

## **Council Meeting 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

### **Question 1**

**Mr Norman Adams to Cllr Hibbert**

On 5<sup>th</sup> August 54 of the flats affected by the Berkeley House & St Marys Court development site were sitting empty with no tenants

According to NBC's Housing Regeneration Policy the council would consider placing homeless households into those sitting empty with no tenants.

QUESTION: Did the council consider placing homeless households into those homes?

### ***Response***

Yes, it was always intended that the Council would use the flats in Berkeley House and St Mary's Court as temporary accommodation when they became vacant. However, when the tenants subsequently moved out, Northampton Partnership Homes advised the Council that none of the flats were in a fit state to be re-let and that the high cost of bringing them up to a lettable standard (for use as temporary accommodation) was uneconomic.

At the Council's request, Northampton Partnership Homes has agreed to re-visit all of the empty flats to confirm if any of them can, in fact, be used as temporary accommodation.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert

**Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing**

**Question 2****Mr Norman Adams to Cllr Hibbert**

Within one month of the Ombudsman's final decision, the Council will apologise to Mr X for:

- o its delay in accepting Mr X's homelessness application; and
- o the unclear assessment of what was affordable to Mr X during his meeting with the money advisor and the subsequent unaffordable bill sent to him.

<https://www.lgo.org.uk/decisions/housing/homelessness/18-011-094>

Have the Council followed the agreed action and apologised?

***Response***

The Council completed the agreed action including an apology to Mr X.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert

**Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing**

**Question 3**  
**Cllr Russell to Cllr Hibbert**

What protocols does the council have in place for bailiffs and other agents with which it has contracts, for evicting council tenants for rent arrears?

***Response***

Northampton Partnership Homes complies with Northamptonshire Housing Protocol (Social Housing Tenants), Rent Arrears Recovery Policy and Rent Arrears procedure for Rent income Officer on evictions. The Rent Arrears Recovery Policy is on the NPH website. The other documents are not downloadable, but copies can be made available on request.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert  
**Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing**

**Question 4****Cllr Russell to Cllr Hibbert**

What provisions does the council have in place to protect people with mental health problems, young children or other vulnerable people in households with council tenancies and who are facing eviction for rent arrears?

***Response***

Northampton Partnership Homes has implemented a number of safeguards to protect people with mental health problems, young children or other vulnerable people in households, as follows:

At the approval stage of the eviction officers must highlight any vulnerability concerns so that a safeguarding referral can be completed to Early Help Assessment (EHA) or Adult Social Care.

We also complete a Pre-Eviction Referral to Northampton Borough Council (Housing Options Team) for investigation into possible homelessness and assistance from NBC Money Advice Team.

We also signpost to other agencies locally i.e. Community Law Service and Citizens Advice.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert

**Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing**

**Question 5**  
**Cllr Roberts to Cllr Hallam**

Under the contract with Veolia/Ide Verde can you confirm the exact provision for the cutting of trees around the street lighting? I understand that tree cutting is done to a metre around street lights, however concern is being raised with regards to whether this is adequate to ensure the lighting performs correctly and that sensors on the lighting columns are not covered by the foliage. How are we managing the protection of our streets whilst ensuring our lighting works correctly and efficiently?

***Response***

The council's tree policy states that council managed trees will clear lamp column heads by 1.5 metres all round. A common complaint is around urban trees blocking lamp columns which in turn create excessive shade in public areas. No one has a direct right to light in common law, however works can be carried out to improve light to areas and to create more aesthetically pleasing community spaces. NBC will always aim to assist in keeping localities reasonably safe by ensuring that trees do not cause an excessive nuisance. Veolia, the council's Environmental Services contractor, are obliged to survey all trees in the borough over a three year period but if there are any areas of particular concern, please advise through the call centre.

Cllr Mike Hallam  
**Cabinet Member for Environment**

**Question 6****Cllr Roberts to Cllr Hallam**

It is noted that NBC do not have provision for the supply of compostable bags to line the food caddy that are supplied for the disposal of food waste. Can you explain on what basis this decision was made? Research by WRAP shows that if Council's provide food waste liners to residents upon request it keeps them engaged with the process.

***Response***

NBC has recently worked with WRAP to improve food waste diversion from the residual waste stream, the project consisted on delivering a leaflet and a roll of caddy liners along with labelling each residual waste bins with a 'no food waste' – this was delivered at the same time as the new 'all in one' blue lidded bin recycling service in September 2018 – since this time, diversion has increased from an average of 192 tonnes a month to around 273 tonnes per month. The project cost £85,000, of this around £77,000 was for caddy liners (£24,000) and stickering & delivery of liners and leaflets (£53,000). The procurement and delivery of the liners are not covered by the Environmental Services contract so may attract an additional cost of around £70,000 per annum to supply free caddy liners to all relevant properties. The final WRAP report is available upon request.

Cllr Mike Hallam

**Cabinet Member for Environment**

**Question 7**  
**Cllr Roberts to Cllr King**

Taxi licensing and support for those with disabilities are two responsibilities covered by NBC. Can you confirm what training is on offer for licensee holders in respect of Assistance Dog use of Taxi and PHV's. What action are we taking to ensure that new applicant drivers are "fit and proper" and understand how to deal with customers with disabilities and the assistance dogs that may travel with them? What work is being done with the PHV companies and ensuring they advertise that not only do they follow legislation regarding assistance dogs in PHV's but that they are welcoming and encourage such use?

***Response***

The one day induction course for all new taxi/private hire drivers includes approximately an hour's session raising the awareness of the needs of all disabled person/s and the roles and responsibilities of the driver. This session has been delivered by an external disabled training supplier to all new drivers for at least the last 10 years. There is currently work in progress with the Northamptonshire Licensing Liaison group, looking at the delivery of a joint training package that can be delivered to all drivers across Northamptonshire and thus setting similar standards of training (this should include rolling out any agreed training to all existing drivers). Due to resources, it is more realistic and achievable if we can deliver this type of training package jointly.

Our website provides information regarding the statutory duties in accordance with the Equalities Act 2010 and operators are made aware of their responsibilities. Unfortunately, there may be peaks in demands for wheelchair accessible vehicles that impact upon the service user, i.e. during school contract hours when all wheelchair accessible vehicles may be in use. It is in the business interest of the operator to provide the right balance and mix of vehicles to meet the needs and demands of their service. The licensing team are always keen to ensure that all sectors of the trade meet their obligations in accordance with the Equalities Act 2010 and will always investigate any complaint that identifies a breach of the requirements. The licensing team will also review any additional training that may be applicable for the operators in order to promote the needs of all disabled passengers.

Cllr Anna King  
**Cabinet Member for Community Engagement & Community Safety**

**Question 8****Cllr Ashraf to Cllr Hallam**

Is Veolia on track with all the weeding and cutting back?

***Response***

There is little 'cutting back' over the summer period, other than to attend to Health and Safety issues. The landscaping resources have been concentrating on grass cutting over the summer period and maintaining weed free flower beds in our parks and open spaces. Resources are now gearing up for the winter maintenance schedule where grass cutting operations are wound down and hedge maintenance such as cutting back increase.

Weeding is one of the area's I referred to in my Cabinet Member report - we have worked closely with the contractor to address some of the challenges in this area and a new sub-contractor has been appointed with a new way of working and a re-spray across the whole Borough starting w/c 16th September.

Cllr Mike Hallam

**Cabinet Member for Environment**

**Question 9**  
**Cllr Ashraf to Cllr Hallam**

Do we have enough wardens if not, are we going to recruit more?

***Response***

The Council has a record number of Neighbourhood Wardens and Park Rangers. There are currently 14 Neighbourhood Wardens which cover the whole Borough. Recently we have focused on maximising Warden time in their communities by freeing up time spent on other activities. We commenced working with our 3rd Party enforcement partner and have also hired an administrator for the Warden team to take on much of the paperwork they used to do themselves.

Cllr Mike Hallam  
**Cabinet Member for Environment**

**Question 10**  
**Cllr Ashraf to Cllr Hallam**

How many missed collections have been recorded since April?

***Response***

A total of 1343 missed collections have been recorded since April 2019 (April to July 2019) with an average of 79% corrected within 48hrs, the total number of collections made in this period is 4,197,622.

Veolia are working with the crews to reduce the amount of missed collections and increase the response times to correct any issues.

These statistics are included in the regular performance monitoring reports and I am delighted that the level of missed collections and corrections has dramatically improved since the new contract started.

Cllr Mike Hallam  
**Cabinet Member for Environment**

**Question 11**  
**Cllr Birch to Cllr Hallam**

On tree maintenance: what is the program of work and is there a budget?

***Response***

Along with attending to the fuller contract specification (available upon request) which deals with routine and emergency tree work, Veolia are currently finalising year 4 of the enhanced tree works schedule which will be undertaken in the attached area – local stakeholders have been consulted and have been asked to provide any areas of concern via the call centre. 2019-20 budget for tree works is £417,000 which includes £100,000 for the enhanced tree works. The enhanced tree works budget was a result of one of the recommendations of a Scrutiny Panel into tree maintenance.

Cllr Mike Hallam  
**Cabinet Member for Environment**

**Question 12**  
**Cllr Birch to Cllr Larratt**

With the possibility of elections over the winter period will all polling stations ensure that the routes to the polling stations have adequate lighting and are safe so as to encourage people to vote.

***Response***

We regularly assess polling stations for suitability and are at the moment conducting a Polling Station Review. We are aware of one polling station where there may be an issue, we have asked for this to be addressed and are awaiting a response. We are also looking for alternative suitable venues.

If any members have concerns regarding polling stations please contact the Returning Officer.

Cllr Phil Larratt  
**Deputy Leader of the Council**

### Question 13 Cllr Beardsworth to Cllr Hallam

My question to the Portfolio Holder, submitted for the Council meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July regarding Electric Charging Points in the town centre, was unfortunately not processed for that meeting and I only received the reply on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September.

In his response the Portfolio Holder says “**a full analysis of demand and usage will be undertaken**”. Can I help the Portfolio holder with Information from the Society of Motor Manufacturers who stated on the 5<sup>th</sup> September, when they released New car registrations to the end of August the following headline comments

05 SEPTEMBER 2019 #CARS #REGISTRATIONS #SMMT NEWS

- UK new car market falls -1.6% in August, to 92,573 registrations.
- Good news for zero emission vehicle uptake, with registrations up nearly fivefold to take record 3.4% market share as hybrids also register growth.
- Industry calls for policies and measures to boost uptake of latest, lowest emission vehicles, a vital step on the road to zero.

I hope the Portfolio Holder will accept that there is no need for this council to undertake analysis when the Motor Trade industry organisation is calling for measures to support the objective of zero admissions.

As far as “usage” is concerned this might be found to be low in a town centre that has no electric charging points.

In the leaders report he states we Northampton was one of just 50 Councils to get through the first round of the Future High Street Fund and the Council was also applying for up to £25M from the Governments **New Town Fund** aimed at improving among other criteria transport.

Can the Portfolio Holder advise if, this council should secure any of this Government support that the Borough Council will up its game which currently consists of supplying just two electric charging points in the Town Centre?

### **Response**

Thank you Cllr Beardsworth for providing this information on demand for and usage of electric vehicle charging facilities. The Future High Street Fund is designed to enable towns adapt to the structural changes within retail that are having a major impact on the High Street. As such, electric vehicle charging points would not be an appropriate use of this funding. The guidance to the Towns Fund has not yet been released. Where funds are available to address electric charging provision we will look to maximise the use of these and work with partners, in particular the County Council who have responsibility for the most obvious areas to locate them (ie. the Highway) and to secure an appropriate level of provision of electric vehicle charging points in Northampton.

Cllr Mike Hallam  
**Cabinet Member for Environment**

**Question 14**  
**Cllr Beardsworth to Cllr Hibbert**

My question to the Portfolio Holder, submitted for the Council meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July regarding 200% increase in payments to external suppliers for temporary accommodation was unfortunately not processed for that meeting and I only received the reply on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September.

In his reply he acknowledged that ***“The homelessness service is demand-led and represents a major challenge for the borough. As part of the action plan approved by Cabinet in April 2019, we are seeking to increase the amount of council-owned accommodation that is used as temporary accommodation”***

He went on to say ***“ Our aim is to reduce the use and cost of temporary accommodation and, in doing so, prevent an overspend on the homelessness budget. It is for this reason that we have asked NPH to increase the amount of council-owned temporary accommodation in line with the action plan”***.

Can the Portfolio Holder clarify the following :-

If NPH increase the amount of NPH owned temporary accommodation used for met the demand-led requirement for temporary accommodation

- Will that be at the expense of the residents on the NPH waiting list?
- Or will NPH increase their supply of accommodation to ensure that existing stock is still available to the waiting list but result in a higher proportion of the NPH stock allocated to temporary accommodation?
- If this strategy is successful what would the Portfolio Holder anticipate would be the reduction in externally sourced temporary accommodation in the current annual budget and over a 3 year period?

**Response**

In your question, you refer to "NPH owned temporary accommodation" and "the NPH waiting list".

NPH is an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and, as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Council, it does not own any housing stock and it does not operate its own "waiting list".

Through the Management Agreement, NPH is contracted (by the Council) to manage, maintain and improve the Council-owned housing stock and to manage Northampton's Housing Register, on the Council's behalf, for all housing applicants who are seeking a council or housing association home within the borough and the NRDA (Northampton Related Development Area).

Although it is proposed (in the action plan) that the number of council-owned homes that are used as temporary accommodation will be doubled, this increase is a necessary and proportionate response to the temporary accommodation problem we are dealing with and will still only result in just 1% of the Council's housing stock being used as temporary accommodation.

Notwithstanding the high demand for affordable rented housing in Northampton, you will be aware that housing applicants (including homeless households) on Northampton's Housing Register will have access to not just the existing council and housing association homes that become vacant each year but also the 150 new council homes that NPH is planning to build each year for the next three years, the new housing association homes that are being built in Northampton and the NRDA, and the homes the Council is hoping to purchase (through NPH) from private developers under s106 agreements.

The primary objective of the 14-point action plan is to substantially reduce the Council's use of temporary accommodation and ensure that, as soon as practicable, all of the temporary accommodation that the Council uses is either owned by the Council (within the General Fund or HRA) or is leased or let to the Council on favourable terms.

For these reasons, I do not think that the decision to use more of the Council's housing stock as temporary accommodation will necessarily be to the detriment of housing applicants on the Council's Housing Register and I am confident that any adverse effect on applicants will be mitigated by the new council homes that are being built or purchased and the NRDA nominations.

Although the high number of placements in temporary accommodation, the slower-than-expected rate of rehousing and NPH's advice that the vacant flats in Berkeley House and St Mary's Court were not in a fit state to be used as temporary accommodation have meant that we are no longer forecasting that the amount of temporary accommodation that is procured from private sector housing suppliers will be reduced by two thirds by the end of 2019/20, our aim is to reduce our use of externally sourced temporary accommodation to less than thirty units of accommodation by March 2021.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert  
**Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing**

**Question 15**  
**Cllr Beardsworth to Cllr Hibbert**

Can the Portfolio Holder advise the Council the Administration's policy with regard to purchasing empty properties on the open market to increase its housing stock?

Will the Portfolio holder advise the council of the number of properties purchased in :-

- The last Financial Year
- The Current Financial Year.

Once these properties have been re-furbished and added to the Council Stock what restrictions apply, if any, to the normal tenants Right to Buy?

***Response***

During the last financial year and the current financial year, the Council has not purchased any empty properties on the open market to increase its housing stock.

However, NPH is aware that we are supportive of such an approach where the acquisition and refurbishment of suitable properties offers good value for money and will meet housing need.

If the properties are included within the HRA and are let as permanent homes, they will be subject to the Right to Buy. However, if they are included within the HRA but are let as temporary accommodation using non-secure tenancies, they will not be subject to the Right to Buy.

Cllr Stephen Hibbert  
**Cabinet Member for Housing & Wellbeing**

**Question 16**  
**Cllr B Markham to Cllr Eldred**

The Agenda for the cabinet meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> September contains as expected a Finance Monitoring Report.

In Paragraph 3.1 it states that this is the second monitoring report of 2019 / 20

<b>3</b>	<b>Issues and choices</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Report background</b>
3.1.1	This report is the second financial monitoring report of 2019/20 and reports the forecast position as at the end of July 2019, period 4 of the financial year.

Can the Portfolio Holder advise when the first monitoring report was issued to inform councillors of progress controlling expenditure approved at the February Council meeting?

The cabinet report provides the a narrative that the author has chosen to bring to the attention of the cabinet.

What the cabinet report does not provide are details of the expenditure YTD compared to the budget to the end of Period 4 at a Directorate / Departmental level as approved by council at the meeting in February.

The failure to provide detailed expenditure and budget figures to the end of Period 4, means that councillors council are not able to identify aspects in the YTD results that the author has not chosen to refer to in the report.

This is a departure from the way that in year budget figures were presented to Cabinet and other Councillors in previous years

Accepting that the Council meeting, at which the Portfolio Holder is required to respond to this question, is after this week's Cabinet, will he also take action to release detailed figures to all councillors of Expenditure against Budget Headings, for period 4, at least 24 hours ahead of the Cabinet meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> September?

**Response**

1. The first monitoring report was reviewed by Cabinet on 24 July 2019.
2. The author of the report is the Chief Finance Officer, who compiles the report with input from his full finance team based on the various Service's inputs. This is then reviewed and where necessary amended by the Corporate Management Board.
3. The content is reviewed and discussed with all Cabinet members, through Portfolio Holder meetings.
4. We are advised that the format of reporting mentioned was not used in 2016/17, 2017/18 or 2018/19, there has been no material change to the Cabinet Reporting in recent times.
5. The normal scrutiny practice is for the draft budget to be scrutinised by O&S and is then considered by full Council. Once the budget is set then the

administration manages it through its officers (Corporate Management Board) and receives reports every two months at Cabinet meetings. The key focus as a strategic meeting is to focus on the issues, rather than all of the detail.

6. If there is a specific aspect of the budgets that is giving cause for concern, then I would be happy to meet Cllr Beardsworth with the Chief Finance Officer to discuss her concerns.
7. If NBC seeks more information/detail in the budget monitoring report and it is not already available, then there will be a cost that will need to be investigated and considered as a cost pressure.

Cllr Brandon Eldred  
**Cabinet Member for Finance**