

Question for Full Council Monday 10th March 2014

Question 1

Question to Councillor Mackintosh from Councillor Conroy

Given the substantial sum of money set aside for the "Boris Bike" type scheme, and the obvious differences between Northampton and London, Paris and other cities that have implemented this type of scheme – has a business case been developed to ensure that this spend is good value for money?

Response

The London scheme is on a totally different scale to Northampton's 'pilot' scheme and the costs of set-up and running the schemes is vastly different. The Northampton Scheme reflects the needs of the local area and the hub locations have been strategically chosen to maximise take up and allow for growth into the future.

In terms of developing the scheme, partners have used business intelligence from other similar schemes in the country with similar demographic profiles to do, for example, income modelling and predicted take up rates.

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Question 2

Question to Councillor Mackintosh from Councillor Conroy

What level of usage will be required to consider the bike scheme a success?
Are there KPIs for the scheme?

Response

NCC are developing a set of success measures for the scheme. NCC will use business intelligence from other schemes and monitor usage figures going forward. The scheme will target its marketing to ensure maximum take up.

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Question 3

Question to Councillor Mackintosh from Councillor Conroy

Given the inherent dangers cyclists face on our increasingly busy roads, has there been a safety survey produced for the Bike Scheme that identifies and mitigates potential risks?

Response

Placement of Bike Hire Bays and the impacts these have on the cycle network will have a thorough risk assessment which will be undertaken by the expert resources that NCC have as the project lead. NCC do cycle audits on all new routes and auditing and assessment of new infrastructure on the network is a matter for Northamptonshire Highways.

NCC publish the Northampton Cycle Map, which we will promote to users of the scheme as part of the marketing campaign. The map shows all of the roads in Northampton graded by how suitable they are for cycling on in a easy to understand format. Users of the scheme can, therefore, use the map to make their own assessment of which routes to take depending on how confident they feel cycling. NCC continually strive to build and maintain health and safety risk assessments to a high standard, but they do not compromise safety in terms of design and build. Health and safety is also a personal responsibility of any Bike hire user and it is recommended that users wear a cycle helmet.

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Question 4

Question to Councillor Hadland from Councillor Meredith

Now that the administration has finally seen sense and decided not to turf 13 successful businesses out of their premises, and has ensured the owners of their ongoing security – what plans are being made to improve the facilities at this Borough Council business site?

Response

We will work with the businesses on their future plans and we will keep the ward councillor fully informed.

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Question 5

Question to Councillor Markham from Councillor Meredith

What quality control measures are in place to ensure that work done, including work done under the "Decent Homes Standard", on the Borough's Housing stock is done to a satisfactory quality, in a satisfactory timeframe and in such a way as to have the least negative impact on tenants?

Response

We have introduced a robust and rigorous system of checks on all capital works undertaken on our tenants' homes. Under the revamped Decent Homes Contracts each contractor is assessed on both quality and timeliness in completing works to the tenants' satisfaction and to the technical specification set out in the project brief. Where contractors fall short of our expected standards we take appropriate action within the terms of the contract to address the problem.

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Question 6

Question to Councillor Markham from Councillor Meredith

How many complaints has the Council received per year for the last 3 years from tenants about work done, or not done, to the Council's housing stock?

Response

In 2011 the Council received 46 complaints about capital works including the Decent Homes programme and 191 about responsive repairs. In 2012 the Council received 108 complaints about capital works and the Decent Homes programme and 267 about responsive repairs. In 2013 the Council received 232 complaints about the capital works and Decent Homes programme and 458 complaints about responsive repairs. In context the Council has increased expenditure on capital works and Decent Homes to over £17m per year from 2012/13 and confirmed ambitious plans to bring all homes up to the Decent Homes Standard by March 2015. We are now working with our tenants to improve our levels of service and satisfaction through the Repairs & Voids Service Improvement Panel and the newly created Decent Homes Service Improvement Panel, and will continue to use complaints as a learning tool to help us improve and not just as a means of collecting data.

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Question 7

Question to Councillor Mackintosh from Councillor Beardsworth

Now that the leader has finally been cajoled into publishing the Consultation Responses to the plans to reopen Abington Street – can he please explain in what way this consultation was taken into account when finalising plans, given that 75% of responses were objections?

Response

The responses were considered as part of the overall decision making process. This process included, of course, the Cabinet meeting in July 2013 where Cllr Beardsworth did not raise any concerns.

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Question 8

Question to Councillor Hadland from Councillor Beardsworth

After the discovery of a significant amount of Asbestos in the Greyfriars bus station – what are the implications for the demolition of the building, in terms of cost and timeframe for completion?

Response

The Council is aware there was asbestos used in the construction of the Greyfriars Bus Station. To ascertain the extent of its usage the Borough Council is currently undertaking detailed surveys of the vacated building.

It is not considered there will be an impact on the project in terms of the delivery and the timescale for the programme. Detailed tenders are currently being analysed and the results of the asbestos survey will be part of this process.

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Question 9

Question to Councillor Markham from Mr Norman Adams

In your report on Toms Close about the council's intentions for the 16 "Airey" type properties. My current understanding is that nine are council stock, which means seven would have been or will need to be purchased from the property owner.

Question:

- a) Will the new homes be social rent?
- b) Will the new development be council owned?

Response

The council has yet to decide the future mix, tenure and ownership of the replacement dwellings in Toms Close but I can confirm that the land will be used for new housing and no other purpose.

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Question 10

Question to Councillor Markham from Mr McNabb

In light of the ongoing Decent Homes Scandal, is there a huge apology and compensation pot ready?

Response

Our Decent Homes contractors are robustly supervised and managed but in a programme of over 8,000 homes and £50m of expenditure it is not possible to get it right all the time and every time. Where our contractors don't get it right we ensure that we work with them and the tenant to resolve the problem and establish if any compensation is appropriate. Where compensation is appropriate it is usually the responsibility of the contractor to pay it.

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Question 11

Question to Councillor Eldred from Councillor Stone

Why was information about International Women's day so late in being made public?

Response

Information was circulated on the same timescale as other events. Councillor Stone may have missed this as I understand she has been on holiday to Bangladesh.

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Question 12

Question to Councillor Eldred from Councillor Stone

Who appoints chairs to the forums and using what criteria?

Response

The Leader of the Council appoints chairs to the forums based on his judgement.

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Question 13

Question to Councillor Eldred from Councillor Stone

Has there been any monitoring of the spending of the Councillor Community Fund? For example, the impact it is having across the town.

Response

Decisions on spending of the Councillor Community Fund is a matter for each individual councillor based on their priorities and community knowledge within their ward.

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Question 14

Question to Councillor Hadland from Councillor N Choudary

It is going to cost 20p to use the public lavatories in the new bus interchange.

1. How much revenue is this predicted to raise?
2. What will the revenue be used for?
3. Will it have the effect of excluding some of our citizens?

Response

1. We have budgeted that the charges will raise £15,000 per annum.
2. The income from the charges for using the public toilets, together with the charges paid by bus operators and rental income from the retail unit, café concession and travel centre is collectively used to meet the operational costs of running the facility.
3. Those with disabilities have access to better free facilities than existed previously at Greyfriars or indeed generally in the Town Centre before the North Gate Bus Station was opened. Many towns make small charges to use public toilets and this has been found to discourage vandalism and abuse of facilities as well as generating income to help meet the cost of keeping them in a good condition. It is not considered that making a small charge will exclude local people from using the facilities.