

Place and Economy 17/01/23

Overview

Four key functional areas:

- Assets and Environment
- Growth and Regeneration
- Highways and Waste
- Regulatory Services

Five Executive Members covering the areas across the Directorate. A draft Net Budget of £68.5m in 2023/24 – around 20% of the overall budget. A draft Capital Programme 2023/26 over £27m. A draft Development Pool 2023/26 around £137m.

Growth & Regeneration

Service area covering – Planning management, Planning policy, Minerals & waste planning, Planning enforcement, Developer contributions, Street naming & numbering, Economic Growth, Digital infrastructure, Regeneration, External funding & investment, Climate change, Flood & water management.

Key Objectives

- Ensure successful operation of 'lead authority' service provision for Minerals & Waste Planning and Digital Infrastructure.
- Complete review/restructure of planning, economic development and regeneration services.
- Develop an aggregated and upscaled Planning Enforcement team.
- Create Climate Change and Flood & Water teams.
- Complete Action Plan from the PAS Review which will include harmonisation of procedures for backoffice processes across the planning service.
- Continue development of new Strategic Plan, Gypsy & Traveller site provision, Economic Strategy for North Northants.
- Progress delivery of key regeneration projects (i.e. Corby Town Plan and Kettering Heritage Action Zone).
- Lead on the implementation of the corporate Carbon Management Plan and work towards carbon neutrality.
- Increase gigabit and full fibre broadband availability across North Northants.
- Attract external funding to the area to support corporate priorities.

MTFP

Members queried whether there would be sufficient staffing capacity to deal with the outcomes of the East Northamptonshire Local Plan once adopted, together with other development control work associated with major applications e.g. Kettering Energy Park.

Officers confirmed that the planning service was currently undergoing review. Although the retention and recruitment of staff was difficult, it was hoped that capacity would be included following any staffing restructure to deal with the projected workload in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Regulatory Services

Service area covering – Bereavement Services, Building Control, Business Continuity Planning, Emergency Planning, Environmental Health, Licensing, Local Land Charges, Private Sector Housing, Trading Standards, Traveller Unit.

Key Objectives

- Complete restructure of Regulatory Services functions linking to Future Ways of Working and Asset rationalisation programmes
- Produce and consult on NNC Street Trading, Sex Establishments and Animal Welfare Policies
- Produce and consult on new Fees and Charges model for Hire Vehicle Licensing and Future Options for Zoning/Dezoning for Hackney Carriage Licensing.
- Develop a new Air Quality Strategy and Action Plan to deliver Improvements in Local Air Quality linked to Public Health Air Quality Project Officer funding.
- Review Regulatory Services Business Support Offer (Better Business for All)
- Conclude procurement and implementation of new Trading Standards Civica CX Database and Metrology Lab relocation.
- Review and Update the Northants Traveller Unit Policy, Operation and Governance arrangements with reference to the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.
- Implement LLC Data Migration Strategy and supporting action plan to meet HMLR requirements.
- Review and Implement new competency validation and training requirements for BCS's to comply with Building Act 2022.
- Embed and validate Business Continuity arrangements across NNC and agree revised Business Continuity Strategy which identifies NNC's critical functions and priorities following BIA process.
- Review Community Risk Register and response plans with LRF partners to support an effective local incident response.

Members queried in the absence of a new NNC Empty Homes Strategy what policy were officers working against.

Officers confirmed that the previously approved local plans were being utilised until such time as an NNC plan was adopted.

Members queried that in former councils, Members were able to obtain data regarding air quality e.g. Kettering, Rothwell. Were readings still being taken and could Members receive this information.

Officers confirmed that readings were still being taken in various areas and this data could be shared with Members upon request.

Members requested clarification in relation what support was available to local business.

Officers confirmed that officers provided statutory services and provision of guidance where required to do so at no additional charge. Anything outside legal requirements e.g. training was chargeable.

Members queried in relation to the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 whether this would make it easier to move on travellers on unauthorised sites.

Officers confirmed that further discussions with Police as a consequence of the new powers in the Act were required, however in certain cases the Act was likely to provide additional powers for the Police and/or Council to take action more efficiently and effectively.

With regard to Fees & Charges concern was expressed that these had not been made available for scrutiny as part of the budget scrutiny process. Fees & Charges were a vital income stream and Members felt that these should be available for perusal, whilst recognising that any increase/reduction to these was a delegated Executive responsibility.

Officers agreed to provide a directory of fees & charges to Members.

In addition, there was concern that figures presented across the budget presentations gave no indication of the 2022/23 base figures, or an indication of the % increase over 2022/23, thus making it difficult for Members to assess the robustness of the proposals or the indication of trends.

Members noted the proposed reduction in income from Bereavement Services of £300k in 2023/24. Members wondered whether there were likely to be any other legacy income targets that had been set which would require adjustment.

Officers confirmed that there had been some legacy targets which needed to be reviewed and reset, however these were manageable. The Bereavement Services target from the former BCW was not manageable so needed to be brought forward as part of the budget setting process.

Members noted that it was desirable that the two crematoria within NNC were not placed in a competitive situation with each other, and there was a harmonisation of fees. Members also raised concern that there seemed to be a lack of scrutiny of the Board of Directors of the Wellingborough crematorium.

Officers confirmed that it was desirable that neither site was in competition with each other and fees should be harmonised. In relation to the Board, officers confirmed that governance arrangements were currently under review.

Highways and Waste

Service area covering – Highways maintenance, Home to school transport, Strategic transport planning, Highways street-lighting (Balfour Beatty PFI), Active Travel, Highways Development Management, Recycling and waste collection and disposal, Street cleaning, Bulky waste collections, Enviro-crime, Housing waste and recycling centres (joint contract until 2025), Closed landfills.

Key Objectives

- Embed the new Highways contract with Kier.
- Complete recruitment to the new highways and transport team.
- Implement and establish the restructured waste and recycling team.
- Implement new harmonised garden waste arrangements across North Northants.
- Commence procurement of the waste disposal contract.
- Review options for the future delivery of Household Waste and Recycling Centres.
- Implement Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership.
- Progress Active Travel schemes and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.
- Support the development and delivery of the Climate Change Management Plan.
- Progress the Business Case and planning application for the Isham Bypass.

It was noted that the new Highways contract with Kier had commenced in September 2022. Executive had made the decision to harmonise the collection of green waste across NNC and arrangements for this were now being rolled-out. For the implementation of the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership, Government funding was being sought.

MTFP

Members queried whether there was any budget allocation for the replacing/resurfacing of roads. Members recognised that potholes and cracks were addressed but wondered whether there was budget for replacement.

Officers confirmed that an investment programme would be required, as there were currently no funds to undertake significant work of that nature.

Members requested information regarding the Isham by pass project. How much had been requested and how much had been received to date.

NB. Later in the presentation it was confirmed that £50m had been requested and awaiting confirmation, with £1.8m received towards the cost of development of a business plan.

Members noted the additional £7m required in 2023/24 for the Home to School Transport scheme.

Officers confirmed that this was a result of contract inflation and increasing demand for the service. This was likely to be a significant growth area for future years. The current budget was £11m. Officers were working to minimise the cost of the scheme within the parameters set.

Members noted that due to changes in regulations affecting the collection and disposal of soft furnishing bulky items there was a £100k pressure. The new regulations came into force on 1st January 2023.

In relation to the harmonisation of green waste charges it was noted that it would result in a reduction in expenditure of £1.358m in 2023/24. NNC would not be able to cover the total cost of the scheme from the charges but it would reduce the cost to NNC of rolling the scheme out. NNC would not make a profit from the scheme but it would reduce the cost of the service to the Council.

In relation to the £5k saving on the review of the litter bin network, officers stressed that this would not result in an impact to the service provided to the public or the removal of existing bins.

Members noted a £50k saving following the promotion of the food waste service in Corby and East Northamptonshire and enquired how this figure had been reached.

Officers confirmed that a reduction in food waste going into general waste would reduce landfill charges. It was an estimated figure.

Assets & Environment

Service area covering – Facilities Management, Asset Management, Energy Management, Capital Projects (Property), Fleet Vehicles, Grounds Maintenance, Parks & Open Spaces, Country Parks, Public Car Parks, Parking Enforcement.

Key Objectives

- Complete Restructure of the Asset & Environment Service across all teams.
- Deliver a new Parking Enforcement Service team as part of service disaggregation by April 2023.
- Implement the adopted Tree Care Policy and Pollinator Strategy across North Northamptonshire to provide a consistent land management service across Grounds and Woodlands teams.
- Deliver Environmental Schemes for which external grant funding has been secured for, such as Woodland Accelerator Programme, Treescape funding, and Active Parks project.
- Develop a Car Parking Strategy to review public car parking arrangements, including Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure.
- Implement the Asset Disposal Policy to support our office and wider asset rationalisation programme (linked to Future Way of Working).
- Implement the Building & Fleet elements of the Corporate Carbon Management Plan to support the Council's carbon neutral commitments for its assets.
- Deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for North Northants.

MTFP

Members queried what plans were there for the Council's estate, as the Council owned a lot of buildings, some of which may be underused. Was repurposing of buildings being considered.

Officers confirmed that work was being undertaken to identify the best use of the Council's estate or where appropriate, consideration of disposal opportunities.

It was noted that some rationalisation of assets was an important part of the transformation process, as well as ensuring services were provided to residents in an efficient and effective manner.

Members queried whether the Council achieved economies of scale in relation to the purchase of vehicles.

Officers confirmed that they worked closely with procurement colleagues to ensure the most appropriate and economical purchase or lease options available.

Members noted that the income from Corby car parks were estimated to be reduced by £108k in 2023/24.

Officers confirmed that currently income was lower within the Corby car parks as usage had yet to recover to pre-lockdown figures. The reassessment of income was considered prudent.

Capital

In relation to Capital schemes a sum of £15,902,266 was being proposed for 2023/24.

In relation to the East Kettering scheme, it was confirmed that this included income from developer contributions.

The £19.9m from the Corby Town Fund had been allocated.

Details of schemes within the draft Development Pool were also circulated. These currently totalled over £38.7m for 2023/24. It was noted that the schemes listed LTP Maintenance, LTP Integrated Transport and Incentive Fund had now been included in the Capital Programme following confirmation of funding from the DfT.

END