Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 1

**Question to Councillor David Mackintosh from Mr T McNabb**

In your new position as leader, could you please give assurance that your group will endeavour to give a full response to questions and that we will NOT be subjected to a disgraceful repeat of 7 December 2009 at which portfolio holders declined to answer on seventeen occasions?

**Response**

This Administration firmly believes in transparency and accountability to the public. I can confirm that this Administration will always endeavour to respond to questions in full, and agree that failure to answer questions as mentioned above would be totally unacceptable. From time to time, some questions may need to be answered in writing after the meeting, but I also agree this should be a full and timely response.

David Mackintosh
Leader of the Council
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 2

Question to Councillor Mary Markham from Mr N Adams

Will you confirm that you intend to uphold your Manifesto pledge on Sheltered Housing?

We recognise and value the special nature of Sheltered Housing Northampton, and the need to protect vulnerable adults from uncertainty about the future of their homes. Because of this, Sheltered Housing stock would be retained under the control of Northampton Borough Council.

Response

You will be aware that the sheltered housing service is currently being independently reviewed. Once we have received the final report, it will be clear on the range of options that are available to us. A further period of consultation will then follow and the recommendations for the future of the service will be brought back to Cabinet for a decision on the way forward. Support for our vulnerable tenants remains an important priority for this council both now and in the future.

I stand by our commitment to recognise and value the special nature of Sheltered Housing and will look at the new Housing Strategy document and subsequent Government guidance in relation to Sheltered Housing.

Mary Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 3

Question to Councillor Mary Markham from Mr T McNabb

Is the new portfolio holder conversant with the Margot James M.P. {CON} debate on Sheltered Housing in Whitehall on November 2010, Which began with residents being bullied and leaned on, and continued with other issues, such as votes for residents, burdensome complaints procedures, legal protection etc.

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101117/halltext/101117h0001.htm

Response

I have read this debate and have contacted Margot James' office to discuss her views on Sheltered Housing further.

Mary Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 4

**Question to Councillor Alan Bottwood from Mr N Adams**

As guidance states: "As a matter of government policy contracting authorities should aim to have at least one or more contracts with a supported factory or business.

What contracts (if any) does Northampton Borough Council have with a supported factory or business.

Response

*NBC currently does not have any procurement arrangements in place with supported factories or businesses. We can only enter into contracts with organisations through the proper procurement processes under the regulations.*

Current procurement legislation does not have provision for the council to invite organisations to tender.

Processes are in place to encourage not only supported organisations but all local small and medium sized enterprises to bid for contracts with the Council. As outlined in my portfolio report the Council recently ran a "how to do business with the Council" day which attracted over 70 local businesses.

**Alan Bottwood**
Portfolio Holder for Finance
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 5

Question to Councillor John Caswell from Cllr L. Mason

Northampton Borough Council is the body taking comments and complaints from customers and councillors alike on Environmental Services now provided by Enterprise.

Can the Portfolio Holder given an assurance that Enterprise has ready access to this information daily in order that they can respond accordingly and promptly?

Response

The Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) which is used by Northampton Borough Council's Customer service staff to record all service requests, complaints and compliments was integrated with Enterprise's existing system to ensure that all customer details are passed on to Enterprise immediately upon receipt. All records are checked on a regular basis for accuracy and to ensure they remain up to date. NBC and Enterprise work very closely to ensure that all the current information and data contained both in the CRM and on the Council website is up to date and reflects that information which Customers are requesting including details of bin rounds, the ability to request assisted collections or bulk collections etc. NBC hold geographical data in relation to new, altered and deleted properties and this information is updated and integrated with Enterprise information on a regular basis and procedures and policies are in place to ensure this happens. NBC Customer Service Staff attend regular meetings with Enterprise to continue to improve the flow of information and data and review complaints and service requests and look for opportunities to further improve the service to our customers.

John Caswell
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Environment
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 6

Question to Councillor Mary Markham from Cllr L Mason

The new Localism Act allows local authorities to restrict the number of people joining the social housing register. Does the Portfolio Holder plan to use this new legislation to stop people joining the council house register?

Response

We understand that all local authorities will be required to produce a Tenancy Strategy to demonstrate how they will manage social housing in the future. As part of our preparations for this requirement we are reviewing our allocations policy and will be receiving a report to Cabinet at a future date with a number of recommendations regarding making changes to our current policy.

Mary Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 7

Question to Councillor Phil Larratt from Cllr L Mason

As the special advisor for “Shared Services” (noted at Council on Nov 7th) what services have you advised cabinet it might want to share with neighbouring local authorities?

Response

Initially I am looking at all back office services operated by the Borough Council to see how we can save costs by joining with other authorities and enable more money to be spent on frontline services.

We are also exploring options around Local Government Shared Services (LGSS) which is operated by Northamptonshire County Council and Cambridgeshire County Council.

Phil Larratt
Special Advisor on Shared Services
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 8

Question to Councillor Mary Markham from Cllr D Stone

What is the projected impact on local residents of the rise in rents and the new cap on housing benefit? What is the Tory Administration planning to do about it at the local level?

Response

The cap will not be introduced until 2013 and will predominantly affect London and areas with higher Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates (Brighton and Edinburgh have also been mentioned). Local Housing allowance rates are set based on the 30th percentile of rents within a broad market areas i.e. Northampton is a single broad market area.

In Northampton this would effect approximately 100 claims based on our current figures.

We are already working closely with landlords, the voluntary sector and customers in order to ensure that we can fully support people through the transition to a reformed welfare system. We also continue to develop decent and affordable housing.

Mary Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 9

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Cllr D Stone

Do you support the campaign by local businessman, John Sheinman, to rename the top of Abington Street "Eastgate"?

Response

Yes, we support this proposal and are happy to look into this as part of our ongoing commitment to support our town’s heritage, and applaud John Sheinman’s long standing commitment to Northampton, its history and future.

Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 10

Question to Councillor Mary Markham from Cllr J Capstick

Will the cabinet Portfolio Holder agree to bring to cabinet a viable long-term Tenant Participation strategy before July 2012?

Response

Establishing effective and meaningful tenant engagement is and remains a crucial part of delivering our Housing service.

Over the last 18 months numerous changes have been implemented to reinvigorate participation at NBC to ensure inclusive, effective engagement is undertaken.

- This has seen the launch of quarterly Hot Desks and Tenant Panels held away from the Guildhall in 4 locations and are very well attended.

- The sounding board continues to grow in size and enables tenants to be as involved as they want in areas of service delivery, this can range from being interviewed over the telephone, becoming a mystery shopper or a Tenant Auditor.

- We have also introduced an extensive free training programme for tenants which range from budgetary skills, IT skills, job interview skills right through to training in areas of housing such as finance.

- Regular focus groups are held all of which are now well attended with the last 4 discussing issues of de-pooling, housing finance and repairs attracting a combined total in excess of 100 tenants.

The new Localism Act also places requirements on the Council in the area of co-regulation and as such this will have to be fully digested and acted upon before a strategy is presented to cabinet.

As can be seen from what I have previously stated the profile of meaningful engagement has been raised enormously at NBC and we remain committed to involving our tenants in the improvement of service delivery.

The Engagement team remain committed to a new strategy produced in conjunction with tenants that fully incorporates the requirements of the new Localism act

Mary Markham
Cabinet Member for Housing
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 11

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Cllr J Capstick

With projections for economic growth in the UK being down graded is the Joint Core Strategy, drawn up exclusively by Tories and Lib Dems, now deliverable in the medium term?

Response

Yes

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 12

Question to Councillor D Mackintosh from Cllr N Choudary

In May 2011 a 'Councillor Development Group' (Cllr N Choudary, Conroy, Glynane, Hallam, Patel & Stone) was formed but has not met yet. Does the Tory Administration plan to carry on with this body? Also does the Tory Administration intend to do 'Annual Member Development Reports' as the previous Liberal Democrat Administration did?

Response

Responsibility for Councillor Development is transferring from HR to Democratic & Chief Executive Services in December, and the first meeting of the Councillor Development Group will be in January 2012, after which it will meet quarterly. It is our intention to publish an annual Councillor Development Report as part of our commitment to help elected members serve the public to the best of their ability.

David Mackintosh
Leader of the Council
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 13

Question to Councillor D Mackintosh from Cllr L Marriott

Recently you took the decision to overturn recently established NBC Policy and scrap Neighbourhood Management Boards.

What evidence did you use to come to this decision?

A vacuum now exists for partnership working at the neighbourhood level when will a report be put before cabinet to rectify this?

Response

NBC policy has not been overtumed and neighbourhood management boards have not been 'scrapped'. As clearly advised, neighbourhood management boards will still be supported in the wards of councillors who wish them to continue.

Many councillors however have strongly indicated that they do not find it useful to sit through long neighbourhood management board meetings, dealing with issues for other wards that are not relevant to them. They of course acknowledge that, from time to time, cross boundary issues occur, but they feel that these will be more effectively dealt with on an ad hoc basis as they arise.

This is a change in focus, rather than a policy change and it has been done to emphasise the role of local councillors as community leaders in their ward. Far from creating a vacuum, being clearer and sharper in our approach to neighbourhood management will facilitate more effective partnership working.

David Mackintosh
Leader of the Council
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 14

Question to Councillor D Mackintosh from Cllr J Capstick

Four times a year Northamptonshire County Council has meetings between trade unions and elected councillors, sometimes known as ‘local joint committees’. At present Northampton Borough Council has no such forum. Will the Leader of Northampton Borough Council consider introducing such a body similar to the one they have at County Hall?

Response

The consultation framework adopted at NBC has been operating successfully with the Trade Unions for a number of years. This is a series of Management Trade Union Consultation Meetings (MTUCM). There is an overarching meeting that meets once a month and the chair of the meeting is rotated between Management and the Trade Unions. There are also separate MTUCM meetings on Policy and Restructures. Any new Policy or Terms and Condition changes are presented to the General Purposes committee.

There was previously a local joint committee, however this was disbanded. The trade unions have not raised a local joint committee as an issue in recent years, and the partnership approach with regard to employee relations works well.

Therefore I do not believe that a local joint committee is needed given the positive employee relations and the trade unions at NBC

David Mackintosh
Leader of the Council
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 15

Question to Councillor A Bottwood from Cllr L Marriott

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm whether the Tory Administration will freeze council tax this next financial year 2012/2013?

Response

Our manifesto pledged to work with Central Government to freeze the rate of Council Tax wherever possible to help lighten the financial pressures felt by local residents. Therefore it is our intention to propose a 0% Council Tax increase for 2012/2013, and at a difficult financial time for many people, we are grateful for the support from Central Government in achieving this.

Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Finance
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 16

Question to Councillor J Caswell from Cllr N Choudary

The Conservative Manifesto says it will find better ways of encouraging residents to recycle more (page 9). After more than six months in office what ideas does the Portfolio Holder himself have, if any?

Response

As you will know, kitchen food waste and textile collections will be rolled out from January, which will boost our recycling service and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

In our contract to clearly specified year on year improvements in recycling levels and there is also a strong financial incentive for EMS to encourage people to recycle more. Furthermore our contract has been designed to encourage ongoing innovation to ensure we continue to stay ahead of the curve.

John Caswell
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Environment
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 17

**Question to Councillor D Mackintosh from Cllr T Wire, DL**

As ward Councillor working with the St James Residents Association who are in discussions with interested partners including Northampton University about securing suitable premises for the relocation of St James Library to allow it to co-locate with other community and social enterprises to form a community hub. This could include a heritage and arts centre.

Some vacant buildings have been identified which may be suitable for this project. Unfortunately, the Council's Planning Committee has just given approval on the 15th November to the demolition of one of them.

Will the Council now give its full support to the SJRA in its endeavours to enhance the community of St James and also support this project in principle?

Will Northampton Borough Council also follow the principles of the Localism Bill which was given Royal Assent on 15th November, and actively support the SJRA in procuring suitable premises for this exciting community enterprise, which is within the scope of the said Bill?

**Response**

*The library in St James is the responsibility of Northamptonshire County Council. They lease the building from the Borough Council and we have not sought to amend or terminate that agreement.*

*We have not been approached directly by St James Residents Association about proposals for a community hub building, that could include library facilities. The Residents Association have though been actively involved in the plans, already approved by Cabinet, for the Doddridge Centre Limited to lease and manage St James Community Centre. We would anticipate that the Community Centre, together with the already successfully run Doddridge Centre, would help contribute to any plans the Residents Association may have.*

*The Council is supportive of community organisations who have viable and sustainable proposals to help re-generate their local areas. The Borough Council is happy to work with such community groups and other partners to develop initiatives, whilst recognising the difficult financial limitations that exist.*

**David Mackintosh**
Leader of the Council
Question for Full Council Monday 5th December, 2011

Question 18

Question to Councillor D Mackintosh from Cllr S Beardsworth

Why has the practice of regularly publishing finance and performance data been stopped?

Will the Administration receive and publish monthly reports on performance and finance

Response

*NBC continues to publish performance data, although the format has now changed. The next Finance and Performance Exceptions report (providing data up to October 2011) is due to be published on 7th December for review at Cabinet on 14th December 2011. The ‘All Measures’ report detailing data up to October 2011 is also scheduled to be published on the Council’s website on 9th December 2011.*

David Mackintosh
Leader of the Council