

Item 12 - Councillor Questions, Responses and Supplementaries – 31st August and 26 October 2023

Questions Carried over from 31st August 2023

No	Received from	Executive Member Responsible	Question	Answer
1.	Cllr Lyn Buckingham	Cllr Matt Binley	<p>In the past year how many reported fly tips have been removed by NNC out of all fly tips reported in the year, and at what overall cost to the council?</p> <p>Supplementary Question – At a time when every penny counts, could we collect the data on how much it is costing us in fly tipping?</p>	<p>In the period between July 2022 and June 2023 the council removed 3,008 incidents of fly tipping. The service is unable to provide an exact amount on how much this cost as the details are aggregated with other service and waste disposal activity, but it is estimated that the cost of addressing fly tipping for the same period is approximately £350,000.</p> <p>Supplementary Response – In the last period it cost approximately £350,000, so we do collect data, it just takes a while to articulate each year. The information is now also recorded centrally by Government (as of last year) and they are now refining that information. Having only this week had a meeting with the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Environmental Quality I know they are currently working on changing the data and how it is recorded and that this information will be available to compare amongst councils.</p>

Full Council – 26 October 2023

No	Received from	Executive Member Responsible	Question	Answer
2.	Cllr Lyn Buckingham	Cllr Lloyd Bunday	What impact has the cost of living crisis had on the Council's ability to maximise its income collection?	<p>The Council's main area of income is derived through the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates. Together these amount c£286m (or 85%) of the funding that the Council needs to meet is net spending requirement of £336m in 2023/24. This excludes general fees and charges which are included with the net spend budgets for each of the service areas.</p> <p>The recent Revenues and Benefits Annual Performance Report 2022/23 submitted to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee in August set out the collection rate for Council Tax and Business Rates, noting that both had increased since the previous year. The latest performance report for 2023/24 also continues to show a strong in-year collection rate.</p> <p>The other main area of income for the Council's General Fund revenue budget, other than government grants, is fees and charges including rentals. These will include items such as client contributions for care provision, planning fees, lease income and leisure charges.</p> <p>The current monitoring of income budgets has shown that the position has remained relatively stable overall in the major areas of income collection. The Council, however, remains mindful of the prevailing economic climate and the potential effect on residents and</p>

				<p>businesses which may result in an adverse impact on income (including a slow-down in expected growth) and this risk is referenced in the monthly budget monitoring reports.</p> <p>Areas to note within fees and charges are set out below.</p> <p>Adult Social Care fees relate, in the main, to client contributions towards the package of care that is in place. The current monitoring indicates that this is forecast to be delivered on budget.</p> <p>The Council has a significant investment estate, contributing over £13m each year to Council budgets. Whilst the income continues to meet budget needs, we are aware of tenants that are struggling due to increased costs, such as utilities, and some that have left their units due to challenging economic circumstance. Whilst it is important the Council uphold commercial contracts to meet its fiduciary and legal duties, we do work with tenants who are seeking support to continue their business where we can, through monthly rather than quarterly billing or payment plans.</p> <p>Planning fee income in 2023/24 is currently projected to be approximately 3% lower than the previous year. Income in this area fluctuates from year to year and it is thought that the current predicted reduction in income is most likely the result of the impact of the</p>
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				<p>increased cost of borrowing. This will lead some businesses and residents to the conclusion that the current national economic climate is not the right time to invest in development.</p> <p>Leisure income is performing well. In-house levels of membership are the highest they have ever been, but the other leisure operators are still working to get to pre-covid levels – there does seem to have been a shift in leisure members in these areas changing to pay as you go which may be a reflection of the cost of living and not wishing to commit to a Direct Debit. Similarly in Culture Tourism and Heritage, for example at Chester House, the income has held up over the last 12 months and seen an increase in line with business plan projections.</p> <p>The Registrations Service has identified a concern over the lower number of weddings being booked this year. This may be a result of the cost-of-living crisis but could also be explained by the post lockdown backlog having been cleared in 2022/23. The service has introduced a smaller ceremony option (higher than statutory but more limited in guest numbers) to cater to those who may want to have a smaller wedding to try and keep costs down.</p> <p>Separately, the Housing Revenue Account relies heavily upon rental income to support the provision of services in this area. The collection of rental income compared to budget can be influenced by an</p>
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				<p>individual's circumstances as well as changes in the assumed levels of right to buy properties and voids.</p> <p>The service has seen an increase in rent arrears or tenants advising that they will need to claim benefit. To support tenants the housing income team is being more proactive in offering support. This includes assisting tenants to make applications for correct benefits, offering budgeting support and more flexibility in the ability to recover debt and assisting with debt management.</p> <p>Income and expenditure plans completed with tenants have shown increases to costs such as food, utility bills and transport to work, so where previously tenants could cover larger payments to council related debts they are now having more difficulty. The Council is reviewing repayment schedules to ensure consistent payments can be achieved longer term, and to sustain tenancies and avoid evictions.</p>
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Questions to 26 October 2023

No.	Received from	Executive Member (or Officer) Responsible	Question	Answer
3.	Cllr Emily Fedorowycz	Cllr Harriet Pentland	<p>How much of the climate change budget has been spent to date, how much has been allocated to date, and how much has been spent on the three biggest projects?</p> <p>Supplementary Question – Can we be assured that this £1m will be spent by the end of the allotted period?</p>	<p>The Climate Change Investment Fund budget amounts to a total of £1m spread over a three-year period between 2022 – 2025. As £250k of this budget is allocated to 2024-25, £750k is the total budget up to the 31 March 2024. Expenditure against this budget is principally guided by the Council’s Carbon Management Plan, which was approved by Executive in December 2022 and to date, £425,255 of the fund has been allocated by the Climate Change Investment Fund Approval Panel.</p> <p>Three largest spends from the Fund to date are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £208k for Corporate Buildings Energy Surveys/Stock Condition Surveys as seed funding to enable application for Public Sector Decarbonisation Funding • £110k for the purchase of battery-operated equipment to replace fossil fuel powered items • £50k to fund a Residential Energy Efficiency Officer for Private Sector Housing <p>Supplementary Response – A large proportion of the money has already been allocated and I am pretty confident that we’re going to get through all of the money that we’ve allocated quite quickly and</p>

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				we're pleased to be supporting them in the right ways.
4.	Cllr Emily Fedorowycz	Cllr Harriet Pentland	<p>Given the council's carbon management plan has been given a rating of 42% on its Climate Emergency Scorecard, what are the main actions being taken to improve this score?</p> <p>Supplementary Question – We have now been rescored and we are now at 22% even with our new Carbon Management Plan, so how are we confident that we're going to have successful implement of the Plan when we are falling behind on our actions. How are we going to rectify the situation and make sure we have a clear road map?</p>	<p>The rating referenced relates to an assessment of local authorities by Climate Emergency UK (CEUK) in 2021. This rating was the assessment made at that time for North Northamptonshire Council and was published in 2022. It is not a rating of the Council's Carbon Management Plan, which had not been produced at this time, but a range of measures determined by CEUK. Since this assessment the Council has produced and adopted a Carbon Management Plan and is confident that successful implementation of the actions outlined in the Plan should improve the rating and help deliver the target of being carbon neutral by 2030.</p> <p>Supplementary Response:- The Organisation changed the way in which Councils are scored so up and down the country, councils have seen their scores dramatically change from one year to the next. We are not unusual in that position. In terms of the work we are undertaking, we are not falling behind on the Carbon Management Plan, with regular updates to the EAP for Sustainable Communities and regular key performance indicators to the Executive and Corporate Scrutiny Committee that members can access. With regard</p>

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				<p>to this particular scoring we don't know if it will change again, but we shall continue to work hard in delivering the Plan.</p>
5.	Cllr Emily Fedorowycz	Cllr Jason Smithers	<p>Since the change to the new member enquiry system, how many of the 170 enquiries have been resolved (meaning the problem has been actually solved)? Only 75 enquiries have been logged in the table outlining time to respond - does this mean 95 have not received a response?</p> <p>Supplementary Question – How long is this system going to be used? Is there a light at the end of the tunnel?</p>	<p>170 queries were received in September during the first month of the new system. At the end of the month 89 had become due for a reply of which 75 had been replied to and 14 were overdue at the time the data was compiled for reporting. As members will appreciate, the system is still bedding in, and I look forward to the number of overdue enquiries reducing. Members patience is appreciated, and feedback is always welcomed.</p> <p>Supplementary Response – This system will be used until there is another system available. It is currently bedding in and proving quite successful with the quantities of queries coming in via a centralised system. The system will be monitored and members' patience is appreciated as it beds down.</p>

Full Council – 26 October 2023

No.	Received from	Executive Member (or Officer) Responsible	Question	Answer
6.	Cllr Matt Keane	Adele Wylie - Petitions Officer	<p>With the possibility of a recall petition being held in the Wellingborough constituency, will the council's electoral services be able to facilitate this if triggered and will the council devise a public awareness strategy of how to sign it?</p> <p>Supplementary Question – when will the Notices of Petition be issued?</p>	<p>Following notification from the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Electoral Services team has put in place arrangements to deliver a recall petition. The Council is well prepared to administer urgent matters such as a recall petition. The Council's website will have information about the recall petition and how registered electors can sign the petition within the Wellingborough Constituency. In addition, registered electors will receive a Notice of Petition (like a Poll Card in an election) to ensure that they know how and where to sign the petition should they wish to do so.</p> <p>Supplementary Response – They will be issued on or around the 3rd November 2023.</p>

Full Council – 26 October 2023

No	Received from	Executive Member Responsible	Question	Answer
7.	Cllr Dez Dell	Cllr Lloyd Bunday	<p>For customer enquiries (to include, daily, weekly and monthly averages):-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) When the 0300 126 3000 number is called, how quickly are calls answered across all auto attendant options? b) How many external calls (via the auto attendant) does each department receive? c) How often are callers transferred between departments? <p>Supplementary Question – Is there already login software in place with the new phone system or is this likely to be an additional expense that is to come later?</p>	<p>The new telephone system is still in its infancy, and we do not yet collect this data. Calls are spread between both Customer Services for some call options and services directly for others, so it is difficult to report how many calls are routed, received and answered by individual services. This also applies to transferring calls between individual services. We are reviewing what meaningful data can be provided to assist the services and Members better understand call volumes and Customer Services will also use call data to help ensure as many calls can be taken by all services as possible. We will be undertaking a member briefing in the coming months so that members are able to better understand our new system and the journey that we are on to improving customer experience.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer – It is part of the system that we have got. A new telephone system on its own won't solve all problems on its own. The Customer Management System that has also been put in will also help matters.</p>

Full Council – 26 October 2023

No	Received from	Executive Member Responsible	Question	Answer
8.	Cllr Charlie Best	Cllr Matt Binley	<p>What is the status of the Parking consultation that was announced earlier this year and can I have a list of all car parks owned and controlled by NNC (as opposed to town councils or private companies)?</p>	<p>The results of the parking survey undertaken over the Summer, along with the usage surveys are being considered as part of drawing together a draft parking strategy. The draft parking strategy will be published for public consultation in the coming months, with engagement sessions with Councillors and Town and Parish Council’s undertaken.</p> <p>A list of car parks owned by NNC is available from the Councils Asset Management team and is also available on our website at:- https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/car-parks-north-northamptonshire</p>
9.	Cllr Martin Griffiths	Cllr Jason Smithers	<p>Do the following local politicians and "public servants " have the leader's full and unequivocal support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPs within the administrative area of the Council; • Senior officers of the PFCC and Northamptonshire constabulary; • Council leaders? 	<p>My role as leader of the Council does not require me to “support” the postholders of the mentioned roles. I do however work with a wide range of stakeholders to deliver for the people of North Northamptonshire.</p>

Full Council – 26 October 2023

No	Received from	Executive Member Responsible	Question	Answer
10.	Cllr Jim Hakewill	Cllr Jason Smithers	How many councillors attended each of the training sessions during August, September and October including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Council Finances, Budget and Commercial Scrutiny and Planning including the urgent extraordinary one for Weekley Wood? Broken down between Executive and non-Executive members?	<p>Equality and Diversity Sessions (four duplicate sessions): 7 August - 15 non-Executive and one Executive; 15 August - 15 non-Executive; 16 August - Nine non-Executive; 19 September – Nine non-Executive.</p> <p>Scrutiny Training sessions – (for non-Executive members only, Executive members not requested to attend): 11 September - Essential & Effective Strategy for Scrutiny - Nine 11 September - Questioning & Listening – Eight 29 September – Chairing Skills for Chairs of Scrutiny - Attended by the five Scrutiny Committee Chairs/Vice-Chairs</p> <p>2 October - Council Finances, Budget and Commercial Scrutiny. - Five</p> <p>Planning Training, promoted to planning committee members: 21 September - 21 plus one Executive member; 22 September - 19 plus one Executive member.</p> <p>Investigations with planners have indicated that there has been no specific planning training on Weekley Wood.</p>

Full Council – 26 October 2023

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			<p>Supplementary Question – In particular speaking about the diversity and inclusion training, why was it necessary to have four training sessions on the same subject when as part of all members’ inductions we had already had two equalities sessions in July 2021?</p>	<p>Supplementary Response:- On 7th August data there is a slight error in that 15 non-Executive and 4 Executive members attended. In answer to the supplementary, I don’t think you can have enough training. As a Council going forward we need to make sure that everybody is skilled in what they do and some people may choose to do training offline from the Council and some may choose to do Council training. The more training dates that go in the better.</p>
11.	Cllr Jim Hakewill	Cllr Jason Smithers	<p>When was the last time that each of the five Councils that created North Northamptonshire Council had an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, listing the actual dates? What arrangements and dates are in place for NNC to welcome the scrutiny of an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge?</p>	<p>It has been identified that the following LGA Corporate Peer Challenges were undertaken prior to 1 April 2020 by the then sovereign councils within the current area of North Northamptonshire Council:-</p> <p>Corby Borough Council – 7-9 October 2014; East Northamptonshire Council – 12-14 March 2014</p> <p>No other Corporate Peer Challenges have been identified since the process commenced in 2011.</p> <p>It is recognised that LGA Peer Reviews can add much benefit to local authorities. The Leader and former Chief Executive met some months ago with the Local Government Association about an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. Once a permanent Chief Executive is</p>

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			<p>Supplementary Question - In a Government publication, Lessons Learned referring to Northamptonshire County Council there is the following:-</p> <p>The Council declined offers of help from peers and was resistant to extensive efforts from sector membership bodies, especially the LGA to wake members up to the reality of their situation. Only at the last minute did the Council accept formal peer challenge from the LGA. Why after two years are we</p>	<p>appointed, they will consider when an appropriate time is for a Corporate Peer Review to take place.</p> <p>As an organisation that welcomes constructive external feedback, the Council has already had a Planning Advisory Service Review. As an extremely important front facing service for North Northamptonshire, it was prioritised for external review. The recommendations have been accepted and continue to be implemented.</p> <p>Supplementary Response – The former Chief Executive and I had had conversations with the LGA to get an LGA process in place. If you look at our peer review in planning with the LGA it was an absolute success. We will have an LGA Peer Review when the timing is right and we look forward to seeing some LGA experts coming in soon.</p>

Full Council – 26 October 2023

No	Received from	Executive Member Responsible	Question	Answer
			going down the same route as the County Council?	

End of Cllr Questions