

Question for Full Council Monday 12th December, 2016

Question 1

Question to Cllr Hadland from Cllr B Markham:

For a number of years local residents, solicitors, services such as estate agents and Councillors have been able to view planning applications and supporting documents on the NBC website. This process was relatively easy; all you needed was an address or post code or ward name or combination of these enabling a search for the planning application number. Following an 'upgrade' several months ago the search facility has not worked properly and now users can only find details in the already know the applications number. This greatly reduces the usability of the site. A fix for this was promised 'by October'.

Can the Cabinet member tell me when he expected the previous level of service to be restored?

Response

Since the new system was installed, there have been a number of technical issues which needed to be resolved before the software supplier could go ahead and install the new website software. These issues have taken longer than initially expected to be resolved, with officers spending a considerable amount of time to ensure that the final product is fit for purpose and works correctly. I'm pleased to report that these have now all been resolved.

The installation of the new website software was scheduled for the 29th & 30th November. Following installation, officers will be receiving dedicated training on the new software during w/c 5th December. Once training has been completed, the process of 'building' the new system will start. The timetable is for this to be completed by late December and testing taking place in the New Year. Providing all tests are completed satisfactorily, the new public facing web pages are expected to be online on the NBC website before the end of January 2017. When this is live the ability to search planning applications will be greatly improved.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

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Question 2

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Mr Adams:

Now that the government have confirmed that they have scrapped the mandatory requirement on Councils for Pay to Stay can you confirm that NBC will scrap any plans to apply it?

Response

Although the Government has recently announced that it is no longer planning to introduce an income based rents policy that compels local authorities to set higher rents for higher income council tenants, it remains committed to ensuring that social housing is occupied by those who need it most.

This is why the Government is introducing the mandatory use of fixed term tenancies for new tenants in local authority housing. At the end of each fixed term, councils will review the tenants' circumstances to ensure that they still need social housing.

The Government has said that its guidance to councils will make it clear that councils should take into account a household's financial circumstances when allocating or renewing tenancies and that, unless there are exceptional circumstances, tenancies should be targeted at those on lower incomes. It has also said it will "consider whether other options exist to ensure that high income tenants in social housing make a greater contribution to costs".

When the Government issues its guidance, the Council will assess the financial implications of that guidance and make a decision on whether or not to set higher rents for higher income tenants.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing

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Question 3

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Cllr B Markham:

In the bidding week commencing Wednesday 30th November 2016, once again, there were no bedroom homes for housing applicants to bid for.

In the last 12 months how often has this been the situation and out of the 4,000 on our waiting lists how many applicants are looking for 3 or more bedrooms?

Response

In the last 12 months, there were 6 occasions when the weekly bidding cycle did not include any family homes with 3 or more bedrooms.

I can confirm that there are currently 373 applicants on Northampton's Housing Register seeking a home with 3 or more bedrooms.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing

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Question 4

Question to Cllr King from Cllr Birch:

It was reported at one time that there was full CCTV coverage of town centre. Can you confirm that this is still the case as the festive season is upon us and the public's personal safety should not be compromised at this busy time?

Response

I confirm that there is good coverage of the town centre by CCTV.

Councillor Anna King

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety

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Question 5

Question to Cllr King from Cllr Birch:

Cycling on pavements pose a real hazard to both pedestrians and cyclists alike. Also many cyclists do not have lights on their bikes or wear high-vis. clothing. The new street lights cast deep shadows and cyclist are often invisible to motorists until the last minute. This is potentially extremely dangerous and a campaign on 'Safe Cycling' would be timely. Are there any statistics on cycling accidents?

Response

Such statistics are not kept by NBC. I suggest you approach the county council or the police to see what information they hold.

Councillor Anna King

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety

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Question 6

Question to Cllr Hallam from Cllr Davenport:

You announced recently that play equipment would be replaced when beyond repair. What budget has been agreed to replace the old equipment with new?

Response

At my instruction, officers are in the process of developing a play equipment strategy which will inform the development of necessary capital and revenue budgets to ensure the sustainable provision of play equipment in Northampton for the next 10 years and beyond. Clearly this is an area worthy of the substantial investment that I know will be required. I will make a more detailed announcement in due course.

Councillor Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 7

Question to Cllr Hallam from Cllr Davenport:

What will happen to seating, bins, fences & toilets when they need replacing - is there a budget for those?

Response

The replacement of equipment for parks and open spaces is met from the parks and open spaces block of the capital programme. This pot contained £250,000 this year and it is proposed that funding is maintained at this level in future years.

Councillor Mike Hallam

Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 8

Question to Cllr Hadland from Cllr Davenport:

We have massive problems all over town concerning the safety of our children around schools due to dangerous parking and speeding by parents and residents. The NCC seem unable/unwilling to help, the Police have given powers to the NCC so will not help, there is an ingrained complacency about this problem, even in Planning, where it is said, 'it is like that all over the town' so they grant planning permission even when the infrastructure cannot cope. Can we at the NBC get a campaign together to raise awareness to this growing problem? Parents/residents are fed up with this.

Response

When making decisions on planning applications, the Planning Committee attach's significant weight to professional advice, including that given by the County Council as Highway Authority. The County Council is also a statutory consultee on planning matters. Where significant highway impacts are identified which cannot be mitigated, proposals can be refused on the grounds that fail to comply with national and local policy. However, such refusals need to be supported by technical evidence in order to be capable of being supported at appeal.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

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Question 9

Question to Cllr Hallam from Cllr Haque:

The state of our "gate ways" into Northampton are important as they give the critical first impression to visitors and potential investors. At times they look untidy, so what can you do to improve them?

Response

I agree that gateways are of great importance and tend to be more of a challenge than other areas because responsibility sometime falls to a number of agencies. Also there are difficulties with cleaning and maintaining open space around high speed routes. I ensure that the NBC responsibilities are properly addressed and I also liaise with colleagues at NCC to try to ensure they do the same. From time there is also engagement with the Highways Agency.

Councillor Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 10

Question to Cllr Hadland from Cllr Duffy:

My concern is the inadequacy of bus station to cope with number of buses using it and the traffic congestion this causes. Timetable delays are also caused, leaving long queues of passengers waiting at bus stops for up to an hour in the freezing cold. The congestion also leads to idling vehicles spewing out noxious fumes adding to the illegal level of pollution in Northampton. What proposals for improvement are there please?

Response

The Borough Council is not the Highways Authority, however are currently looking at options to enhance the public realm of the town centre; these plans may include additional bus stops. All plans will be discussed with the Highways Authority and the bus companies.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning