

Question for Full Council Monday 6th June, 2016

Question 1

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Norman Adams

Main Homelessness Duty

Changes brought in under the Localism Act (2011) enable local authorities to also discharge this duty via a fixed-term assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector with a minimum term of 12 months. This is often referred to as a 'private rented sector offer

Question: Since 2012 how many private rented sector offers have been made?

Response

Since November 2012, the Council has not used this power under the Localism Act 2011.

I can confirm, however, that the Council has been using the private rented sector to prevent homelessness and discharge its homelessness duty for more than 10 years.

As you are aware, the Localism Act 2011 provides local authorities with the power to discharge their homelessness duty by making the homeless household an offer of 'suitable' private rented accommodation even if that household decides to refuse the offer.

Due to the shortage of good quality, affordable private rented accommodation in Northampton, we have chosen to use the private rented sector to prevent homelessness, rather than to discharge the Council's duty to households for whom it has already accepted a rehousing duty.

It is hoped, however, that the Council's access to good quality, affordable private rented accommodation will improve when it establishes its Social Lettings Agency, relaunches its rental deposit scheme and starts bringing empty homes back into use in 2016/17.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

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Question 2

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Norman Adams

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was originally intended to ensure people could access 30% of the market.

Question: Do Northampton Borough Council know what the current percentage is, and if so what is it?

Response

Local Housing Allowance Rates reflect the rents being charged across the “Broad Market rental Area” and are set by Government. The LHA level reflects the lowest 30% of these rents. The Council currently pays LHA which is 30% of average local rents.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

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Question 3

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Cllr Ashraf

When was the last temporary / emergency accommodation last inspected?

Response

The Council currently uses two types of temporary accommodation to accommodate homeless households: self-contained council housing, and bed and breakfast accommodation.

All of the self-contained council housing is inspected each time it becomes vacant. All bed and breakfast accommodation is inspected fortnightly and whenever a complaint is received.

Inspections of bed and breakfast accommodation are carried out by the Council's Temporary Accommodation Officer – who has received the appropriate training to identify hazards and issues in the accommodation – and by members of the Private Sector Housing Team.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

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Question 4

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Cllr Ashraf

Why have the housing estate walkabouts been cancelled?

Response

The programme of estate walkabouts was suspended by NPH in September 2015 because they were poorly attended, they prevented frontline staff from dealing with urgent operational matters and, due to staff shortages, they sometimes had to be cancelled at short notice.

In 2014-15, a total of 249 estate walkabouts were organised, and these were attended by a total of 31 ward councillors and 53 residents. As the estate walkabout model was not working, it was replaced with a range of activities – including day to day reality checks, health and safety inspections and better risk management – aligned to NPH's ambitious 2 year Neighbourhood Improvement Plan which sets out how NPH will build capacity in local communities, empower people to take a lead in their communities and work with partners to develop new, innovative ways of working that encourage people to take more responsibility for their behaviour.

NPH has agreed to work with the Neighbourhood Service Improvement Panel to revisit the estate walkabout principles and design a resident-led process that is supported by Officers This work is ongoing and it is expected that a new approach will be launched in Autumn 2016.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

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Question 5

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Cllr Ashraf

Do the councillors get invited to the housing officer surgeries?

Response

To improve its engagement with local residents, NPH has introduced monthly surgeries at Community Hubs. These surgeries are widely publicised through the NPH website, local shops, the Facebook pages of local services and groups, and at Residents Association meetings.

The Community Hub surgeries are co-ordinated by the area Housing Officer and are intended to be supported by partner agencies and local stakeholders, including the local PCSOs and Environmental Wardens.

Although Councillors are not invited as a matter of course – because many already hold their own local surgeries – NPH has confirmed that this is something it would be pleased to explore.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert

Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

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Question 6

Question to Cllr Hadland from Cllr Duffy

The officer overseeing seeing the lakes has left the Borough Council, which officer is now in charge?

Response

The Officer in charge is Glenn Miller, who is Interim Corporate Asset Manager.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 7

Question to Cllr Bottwood from Cllr Smith

Can those streets that are part of the night time economy and those neighbouring streets have a priority in being kept clean?

Response

I do give already very high priority to cleanliness of the town centre and I have more recently ensured that extra resource is applied in order to raise standards. Those streets that feature strongly in the night time economy are given particular attention to ensure the cleaning regime deployed fits with their pattern of usage.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 8

Question to Cllr Markham from Cllr Davenport

Can councillors be notified about decisions that are related to their ward before the general public and the media are notified. For instance, my colleagues and I have been asking about the garage review for some time but we have been informed by our own residents?

Response

All major decisions are made either through Cabinet or Full Council. It would not be practical to contact ward councillors on every day decisions.

Councillor Mary Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 9

Question to Cllr Nunn from Cllr Stone

Can you please list your responsibilities?

Response

As Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Town Centre and Sports Clubs, my key responsibilities are:-

- To deputise for the Leader in her absence
- Town Centre Operations
- Markets
- Sports Clubs
- Councillor Training and Support
- Cabinet and Member Support
- Night time Economy

Councillor Jonathan Nunn

Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Town Centre and Sports Clubs

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Question 10

Question to Cllr Bottwood from Cllr Russell

How many fines have been issued in the last 12 months for dropping litter and cycling on pavements?

Response

The number of fixed penalty notices served for littering in the year to 20 May 2016 is 446.

Fixed penalty notices for cycling are administered by the Police.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 11

Question to Cllr Hallam from Cllr Birch

The Psychoactive Substance Act, a ban on the trade of any substance that can affect a person's nervous system, came into force on 26th May. Those convicted of dealing or possession with intent to supply could face seven years in jail. What is the Borough doing to ensure that all traders who sell these previously named 'Legal Highs' are identified and prosecuted?

Response

Responsibility for prosecutions for the illegal sale of such substances falls to the Police and/or Trading Standards, which, as you know, is an NCC function. The Community Safety Team does however actively support the police in their work in this area through, for example, supporting community engagement or dealing with associated antisocial behaviour.

Councillor Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for Community Safety

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Question 12

Question to Cllr Hallam from Cllr Russell

I have recently been made aware that we have brothels operating in the town under the guise of offering massage services. Is the portfolio aware of how many of these establishments there are in the town. Are they being monitored in regard to human trafficking and modern slavery and is there a case for prosecutions under the trade description act?

Response

There are no official numbers of such premises in Northampton. Managing or owning a brothel is a criminal offence and as such comes under Police jurisdiction, as would offences relating to human trafficking or slavery. If the Police become aware of any allegation that a premise is being used as a brothel, they undertake visits to ensure that offences of any nature are not being committed. If there are any issues in relation to Trading Standards then these will be the responsibility of Northamptonshire County Council

NBC do not have any direct enforcement responsibilities. However, there are plans for a multi-agency approach to be taken in undertaking joint operations/inspections of suspect premises. Discussions are taking place between ourselves, the police and Trading Standards in order to progress this.

Councillor Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for Community Safety

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Question 13

Question to Cllr Bottwood from Cllr Birch

The Racecourse will be the venue for a number of large events this summer. These will attract hundreds of residents and visitors to the Racecourse area. Can we be reassured that everything possible will be put in place to cater for the visitors – eg broken rubbish bins replaced, fly tipping cleared, and that the clean up process will be efficient with the Racecourse returned in good condition after the events.

Response

Yes. The cleanliness and maintenance of the Racecourse is amongst my top priorities. As for any event on council property, event holders are expressly required to leave the venue in a clean and tidy state after the event is over and to repair or replace anything that is damaged in the course of or as a result of the event.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 14

Question for the Leader of the Council from Mr S Miller, 43 Lynton Avenue, Kingsthorpe, Northampton. NN2 8LX

Stagecoach has recently cut back its services to Northampton, explaining that the increased congestion in the town centre meant that they would struggle to meet the reliability targets of their operating license.

As these delays seem to have coincidentally started around the time of the new bus station, and the leader of the council said in January that Stagecoach have never said they have any problems with the new station, could the leader please confirm that she is in discussions with Stagecoach to ensure that the issues in the town centre are not permanent and that the council is encouraging the bus company to reinstate those reduced services.

Response

I can confirm that the council's officers are in continual contact with Stagecoach. The service levels have been discussed and Stagecoach has confirmed that the reduction in services is not as a result of the Bus Interchange.

The commercial nature of bus services has resulted in Stagecoach reviewing their services and they have confirmed that there are no current plans to further review or amend the services now offered.

Councillor Mary Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 15

Question to Cllr Bottwood from Mr S Miller.

Stagecoach has recently cut back its services to Northampton, advising that the increased traffic and congestion in the town centre meant they were struggling to keep to time. Could the councillor please update on air quality measurement in the town centre since the buses moved to North Gate Bus Station, specifically with regard to the levels of Nitrogen Dioxide caused by traffic having to put up with the frequent traffic jams..

Response

Air quality monitoring has been carried out in the vicinity of the new Northgate Bus Station since before it opened. The results of this monitoring are currently being analysed and ratified. Any action that is required as a result of these results will be taken forward as part of the Low Emissions Strategy process. The draft Low Emissions Strategy is being presented to Cabinet later this week ahead of a period of proposed public consultation. It is anticipated that the strategy will be finalised later in 2016.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet member for Environment