

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive

At 10.00 am on Thursday 15th February, 2024 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 David Howes
Councillor David Brackenbury	Councillor Gill Mercer
Councillor Lloyd Bunday	Councillor Harriet Pentland
Councillor Scott Edwards	Councillor Mark Rowley

Also in attendance – Councillors Jim Hakewill, Anne Lee, Valerie Anslow, Dorothy Maxwell and Lyn Buckingham

582 Apologies for absence

No apologies for absence were received.

583 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 18th January 2024

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2024 as a true and accurate record of the meeting subject to the amendment of two minor typographical errors.

584 Members' Declarations of Interest

Cllr Gill Mercer declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 9 - Communities Strategy and Strategic Investment into the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector as a Board Member for Groundworks.

Cllr Mercer would depart from the meeting for the duration of the consideration and voting of that item.

585 Notifications of requests to address the meeting

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

Agenda Item	Speakers
Item 5 - Performance Indicator Report 2023/24 (Period 9 (Q3) – December 2023)	Cllrs Valerie Anslow & Anne Lee

Item 6 - Options Appraisal for Recommissioning Public Health Services	Cllrs Lyn Buckingham, Anne Lee, Dorothy Maxwell & Jim Hakewill
Item 7 - Determination of Admission Arrangements	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 8 – Department for Transport Funding Allocations	Cllrs Valerie Anslow, Anne Lee, Dorothy Maxwell & Jim Hakewill
Item 9 - Communities Strategy and Strategic Investment into the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector	Cllrs Lyn Buckingham, Valerie Anslow, Anne Lee, Dorothy Maxwell, Jim Hakewill and Mr Stuart Nethercott
Item 10 - Levelling Up in North Northamptonshire Plan 2024 - progress report	Cllrs Lyn Buckingham & Valerie Anslow
Item 11 - Corby Business Academy SEND Provision	Cllrs Lyn Buckingham
Item 12 - Capital Outturn 2023/24 – Draft Outturn as at Period 9	Cllr Jim Hakewill
Item 13 - Capital Programme Update 2023/24	Cllr Jim Hakewill
Item 14 - Budget Forecast 2023-24 at Period 9	Cllr Jim Hakewill

Mr Stuart Nethercott did not attend the meeting and therefore did not speak in relation to Item 9.

586 Performance Indicator Report 2023/24 (Period 9 - December 2023)

The Chair invited Cllr Valerie Anslow to address the Executive. Cllr Anslow spoke to reference figures for rough sleepers and raised concerns that this figure could rise once current homeless provision in Wellingborough closed at the end of March, calling for voluntary sector support to operate a shelter system. Cllr Anslow also referred to the low level of affordable housing built during 2022/23 and queried when the Housing Strategy required to address the issue in a creative and bold manner would be available.

The Chair thanked Cllr Anslow for her contribution and invited Cllr Anne Lee to speak on this item. Cllr Lee also referenced the timelines for creation of affordable housing as well as a decrease in e-scooter usage and a 3000 decrease in the number of jobs in North Northamptonshire, querying the Council's engagement with the business community. Cllr Lee also raised concerns regarding unavailable performance data for housing repairs.

The Chair then invited the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, Cllr Lloyd Bunday to introduce a report that sought to provide an update on the performance of the Council across a range of services as measured by performance indicators (PIs), as well as setting out the progress that was being made in the development of the Council's performance monitoring arrangements.

It was heard that the Period 9 report contained 106 PIs, 44 that were reported monthly, 56 quarterly and six annually. Of the PIs with established targets, 38 indicators were on or exceeding their target, with seven inside tolerance levels and 16 performing below target levels. One PI did not have sufficient data to allow reporting. It was noted that of the PIs that had a determined polarity for direction of travel,

performance had improved for 31, with 25 deteriorating since the previous reporting period.

Cllr Bunday drew attention to highlights within the report, including the number of customer service contacts handled to date, library visits reported and payment of supplier invoices within the target date.

Cllr Mark Rowley spoke to clarify the forthcoming closure of the homeless facility in Wellingborough and refuted rumours that further provision elsewhere was also due to close. It was noted that discussions were ongoing with the voluntary sector to get residents of the closing site into suitable alternative accommodation.

In response to a comment from Cllr Lee, Cllr David Brackenbury referenced the Business Relations Team and their engagement with the local business community.

In response to Cllr Anslow's comments, the Chair stated that would welcome the construction of as much affordable housing as possible and that this aspiration would be championed as part of the Big50 Vision going forward.

Cllr Matt Binley spoke to reference the indicative timescales for affordable housing construction and noted the seasonal downward trend for e-scooter usage, with the exception of rider levels in Corby which had been maintained.

Cllr Harriet Pentland spoke to welcome positive PIs relating to the green and sustainable environment, with reference to the number of electric vehicle charging points coming online and the local extension of the e-scooter trial.

The Chair concluded debate by praising the ongoing e-scooter trial as having had a beneficial impact on the local area, noting the positive public feedback that had been received despite political challenge in relation to the project.

RESOLVED

That the Executive noted the performance of the Council as measured by the available indicators at Period 9 (December) 2023/24, set out in **Appendix A** to this report.

Reason for Recommendations: to better understand the Council's performance as measured by Key Performance Indicators as at Period 9 (December) 2023/24.

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

587 Options Appraisal for Recommissioning Public Health Services

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to speak on this item. Cllr Buckingham spoke to welcome the introduction of the climate change assessment tool that now accompanied Executive reports. Cllr Buckingham raised concerns regarding a low

performance base for existing Public Health Services and queried how performance would be improved with poor future performance penalised.

The Chair thanked Cllr Buckingham for her comments and invited Cllr Anne Lee to address the meeting. Cllr Lee raised concerns regarding a lack of providers within the Public Health market, noting the complicated nature of the commissioning process. Cllr Lee requested that needs analysis reports and recommissioning timelines be shared with members of Health Scrutiny Committee, so they were appraised of the processes involved.

The Chair thanked Cllr Lee for her contribution before inviting Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the Executive. Cllr Maxwell referred to Public Health considerations within local schools and stated that for high service standards to be met there had to be adequate staffing provision and ongoing professional development. Cllr Maxwell also referred to the possibility of services being provided in-house and the investment this would require as well as long waiting times to access existing counselling services.

The Chair thanked Cllr Maxwell for her comments and invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to address the meeting. Cllr Hakewill queried whether there were sufficient levels of experienced staff to enable the progress of the procurement process and further queried the scrutiny of figures detailed within the exempt appendix. Cllr Hakewill also raised the matter of the report not being considered by an Executive Advisory Panel (EAP) or the Council's scrutiny function.

The Chair thanked Cllr Hakewill for his comments before inviting Cllr Gill Mercer, Executive Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing to introduce a report that sought approval to procure a number of Public Health services as set out below, with a view to the new arrangements being in place by 1st April 2025

- The 0-19 Health Visiting and School Nursing Service
- Strong Start Service
- Northamptonshire Integrated Sexual Health Service and HIV Service
- Youth Counselling Offer (REACH)
- Oral Health Promotion Service
- Dental Epidemiology Survey

In response to comments from the speakers, Cllr Mercer stated that the Council would continue to work hard with providers to build up strong relationships that could offer better control of performance as part of the move to disaggregate the service from West Northamptonshire as decided by the Shared Services Joint Committee at its meeting on 17th January 2024 . It was noted that ongoing work relating to the procurement would be included as part of future Health Scrutiny agendas. Once the outcome of procurement was known the various options would be presented to the Council's scrutiny function and the Active Communities EAP. The meeting was also advised that the Council now had a specialist procurement officer for Public Health. Concluding the responses to speakers, Cllr Mercer also stated the Council would be working alongside the Children's Trust to obtain their views on the services and already operated a Healthy Schools team that provided health services within an educational setting.

Cllr Mercer stated that by disaggregating the previously jointly commissioned services outlined above, the Council could provide future Public Health services that were more

easily tailored to the needs of the local population and would fit around existing and developing infrastructure including Family Hubs.

The meeting heard that approval of the report would signal the first stage in designing and procuring these services, with an extensive piece of work to be undertaken in examining the evidence base to establish what elements worked, to engage staff and services users and to use local data to pull together models of care offering the best outcomes for the local population.

A fundamental consideration was whether to provide some, or all, of the services in-house, to commission services externally or to adopt a mixed approach. It was noted that the services were complex and diverse, and a single approach may not work for all the services. Certain services such as the Sexual Health Service could prove too costly or complex to deliver in-house, with issues such as national shortages of specific staffing roles also being a consideration.

The meeting heard that flexibility of approach was important, with the ability to respond to the planned engagement work being key. The commissioning process would be open and transparent and involve current providers, the Active Communities EAP and the Health Scrutiny Committee as the Council sought for the process to become the blueprint for all future commissioning within Public Health. In addition, the process would be subject to internal audit review so the approach could be refined and developed going forward.

Cllr Mercer concluded by stating that the report before members, if approved, would ensure the right services were commissioned for the local population, informed by evidence and engagement and would enable the Council to realise its ambitions of improving the health and wellbeing of its residents.

Cllr Harriet Pentland spoke to note that although the primary focus of the report was Public Health service, the introduction of the climate change assessment tool was useful to ensure there was a green thread running through all elements of the Council.

Cllr Lloyd Bunday spoke to reference Cllr Hakewill's comments regarding staff levels, noting that all posts within the procurement team had been successfully recruited to.

Cllr Scott Edwards welcomed the report, particularly the opportunity to reset the 0-19 years programme and examine the needs of children and families, with reference made to the involvement of the third sector and Family Hubs.

Cllr David Brackenbury also welcomed the report as providing an opportunity for a service reset, with best practice identified and continued and utilisation of external expertise where it was required to move forward such important services.

Cllr Gill Mercer in concluding debate noted that each service would be considered on a case-by-case basis, with delegated authority provided to her make the final decisions. Cllr Mercer noted that it was imperative that the right result was achieved for each of the services with viable opportunities taken to provide service in-house if appropriate.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- i) Approved a procurement process for the following services as set out in the report:
 - The 0-19 Health Visiting and School Nursing Service
 - Strong Start Service
 - Northamptonshire Integrated Sexual Health Service and HIV Service (NISHH)
 - Youth Counselling Offer (REACH)
 - Oral Health Promotion Service and
 - Dental Epidemiology Survey
- ii) Granted delegated authority to the Executive Member for Adults, Health, and Wellbeing to determine the model of delivery on a contract-by-contract basis.

Reasons for Recommendations: Approval will ensure an open and robust process as to whether each contract should be provided internally or externally commissioned, and new services are in place by 1st April 2025.

Alternative Options Considered: A report was taken to shared services joint committee on 17th January 2024, exploring to either continuing jointly or independently recommission the CYP and sexual health services, it was approved by both NNC and WNC executive members that these services should be disaggregated now from the joint arrangement and separately recommissioning these in order to fit the needs of local population. However, commissioners have now drafted a further option paper to engage with elected members around the option for internal vs external recommissioning.

588 Determination of Admission Arrangements for Local Authority Maintained (Community and Voluntary Controlled) Schools in North Northamptonshire for the 2025 Intakes

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the meeting. Cllr Maxwell made reference to the need to assist gifted children and those from less affluent backgrounds in accessing the school of their choice even if it was outside their catchment area, with particular reference made to transport costs.

The Chair thanked Cllr Maxwell for her comments before inviting the Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills, Cllr Scott Edwards to introduce a report that asked the Executive to discharge its statutory duty to consider and determine admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled North Northamptonshire schools for the 2025 intakes and the Primary and Secondary Co-ordinated Schemes for the 2025 intakes.

Cllr Edwards, in response to Cllr Maxwell, stated that it would not be possible for the Council to pay transport fees for children applying to schools outside their catchment area, noting that there were charities and other organisation that may offer bursaries or grants for such travel.

Cllr Edwards reported that following consultation, the Pupil Admission Number was proposed to be reduced for a number of schools as set out in the report due to projected falling pupil numbers. Cllr Edwards noted that Cransley, Little Cransley and Great Cransley had been omitted as linked villages for Broughton Primary School and would be included as such within the published admission arrangements.

Cllr Matt Binley spoke in reference to Cllr Maxwell comments, referencing the recently adopted Home to School transport policy, where qualifying pupils were eligible for free transportation to the closest available school.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- i) Determined the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools as detailed in **Appendix A**, subject to the addition of Cransley, Little Cransley and Great Cransley as linked villages in the admission criteria for Broughton Primary School
- ii) Agreed the two Co-ordinated Schemes for the 2025 intakes as detailed in **Appendix B** and **Appendix C**.
- iii) Approved the setting of the relevant area for schools in the authority.

Reasons for Recommendations

- All admission authorities must determine the admission arrangements for their schools annually. Consultation on reducing the PANs of some schools because of falling pupil numbers in the area of the schools.
- It is the duty of local authorities to formulate and publish a co-ordinated scheme for the admission of pupils to all schools in the area.
- The LA must review the relevant area every two years.

Alternative Options Considered: All the above are statutory requirements and, therefore, there are no alternative options available.

589 Department for Transport Funding Allocations

The Chair invited Cllr Valerie Anslow to address the meeting. Cllr Anslow spoke to welcome elements of the report and additional funding for the highways network but spoke in favour of road resurfacing rather than pothole filling. Cllr Anslow also queried

figures for insurance payouts and accidents resulting from pothole damage and stated that Kier, as the Council's contractor, needed to have its effectiveness scrutinised

The Chair thanked Cllr Anslow for her comments and offered his support for her views on the Council's highways contractor, noting that he would continue to speak out until the best service level was received across the area. The Chair then invited Cllr Lee to address the meeting.

Cllr Lee questioned what performance indicators were in place to measure the value for money level offered by Kier's highway repairs and whether the quality of workmanship was independently verified. Cllr Lee also raised the issue of new LED streetlighting not being bright enough for residents to see potholes whilst driving.

The Chair thanked Cllr Lee for her comments, noting that he was aware of the LED streetlighting issue and had sought a report to ascertain whether they were fit for purpose. The Chair then invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the Executive.

Cllr Maxwell welcomed the additional highways funding and referred to ongoing roadworks at the A14 near Thrapston as well as querying whether the highways contract covered rubbish collection and bin installation. Cllr Maxwell also referred to white line marking and effective streetlighting.

The Chair thanked Cllr Maxwell for her comments before inviting Cllr Jim Hakewill to address the meeting. Cllr Hakewill requested that the lighting report referred to by the Chair be brought to a future scrutiny meeting and echoed comments supporting the climate change assessment tool. Cllr Hakewill queried how funding for 2024/25 compared to the previous year and noted that that Council had received a real terms decrease in funding due to inflation. Cllr Hakewill queried how the Leader would solve the issue of poor-quality highways repairs.

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 sought approval to add £1.069m of government funding derived from the cancellation of High Speed 2 northern phase 2 to the capital programme of highway maintenance to the 2023/24 in-year budget and additionally for 2024/25.

Cllr Binley reported that the funding was part of an 11-year government investment plan into the roads with the current list of works to be assessed to determine which works would be delivered. The works would be based on current priorities in the list of identified schemes, in accordance with the Northamptonshire Asset Management Plan and the Network Management Plan.

It was noted that the Department for Transport had introduced a requirement that by March 2024 the Council publish a summary of the additional resurfacing works to be delivered from the funding over the two-year period, with quarterly update reports published detailing what works had been completed and which road resurfaced. In addition, during the 2024/25 financial year there was a requirement to publish a long-term plan detailing the usage of the full 11-year funding programme.

Cllr Binley noted that the funding could be used for resurfacing schemes, inlaid patching and permanent repairs to potholes.

The Chair spoke to welcome the large investments being made by the Council to improve roads for residents in road, noting that in terms of failed pothole repairs, Kier were contracted to return at their own cost to make good any defective repairs at no cost to the Council.

Cllr Gill Mercer stated that there was a hope that more people would use active travel methods once the road network had been improved and encouraged members and residents to use Street Doctor to report highways defects or issues.

Cllr Harriet Pentland referred to comments from Cllr Hakewill regarding climate change, noting that the Council's Carbon Management Plan would be submitted to a future meeting of the Executive.

Concluding debate, Cllr Binley also echoed the need for highways defects to be report via the Street Doctor portal. It was noted that regular meetings were held with Kier to discuss performance, with the Council constantly challenging the service received to ensure accountability and to address service level failures as soon as possible.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Noted and accepted the receipt of the government grants totalling £9.768m made up of the following:
 - Highways Maintenance Block needs element - £3.735m
 - Highways Maintenance Block incentive element (subject to confirmation) - £0.934m
 - Potholes Fund - £3.735m
 - Integrated Transport Block funding - £1.364m
- b) Agreed to spend the grants on maintaining and upgrading the highway network in line with the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan and to deliver the current priorities in the list of identified maintenance schemes.

Reason for Recommendations: Utilisation of government grant to support and maintain the Council's Highways infrastructure and transport network.

Alternative Options Considered – Options would include not spending the money and allowing DfT to recoup it. Alternatively, the Council could choose to spend the money on schemes that are not a priority in line with their Northamptonshire Transportation Plan. Neither option is recommended.

590 Communities Strategy and Strategic Investment into the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the meeting. Cllr Buckingham spoke to note that the funding envelope outlined within the Communities Strategy would not

see an increase for the period it covered, this following two-years of static funding for the sector. Cllr Buckingham believe this funding would be insufficient to enable the sector to undertake the work the Council sought.

The Chair thanked Cllr Buckingham for her comments before inviting Cllr Valerie Anslow to address the Executive. Cllr Anslow welcomed the report as recognising the valuable work of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector who responded to need in innovative ways. Cllr Anslow referred to homeless shelters and rough sleeping provision working alongside the sector and supporting communities to take on assets and services with specific reference to the Hemmingwell Centre lease. Cllr Anslow concluded by querying which community centres had been supported by legacy authorities and whether additional centres could be included going forward.

The Chair thanked Cllr Anslow for her contribution before inviting Cllr Anne Lee to speak on this item. Cllr Lee noted the level of work that had gone into the production of the report, stating that the voluntary sector was very important in adding positively to the local economy and communities, although queried the late timing of advising some providers of the proposals contained in the report. Cllr Lee stated there should be a greater focus on youth groups and young people and stated her concern for loss of capacity within the voluntary sector given the value it delivered in comparison to the funding it received.

The Chair thanked Cllr Lee and invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to address the meeting. Cllr Hakewill spoke to reference support for anxiety in being a barrier to accessing services. Regarding transfer of assets or services, Cllr Hakewill queried what a place-led approach would mean. Cllr Hakewill queried whether long-term funding would be available for any assets transferred, with a risk of potential double taxation, and questioned how this would be avoided. Cllr Hakewill queried what amendments had been made to the report resulting from comments made by the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 5th February 2024.

The Chair thanked Cllr Hakewill for his comments and invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the meeting. Cllr Maxwell raised queries in relation to rural street lighting and the wellbeing of residents, what role was played by the staff members comprising the Support North Northants team, disabled parking funding and the lack of reference for funding in East Northamptonshire.

The Chair then invited Cllr Mark Rowley, Executive Member for Housing, Communities and Levelling-up to present a report that introduced the Council's Communities Strategy, co-produced with representatives from across the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. It was noted that the report also set out the proposed new VCSE strategic grants framework for period of three years from 1st April 2024, which replaced the previous strategic grant arrangements which the Council had inherited from the legacy authorities. The report also detailed the proposed new VCSE Infrastructure support arrangements which would be tendered and contracted for three-years from 1st September 2024.

Responding to comments from speakers, Cllr Rowley noted that in regard to static funding levels, multiple other pots of funding had come through to assist the sector and that infrastructure elements of report would help those organisations requiring support with accommodation or bid writing. It was noted that the VCSE had been notified of proposals in September 2023, with written correspondence issued in November. Cllr Rowley clarified that a report focussing on provision for youth groups

and young people would be submitted to a future meeting of the Executive and also provided clarity regarding asset and service transfers and future funding.

Cllr Rowley reported that purpose of the Communities Strategy was to emphasise and strengthen the role that the Voluntary, Community and Enterprise sector, residents and communities had in helping to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan and Northamptonshire's Integrated Care System "Live Your Best Life" strategies.

It was noted that in March 2022, the Executive had agreed to extend the VCSE strategic grants inherited from the former councils for a further two years until 31st March 2024 to allow time for the strategy to be brought forward. The strategy brought key themes that underpinned local and nation agendas together into a coordinated framework for effective membership and partnership working within the VCSE. The strategy would also support positive relationships across all organisations and many sectors to drive innovation and collaboration.

The meeting heard that the strategy had five principle aims for the period 2024 to 2027 and these were outlined to the meeting. In addition, while introducing eight key themes, six of which would form a significant part of the ask the Council would make of the future providers of the VCSE Infrastructure support contract, which would be tendered for delivery.

It was reported that in North Northamptonshire there were 368 VCSE member organisations, many operating successfully without funding from the Council, some providing very specific services such as debt a case work, mental health counselling and supporting victims of domestic abuse.

Cllr Rowley stated that with the adoption of the Councils' Corporate Plan and ongoing development of the Big50 vision, the VCSE could assisting in helping to deliver most of these objectives. It was also necessary to ensure that where the Council was grant funding VCSE delivery, it must make demonstrable contribution.

In preparation for the strategy, the current VCSE infrastructure organisations had engaged with the VCSE network and organised the first sector-wide engagement event in September 2023 with over 100 organisations represented. At this event attendees were advised that the new grant funding model, if approved, would come into effect from September 2024. Following this, a series of coproduction meetings had also been held with VCSE partners. In addition, the North VCSE Oversight Group leaders had proactively helped to develop the strategy and Cllr Rowley thanked them for their efforts in this regard.

The meeting was informed that the current grant arrangement totalled £671,721k, but these were not the only grants provided to VCSE, with other funding providing an overall total support to the sector of £1.82m for 2023/24, rising in 2024/25 to just under £2m. Additionally, it was heard that a number of community centres and sport clubs had received financial assistance as part of the grant arrangement and discussions had taken place over the previous 12-month period as to their needs and assistance required to become self-sustainable.

Concluding, Cllr Rowley noted that the strategy had been considered by both the Active and the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee with comments received integrated into the strategy document. Cllr Rowley thanked all those who had been involved in developing the strategy to get it to this stage.

Cllr Matt Binley spoke to note that community asset transfers would be worked in partnership with organisations supported to obtain any available grant funding should they decide to take on an asset. Cllr Binley also spoke to provide an update on the transfer of Hemmingwell Community Centre.

Cllr Scott Edwards referenced provision for children and young people and the future report to Executive on the subject acknowledging a reduction in provision. Cllr Edwards welcomed partnership working with the VCSE sector that provide important and nice services to some of the most vulnerable in society.

Cllr David Brackenbury noted the scale of the work involved in producing the strategy and strategic investment consideration and thanked all those involved for the services they provided. Cllr Brackenbury acknowledged the funding pressures for the Council but noted the ability to mobilise £1.82m from a variety of sources to help support the work of the sector.

Cllr David Howes spoke noted that whilst the Council was open to town and parish councils taking over assets and services, it had made a commitment that it would not devolve these unless a request was received.

The Chair echoed the comments of Cllr Howes and noted that there would be a meeting held with Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils regarding the subject of service and asset transfer.

Concluding debate, Cllr Helen Howell spoke to welcome the report, noting that aside from the Council the sector could access other funding streams which were advertised to them as they became available. Cllr Howell referenced the member empowerment fund continuation and noted that this too was not an insignificant amount of money.

(Having declared an interest in this item, Cllr Gill Mercer left the meeting prior to its consideration and returned once the vote had been taken)

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved the Communities Strategy for adoption;
- b) Approved the proposed VCSE Strategic grants framework and the proposed VCSE Infrastructure support arrangements for the period 2024-2027.
- c) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Housing, Communities and Levelling Up, in consultation with the Director of Public Health and Wellbeing to procure the new VCSE Infrastructure support contract and undertake any activities required to deliver this strategy.

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.

Alternative Options Considered:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.

591 Levelling Up in North Northamptonshire Plan 2024 - Progress Report

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the meeting. Cllr Buckingham spoke to welcome the Levelling-up Progress Report but noted only one area of the action plan appeared to have been achieved, with full coordination of the plan and detailed outcomes lacking. Cllr Buckingham noted that there had been a proposal to convene a cross-party working group once the action plan was in place with an initial priority focussed on young people. Cllr Buckingham queried whether the working party had been created and asked whether Cllr Rowley had visited the three levelling-up areas and met with residents.

The Chair thanked Cllr Buckingham for her comments and invited Cllr Valerie Anslow to speak. Cllr Anslow noted that the progress summary showed that good work had been undertaken so far, with work undertaken by voluntary and community groups support through grants being a key element. Cllr Anslow noted the potential benefits of providing neighbourhood centres in levelling-up areas other than Corby with core funding.

The Chair thanked Cllr Anslow for her contribution before inviting Cllr Mark Rowley, Executive Member for Housing , Communities and Levelling-Up to present a report that provided the Executive with a progress report for the Levelling-up Action Plan and sought agreement of the proposed steps for further consideration of the report.

In response to Cllr Buckingham's comment regarding achievements made in regard to the action plan, Cllr Rowley clarified that the use of a RAG rating indicated short, medium and long-term objectives not those achieved. Cllr Rowley confirmed a working group had been created to support the action plan and that he had visited all three levelling-up areas. Cllr Rowley noted a review of community centres would be ongoing over the next 12-months.

It was reported that the Scrutiny Commission had reviewed underlying data and an associated report relating to areas highlighted as "left behind" and brought forward a proposed plan to work towards levelling-up those areas. This work had concluded in July 2022, with the final report subsequently agreed by the Executive at its meeting on 25th August 2022.

Cllr Rowley referenced the summary position of the programme to date and the key issues as detailed within Appendix B to the report. A number of achievement highlights were provided to the meeting including resident engagement events in Winter 2023 that had both seen over 100 attendees, a pilot project for toddlers that had become a sustainable ongoing group, FreshFest in Wellingborough, the

WellNorthants programme and a pilot project with the Probation Service to target resources towards issues such as street cleansing and graffiti removal.

It was reported that residents had received support to bid for and deliver projects funded through the WellNorthants programme, with £105,000 investment made in youth-related projects through the Shared Prosperity Fund. In addition, the Knife Angel Knife Crime awareness programme had been delivered and new CCTV cameras had been installed on both Hemmingwell and Queensway estates in Wellingborough.

Cllr Rowley stated that officers would continue to work with communities to ensure that achievements made to date would become the new normal for the benefit of all residents. Concluding, Cllr Rowley noted the report had been considered by the Prosperous Communities Executive Advisory Panel at its January 2024 meeting and its comments taken onboard.

Cllr Matt Binley spoke to thank the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for his support in regard to the work in levelling-up areas, with reference to Safer Streets and further work undertaken as part of the Community Safety Partnership. Cllr Binley stated that there was focus on “left behind” areas with consideration given across the authority when decision-making. It was heard that the Council’s new Chief Executive would be visiting Queensway as one of the levelling-up areas, with Cllr Binley also making reference to the ongoing Voi e-scooter trial and the possibility for discounting trips made in, and from, these areas.

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to welcome the refreshed play equipment in Kingswood that had been upgraded following public consultation.

(Following the vote being taken on this item, Cllr Harriet Pentland departed the meeting)

RESOLVED

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the progress against the Levelling Up Plan in North Northamptonshire.
- b) Requested the Scrutiny Management Board to consider if the report should be received and considered by any of its scrutiny committees.
- c) Recommended to Full Council that the progress report is received by Full Council in quarter one of the 2024 – 2025 municipal year, as set out in the governance for the plan in **Appendix A**, following consideration by the relevant Scrutiny committees, as determined by the Scrutiny Management Board.

Reason for Recommendations:

- i) The levelling up agenda is both a national and local priority and of importance to council members. The scrutiny review was undertaken

because of an amended motion and discussion at Full Council.

- ii) The recommendations seek approval from the Executive to progress the update through the governance set out in **Appendix A** (Page 4).

Alternative Options Considered:

- i) Do not follow the governance set out in the Levelling Up plan, and transfer reporting activity to Business-as-Usual activity.
- ii) Whilst it would be expected that this activity will eventually transfer into business-as-usual activity and be subsumed into the corporate plan priorities, it is felt that there should be 1 – 2 full reporting cycles including scrutiny and Full Council prior to transferring this activity to business as usual.

592 Corby Business Academy SEND Provision

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the Executive. Cllr Buckingham welcomed the increased in SEND provision but stated there remained more to be done, querying whether any of the spaces would be for those aged over 16, with a lack of such provision locally.

The Chair thanked Cllr Buckingham for her comments before inviting Cllr Scott Edwards, Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills to introduce a report that sought approval for the capital project of Corby Business Academy SEND Provision which would see the conversion of underused areas of the school to create two further teaching spaces and thereby extend SEND provision by 28 places.

Cllr Edwards, in response to Cllr Buckingham, stated he would provide details for SEND provision for 16-18 years outside of the meeting.

Cllr Edwards noted the work undertaken by the Council in the last year to increase SEND provision in mainstream schools and also referred to additional provision being made at Raunds Manor School that was detailed within the Capital Programme Update report to be considered later in the meeting.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved the proposed Capital Project of Corby Business Academy SEND provision.
- b) Noted the scheme will be funded primarily by Higher Needs Funding.
- c) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Children, Families and Education, in consultation with the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Executive Director of Place and Economy, to authorise all

necessary legal, property and financial agreements to ensure effective delivery of the scheme

Reasons for Recommendations:

- Corby Business Academy has enough physical space that can be utilised to support the severe shortage of specialist spaces in North Northamptonshire as result of falling rolls.
- This project provides NNC the support to increase sufficiency of SEND places by creating 28 SEND places within the school.
- School place planning duties (s13-14 Education Act 1996) The Council as an education authority has a duty to promote high standards of education and fair access to education. It also has a general duty to secure sufficient schools in their area, and to consider the need to secure provision for children with SEN. This includes a duty to respond to parents' representations about school provision. These are referred to as the school place planning duties.
- If we do not provide the Corby Business Academy SEND provision, out of necessity we may need to seek SEND places in the independent sector which will have significant budget implications.
- There would also be implications on home to school transport costs if the pupils are placed out of county or out of area because of not creating these places.

Alternative Options Considered: The other option was to do nothing; this would not support the Council's school place planning duties.

593 Capital Outturn Report 2023/24 at Period 9

The Chair invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to speak to the Executive in relation to this item. Cllr Hakewill noted the £35m delivery shortfall for the general fund Capital Programme and queried what measures would be put in place to create a viable and deliverable programme.

The Chair then invited Cllr Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation to introduce a report that set out the provisional capital outturn position for 2023/24 as at Period 9, including requests to rephrase scheme expenditure profiles. The report also detailed the latest capital budgets for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme, including new schemes that had been approved since 1st April 2023.

Cllr Bunday reported that the final outturn position could be affected by the outstanding audits of legacy authorities, stating that the current outturn forecast in respect of the General Fund Capital Programme showed a revised capital budget position of £94.2m, including slippage and in-year approved programmes. The outturn position was currently estimated at a spend of £59m, representing an underspend of £35.1m against the budget. It was heard that the Development Pool had been fully reviewed as part of the budget setting challenge sessions, with specific schemes added back to the pool from the programme.

The outturn for the HRA Capital Programme showed a revised a budget for 2023/24 of £23.4m, including slippage from 2022/23. The outturn showed a forecast spend of

£8m, representing an underspend of £15.4m compared to budget. This would be reviewed and re-profiled considering the latest position.

Cllr Mark Rowley spoke to reference the underspend regarding the HRA Capital Programme, noting that this related to three ongoing social housing developments.

RESOLVED

That the Executive:

- a. Noted the draft capital outturn position as at period 9 for the General Fund (GF) Capital Programme and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme for 2023/24.
- b. Noted the new schemes that have been approved since 1st April 2023.

Reason for Recommendations: This is in line with the Council's constitution and financial regulations in relation to governance.

Alternative Options Considered: This report is on the forecasted out-turn and therefore alternative options are not proposed.

594 Capital Programme Update 2023/24

The Chair invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to address the meeting. Cllr Hakewill spoke to welcome the initiative to increase biodiversity as part of the community orchards and micro woodlands schemes but made reference to potential loss of biodiversity elsewhere in the area. Cllr Hakewill queried details regarding grant funding for tree planting, when funding would be available, ongoing maintenance of planted trees and the composition of project boards convened to monitor schemes approved.

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

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to welcome both the additional SEND provision and community orchards project and looked forward the involvement of both communities and schools in the latter.

Cllr Howes spoke to reference Cllr Hakewill's comment regarding potential loss of biodiversity at a site near Rothwell, noting that the site in question could be enhanced to realise a biodiversity net gain.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- i) Approved the following changes into the capital programme:
 - a. Manor School, Raunds SEND Provision - budget approval for £145k in 2024/25, to be funded from external grant.
 - b. Corby Business Academy SEND Provision - budget approval for £544k, £2k in 2023/24, £542k in 2024/25, to be funded from external grant.
 - c. End User Devices – virement of £441k from completed existing ICT schemes to End User Devices scheme, funding to remain as approved from capital receipts.
 - d. Community Orchards – budget approval for 16K in 2023/24, to be funded from external grant.
 - e. Mirco Woodlands – budget approval for £27.7k in 2023/24, to be funded from external grant.

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:

- Active, fulfilled lives
- Safe and Thriving Places
- Green sustainable environment
- Connected Communities

Alternative Options Considered:

- For those schemes which are grant funded, they are undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the grant conditions and, therefore, there is no alternative option proposed in this report.
- The budget virement in support of the ICT equipment could have been released, however, the replacement of end user devices is an important element of ensuring that the Council has the appropriate equipment to support and deliver services and further investment is required in this area.
- 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.

595 Budget Forecast Update 2023-24 - Period 9

The Chair invited Cllr Jim Hakewill to address the meeting. Cllr Hakewill queried the budget deficit as set out in the report and questioned what the likely end of year figure would be given the increase since the previous reporting period. Cllr Hakewill also questioned the use of funds from the transformation reserve to fund new education case management and regulatory case management systems and what transformation this spend would achieve

The Chair then invited the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, Cllr Lloyd Bunday to introduce a report that set out the forecast outturn position for the Council based on the Period 9 monitoring forecasts for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

In response to Cllr Hakewill's comments, Cllr Bunday noted that updating and amalgamation of legacy software systems was a requirement arising as result of unitarisation.

The meeting heard that the overall outturn forecast for the General Fund for 2023/24, as at Period 9 was a forecast overspend of £10.12m against the approved budget, an additional pressure of £1.569m since the last reporting period. The Children's Trust had forecast an overspend of £29.7m, an increase of £5.093m since the previous period, with a risk that £1.070m of efficiency savings would remain undelivered. It was noted that should this pressure not be mitigated it would pose a significant financial risk to the Council.

In regard to other directorates, it was report that Place was showing a favourable movement of £281,000 and Enabling Services a favourable movement of £195,000.

It was noted that the main risk to the Council alongside inflationary impact was the pressure on demand-led services. The main saving to offset this impact was additional investment income of £5.8m arising from an increase in the Bank of England base rates.

It was heard that the Council's Corporate Contingency Budget for 2023/24 was £3.746m, representing around 1% of the net budget and was held to meet unknown or unplanned costs. The recent pay award had resulted in a pressure of £2.222m that had been met from the contingency budget, leaving a balance of £1.524m. It was assumed that the contingency budget would be used in full during the remainder of the financial year.

The Council's overall outturn forecast for the Housing Revenue Account was reported as being an overspend of £26,000.

It was also reported that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) had a forecast pressure of £9.1m, with pressures relating to the high needs funding block that supported SEND provision. Use of reserves had reduced this figure from £9.81m

Concluding, Cllr Bunday recognised that the current financial climate was challenging, however, the Council would continue to work hard to balance its finances whilst protecting vital services, particularly those to its most vulnerable residents.

Cllr Scott Edward spoke to refer to the education case management system that would assist in making the service more efficient and streamlined and was a legal obligation to have in place.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to note that demand-led services were exceeding budgeted levels and welcomed the work of the Finance team and each directorate in their work to mitigate costs, stating that the Council was doing everything it could to be as efficient as possible whilst still delivering services that residents expected.

RESOLVED

That the Executive:

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

Reason for Recommendations – to note the forecast financial position for 2023/24 as at Period 9 and consider the impact on this year and future years budgets.

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

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 12:45pm