

## Member Questions – Full Council 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

### Question 1

At a recent full council meeting Councillor David Brackenbury mentioned a complete review of the planning arrangements and committee system for North Northamptonshire. What progress has been made and when will any progress be shared with the full membership.

Councillor Martin Griffiths 14.12.21

### RESPONSE

***The review referred to was a review of the planning service and not specifically the committee system. An initial review of the new planning committees was made by the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the committees in October, which resulted in some changes being made to the committee procedures, such as the introduction of a Planning Site Visit Code of Practice and the Constitutional amendments on the agenda for Council to consider today. The review of the wider planning service is ongoing as work is undertaken to continue harmonising the practices carried out across each of the area planning teams. This has resulted in a number of changes to back-office procedures to improve the efficiency and consistency of the service and for example, the introduction of a North Northamptonshire Planning Protocol and updated Local Development Scheme, the latter of which is again on the agenda for Council today.***

### Question 2

Like many millions of people, I am appalled by the recent evil and tragic deaths of children in this country who appear to have been let down by failures in child protection. As a corporate parent what assurance do I have that the Children's Trust will help us protect at risk and vulnerable children in Northamptonshire.

How many young people in North Northamptonshire are currently in care to protect them and what assurance can be provided that our social workers are able to cope with increased workloads exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Councillor Martin Griffiths 17.12.21

### RESPONSE

***Under a direction from the Department for Education, NNC (along with West Northamptonshire Council) has delegated its children's social care functions to Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT). The relationship between the Councils and NCT is governed by a set of contractual agreements, this provides the councils with assurance about the delegation of its social care duties. The contract sets out how NCT's performance should be measured and what information must be shared, including a suite of Key Performance Indicators.***

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***As part of the management of the contract, there are regular contract review meetings to scrutinise NCT's performance and to understand how services for children are improving. There is a monthly meeting attended by senior council officers and chaired by NNC's Director of Children's Services as well as a Quarterly meeting attended by the Council Chief Executive and Lead Member for Children's Services. There is also a Social Care Improvement Board which focuses on improving social care practice at NCT, this is attended by senior council officers and the lead member. This meeting is led by an independent DfE-appointed Chair. As well as these formal meetings, there is regular informal contact between Council officers and NCT senior leaders to understand any service pressures and to discuss and resolve any issues.***

***NNC also receive external assurance through Ofsted. As a result of the Summer 2019 inspection, where Northamptonshire received an inadequate rating, NCT is subject to regular monitoring visits to assess whether services are improving. There have been two monitoring visits since NNC was established, both of which showed progress is being made although there continue to be challenges. NCT is preparing for a full Ofsted Inspection at some point in 2022.***

***There are currently 1170 children in care across the whole of Northamptonshire. Like many services, there has been additional demand as a result of the pandemic. The impact of this is regularly monitored by senior leaders at NCT including its impact on caseloads and staff wellbeing, this is also monitored through the arrangements outlined above. To date, NCT have continued to perform well in terms of visiting and assessing children's needs in a timely well despite the increases in demand. They have also launched a recruitment campaign to increase the number of permanent social workers which will if successful, reduce caseloads for social workers. The pandemic has at times required social workers to work in different ways to ensure that all of our children are appropriately safeguarded throughout the pandemic.***

### **Question 3**

The global pandemic has shown us the importance of health, wellbeing and the mental health of our residents here in North Northamptonshire.

In the final months of BCWs existence and following the opening of the very popular all-weather football pitches, plans were released and progressed to build a brand-new leisure centre and well-being hub on the site of Redwell Leisure Centre.

Could we please have an update on this project, the planned timescales and confirmation that the funding is still available to deliver North Northamptonshire's first purpose-built health and leisure facility here in Wellingborough.

Councillor Martin Griffiths 18.03.22

**RESPONSE**

***Health and Wellbeing is a priority for the Council, and it is important that we can provide good quality Leisure facilities across North Northants for all our residents to access and benefit from.***

***BCW did progress designs and drawings to RIBA stage 3 for the site at Redwell Leisure Centre, there was no Capital funding identified as part of this work and the BCW suggested that the new unitary authority should look at this project moving forward and to determine if funding would be available. North Northants Council will be undertaking a full Sports Facility Strategy to review all its leisure sites and to understand where this site fits in with capital investment into Leisure by the Council and what possible external funding opportunities could be progressed to support any future plans. This is an essential piece of work to ensure that Capital investment into future Leisure Provision is prioritised according to our facility portfolio needs across North Northants.***

**Question 4**

With regard to New Build properties within North Northamptonshire, will planning consent be granted to ensure –

All New Build properties have an electric charging point included in each one?; and That letterboxes be situated at a reasonable height on each door?

Councillor Dorothy Maxwell 25.03.22

**RESPONSE**

***From June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, an [amendment to Building Regulations](#) will require every new home (including flats and dwellings created from a change of use) to have EV charging point infrastructure, subject to some exemptions. This means new residential developments must have a minimum 7kW charge point for every residence with a parking space. New non-residential properties with more than 10 parking bays must include a minimum amount of charging, with provisions for future expansion. While the emphasis is on charging points, there is also an onus on cable routes to make it easier to install extra points in the future. The Regulations include transitional provisions which provide that building work for which a building notice or an initial notice has been given to, or full plans have been deposited with, a local authority before 15th June 2022, and which has commenced before 15th June 2023, will be exempt.***

***There is currently no legislation in this country that stipulates a minimum height for letterboxes. A proposal to introduce such a requirement was the subject of a private members bill in Parliament in 2019, but to date there has been no amendments to the Building Regulations that makes this mandatory for housebuilders.***

**Question 5**

When will clear guidance be issued by NNC to residents who wish to take part in the Homes for Ukraine scheme on how to access the support? We note that recent communications confirm that homes will need to be assessed and Disclosing and Barring Services checks made. Will residents offering accommodation need to wait for all checks to be completed before they can receive a Ukrainian refugee in their home under this scheme and if so, what is the current waiting time for a DBS check?

Councillor Lyn Buckingham 27.03.22

**RESPONSE**

*Guidance for Sponsors is available on the government website [Homes for Ukraine: guidance for councils - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homes-for-ukraine) and this is also available on the Council website [Ukraine - Sponsor someone | North Northamptonshire Council \(northnorthants.gov.uk\)](https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/ukraine-sponsor-someone) .*

*Council officers are working swiftly to mobilise arrangements to meet the government's requirements for the Homes for Ukraine programme. We will be writing to all sponsors in the North Northants area this week of whom we have been notified by DLUHC, with information about the checks we need to undertake and how we will work with them to provide wraparound support for their guests. The guidance asks Local Authorities to undertake the checks once the visa application has been approved, ideally before the guest(s) arrive or at least very shortly afterwards.*

*Resources are being identified to manage the checks, DBS Identification verification and our administration of the DBS system here at the council. However all DBS checks are actually undertaken centrally by the Home Office DBS service. We are informed this service is being enhanced to meet anticipated demand. There is no further information on turnaround times at this time.*

**Question 6**

What support is the council currently offering businesses to help them work towards being Net Zero, and are we considering offering any grants to aid this?

Councillor Emily Fedorowycz 28.03.22

**RESPONSE**

***The council is currently supporting various projects which will directly benefit local businesses to move towards Net Zero through the Community Renewal Funding won for this area. A prime example is the Green Recovery and Innovation Programme (GRIP) being delivered by the SEMLEP Growth Hub, and also covering West Northants.***

***GRIP consists of one-to-one support with a range of experts, including innovation and energy specialists, to help business leaders discuss, identify***

*and develop their innovation and sustainability plans. After this, they will be able to attend a series of workshops designed to help boost their productivity and make their business more sustainable. Businesses will also have the opportunity to apply for grants of up to £10,000 to spend on consultancy support and small capital items of up to £5,000 (50% private sector match required), and to support the innovations that will help make their business more sustainable. By participating in the GRIP programme, local business leaders will not only be making their organisations more innovative and sustainable, they will be making them more efficient and profitable by reducing waste and cutting costs.*

*This is an important issue and the council will continue to look for opportunities to assist more business move towards Net Zero through advice, networking, funding or other activities.*

#### Question 7

How much warden time is spent enforcing fly tipping in each main area within North Northants? How much has it cost in each to collect and dispose of fly tipping this year? Are the enforcement teams aligned in terms of comms, software tools etc., or is this still due to be integrated?

Councillor Emily Fedorowycz 28.03.22

#### RESPONSE

*The enforcement activities for environmental crime were carried out differently by the former local authorities, although they always collaborated to develop and implement best practice and share intelligence.*

*Since North Northamptonshire Council was formed, these teams have started working more closely together. The teams covering Corby and East Northamptonshire are now operating as one team across those areas. The same team have also been operating in the Wellingborough area and this will be further enhanced when the streetscene services transfer from Wellingborough Norse to North Northamptonshire on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.*

*Across these three areas, there are currently 8 posts involved in enforcing a range of offences linked to environmental crime such as fly-tipping, fly-posting and littering. This is a multi-functional team who promote responsible behaviours amongst our communities by engaging with them and raising awareness of individuals' responsibilities as well as using investigative and enforcement powers where required. They work with the refuse and recycling crews and street cleansing operatives as well as the local police to identify fly-tipping hotspots, gather evidence and pursue investigations to identify the offenders. In the Kettering area, environmental crime is enforced by the Town Centre Wardens, who also have a wider remit to enforce car parking restrictions across the town. The enforcement and warden teams co-ordinate together through the Waste Enforcement Group that meets bi-monthly and consists of*

*officers from North Northamptonshire Council, West Northamptonshire Council, the Environment Agency and Police to share intelligence and best practice.*

*The amount of time spent specifically on fly-tipping by the enforcement and warden teams is not recorded separately from other activities and, therefore, the costs of this activity cannot be identified separately from the total costs of the team.*

*Collecting fly-tipping is only one function of the street-cleansing team and all operatives play a part in identifying, investigating and removing fly-tipping. The fly-tipped waste is often combined with waste and litter from other activities and is not weighed or costed as a separate waste stream. It is not possible, therefore, to isolate the costs of collecting and disposing of fly-tipping from the rest of the street-cleaning costs which include sweeping, emptying litter and dog bins, removing graffiti and litter picking among other tasks undertaken to keep North Northamptonshire clean and tidy.*

#### **Question 8**

How many trees have been cut down in the last year alongside the new ones that have been planted? How many of the new trees are “standards”? (Standards are established trees 2.5-3m minimum). Are established trees rated in terms of their carbon sequestering abilities compared to standards and whips?

Councillor Emily Fedorowycz 28.03.22

#### **RESPONSE**

*Trees in the ownership of North Northamptonshire Council are maintained by different teams depending on where they are located and as a result of legacy arrangements inherited from the former borough and district councils.*

*The highways maintenance team maintains trees on the highway network across the former East Northamptonshire area and rural areas of North Northamptonshire. This excludes the areas of Kettering, Corby and Wellingborough, which are maintained by the grounds maintenance service. The highways service inspects and maintains trees in accordance with an inspection regime and may have to remove trees if they are diseased, dead or pose a threat to local infrastructure or neighbouring properties. Removing a healthy tree is only an option of last resort where other maintenance options are infeasible. Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, the highways maintenance team removed 13 trees across the highways network. Trees are often encouraged and required through the planning process and many trees have been planted as a result of new road construction schemes linked to new development. We do not hold a central register of the number of trees planted in these circumstances.*

*With regards to NNC property in the Corby Kettering area the number of trees felled by the grounds maintenance services in 2021-22 has not been collated yet. We do not hold a register of the number of trees felled in our country parks and woodland greenspaces, as woodland management requires the routine coppicing and other management of large woodland areas; however, standard*

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*trees over 15cm diameter, are generally only removed for safety purposes and are likely to number in the dozens and will be vastly outnumbered by the 4,000 trees planted in 2022-23 across NNC's parks and open spaces. Essential safety work aside, tree felling licences are required if felling more than a total of 5 cubic meters of timber per calendar quarter and none were required in country parks in 2021-22.*

*With regards to carbon sequestration, there are many different measures and approaches to estimating this and further work will be required before the council adopts a robust method of evaluating this. This will be considered as part of the development of the Councils Tree Policy and Strategic action plan.*

### Question 9

Regarding the NNClimate Conference – could the next one look to engage people to find climate leaders, encourage people to be climate leaders and gain feedback and ideas from the public? We need to inspire as well as inform. Could we also consider a young people's conference/forum?

Councillor Sarah Tubbs 28.03.22

### RESPONSE

*The format of the NNClimate21 conference was designed specifically with engagement across the whole NN community in mind, with the question and answer function throughout each session and by reaching out to schools. The ability to enhance and build on this engagement moving forward is a key consideration.*

*Indeed, the NNC Climate Change Route Map, which is appended to agenda item 12 today, identifies a requirement to explore the development of a Virtual Climate Change Partnership. The purpose of this is to establish the most appropriate approach to engage and work with members of the wider community, that can collaborate with NNC and help to reduce the wider carbon footprint of the NN area.*

### Question 10

When will the flood investigation report into the August 2020 flooding in Waverley Road, Kettering, be completed?

Councillor Anne Lee 28.03.22

### RESPONSE

*The final flood investigation report for Waverley Road, Kettering has now been received by the Council, and following a final review and approval will be published on the Flood Toolkit website in April 2022.*

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### Question 11

In December 2021 Full Council met to discuss the Monks Case. A case, which despite the 'accounting adjustments' made to East Northants Council accounts, cost the residents of North Northamptonshire Council four million pounds.

At that meeting the Labour Group asked the Leader to put in place a task and finish group, made up of members from Commission and Finance scrutiny committees, to look at why NNC found itself in the position of having to meet the cost of the case when the leadership of ENC were fully aware that the case was pending but did not declare this during the period of the Shadow Council.

Members were told that the auditors needed to carry out their investigations. They have now had time to do that. Our residents deserve to be given a full and open explanation about this case.

Will the Leader now stand by his promise that NNC will be an open and transparent council, willing to learn from the past and make changes to improve its future practice, put in place a scrutiny task group to fully investigate this matter?

Councillor Jean Addison 28.03.22

### RESPONSE

***The audit for ENC is being finalised during April and the auditors' final conclusions on this matter as relates to ENC's arrangements in the financial year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 will be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee at its next meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022, which will ensure openness and transparency on this matter. We will await the findings of the independent auditor and determine the actions to be taken based on those findings.***

### Question 12

The governments Holiday Activity & Food Fund provides holiday activities and 2 meals per day, to vulnerable & low-income families. This runs during 3 school holidays per year & has been a greatly welcomed source of vital support to the most deprived and struggling families in Northamptonshire. After only reaching the county last Easter, the responsibility for claiming the funding from the DoFE, lies with Public Health. Can North Northamptonshire council commit to backing Public Health in accessing this fund for as long as it's available. Further can we as a council congratulate Northamptonshire Sport for the excellent work, they have done, in distributing this fund in both sides of the county?

Councillor Lyn Buckingham 28.03.22

### RESPONSE

***For the 2021/22 financial year, Public Health led on the delivery of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme. They commissioned Northamptonshire Sport to deliver the programme and work with local delivery partners to provide high quality activities and food to eligible children. 2092 children attended provision during the summer of 2021, with 1149 attending over Christmas (a***

*reduction was expected given the emergence of the Omicron variant of covid-19 and the desire for families to spend Christmas together).*

*For 2022/23, the management of the contract will pass from the Public Health to Children's Services. The aim of this is to enable Northamptonshire Sport to link up with other services for children including schools and social care services delivered by Northamptonshire Children's Trust. NNC and Northamptonshire Sport are working together to promote the programme and hope to see more children attending activities this year.*

*The Department for Education has confirmed there will be further investment in the HAF Programme of over £200m per year over the next 3 years. North Northamptonshire's allocation for 2022/23 will be £1,066,490, this will be combined with the £1,055,190 for West Northamptonshire. Future allocations for 2023-25 will be confirmed at a later date. The current contract with Northamptonshire Sport will end in February 2023, so officers from NNC are beginning to consider options for future delivery and how NNC can ensure as many children and families can benefit from this programme as possible.*

#### Question 13

With the recent garden waste consultation there are concerns that if a charge is brought in more garden waste will be fly tipped or burnt. Last year 50 instances of fly tipped garden waste were reported - where did these instances occur? If garden waste is burned, what reporting and enforcement is available?

Councillor Dez Dell 28.03.22

#### RESPONSE

*Out of 5507 fly-tips cleared in 2020/21 across North Northamptonshire, 130 of them were predominately made up of grass, hedge or tree trimmings and they tend to be dumped on highway verges and lay-bys. This does not mean all of this vegetation originated from domestic properties as some of these are likely to have originated from commercial premises and some will have been dumped by rogue traders who are not fulfilling their responsibilities when disposing of garden waste arisings from paid jobs they have undertaken. This is a criminal offence and residents should be careful to only use garden services that can prove they have a waste carriers' licence and dispose of their waste responsibly and legally.*

*To report a garden bonfire that is causing a nuisance, contact the Council online via <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/contactus> or Tel 0300 1256 3000; the matter will then be referred to the Council's Environmental Health Service for further investigation. Environmental Health have the powers to serve an abatement notice on the person causing the nuisance if proven and prosecute, if there is a breach of the notice, however, we would always encourage residents to try and resolve the matter informally first by going round to their neighbour's*

*house and asking them politely to extinguish it or if they could do anything to reduce its effects.*

#### Question 14

What are we doing to actively promote the financial support available to residents struggling with energy bills, and what is our retrofitting strategy for council owned housing to ensure we are protecting the most vulnerable as energy becomes more expensive?

Councillor Dez Dell 28.03.22

#### RESPONSE

*Each year the Council delivers a Capital programme of investment in our housing stock. This covers a variety of different areas of investment from installing new kitchens and bathrooms to wiring and heating upgrades. A number of our capital programmes are designed to improve the energy efficiency of our stock. For example, our flagship Homes for the Future Programme is currently retrofitting homes on two streets in Rothwell with External Wall Insulation, modern energy efficient boilers, new windows and doors and replacement kitchens and bathrooms. This results in the average EPC rating of a property in these streets increasing from a low D to a high C, meaning tenants see a reduction in their energy use as a result. In addition to Homes for the Future our 2022/23 capital budget will see us continue to invest in External Wall Insulation to our solid wall housing stock on the Naseby Road estate in Kettering. We will also install approximately 500 new energy efficient boilers across our stock in Corby and Kettering. Finally, we have a window and door replacement programme that results in increased thermal efficiency in our stock. We will apply for funding to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund this year. If our bid is successful, this will result in additional funding to spend on measures to increase the energy efficiency of our stock.*

#### Question 15

What protection is afforded to established trees, hedgerow and other key carbon sequestering features, both within council control and within private ownership?

Councillor Dez Dell 28.03.22

#### RESPONSE

*There are many levels of protection afforded to carbon sequestering features administered by various public bodies, and here within NNC there exist separate saved and more recent Planning Policies for each of the legacy Councils Local Plans, and joint ones within the Joint Core Strategy.*

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***A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is an order made by a local planning authority in England to protect specific trees, groups of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity.***

***TPOs protect individual trees or groups of trees which are important to a local area. They may make an area visually more attractive or may be of historical significance. The order may cover anything from a single tree to woodlands. Hedgerow trees can be protected, but not hedges, bushes or shrubs. TPOs can't be used to protect every tree in a neighbourhood nor stop approved building development or infrastructure improvements. Tree Preservation Orders can and do protect Council owned trees.***

***All trees within a conservation area that have a trunk diameter of 75mm (approximately 3 inches) or more are protected. Unauthorised work to a tree protected by a TPO or a tree in a conservation area is a criminal offence.***

***Trees in a conservation area that are not protected by a TPO are protected by the provisions in section 211 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. These provisions require people to notify the local planning authority, using a 'section 211 notice', 6 weeks before carrying out certain work on such trees, unless an exception applies. The work may go ahead before the end of the 6-week period if the local planning authority gives consent. This notice period gives the authority an opportunity to consider whether to make an Order on the tree. This legislation is administered by the Planning teams.***

***A new tree strategy is being developed to bring together the various existing guidance documents, policies, and management plans for trees and woodlands across the new Council. A review of all TPO's is required and will form part of the proposals put forward in the developing tree strategy.***

### Question 16

Residents of the former Kettering Borough Council paid for Town and Parish Council elections through their KBC Council Tax. Residents now pay for elections through Town and Parish Precepts. NNC included election costs when harmonising the area's council tax. Why are NNC residents paying twice for the same service?

Councillor Jim Hakewill 28.03.22

### RESPONSE

***North Northamptonshire Council residents are not paying twice for the same elections service.***

***Prior to 1 April 2021, Kettering Borough Council, uniquely in North Northamptonshire, had historically paid for the election and by-election costs arising from elections to town and parish councils. In the rest of the North Northamptonshire area, the relevant parish or town council had paid for the costs of its own elections. It is usual throughout the UK for the relevant***

***sovereign body to pay for its own election costs, irrespective of where responsibility for organising that election falls.***

***On 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020 the then Shadow Executive Committee in preparing for unitary status addressed this anomaly in order to ensure equity across the area of North Northamptonshire. It therefore advised the town and parish councils in Kettering Borough that future election costs arising in May 2021 and any future elections beyond would be borne by them.***

#### **Question 17**

What is the Council doing to assist the several thousand Pensioners across North Northamptonshire who could claim Pension Credit but don't (and other available benefits), to claim what is due to them after a lifetime of paying into National Insurance and other taxes?

Councillor Jim Hakewill 28.03.22

#### **RESPONSE**

***As you are no doubt aware Pension Credit relates to a national benefit scheme rather than a local one. Information and application details can be found on line and claims can be made through the pension credit claim line for which details are also available. This can be done by the individual or through a friend or family member.***

***If we have pensioners who make a claim for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support and are not in receipt of Pension Credit the Council will advise them to make a claim if we think they will qualify.***

***The Council's social inclusion team will also assist with this if anyone is referred to them.***

#### **Question 18**

Why did the Executive not welcome scrutiny of their proposals to change the way in which green waste might be collected and funded across North Northamptonshire as well as the changes to parking charges at our Country Parks, by asking them to be evaluated by the 22-23 budget scrutiny process?

Councillor Jim Hakewill 28.03.22

#### **RESPONSE**

***The Garden Waste work was not at a point to be able to present sufficient detail on the options available when the scrutiny process was being undertaken, nor was it possible to put any figures in the budget, given the breadth of possibilities and without the results of the consultation. Scrutiny of any proposals will be***

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*undertaken by the relevant EAP before going to Executive. The topic has already been taken to the Climate Change, Environment and Growth EAP in March.*

*Changes to the Country Parks car parking were discussed with the Executive lead member as part of the annual fees and charges review which was concluded on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2021. There was no change to the prices.*

*It is intended that there will be a review of the Council's parking strategy and this may include our country parks. The relevant EAP will be consulted in the process.*