

Council Meeting 3rd June 2019

Question 1

Cllr Ashraf to Cllr Hibbert

Will there be another wave of A Decent Homes programme anytime soon?

Response

The Council's housing stock is managed and maintained, on the Council's behalf, by Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH).

As a member of the NPH Board, you will be aware of the substantial investment that the Council is continuing to make in its housing stock. You will be aware, also, that almost all of Northampton's council homes now meet the decent homes standard and, where they do not, there are good reasons for this.

NPH's 'Whole Home, Whole Neighbourhood' approach to neighbourhood regeneration and investment has delivered much better outcomes (in terms of efficiency, sustainability and customer satisfaction) than was previously achieved through the traditional 'Decent Homes Programme' approach. We have no plans to change this approach.

Details of the planned investment for the current year are available on NPH's website:

www.nph.org.uk/development-and-investment

You will be aware, also, of the Housing Regeneration Policy (approved by Cabinet in February 2019) which sets out the principles and processes that will be applied and followed when regeneration involves the demolition or major reconfiguration of homes.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert

Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

Question 2

Cllr Smith to Cllr Hibbert

Please can we have regular reports to Council on voids, waiting lists for housing, numbers in temporary accommodation, duration of families in temporary accommodation and numbers of rough sleepers and the homeless?

Response

Yes, I am happy to include in future Cabinet Member Reports the end-of quarter figures for empty council homes, the number of households on the housing register, the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation and the amount of time that homeless families (households containing a child or children) currently living in temporary accommodation have spent in temporary accommodation.

The Council, Northampton Hope Centre and Homeless Link are working together to establish a Single Homelessness Forum in September 2019 and, as part of its work programme, the new Forum will be developing the methodology for monitoring, estimating and reporting the levels of rough sleeping in the borough. This figure will be published, first, in November or December 2019 to coincide with Northampton's annual rough sleepers count.

Although it will be for the Single Homelessness Forum to determine the methodology used and the frequency with which the number of rough sleepers are estimated and published, I am happy to include those figures (after they have been approved by the Single Homelessness Forum) in future Cabinet Member Reports.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert

Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

Question 3

Cllr Russell to Cllr Hibbert

The homeless and rough sleepers are still visibly with us. How are we to judge the effectiveness of the Outreach Team?

Response

As you will be aware from your work in Chairing this year's Scrutiny Panel review of rough sleeping and homelessness, tackling and reducing rough sleeping is complex and difficult.

The Scrutiny Panel reviewed the way in which the Council and its partners engage with rough sleepers, including people who have multiple complex needs, and considered way in which different approaches (including the use of the 'Housing First' model) may contribute to a reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in Northampton.

The Street Outreach Workers play a vital role in engaging with people who are sleeping rough in Northampton or are living in the makeshift shelters and tent encampments on the outskirts of the town. From my discussions with them and their managers - and the feedback that I receive from homeless people during my fortnightly visits to the Nightshelter - I have been incredibly impressed by the compassion, understanding and skill of the Street Outreach Workers and their patience, motivation and perseverance in providing rough sleepers with the help, support and encouragement to come off the streets and rebuild their lives.

Since February 2019, we have been able to expand our Street Outreach Team and, during 2019/20, extra funding from the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative has enabled us to provide a six-day-a-week Street Outreach Service. Through regular, daily contact with people who are sleeping rough - both on the streets and in the services that homeless people visit - the Street Outreach Workers are now familiar to, and have gained the trust and confidence of, people (including non-UK nationals) who are sleeping rough.

The extra funding that the Government is providing in 2019/20 to help Northampton tackle, prevent and reduce rough sleeping - together with the work that is going on to strengthen multi agency working - will increase the borough's capacity to engage with people who are sleeping rough and it will improve the quality and effectiveness of that engagement.

in future Cabinet Member Reports, I will provide further information about the way in which the Rough Sleeping Initiative funding is being used and the metrics that we will be using to measure the quality and effectiveness of services, including the Street Outreach Service.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert

Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

Question 4

Cllr Haque to Cllr Hallam

When are landlords going to pay for the extra rubbish and fly tipping their HMOs generate?

The Mounts and Lower Mounts are drowning in rubbish.

Response

Under the Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006, managers of HMOs have a responsibility to:

- Ensure that sufficient bins or other suitable receptacles are provided that are adequate for the requirements of each household occupying the HMO for the storage of refuse and litter pending their disposal; and
- Make such further arrangements for the disposal of refuse and litter from the HMO as may be necessary, having regard to any service for such disposal provided by the local authority.

In its guidance to local authorities, the government has made it clear that local authorities should be mindful that HMOs are residential properties and that, as such, they should provide a comprehensive and frequent waste collection service for such households which is free at the point of use; this includes HMOs which are occupied by students. It also advised that it would not be appropriate for local authorities to levy commercial waste charging on such residential properties, or to seek to impose such charging via any scheme or direction (Source: 'Houses in Multiple Occupation and residential property licensing reform', December 2018).

At a local level we are doing more work than ever before to try to tackle the problem of fly-tipping. The trial reduction in bulky waste charge from £25 to £15 came into force at the start of April and will have also increased the number of slots available to book by around 50% - in order to facilitate faster collection times. The trial was deliberately timed to coincide with one of the busiest periods we experience with fly-tipping.

The Council along with its contractors Veolia, Enforcement officers and Wardens work very hard to address the issues of fly-tipping and extra rubbish. We have introduced a sacrificial sacks trial in Far Cotton on 5th April 2019 and the first four weeks have shown an improvement in both the recycling rate and in the general cleanliness of the area. We will monitor the trial closely with a view to rolling this out to other areas. We have in partnership with the Northants Waste Partnership launched the "lets scrap fly-tipping campaign". Veolia have now re-introduced Kangaroo run's which are targeting known problem areas for flytipping. The first run was successfully undertaken recently and more runs will be undertaken in the future. I will not be widely publicising where the crews are targeting, other than to the area they are going too – as evidence shows that publicising too widely can lead to an increase in the level of fly-tipping in that area.

Whilst there is still much work to do to tackle this complex problem - the fly-tipping figures that I published at the last full Council meeting are starting to show that the figures are reducing and we are moving in the right direction

Cllr Mike Hallam

Cabinet Member for Environment

Question 5

Cllr Ashraf to Cllr Hallam

Air pollution is a serious concern. What is being done to reduce it in residential areas and in shopping centres? Is our air quality strategy working?

Response

I agree that air quality is a serious concern. Unfortunately it is not a simple problem to solve. Improving air quality requires actions from central government, a range of different partner agencies and individuals. We are continuing to progress with the implementation of the low emissions strategy. We have started the process to prepare for the installation of two rapid electric charging points for taxis. These have been funded by a grant from the office for low emissions vehicles. We are continuing our discussions with colleagues in highways and transportation. We are also using our planning powers to require installation of charging infrastructure in new development.

It is also an area where lots of people share the same concerns and with that in mind I have arranged a meeting on 18th June at 5pm at The Guildhall to review the draft Air Quality figures for 2018 and actions we are looking at this year. I have invited a range of people to this meeting including Councillors, Officers and also members of the public who have both expertise and an interest in this area. Cllr. Ashraf is more than welcome to join us.

Cllr Mike Hallam

Cabinet Member for Environment

Question 6

Cllr Marriott to Cllr Nunn

In these transitional times, particularly now that none of us have a mandate from the electorate, do you not think that all council business should be conducted cross party?

Response

No.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn

Leader of the Council

Question 7

Cllr Stone to Cllr Nunn

Will the Town Centre Strategy be inclusive of youth and BAME communities?

Response

Yes.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn

Leader of the Council

Question 8

Cllr Stone to Cllr Nunn

Some local authorities are appointing a climate emergency cabinet member. When will we be doing that?

Response

Cllr Mike Hallam is the Cabinet Member for this, but I am pleased to advise that Cllr Sam Kilby-Shaw has agreed to take on the role of Climate Emergency Champion, having a passion for this subject and having led Scrutiny projects, and we would therefore hope that he will chair the cross-party working group that Cllr Hallam has already set up on this, which meets on 18th June.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn

Leader of the Council

Question 9

Cllr Russell to Cllr Hibbert

The homeless and rough sleepers are still visibly with us. How are we to judge the effectiveness of the Outreach Team?

Response

Identical question submitted, please see response to Question 3.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert

Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

Question 10

Cllr Duffy to Cllr King

In what way will the government announcement that all local authorities need to provide refuge for domestic violence victims' impact on NDAS? What will we be doing to support a refuge for every victim that needs one?

Response

A countywide Community Safety Board has been established and one of the priorities of the Board is domestic abuse and sexual violence. A partnership countywide strategy has been drafted and an action plan will be developed detailing how the strategy will be delivered. The provision of refuge and the countywide offer, is part of the strategy.

Northampton Borough Council has a three year funding agreement with NDAS to provide domestic abuse services in the Borough. We currently fund them £20k a year.

Cllr Anna King

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement & Community Safety

Question 11

Cllr Russell to Cllr Hadland

When are we going to have a shelter for people waiting for a taxi at the train station?

Response

The Head of Planning wrote to Network Rail in January this year, suggesting that a shelter be provided as the provision currently being offered to rail users is poor in this regard, and could be discouraging potential passengers to make sustainable transport choices. No response has been received to date but officers will chase Network Rail up on this. Officers are also looking into opportunities to provide a shelter through other potential developments on the site.

Cllr Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Enterprise

Question 12

Cllr B Markham to Cllr Nunn

The cancellation of the Borough elections in 2019 resulted in a potential 3 month gap between March and the next scheduled ordinary meeting in June.

The Leader consulted opposition parties on an additional meeting on the 29th April to bridge the 3 month gap. This was agreed and added to the Council's calendar of meetings.

Subsequently the date of the meeting was change twice without any consultation with opposition parties. Apparently this was because of the time to prepare the Community Governance Report.

On reflection does the leader believe that the change of date, which has resulted in two council meetings within two weeks, has served democracy for Northampton residents or was communicated in an appropriate way?

Response

Yes.

Bringing the council together to meet with no report to consider or debate would not, in my view, have been good democracy.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council

Question 13

Cllr Meredith to Cllr Hallam

The demise of diesel fuelled vehicles and the growth of electrically powered vehicles reflects the public's appetite to make a contribution to reducing pollution in the air.

The infrastructure to support this change, in the form of electrical charging points in public places, is a vital consideration for Northampton residents considering making the switch to electric vehicles.

Many towns and cities are making the provision of electric power points a Unique Selling Point to attracting visitors to their town centre.

1. Can the Portfolio holder advise the council of how many charging points are currently available within the town centre ring road and how many more charging points he anticipates being installed by March 2020?
2. Is the Portfolio Holder satisfied with this plan or does he believe that more could be done to provide an infrastructure that would contribute to reducing Northampton's carbon foot print?

Response

At present there are no electric vehicle charging points in the centre of Northampton which are accessible to the public. The Council have secured a central government grant to fund the installation of two rapid chargers which will be used for charging taxis and private hire vehicles. Works are being progressed to arrange for the installation of these points and it is planned that they will be in place by the end of 2019. In addition discussions are progressing with the providers of charging infrastructure to progress the installation of further public charging points at sites in the town centre which we hope to progress during the current financial year.

Cllr Mike Hallam

Cabinet member for Environment

Question 14

Cllr Beardsworth to Cllr Nunn

This council has recognised that the market square provides a unique opportunity to stage large events and to attract the public to the town centre.

In 2009 the Liberal Democrat administration applied for and secured funding from the East Midlands Improvement Board to purchase large TV screens in order to stage public events in the market square.

Can the Leader advise the number of times that these screens have been used since this administration took office in 2011 and if any plans are in preparation to use the large screens to cover major sporting events this year such as the FA Cup Final, Wimbledon or the Rugby world cup?

Response

The large tv screen was in fact a number of smaller screens linked together and produced a screen up to 6m x 6m.

From 2011 – 2015 the screen was used to show a variety of activities including:

- Wimbledon Final (Andy Murray final)
- Saints Cup Final
- Queens Jubilee
- Olympic Torch
- Waterfront Festival

The screens were part of a combined funding BID which allowed all other local authorities within Northamptonshire to use them.

A local company stored and maintained the screens on behalf of the council.

Within two years (2013/14) screen technology advanced significantly and companies around the country provided screen hire at reasonable rates with a much better picture than those provided by the councils 2011 screen technology. The council used the screens up until 2015 at which point the screens were obsolete and the like for like replacement was no longer available.

The council disposed of the screens in 2016.

In order to provide a comprehensive list of screen use, the event files will need to be reviewed one by one from 2011 onwards. Derrick Simpson will require a 4-6 weeks with his current workload to undertake this task. No one else within the authority has access to the historic data as the events team was terminated in 2015.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council