

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive

At 10.00 am on Thursday 19th December, 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 Scott Edwards
Councillor David Brackenbury	Councillor David Howes
Councillor Lloyd Bunday	Councillor Mark Rowley

Also in attendance – Councillors Lyn Buckingham, Jim Hakewill, Anne Lee, Dorothy Maxwell and Mark Pengelly

732 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Gill Mercer and Harriet Pentland.

733 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 14th November 2024

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 14th November 2024 as true and accurate record of the meeting.

734 Members' Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

735 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 - Commissioning of Substance Misuse Services for North Northamptonshire	Cllrs Dorothy Maxwell & Anne Lee
Item 6 - Stock Condition and Workspace Transformation Capital Investment	Cllr Lyn Buckingham
Item 7 - Customer Service Outreach Programme	Cllrs Lyn Buckingham, Matt Keane & Anne Lee

Item 8 - Environmental Crime Offences 2023 – Fixed Penalty Fines Update	Cllrs Lyn Buckingham, Matt Keane & Dorothy Maxwell
Item 9 - Sheltered Housing Alarm Digitalisation	Cllrs Lyn Buckingham, Matt Keane, Dorothy Maxwell & Mark Pengelly
Item 10 - Kettering Pitch, Track and Pavilion Refurbishment Project	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 11 - Housing Revenue Account Draft Budget 2025-26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan Proposals	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 12 - Draft Budget 2025-26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan	Cllr Mark Pengelly
Item 13 - Draft Capital Programme 2025-2029	Cllr Dorothy Maxwell
Item 15 – Corporate Strategic Risk Register	Cllr Anne Lee

Cllr Matt Keane was not in attendance at the meeting and therefore did not speak in relation to Agenda Items 7, 8 or 9

Cllr Dorothy Maxwell opted not to speak in relation to Agenda Items 9, 11 or 13.

Cllr Mark Pengelly opted not to speak in relation to Agenda Item 12.

Cllr Anne Lee opted not to speak in relation to Agenda Item 15.

736 Commissioning of Substance Misuse Services for North Northamptonshire

The Chair, Cllr Jason Smithers invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the Executive. Cllr Maxwell noted that with ongoing funding uncertainty there was a need to make the right decisions and to consider the requirements for tackling substance misuse in rural areas utilising effective partnership working.

The Chair thanked Cllr Maxwell for her contribution before inviting Cllr Anne Lee to speak on this item. Cllr Lee referred to a historic discussion at the Health Scrutiny Committee regarding the benefits of dual diagnosis for treating mental health and addiction and raised concerns that this may not be acted upon in practise until 2026. Cllr Lee suggested that there was an implication that mental health services were not currently integrated and stated that it was crucial to make mental health support available to people with addictions sooner rather than later.

The Chair thanked Cllr Lee for her contributions before inviting the Director of Public Health, Jane Bethea to introduce a report that sought approval to commission local Substance Misuse services within North Northamptonshire with effect from 1st April 2026 following the end of existing contracts.

The Director of Public Health responded to the points raised by speakers, clarifying grant funding and acknowledging the issue of substance misuse in rural areas and the need to commission locally to tackle this. Assurance was provided regarding work in relation to substance misuse and mental health, with work underway alongside NHFT and providers to develop a pathway to meet user needs effectively through the service offer. Further assurance regarding service integration was provided.

It was reported that current services worked extremely hard for local residents, with service users at the heart of their offer. It was noted that the current commissioning lead for the services in North Northamptonshire was West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and a decision had been taken in October 2024 by the Joint Services Committee for the two authorities to commission separately from April 2026 in line with the current contract end date.

It was reported that the current substance misuse spend was significant, with the Council wishing to undertake a robust, transparent and fair commissioning process involving significant consultation to result in the best service model for North Northamptonshire from April 2026.

Benefits of separate service commissioning were highlighted, with the consideration of geography being an important factor alongside financial and contract management. It was reported that the Council maintained an excellent working relationship with Public Health at WNC and this would continue to the end of the current contracts. Details of significant consultation already undertaken were highlighted to the meeting, with it being heard that this needed to be built upon to ensure new service models met the needs of residents. The meeting noted that following further consultation with stakeholders and service users, and after any necessary revisions based on this and Health Scrutiny input, the finalised service model would proceed to the commissioning stage.

Cllr David Brackenbury thanked the Director of Public Health for introducing the report and providing answers to speaker questions, noting the assurance received as a result of the emphasis on integration of services and rural service provision as part a holistic approach.

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to welcome the report noting that mental health considerations often went hand in hand with substance abuse issues.

Cllr Mark Rowley welcomed the references to rural area service provision and the emphasis on mental health considerations alongside substance misuse.

Cllr Helen Howell welcomed the report and the control the Council would have over the new contracts.

The Chair spoke to welcome the report, noting the complications inherent in addiction and the positive move towards the Council commissioning its own services for local residents.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- (a) Delegated authority to the Director of Public Health & Wellbeing in consultation with the Executive Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing to commission substance misuse services for North Northamptonshire Council.
- (b) Delegated authority to the Director of Public Health & Wellbeing in consultation with the Executive Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing to undertake a thorough and structured commissioning process, undertaking all necessary steps to establish contracted services that are both robust and effective in addressing substance misuse and related issues.

Reasons for Recommendations:

Statutory Duty: North Northamptonshire Council has a statutory responsibility under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of its residents. This includes commissioning services for the treatment and prevention of substance misuse. Fulfilling this duty requires the continuation of effective and accessible Substance Misuse services.

Prevalence of Substance Misuse: Drug and alcohol misuse remains a significant issue both locally and nationally. The latest data indicates that substance misuse continues to have a detrimental impact on the health, wellbeing, and safety of individuals, families, and communities within North Northamptonshire. Commissioning these services will directly address these challenges and contribute to reducing substance-related harm.

Improving Public Health Outcomes: The commissioning of Substance Misuse services will support the Council's commitment to improving public health outcomes and reducing the burden on local healthcare services, including accident and emergency departments and mental health services.

Effective Service Delivery: By commissioning services well ahead of 1st April 2026 start date, the Council can ensure that the new contracts will be in place in a timely manner, avoiding any service disruption and ensuring continuity of care for vulnerable individuals.

Alternative Options Considered:

Do Nothing: Continuing without re-commissioning the service was considered, but this option would result in a service gap from April 2026, which could adversely affect service users, and the council would be in breach of its statutory responsibilities.

Continue Shared Services with West Northamptonshire Council: This option was considered but decided against. The process of disaggregating services was agreed at Shared Services Joint Committee on 23rd October 2024

In-House Provision: The possibility of bringing the services in-house was reviewed, but external commissioning was deemed more cost-effective and allowed access to specialist providers.

737 Stock Condition & Workspace Transformation Capital Investment

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the meeting. Cllr Buckingham noted that report before members comprised a significant piece of work and urged that consultation should be undertaken with communities affected by any Council building loss or change of use. In regard to any building work procurement, Cllr Buckingham stated it was important that procurement was sustainable and undertaken in the right way.

The Chair thanked Cllr Buckingham for her comments noting that when embarking upon building projects, issues could arise, although the Council would always seek the best possible outcomes.

The Chair then invited the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets, Cllr Matt Binley to introduce a report that sought approval to deliver a proposed project to improve corporate office spaces as detailed in the report, allowing for more effective utilisation and improved overall condition of the Council's building stock. The report also sought permission to procure the works.

It was reported that the Council had commenced the important task of consolidating its properties and repurposing unused or surplus to requirement buildings as part of its asset rationalisation project, with a task to future-proof those that would be retained for the public and staff, thereby ensuring staff were accessible in the community.

The meeting noted a significant level of work already undertaken regarding asset rationalisation which would save costs by reducing the number of buildings in use by staff, thereby reducing energy and maintenance costs. It was reported that stock condition and workspace transformation had been considered as part of the Assets Rationalisation Group.

The Council had a duty to improve its buildings given some of the poor energy performance certificates held as a result of works not having been undertaken by legacy authorities, with other works identified following stock condition surveys. Priority works would be completed at Corby Cube, Corby Enterprise Centre, Corby Innovation Centre, William Knibb Centre, Bowling Green Road and Haylock House; alongside works required for staff relocations.

It was reported that stock condition work would be undertaken alongside the workspace transformation to ensure best value and maximum efficiencies. It would include office reconfiguration, facilities, meeting spaces and IT related works with

further surveys undertaken, along with input from the relevant teams and staff consultation to form the written specification to procure the works.

Reassurances were offered that the replacement of furniture would only be carried out where absolutely necessary and where furniture was to be disposed of there would be a process to see whether local charities or companies wished to take possession of these items.

Concluding, Cllr Binley noted that the works were to be funded with a £3.25m budget allocation in the approved capital programme.

Cllr Scott Edwards welcomed the report and the fact that Northamptonshire Children's Trust would be based within North Northamptonshire as a result of the workspace transformation.

Cllr Helen Howell spoke to support the report, noting that the Council had inherited a significant number of buildings from legacy authorities in a variety of differing conditions and it was right for the Council to utilise these spaces as best it could for the benefit of its residents while bringing staff back into suitable facilities.

The Chair stated that for the Council to be an employer of choice its buildings must be fit for purpose. The proposal before members was one of "invest to save" that would be beneficial for the Council in numerous ways, including financially.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Agreed to undertake the procurement for refurbishment of identified properties and replacement of furniture as required as set out at paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 of the report.
- b) Delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Assets & Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets, to take all necessary actions to deliver the project, including awarding of the contract.

Reasons for Recommendations:

- This project provides improvements to the Council's corporate office accommodation allowing improvements to the environment for the workforce.
- Works to the specific properties is undertaken to ensure their condition is improved and ensure insurance conditions are met.
- Works undertaken reinforces the Council's commitment made in the Carbon Management Plan including the replacement of more efficient equipment.

Alternative Options Considered:

- The condition of the properties needs to be improved to ensure that the life of the property is improved or maintained. The occupation of buildings has been considered as part of the assets rationalisation work recently undertaken which has helped to consider the properties whose use could be increased and which ones could be leased or disposed of.
- There is an option to deliver this in-house however these works are of a significant scale that this cannot be accommodated by our in-house resources.

738 Customer Service Outreach Programme

This item was deferred.

739 Environmental Crime Offences 2023 – Fixed Penalty Fines Update

The Chair invited Cllr Lyn Buckingham to address the meeting. Cllr Buckingham spoke to suggest that the Environmental Crime fixed penalty fines update did not go far enough, with specific reference made to a perceived lack of enforcement action and officers available to undertake such enforcement.

The Chair thanked Cllr Buckingham for her comments and invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to address the Executive. Cllr Maxwell stated that she was pleased to see action relating to fly-tipping and graffiti but also queried enforcement levels. Cllr Maxwell also referenced vehicles being used for advertising purposes that were not roadworthy.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their contributions before inviting the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets, Cllr Matt Binley to introduce a report that sought approval of revised fixed penalty levels for the following offences:

- Littering
- Fly-tipping
- Household waste duty of care offences
- Graffiti
- Flyposting

Cllr Binley noted that in terms of enforcement, this related to the code of practice that stated enforcement should be self-funded with taxpayers not being responsible for covering any deficit. Increasing fine levels for transgressors would assist in increasing the Council's ability to undertake increased enforcement action.

It was heard that the report outlined the changes arising from the Environmental Offences Regulations, giving local authorities the power to increase fines for various environmental offences as listed above. The report sought approval of the recommendation to increase the relevant fines for these offences.

Cllr Binley stated that there was a clear opportunity for the Council to send a resounding message to anyone considering fly-tipping or committing any of the other offences listed, that they were not welcome to do so in North Northamptonshire and

that the Council would take clear, decisive and robust action against any perpetrators. It was considered that local residents wanted to see a tough stance on those who had no respect for others or the land, and, given the cost of clearing up and investigating these offences, it was heard that deterrent was preferable to detection.

It was heard that whilst the report referenced increasing fixed penalty notice levels, the Council would consider the merits of each offence and consider all enforcement options available to it, including prosecution which was a vital part of the enforcement toolkit and that where legal and policy tests were met, suspects would be prosecuted.

The meeting noted that money received from fixed penalties was ringfenced and could only be used for specific environmental functions as detailed in the report.

Key actions that to support a more robust approach in tackling environmental crimes included increased use of CCTV, encouraging residents to report incidents, ensuring prosecutions were processed in a timely manner, strengthening partnership agency collaboration, further data analytics and educational campaigns to change behaviours.

It was understood that offering a fixed penalty was an alternative disposal method to the offence and paying the fine would not result in a criminal record. Fixed penalties would not be offered to re-offenders or for offences such as large scale fly-tipping, businesses, or bio-hazard material, with the Council enforcing these through prosecution.

The meeting noted that offences were enforceable on private land, with the Council continuing to work with landowners, especially farmers, who were particularly affected by this type of offence.

Cllr Binley concluded by encouraging the public to report fly-tipping using the Council website and where they witnessed offences and had obtained evidence that it be reported.

The Chair spoke to acknowledge the work of the Enforcement Team in investigating and carrying out enforcement action on those fly-tipping across the Council area.

Cllr David Brackenbury welcomed the report and stated that graffiti was not a low-level crime and that it impacted the attractiveness of the area. Cllr Brackenbury also approved of prosecution for fly-tipping offences that met the relevant legal bar.

Cllr Mark Rowley also echoed comments regarding graffiti and noted the danger of fly-tipping in rural areas and encouraged residents to use responsible waste removal companies or the Council's bulky item collection service

Cllr Helen Howell spoke to note that the proposals sent a clear message to those breaking the law by dumping rubbish in North Northamptonshire's beautiful countryside that such offences would not be tolerated.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive,

- a) Adopted Option Two as set out in Section 5 of the report as the new levels for fixed penalty notice (FPN) for offences related to littering, graffiti, fly-tipping, and household waste duty of care and to give a discount of 25% i.e., discounted fine value, for early payment as set out in paragraph 5.6 of this report.
- b) Amended the payment period for FPNs for littering, graffiti, fly-tipping, and household waste duty of care to 28 days and the early payment (discounted FPN level) period to 14 days.
- c) Delegated responsibility to the Executive Director of Place and Economy in consultation with the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets for the amendment of the Council's Enforcement Policies and the Council's Fees and Charges publication in respect of the changes to the early repayment discount and the new fine amounts.

Reason for Recommendations – To accord with the Regulations and the Council's Enforcement Policy. This recommendation supports the Corporate Plan Key Commitments specifically

- Green, sustainable environment
- Safe and thriving places

Alternative Options Considered –

- Do Nothing Option – this option was considered, however given the increasing cost to the Council for the activities relating to the investigation, and clearances of incidents, and the resources required to complete meaningful enforcement action, this option ultimately will reduce the resources the Council can allocate to environmental enforcement. Code of practice for litter and refuse 11D.3 is clear that enforcement should be self-financing, and neither national nor local taxpayers should be expected to meet any deficit. This also misses the opportunity to send a clear message to offenders that the Council will take proportionate enforcement action against environmental offences.
- Increase fines to a lesser amount – this option was considered however the risks identified for increasing are similar regardless of the fine amount. A smaller increase in the fine does less to reduce the current gap between expenditure and cost recovery for the Council in respect of waste enforcement and the removal of fly tipping within the local authority area. This also misses the opportunity to send a clear message to offenders that the Council will take proportionate enforcement action against environmental offences.
- Remove the option for an early repayment discount. -
 - this option was considered as part of the key messages to demonstrate the robust approach taken by North Northamptonshire Council in respect of incidents of environmental crime.

- To remove the early repayment discount is contrary to the Code of Practice that requires enforcing authorities to set fixed penalties, within the ranges specified in the Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (England) Regulations 2017 and that they should select an appropriate level to reflect local circumstances, including local ability to pay.
- The Council's Enforcement Policies and guidance within the Council's Enforcement Concordat are the Council's current best practice guidance which defines the principles of good enforcement and is the foundation upon which the Council's own enforcement policy is based. Removal of the early repayment discount would be contrary to these existing agreed Policies and guidance.
- The Council currently applies an early repayment discount to all FPNs issued. Should the Council wish to depart from its current position and implement the removal of the early repayment contrary to national standard practice, it should ensure that its reasons for doing so are reasonable and proportionate.
- To remove the early repayment discount would trigger a review and update of the Council's enforcement policy.
- The provision of an early repayment discount encourages offenders to discharge their liability for the offence in lieu of prosecution. When set at an appropriate level the receipt of payment at a reduced level provides an incentive to make payment and indicates an effective deterrent against future offending. The receipt of payment of FPNs provides income to the authority that is ringfenced for spending on specific environmental functions and in turn contributing to a reduction in the administrative burden of tracking fines paid and seeking payment from offenders.
- Unpaid FPNs will be prosecuted in the relevant Court. Courts will seek to ensure that any local authority prosecutions are only brought before them when the enforcing authority has exhausted all other reasonable measures when offering sanctions for an offence, as described in the Council's enforcement policy. Offering early repayment period is seen as standard practice when dealing with offences where a fixed penalty can be offered.
- Removal of this option may increase the number of FPNs that are not paid. This will require an increase in resources of local authority officers both from legal and waste management teams in preparing and prosecuting cases in court.
- The impact of an increased number of prosecutions is the increase of the court to exercise their discretion for sentencing of offenders in these cases. Historically where prosecutions locally are successful, the level of fine imposed by the court is far lower than the amount of an FPN, even with an early repayment discount applied. Officers routinely include an impact statement to the court which details the officer time, clean-up costs and other associated expenses, however it is rare that Courts order repayment of the full and true costs to the authority.
- The last prosecution by the Council for the offence of fly tipping that went to Magistrates Court, where an FPN of £400 had not been paid, was concluded with the offender entering a guilty plea.

This matter had twenty-three hours of legal officer time recorded. The average fee from the Government guideline solicitors' rates is £231 per hour. This matter would have incurred an approximate cost at average guideline rates of over £5,300. The court issued a fine of £400 and a contribution towards costs of £150.

740 Sheltered Housing Alarm Digitalisation

The Chair invited Cllr Mark Pengelly to address the Executive. Cllr Pengelly spoke to welcome the report and the benefits of the lifeline service within sheltered housing, whilst noting his disappointment that the report had taken so long to come forward. Cllr Pengelly referenced opportunities of the service and the potential to extend it to private properties and welcomed increased control room coverage for the service. Cllr Pengelly also queried how long the new provision would take to come into effect and queried the exact costing of the new system.

The Chair thanked Cllr Pengelly for his contribution before inviting the Executive Member for Housing and Communities, Cllr Mark Rowley to introduce a report that sought approval to enter into a procurement to modernise the Council's Sheltered Housing Alarms to be ready for the digital switchover of telephone lines between 2024 and 2027 and further recommended procurement of a new fully digital system to replace all peripheral, analogue sensors, with an in-house monitoring centre operated by Council staff.

Cllr Rowley spoke to note that any service users whose system was not currently operable had been offered alternative solutions, including additional welfare checks. It was reported that the upgrade to the alarm system was necessary as a result of notification from Openreach that it would be switching off all analogue phone line connections and moving to a digital internet network from January 2027. Consequently, the technology used throughout the Council's sheltered housing stock would cease to work if action to upgrade the system was not progressed.

The meeting heard that proposal before members sought £1 million of capital funding to purchase relevant equipment, with a further £800,000 across three years to support and maintain it and to support provision of the in-house monitoring support referred to above.

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to welcome the report and to note that service users were some of the most vulnerable members of society and the proposal, if approved, would provide residents and their families with a trust that someone could assist them should the need arise.

Cllr Matt Binley spoke to welcome the report and offered thanks to Cllr Rowley and the housing service for moving forward with the proposal.

Cllr David Brackenbury also welcomed the report, noting that the Council did its utmost to help people stay in their own homes as long as possible and the service offered vulnerable residents a measure of independence.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Noted the risks associated with not completing the necessary work required to facilitate switchover from analogue to digital infrastructure in line with the Openreach planned deadline.
- b) Approved the preferred option, Option 2 - Procure a new fully digital system, replacing all peripheral, analogue sensors with digital equivalents with an in-house monitoring centre staffed by council staff.
- c) Approved the funding proposal as set out in this report (£1.8 million), noting the elements that will be used from Capital Housing Revenue Association (HRA) budget, and that which will be used from the Revenue budget.
- d) Noted that the service will be consulting on the current and future Housing Service charge with tenants with the intention to ensure all costs to deliver the Sheltered Alarm Service are covered. Any decisions on changes to fees and charges will be agreed in Consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Communities in line with delegations set out in the Council's constitution.
- e) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and housing, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Communities, to conclude the procurement in line with the Council's contract procedure rules.

Reasons for Recommendations –

- Seeking a digital solution will address the problem the service is currently facing with ageing technology infrastructure.
- It will ensure people remain safe, with working alarms that allow them to maintain their independence. Not doing so will guarantee alarms will stop working when digital switchover occurs.
- Digital solutions, as opposed to analogue hardwired solutions, reduce the number of failure points that arise from wiring, offering more affordable and manageable solutions if anything should go wrong
- The procurement route via framework will be in line with the Council's contract procedure rules.
- Use of Cloud based technology, for the alarm monitoring, is a recommendation by IT, taking into account the limited resource to support with physical hardware.
- The recommendation to update the Housing Service Charge will ensure the service remains affordable in the long-term.
- Existing contracts for Alarm monitoring, and wider Housing out of hours call monitoring, have expired and require renewal in line with the Council's contract procedure rules.
- An in-house solution will yield cost efficiencies in the region of £22,000 due to consolidation of provision.

Alternative Options Considered –

Option 1: Do nothing – allow the analogue system to be switched off without an alternative put in place **(not recommended)**

Option 2: Procure a new fully digital system, replacing all peripheral, analogue sensors with digital equivalents with an in-house monitoring centre staffed by council staff. **(recommended option)**

Option 3: Procure a new fully digital system, replacing all peripheral, analogue sensors with digital equivalents with an external monitoring centre. **(not recommended)**

Option 4: Procure a new fully digital system, replacing all peripheral, analogue sensors with digital equivalents with the procurement process exploring both in-house and external monitoring systems to inform the final contract award. **(not recommended)**

Option 5: Procure an analogue terminal adapter-based system that enables analogue equipment to be used as part of a digital system **(not recommended)**

741 **Kettering Pitch, Track and Pavilion Refurbishment Project**

The Chair invited Cllr Dorothy Maxwell to speak on this item. Cllr Maxwell commended that hard work that had resulted in a successful grant funding award for the Kettering Pitch, Track and Pavilion Refurbishment Project. Cllr Maxwell noted that similar facilities in the former East Northamptonshire area were lacking and suggested that provision was required in this location

The Chair thanked Cllr Maxwell for her comments before inviting the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism, Cllr Helen Howell to introduce a report that sought to provide an update on the Kettering Pitch, Track and Pavilion Refurbishment Project and detailed the budget request for £1.021m to progress the project following a successful capital grant award from the Football Foundation.

Further approval was sought in relation to the procurement process carried out in collaboration with Northamptonshire Football Association for the purpose of securing funding from the Football Foundation and approval to award the procurement of the works to refurbish the current artificial pitch and the pavilion.

Cllr Howell, in response to Councillor Maxwell, stated that the Council's forthcoming Active Communities Strategy due for consideration at Executive in January 2025 would include a Playing Pitch Strategy, highlighting facilities across the Council area including areas where additional need had been identified.

Cllr Howell stated that the existing facilities at Thurston Drive, Kettering had seen years of underinvestment, with the artificial pitch condemned in 2019 and the pavilion also being in desperate need of refurbishment. In September 2024, members had agreed to provide £150,000 to improve the artificial pitch, with an additional contribution from the Northamptonshire Football Association of £50,000. This partnership funding had enabled the Council to further secure a grant of £810,330 from the Lionesses Future Fund. The report considered the procurement and construction phase of the project, with funding totalling £1.021m.

It was heard that the proposal would see a complete redevelopment of the artificial pitch, with the pavilion significantly refurbished with new changing facilities, athletics club room and a café. Once complete, local women and girls grassroots football clubs would have priority access to facilities, alongside minority groups. Furthermore, coaching and development programmes would be established bringing further investment into the area and offer the opportunity for local people to be more active.

Cllr Howell acknowledged the extensive consultation that had been undertaken in relation to the project and noted the excitement around the project that would breathe life back into the facility and benefit Kettering and the North Northamptonshire area. Cllr Howell offered her thanks to all those involved in getting the project to its current stage.

Cllr Scott Edwards welcomed the report, noting the proposal was a fantastic opportunity for Kettering and surrounding areas. Cllr Edwards also welcomed the opportunity to increase involvement for women, girls and minority groups as well as the security provided as a result of the planned works for Kettering Town Harriers Athletics Club.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved the delivery of the Kettering Pitch, Track and Pavilion Refurbishment project.
- b) Approved the procurement process as outlined at Section 4 of this Report which was completed as part of the Football Foundation Capital Grant Application Process.
- c) Noted the request contained in the Capital Update Report (The Report) elsewhere on the agenda for budget approval for the scheme totalling £1.021m in 2024/25, £810k from the Football Foundation grant, £33k from external contributions and a virement of £178k from the Leisure Minor Works budget within the approved capital programme.
- d) Approved the award to the contractors that have been identified to complete these works as part of the Football Foundation Capital Grant Application Process.
- e) Delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Assets & Environment and the Assistant Director of Communities & Leisure in consultation with the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism to take all necessary actions to deliver the project including awarding of the contracts.

Reasons for Recommendations

- To utilise the capital grant award of 81% of a total project cost from the Football Foundation.

- This project will have a positive impact on multi-sport, but particularly football and athletics development within the North Northamptonshire Community, but particularly for Kettering.
- This is a high-profile site which has been underinvested in for many years and the pitch is condemned and out of use.
- Increased opportunity for local people to be more active and for coaching and development programmes to be established for local clubs and coaches to reinvest into sport in the area.
- The project will support people to live healthier more active lives. The programme of delivery will offer accessible opportunities for all members of the community to be more active. This meets the Councils Corporate Plan objective of “Active, fulfilled lives” and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority for “Keeping Active”.

Alternative Options Considered

- A range of funding opportunities for the project have been explored including being fully funded by the Council. However, this would not create a collaborative approach with Northamptonshire Football Association and the athletics club, would have limited success of funding, reduced opportunities to develop more of the facilities and therefore would not provide best value for the Council.
- Kettering Town Harriers Athletics Club, who currently have part of the pavilion on a lease agreement, have limited funding to invest into the scheme, their governing body England Athletics do not have capital funding opportunities, and they do not have the resource, skills, or experience to take on the full management of the project and facilities.
- The Athletics track and facilities have had some investment by the Council. However, the track itself needs additional investment to ensure that it provides a quality surface for future use by the club. Although the track and equipment improvements for athletics do not form part of the funding award from the Football Foundation, the improvements to the club house will and Northamptonshire Football Associations experience and skills will be able to support future funding opportunities for investment for the club and facilities.

742 Housing Revenue Account Draft Budget 2025-26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan Proposals

The Chair invited the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, Cllr Lloyd Bunday to present the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan and set out the proposals for a rent increase in 2025/26.

Cllr Bunday stated that the Council had an ongoing commitment to offer quality housing and services for its tenants, with the report setting out a framework to guide investments in the coming years. It was noted that the HRA was a ringfenced account for expenditure in relation to the Council’s housing stock that did not impact upon Council Tax levels or the general fund budget.

It was noted that the HRA was primarily funded by rent and leaseholder contributions, with the Cllr Bunday stating that he was deeply aware of the trust placed in the

Council to manage these resources effectively and responsibly. Substantial work had been undertaken in the development of a 30 year business plan informed by the Council's Housing Strategy, as a cornerstone to tackle issues in the housing market including availability, affordability and quality while setting out clear options for residents.

It was understood that proposed rent increases were mandated by the Housing Act 1985 with the current rent setting formula being the Consumer Price Index +1% that resulted in a proposed rent increase for 2025/26 of 2.7%. Such an increase would help protect service levels and ensure ongoing investment in the Council's housing stock, with Cllr Bunday encouraging all stakeholders to shape the future of housing in the community. It was reported that feedback had been gathered from tenants regarding proposals, with consultation set to end on 23rd December 2024.

The Chair spoke to note the benefit of tenants providing feedback on the HRA and proposed rent increases.

Cllr Mark Rowley made reference to the Tenant Advisory Panel and its consideration of proposed rent increases, noting that the Panel understood the need for rent increases to cover additional costs of maintenance and upgrades to properties. It was noted that the HRA also paid interest on loans on the Council's housing stock with the Finance Team commended for managing these loan repayments.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a. Noted the draft 2025/26 Housing Revenue Account Budgets as set out in **Appendix A** to the report, which will be consulted upon with Tenants, which includes: an increase in dwelling rents for 2025/26 of 2.7% which adheres to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) rent setting formula.
- b. Noted the draft Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan beyond, for 2026/27 to 2029/30 as set out in **Appendix B** to the report.
- c. Noted the forecast reserves for the Housing Revenue Account up to 2029/30 as set out in **Appendix C** to the report.

Reason for Recommendations: To ensure that the Council complies with its Constitution in setting the budget for North Northamptonshire.

Alternative Options Considered – This is the start of the formal budget consultation for the HRA and any comments from the consultation will be considered as part of this process.

743 Draft Budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan

The Chair invited the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, Cllr Lloyd Bunday to present the draft Revenue Budget 2025-26 and the indicative Medium-Term Financial Plan for North Northamptonshire Council.

Cllr Bunday stated that the budget was critical in shaping the future of Council services, supporting residents and driving growth and prosperity in the area and reflected the Council's continued commitment to delivering high quality services for residents and businesses across North Northamptonshire. Examples of services supported by the budget were provided to the meeting.

The Executive heard that the budget was structured to underpin the key objectives outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan which focussed on the following areas:

- helping people lead active fulfilled lives
- building better brighter futures for our young people
- developing safe and thriving places
- creating a green sustainable environment
- building connected communities
- developing modern Public Services

Cllr Bunday noted the challenging financial landscape faced by the Council with unprecedented pressures from increased demand for services and high inflation rates. It was understood that the Council needed to continue its transformation program to make services more efficient and cost-effective, with the draft budget proposing a balanced general fund budget of £400.927 million for 2025/26 with further investment of £51.9m to both protect vital services and allow for increased service demand and cost increases, most notably in Adult Social Care and Children's Services. It was heard that these investments were balanced by saving efficiencies of £26.3 million which would be achieved through improved Business Rates income, Council Tax revenue and targeted government grants.

Cllr Bunday stated that there was a proposed Council Tax increase of 4.99% which included a 2% increase for Adult Social Care. These increases would contribute approximately £10.2 million towards funding key priorities and maintaining service levels.

It was reported that the government had announced the local government financial settlement on 18th December leaving very little time for the details of that to be incorporated within the report before members, although it would form part of a budget update report submitted to Executive at its 16th January 2025 meeting. It was heard that initial impressions suggested that the Council had not benefitted from the settlement to the degree hoped, although the figures provided were still within the envelope of expectation.

The Executive heard that in the medium-term, it was anticipated that Business Rates would be reset during 2026/27 resulting in a potential loss of revenue growth. It was reported that the Council was proactively addressing this risk by investing in service transformation to ensure that it was operating as efficiently as possible while continuing to deliver essential services to communities.

The meeting received details of the five-week budget consultation process that would allow residents, local partners and stakeholders to provide feedback on the proposals. Additionally, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee would review the proposals to ensure that all areas were properly scrutinised, with such input welcomed and all parties encouraged to participate in the consultation to ensure that the Council aligned its budget with the needs and priorities of its communities. A report including feedback from the consultation and the views of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, together with any updated information regarding Government funding would be presented to Budget Executive on 6th February 2025 before being presented for approval at Full Council on 20th February.

Cllr Bunday concluded his introduction by stating that the Council remained committed to ensuring that the budget not only reflected the resources available, but also aligned with resident priorities and the broader economic challenges faced. Members were reminded that the Council's approach to budgeting included management of financial resources and investment in the future of North Northamptonshire to building a strong, modern and efficient Council that delivered high quality, affordable services especially to the most vulnerable in the community.

Cllr David Brackenbury spoke to thank the Finance Team for their work in getting the Council to a position where it could propose a balanced budget with no cuts to frontline services, although wider inflationary concerns were raised.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved for consultation the 2025-26 Draft Revenue Budget, which includes:
 - i. an estimated net revenue budget of £815.4m (£414.5m including the Dedicated Schools Grant) as set out in **Appendix A**, noting that this is subject to further update and change following the publication of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.
 - ii. a Band D Equivalent Council Tax of £1,827.06 for North Northamptonshire Council, representing an increase of 2.99% in the 'core' Council Tax and a further 2% for the Adult Social Care Precept.
 - iii. pressures of £51.9m, including adjustments for the reversal of one-off funding in 2024-25, and savings, efficiencies and income proposals of £26.3m as detailed in **Appendix B**.
 - iv. the provisional Dedicated Schools Grant budget of £414.5m for 2025-26, pending the final settlement, as detailed in **Appendix C**.
 - v. the draft planned use of, contribution to, and movement in, reserves as identified in paragraph 5.42, section 9 and **Appendix D** of the report, noting the reserves will be reviewed again after the Finance

Settlement and prior to the final budget proposals, to consider the risk applying at that time.

- vi. corporate budget requirements as set out in paragraph 8.1, including a contingency sum of £2.6m as set out in paragraph 8.2.
- b) For the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG):
- i. Notes the provisional allocations of the funding for the Schools Block, Central School Services Block, High Needs Block and Early Years Block
 - ii. Following consultation with the Schools Forum, delegates authority to the Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance and Performance (S151 Officer), Executive Member for Finance and Transformation and the Executive Director for Children's Services, to determine the DSG 2025-26 schools funding formula, high needs funding arrangements and the early years funding formula in line with Department for Education guidance.
- c) Endorsed the budget consultation process as outlined at paragraphs 13.16 to 13.20 which commences following the approval of the recommendations in this report.
- d) Noted that the funding allocations are estimates only at this stage and will not be confirmed until the publication of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.
- e) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance (S151 Officer) to amend the draft budget following the publication of the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

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 – This is the start of the formal budget consultation for the General Fund and any comments from the consultation, together with any changes from the Finance Settlement, will be considered as part of this process to inform the need for alternative options.

744 Draft Capital Programme 2025-29

The Chair invited the Executive Member for Finance and Transformation, Cllr Lloyd Bunday to present the draft Capital Programme for 2025-26 and the indicative Medium-Term Financial Plan for North Northamptonshire Council.

Cllr Bunday reported that the publication of the programme was a vital step in shaping communities in North Northamptonshire by directing financial resources to deliver

essential projects and services. It was noted that given the lasting impacting on services and infrastructure, the decision had to be approached with transparency and inclusivity and formed part of the budget consultation process that would run until 24th January 2025.

The meeting heard that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had a critical role in reviewing and challenging the draft proposals, with its feedback and recommendations then incorporated into the final recommendations presented to the Executive on 6th February 2025.

It was noted that the total capital programme amounted to £180.7m, consisting of the General Fund Programme of £125.8m, and Housing Revenue Account programme totalling £54.9m. Reference was made to the Development Pool of £263m which detailed schemes awaiting formal business cases and approval into the Capital Programme.

It was heard that the Council was committed to providing a strong and sustainable future for North Northamptonshire, with funds detailed above being utilised to enhance the lives of residents, support the local economy and to meet the Council's corporate objectives. At the same time there was a need to ensure that the programme was affordable and sustainable utilising a mix of external borrowing and internal resources.

Cllr Bunday stated that new investments would only be made if they contributed to the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities, with government grants targeted to the areas of greatest need such as highways and education places, maximising efficiency of Council assets to deliver best value for residents.

A number of new investments for 2025/26 had been identified, with reference made to the following projects:

- £737,000 for Childcare Expansion, funded by government grant
- £11 million new investment in Primary and Secondary School expansion programmes, funded by £1 million from S106 and £10 million from borrowing
- £1.2 million for Hanwood Park Secondary School and £1.06 million for Stanton Cross Secondary School for the planning stages of these two new schools, funded from S106
- £1.7 million for NCT Property Condition Works,
- £50,000 waste contract in-house provision IT set up costs, to be funded from capital receipts/reserves

Cllr Bunday stated that such investments were crucial for the continued development of infrastructure in the area, with a clear governance structure within the capital strategy highlighted and rigorous evaluation of all projects. Cllr Bunday also noted the mix of funding for projects and the need to collaborate with external partners, where possible, to maximise the impact of investment.

Cllr Bunday noted that the Council must ensure that borrowing was used responsibly and only for projects that met its long-term objectives. Minimum Revenue Provision, the amount the Council must set aside for repaying borrowing would also be reviewed as part of the treasury management strategy to ensure that the Council maintained a sustainable approach to financing its capital investment.

Cllr Bunday sought engagement with the budget consultation process to ensure that the capital programme accurately reflected the needs and aspirations of the community to create a stronger, more sustainable and connected place to live for the benefit of all residents.

Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to welcome proposed new investments in education, referencing the ongoing issue of school places and specific investments to target this area.

Cllr Binley referenced existing government funding that was benefitting local residents, such as the local electric vehicle infrastructure fund but raised concerns regarding government funding for the Isham Bypass and A43 dualling which was required to improve the infrastructure of one of the fastest growing areas in the country.

The Chair concluded debate by noting the significant investment in school places as the mark of an ambitious council and made reference to the recent corporate peer review that had recognised the achievements of the Council to date. The Chair offered his thanks to the Finance Team for their work in relation to the budget.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Approved for consultation the General Fund Capital Programme 2025-29 and HRA Capital Programme 2025-29.
- b) Noted the Development Pool 2025-29 and that schemes within the pool will be subject to further approval prior to inclusion in the programme.

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

Alternative Options Considered - This is the start of the formal budget consultation for the Capital Programme and any comments from the consultation will be considered as part of this process.

745 Capital Programme Update 2024-25

The Chair 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 David Brackenbury spoke to welcome the project regarding Rowan Gate Special School and the real-time bus stop provision in Thrapston that would benefit local residents and had been welcomed by the town council.

Cllr Helen Howell spoke to welcome the budget proposal for Kettering Pitch, Track and Pavilion and referenced the funding for Washbrook Road ramp in Rushden that would finally allow completion of a long-standing project.

Cllr Scott Edwards referenced the transformation achieved at Wilby School as part of the Rowan Gate Special School to provide an amazing facility for local children and the community.

The Chair spoke to welcome the positive outcomes that would arise as a result of the investments before members, with specific reference to the Washbrook Road ramp that would connect to the Greenway.

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

Approved the following changes into the capital programme:

- a. Kettering Pitch, Track and Pavilion, budget approval for £1.021m in 2024/25, £810k to be funded from an external grant, £33k from an external contribution and a virement of £178k from the Leisure Minor Works budget within the approved Capital Programme.
- b. Wilby School Building Refurbishment for Rowan Gate Special School – budget approval of £410k in 2024/25 to be funded from Higher Needs capital grant.
- c. Washbrook Road Ramp, Rushden – additional budget approval for £291k in 2025/26, to be funded £115k from S106 contributions and £176k from capital receipts/ reserves.
- d. Household Waste and Recycling Containers – additional budget approval for £464k in 2024/25 to be funded from Capital Receipts/ reserves.
- e. Thrapston Bus Stop Real-Time Passenger Information System – budget approval of £26k in 2025/26 to be funded from S106 contributions.

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.

746 Corporate Strategic Risk Register

The Chair invited Cllr Lloyd Bunday, Executive Member for Finance and Transformation to introduce a report that provided the Executive with an annual update on Council's Strategic Risk Register.

Cllr Bunday stated that the Risk Register was critical for identifying and managing risks that might impact on the Council's ability to deliver its corporate proprieties.

Two significant updates to the register were highlighted, alongside proposals to mitigate the associated risk, these being:

- Risk 22 - Public Health Recommissioning of Children's and Sexual Health Contracts delayed
- Risk 23 Impact of Social Housing Regulation Act on the inadequate provision of social housing (to be carried out through a Social Housing Inspection and rating)

RESOLVED

That the Executive noted the risk management update

Reason for Recommendations: To ensure that the Council complies with its Constitution and legislative requirements.

Alternative Options Considered: Do nothing option was considered but deemed inappropriate as it would not meet with the recommendation of the Value for Money report by our external auditors in best practice in ensuring that Executive Member are sighted on the risks of the council.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 12:38pm