council's control with 30 different school expansion projects completed within budget to date.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- i) Approved the following changes into the capital programme:
 - a. Earls Barton School Expansion – additional budget approval of £762k in 2025/26 to be funded from Basic Needs capital grant.
 - b. Swanspool Tennis Courts refurbishment – budget approval of £70k in 2024/25, to be funded £50k from external grant and £20k from capital receipts.
 - c. West Glebe Park, astroturf resurfacing – budget approval for £55k in 2025/26, to be funded £25k from external grant and £30k virement from the Leisure minor works budget.

Reasons for Recommendations: These are set out in greater detail within section 5 of the report, but can be summarised as helping to meet the Council's corporate plan objectives:

- Green sustainable environment
- Better, brighter futures
- Safe and thriving places
- Connected communities
- Active, fulfilled lives

Alternative Options Considered:

- For those schemes which are grant funded or from Section 106 contributions, they are undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the grant conditions/ legal agreement and, therefore, there is no alternative option proposed in this report.

- Where individual schemes are over £0.5m, separate reports are included elsewhere on this agenda, and these set out the wider options that were considered before reaching the proposals put forward.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 11.28 am