

Question for Full Council Monday 8th June 2015

Question 1

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Mr Norman Adams

2014/15 NBC only spent 39% of its Disabled Facilities Grant budget; delays are leaving disabled people stuck sleeping in their lounge, washing at their kitchen sink or at risk of falling down the stairs and needing hospital treatment.

Are you content with this situation?

Response

The Council is committed to doing everything it can to help people with disabilities to remain in their own homes through the provision of amenities, aids and adaptations.

To this end, we have ensured that, in Northampton, the Disabled Facilities Grant budget is sufficient to meet demand and that there are enough Officers to process and approve grant applications as efficiently and as quickly as possible.

Although it is currently taking longer than intended for the County Council's Occupational Therapists to assess people's needs and provide NBC with their recommendations, the Head of Housing and Wellbeing has met with the Chief Executive of Olympus Care to explore ways of reducing the amount of time it is taking to complete the Occupational Therapist assessments.

I am satisfied that, although it is very important to reduce the amount of time it is taking the Occupational Therapists to issue their recommendations, there are no backlogs in the Council's processing and approval of DFG applications.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 2

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Councillor Danielle Stone

Please can we see the plans for the Social Letting Agency promised by the Conservative Group during the election campaign and how is it going to be funded?

Response

Work is underway to set up a social lettings agency that will let and manage private rented accommodation, on behalf of landlords, in return for a set management fee.

Northampton's social lettings agency will raise standards, increase the supply of good quality, lower cost private rented housing, prevent homelessness and reduce the Council's use of expensive temporary accommodation.

At its meeting on 21 October 2015, the Cabinet will consider a report on the options available to the Council in setting up a not-for-profit social lettings agency. The report will describe the relative merits of each option and provide details of how the new agency can be funded through the management fees and the savings achieved from the borough's reduced use of temporary accommodation.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 3

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Councillor Rafia Ashraf

When are the 100 new Social Housing Units planned for Dallington being built and how are they going to be funded?

Response

The planning application for the 3,000 dwellings at Dallington was submitted in March 2015. The build will be subject to planning permission and the necessary infrastructure work, but it is hoped the 100 homes will be completed by March 2017.

The costs are principally being met by a DCLG-approved increase in the borrowing cap of the Housing Revenue Account to meet the construction costs. The rental income has been modelled to meet the anticipated repayments required.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 4

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Councillor Rafia Ashraf

When does the Cabinet envisage all NPH properties will meet the new 'Northampton Standard'?

Response

The "Northampton Standard" is set out in 2 key strategic documents, firstly the "2015-2020 Delivery Plan" which has a requirement to improve properties to the Northampton Standard but has no set date but refers to the second strategic document the "Asset Management Strategy" (AMS). The AMS, section 3.8 sets out the requirement for all Northampton properties to achieve the standard within 10 years, i.e. 2025.

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 5

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Councillor Enam Haque

I understand there was a recent plan to bring new traders into the market square, can we have an update of how many new traders there are since 1st January 2015?

Response

There have been 22 new traders join the market since 1st January 2015. 14 of these traders are still trading. Initiatives have included advertising in trade magazines, promotion as part of National Love your Market Campaign and attractive initial rates for unique lines. We have also promoted the grants for small business start-ups. Additionally, four weeks free rent is offered for unique lines starting up

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 6

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Councillor Muna Cali

When approximately will the Conservative Administration introduce "a star rating system for the private rental sector in Northampton..."?(page 12 of the Conservative Manifesto).

Response

The Council has a vital role to play in supporting and improving Northampton's thriving private rented sector. It is for this reason that we have introduced an Additional HMO Licensing Scheme, we are planning to set up a Social Lettings Agency and we remain committed to prosecuting rogue landlords.

No decisions will be made on how the star rating system will operate and when it will be introduced until after the Council has consulted with the National Landlords Association, the University of Northampton, local landlords and other stakeholders. This consultation is likely to take place during the second half of 2016.

I believe that we can learn a lot from the 'scores on the doors' hygiene ratings that are already being displayed by restaurants and food premises. As well as helping tenants to make informed decisions about the landlords from whom they let, a star rating system will provide official recognition for those landlords who are managing and maintaining their properties to a good standard whilst at the same time identifying and incentivising those landlords whose standards need to improve

**Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing**

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Question 7

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Councillor Arthur McCutcheon

The Conservative Manifesto says "...will remain opposed to plans by neighbouring authorities to impose housing developments around the town." (page 8).

i. Can the Conservative Administration confirm it is now opposed to all of the following,
POLICY N3 - NORTHAMPTON NORTH SUE POLICY N4 - NORTHAMPTON WEST SUE
POLICY N6 - NORTHAMPTON SOUTH OF BRACKMILLS
POLICY N8 - NORTHAMPTON NORTH OF WHITEHILLS SUE

ii. Can the Cabinet member confirm that the Conservative dominated 'West Northamptonshire Joint Core Planning Committee' has not been serving in the interests of Northampton?

Response

i) On 19th January, the Council voted unanimously to confirm objections to the allocation of 1,000 and 1,300 dwellings respectively in the Northampton South (Policy N5) and Northampton South of Brackmills (Policy N6) SUEs and to the limited provision of the North West By Pass in the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy. With these exceptions, the Council voted (unanimously) to support the adoption of the Joint Core Strategy. It therefore follows that the other SUEs listed by Cllr. McCutcheon were not opposed by the Council and they cannot be described as having been imposed by neighbouring authorities.

Nevertheless, the Administration will continue to campaign to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is provided in advance of these developments, and that no additional burden falls in the already fully committed services provided for the residents of Northampton.

The Council will, of course, continue to oppose the development of the Northampton South and Northampton South of Brackmills SUEs at the forthcoming appeal public inquiries.

ii) As is clear from my answer to Cllr. McCutcheon's first question, there has been cross-party opposition in Northampton to some of the decisions made by the Joint Strategic Planning Committee. Now that the Joint Core Strategy has been adopted, the further role and direction of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee will be the subject of discussion between all parties. Please be assured the Administration will continue to fight Northampton's corner in any future meetings of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee.

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 8

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Councillor Julie Davenport

I would like to thank the Borough Council for arranging another container for Friends of Delapre Abbey (FoDA) to store all their items in. How does the cabinet Member plan to involve FoDA in the coming weeks in relation to the restoration of Delapre Abbey?

Response

FoDA remain a key partner to the restoration of Delapre Abbey. The Chair of FoDA is invited to the Joint Programme Board along with the Borough Council and DAPT. The role of the Joint Project Board is to oversee the progress and performance of the restoration works. The Board is also responsible for reviewing potential future restoration phases.

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 9

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Councillor Julie Davenport

In light of recent developments, will the premises allocated to FoDA for a Tearoom now be available for FoDA's new office?

Response

The original premises which were identified for a tea room, but ultimately declined by FoDA, remain in the License of the "Pony Club". The license informs all parties as to their rights and responsibilities. NBC will need to review more permanent facilities for FoDA in light of expected future restoration phases for the 19th Century Stable Block, it would be short sighted and not represent value for money should a facility be adapted for use which potentially is then part of a future restoration. Northampton Borough Council remain committed to keeping FoDA onsite within Delapre Abbey/Park and we continue to look at all options in relation to this.

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 10

Question to Councillor Alan Bottwood from Councillor Gareth Eales

In the next three years this Administration will need to decide whether to continue with the present Environmental Services contract. Will the Cabinet member agree to a cross party working group to decide whether to renew the present contract, go with a new provider or bring it back in house?

Response

It has already been established that our contract with Enterprise Managed Services (EMS) will come to an end in 2018. This is because our partner, Daventry District Council, has advised NBC that it does not wish to continue our joint arrangement once the initial seven year period expires in three years time and for the contract to be extended for a second period of seven years both councils need to agree to do so.

I intend commencing the process to replace EMS in about 18 months, in good time for new arrangements to be put in place in 2018. This process will include a detailed options appraisal which, amongst other things, will give full consideration to bringing all or part of the service back in house.

I would suggest the best way for councillors to support this process might be by providing pre-decision scrutiny under the auspices of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This was the approach that was taken prior to the awarding of the current contract and it proved very effective.

Councillor Alan Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 11

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Councillor Janice Duffy

What is happening about Silver Horse Pub in Goldings as it is an eye sore? I appreciate it is privately owned but can pressure be applied?

Response

We have maintained regular contact with the private owner of the former Silver Horse pub about the re-development of the premises. We understand that substantive works of demolition are proposed within the next month and we will monitor the position. There is an existing planning permission in place for a combination of new retail and residential property.

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 12

Question to Councillor Mary Markham from Councillor Naz Choudary

It is great news that councillor allowances continue to be frozen. When will an Independent Remuneration Panel be set up as to their future?

Response

The Council is investigating the best value option for having a Remuneration Panel review of our members allowances. We aim to appoint a panel by October with a report back to council around 6 months thereafter with recommendations. However the timetable for a report back to council will be driven by the Remuneration Panel themselves. I shall ask the Borough Secretary to update group leaders on progress periodically.

Councillor Mary Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 13

Question to Councillor Mary Markham from Councillor Naz Choudary

Freedom of the Borough ceremonies cost money and we have had a few now since 2012. Will the Leader agree not to have any more from now until May 2019?

Response

This administration will continue to recognise the service and commitment of individuals in this manner when it is deemed fit and proper to do so.

Councillor Mary Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 14

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Councillor Janice Duffy

Could the cabinet member tell us the current situation installing a children play area at Foxcovert Wood in Overstone Lodge (it was part of Growing Together Fund)? There seems to be a delay.

Response

The Council made a contribution of £195 to Growing Together to fund a planning application for the play area you refer to. The planning application has been received and is currently being considered.

Councillor Tim Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

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Question 15

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Mr Norman Adams

March 2015 the Cabinet approved the principle of the acquisition of buildings and land for the potential development of sheltered accommodation. It also approved funding of up to £750,000 to support the acquisition subject to further investigation, due diligence and production of the business case.

Has this acquisition taken place?

Response

Although the acquisition has not yet been completed, it is proceeding in accordance with the decision made by the Cabinet in March 2015.

**Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing**

