

Questions for Full Council Meeting 5th November 2018

Question 1

Question from Cllr Beardsworth to Cllr Hibbert

I understand that you have received a proposal to address the significant expenditure on homelessness by building “modular units” on council owned garage sites to provide basic accommodation for the homeless rather than having to use bed and breakfast accommodation.

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council if this is a course of action that he is considering, to control the cost of homelessness and when the first units might be installed?

Response

At its meeting on 5 December 2018, the Cabinet will consider a wide range of options for reducing the use and cost of temporary accommodation. Some of these options will involve the Council purchasing or leasing properties (including modular homes) at a lower net cost than the accommodation it is using at the moment.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

Question 2

Question from Cllr Beardsworth to Cllr Hibbert

Oasis House was set up to help vulnerable residents turn their lives around and to establish a way forward for them to lead independent lives.

Recently there has been coverage of changes planned by the Councils partner, Midland Heart to update the delivery of services from Oasis House.

Can the Cabinet Member advise if the remit and objectives of Oasis House are going to change or is this a refresh of the operation to continue the same service to vulnerable residents?

Response

When it opened in 2012, Oasis House was celebrated for its wonderful facilities and its inspirational space, designed to motivate people to get back on their feet, to turn their lives around and to live happy and independent lives.

At the time, Midland Heart said its vision was to help homeless people regain their independence, rebuild their confidence and be reintegrated into society.

Last month, Midland Heart met with the Hope Centre and explained that it has carried out a review of its supported living arrangements and decided that it wants to work more closely with the Council and to focus on ending the cycle of homelessness, improving the transition from supported living to independent living and helping people into employment.

As Midland Heart wants to increase the number of homeless people that it can accommodate at Oasis House, it has given the Hope Centre a year's notice to vacate the communal space it currently occupies in Oasis House and to find alternative premises for its day centre.

I welcome Midland Heart's plans to work even more closely with the Council and its partners to end the cycle of homelessness and improve the life expectancy and life chances of men and women who are sleeping rough.

Midland Heart's plans will support the implementation of 'TOGETHER we change lives' (our multi agency strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton) and is consistent with the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Midland Heart is aware of the Council's interest in establishing a Nightshelter that can accommodate men and women, and it has recently indicated that the relocation of the Nightshelter to Oasis House is something it would be willing to support.

Irrespective of whether or not the Nightshelter moves from its current premises, the changes that Midland Heart is proposing are consistent with what Oasis House was originally set up to do: provide accommodation, services and facilities that motivate people to get back on their feet, to turn their lives around and to live happy and independent lives. In this respect, Midland Heart is just adapting its delivery model to meet the current and future needs of rough sleepers in the borough.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing

Question 3

Question from Cllr B Markham to Cllr Hallam

Friends of Parks and Community Groups do a lot to help this council maintain our parks, open spaces and community areas.

In the past this Council has supported Friends and Community Groups by providing skips and cages when they undertake major clear up activity to take away the rubbish and excess foliage.

Is it true that within the New Environment Contract that this support to community groups was not specified?

If so what action is the council taking to support Friends and Community Groups to continue to be positive partners to this council?

Response

The cage collection part of the service is absolutely a part of the new environment contract and we have been awaiting for the arrival of a new vehicle and cages which have been on order. At the time of writing, the vehicle is waiting its appropriate licensing - which will mean this valuable service will be able to resume shortly.

As I have often said Community participation through Friends groups, Community Groups and programs such as Bloom is one of the 3 key aspects of our overall strategy moving forwards. We are currently working with Veolia and Idverde to launch a Street Champions Scheme later this year. As well as providing groups with useful equipment, the scheme aims to reduce fly tipping and littering in the town by raising awareness of the valuable contribution the Friends and Community groups make in improving the town's environment, installing sense of pride and responsibility in each area.

The valuable contribution that the friends and community groups make towards improving the environment is greatly appreciated by the Council and we will continue to support initiatives such as community litter picks, weeks of action and love parks week. Regular support is provided to our Friends Groups by the park rangers, neighbourhood wardens and our community safety and engagement officers. Much of this support is coordinated through our eight Park Management Committees, across our bigger and medium sized parks and to the Friends Groups of our smaller parks.

Cllr Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for Environment

Question 4

Question from Cllr B Markham to Cllr Hadland

Delapre Residents and Heritage Groups have been expressing concern for over 18 months about the deteriorating condition of the Queen Eleanor Cross on the London Road.

In May this year you said *"The aim all along has been to get these repairs done in the summer before another winter"*

With repairs now delayed until 2019, are you satisfied that the Council has acted with sufficient urgency over the past 5 months?

Response

Yes we have. We have appointed a specialist team to advise on the repair programme, and have advised that it would be preferable to carry out the repairs next spring.

Cllr Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Question 5

Question from Cllr Duffy to Cllr King

The skateboard ramp at Lings is being closed by NBC. Are there plans to replace it or substitute it for something else? There is a desperate need for youth activities to help combat the influence of county lines etc.

Response

The skatepark has unfortunately come to the end of its life.

The item will be discussed at the multi agency next meeting to establish a consultation strategy to ask the community what they would like in replacement.

Briar Hill skatepark is also in this position.

This doesn't necessarily mean a skatepark won't be in either area in future but the community may prefer something different.

Cllr Anna King

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement & Community Safety

Question 6

Questions from Cllr Duffy to Cllr Eldred

Universal Credit is being introduced and the Community Law benefits advice service is no longer available. Some households will be worse off. UC is accessible only online. Will we be increasing the number of computers and IT help for applicants, especially in the localities?

What are we planning to do to ameliorate the negative aspects of UC?

Response

Universal Credit is a Central Government initiative, which seeks to provide consolidate a number of benefits and give recipients more control over their finances, as if they were receiving a salary.

The Council continues to support the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Community Law, both of which can be co-located within the One Stop Shop and offer benefit and debt clinics and appointments. In respect of IT and support, there is a process of assisted self-service and 6 self-service computers are available. The number of self-service computers is reviewed on a regular basis, should demand require an increase, the service will seek to provide them. The self-service kiosks are supported by customer service advisors who assist not only with using the computers provided but with any other devices that customers might choose to use such as their phones or personal devices. We also offer printing facilities for claimants. We work closely with Job Centre Plus and a work coach is present in the One Stop Shop every Monday. The coach works closely with claimants and partners supporting and maximising claims. From week commencing 14th November the work coach will be present all week. Support is available both for making and checking on claims and also for personal budgeting.

Cllr Brandon Eldred

Cabinet Member for Finance

Question 7

Question from Cllr Duffy to Cllr Larratt

In the face of unitary is a schedule of location and inspection of Drains in Northampton being compiled by NCC and NBC, working in partnership together?

Response

Further to the recent isolated flooding events, NBC and NCC are working in partnership to carry out the maintenance and upgrade of drainage where possible. NBC has also produced a programme of works in areas such as Penvale Park, Augusta Avenue and anywhere where there were more than five properties flooded.

At present we are only inspecting some of the drains and water courses on Asset Management land. Moving forward Veolia are being contracted to maintain water courses but there is a backlog in inspections of drains due to a lack of personnel in the Asset Management Team. This is being addressed with a view to clearing the backlog at the earliest opportunity.

NPH have responsibility for drains on Housing land. They respond to issues that are reported and address them. Responsibility for drains on NPH land will remain with NPH post Unitary. However there are some drains on NBC Retained Housing Land that remain the responsibility of NBC. The issue and future of NBC Retained Housing Land is currently under consideration by the Chief Executives of NBC and NPH.

If Councillor Duffy knows of any particular areas or has any individual cases that she feels need addressing I would be happy to meet with her and discuss them with officers.

Cllr Phil Larratt
Deputy Leader of the Council

Question 8

Questions from Cllr Haque to Cllr Hadland

Who owns the car park now being run by NCP at St Peters Way?

Should we not be trying to buy the land and run it ourselves?

Response

The car park is owned by St Peters Way Car Park is owned by P.A.T. (Pensions) Nominee Company No.1 Limited and P.A.T. (Pensions) Nominee Company No.2 Limited.

No, as it is unlikely that it would be a sensible investment for us to make.

Councillor Tim Hadland

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Question 9

Question from Cllr Stone to Cllr Eldred

The other Districts and Boroughs are seeking to spend money on improvements to their localities head of unitary. Are we planning to follow their example?

Response

As we have not yet received a direct instruction from the Government to form a Unitary Authority, we will continue with projects we promised in our manifesto and focus on our balanced budget for the good of Northampton. Any time we receive an official instruction that we are going to unitary, we will re-address the allocation of funds in the budget.

Cllr Brandon Eldred
Cabinet Member for Finance

Question 10

Question from Cllr Ashraf to Cllr Hibbert

The news about the Hope Centre being asked to leave Oasis House came as a shock to all Councillors. Please may we know from your perspective what happened and the likely impact on our homeless Strategy?

Response

Last month, Midland Heart met with the Hope Centre and explained that it has carried out a review of its supported living arrangements and decided that it wants to work more closely with the Council and to focus on ending the cycle of homelessness, improving the transition from supported living to independent living and helping people into employment.

As Midland Heart wants to increase the number of homeless people it can accommodate at Oasis House, it has given the Hope Centre a year's notice to vacate the communal space it currently occupies in Oasis House and to find alternative premises for its day centre.

In its Rough Sleeping Strategy of August 2018, the Government set out its plans for halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it entirely by 2027. It wants every area to have a rapid rehousing pathway into settled accommodation (recommended by an Advisory Panel comprising senior experts) that includes rapid assessment of need and eligibility and rapid rehousing into an appropriate settled home.

Midland Heart's plans for Oasis House are consistent with the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy and will help the Council to create a rapid rehousing pathway in Northampton. It is also consistent with 'TOGETHER we change lives', our multi agency strategy for ending the need for people to sleep rough in Northampton.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert

Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing