

Question for Full Council Monday 14 December 2015

Question 1

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Rufia Ashraf

What is the number of rough sleepers in Northampton as of 1st December?

Response

A formal multi agency 'count' of rough sleepers is not due to take place until February 2016. However, based on the information provided by the Outreach Workers and local organisations, it is estimated that there are approximately 25 rough sleepers in Northampton at the moment.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 2

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Rufia Ashraf

How many people are currently placed in Bed and Breakfast awaiting accommodation as of 1st December?

Response

38 households were living in Bed & Breakfast accommodation on 1st December. Of these 38 households, six had been offered suitable social rented housing, three were 'intentionally homeless' and one was about to move into more suitable temporary accommodation

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 3

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Danielle Stone

When does the Cabinet Member expect the Social Lettings Agency to be fully operational?

Response

I am expecting the Social Lettings Agency to be up and running by April 2016 and fully operational (with a full complement of staff and offering the full range of services) by October 2016...

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 4

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Danielle Stone

How many rogue landlords were prosecuted between 1st December 2013 1st December 2015?

Response

During this period, there were no prosecutions. At present, 12 landlords are the subject of criminal investigations by the Private Sector Housing Team. Since her appointment in September 2015, the Council's new Private Sector Housing Manager has started to make fundamental changes to the way in which criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords are identified and dealt with. A new Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy will be considered by Cabinet in February 2016.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 5

Question to Cllr Mary Markham from Cllr Danielle Stone

Please can the leader tell us how far she has got in negotiations with the Government about Northampton receiving refugees?

Response

We are working with other local authorities, particularly Northamptonshire County Council, on having arrangements in place when Government decide to locate any to Northamptonshire.

This is a Government led programme and we will respond to the need as it arises.

Councillor Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 6

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Zoe Smith

Please could we have the up to date figures for voids as of 1st December. How many, and what is the average turn round time?

Response

On 1st December, 170 council homes were void and, of these, 112 were empty awaiting extensive modernisation or redevelopment. The average void turnaround time for the homes let during October 2015 was 28.30 days. I will provide you with November's average void turnaround time at Full Council on 14 December 2015.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 7

Question to Cllr Brandon Eldred from Cllr Jane Birch

Although there are financial challenges please can the Cabinet Member carefully consider keeping the funding for CEFAP at its present level?

Response

The council is currently actively reviewing its strategic business priorities. A key part of this work includes maximising the impact of the voluntary and community sector (VCS). The review is not yet complete, but I do not expect that it will result in any reduction to the pot of money that is currently distributed via the CEFAP pot. However I will be seeking ways to achieve better outcomes from the VCS in return for the money the council spends in that sector.

Councillor Eldred
Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

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Question 8

Question to Cllr Brandon Eldred from Cllr Jane Birch

Please can we have a complete list of the funding Northampton Borough Council gives to the voluntary and community sector throughout the town?

Response

I have asked one of my officers to pull this information together for you into a single list and to send it to you directly.

**Councillor Eldred
Cabinet Member for Community Engagement**

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Question 9

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Clement Chunga

Many of our residents live in overcrowded conditions. When will this Authority put in place realistic minimum standards for living room and bedroom sizes that recognises the need for everyone to have personal space and space for clothes and belongings?

Response

Although the definition of statutory overcrowding – and minimum bedroom sizes – is prescribed in legislation, I am very keen to ensure that the Council does as much as it can to tackle overcrowding in social rented housing by making changes to its Housing Allocations Policy. I want to make it easier for tenants to qualify for a transfer, for example, if they are severely overcrowded (lacking 2 or more bedrooms) or they are suffering severe hardship because an adult or child is having to share a bedroom with someone else even though they have a serious medical condition that means it is unreasonable to expect them to continue sharing a bedroom.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 10

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Clement Chunga

Please can we have a map of the areas with high concentration of HIMOs?

Response

Yes. As the Planning Service is already mapping the location of licensed HIMOs, this information is already available on request. As part of the planned improvements to HIMO licensing, the Private Sector Housing Team will be publishing this information in a map on the Council's website and updating the map and HIMO Register every time that a new HIMO Licence is issued.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 11

Question to Cllr Tim Hadland from Cllr Arthur McCutcheon

Is this authority aware that there are restrictions on the proximity of fast food outlets to schools?

Response

"There are currently no restrictions in national planning policy on the location of new fast food outlets near to schools. However, some councils (15 according to a recent survey) have adopted local policies with this aim. A report in 2013 by Public Health England, the Institute of Environmental Health and the Local Government Association (Obesity & the environment: regulating the growth of fast food outlets) advises that it is preferable to incorporate such policies in statutory local plans rather than producing supplementary planning policy. We have recently begun work on the Northampton Part 2 Local Plan so we will address the issue of fast food outlets in that plan."

Councillor Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 12

Question to Cllr Mary Markham from Cllr Arthur McCutcheon

Early this year Tory controlled Aylesbury Vale District Council said they wanted unitary status as 'they are the second largest district council in the country'. A unitary Aylesbury Vale would give them more bargaining power within SEMLEP. What does the Leader of the Council think of this?

Response

The Government is currently promoting better joint working between authorities under the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. This legislation is intended to encourage authorities to find ways to combine their efforts through collaboration rather than by arguing over the structure and form of each Council.

Northampton has been very successful in gaining significant support from SEMLEP and from NEP, including being the first Enterprise Zone in both LEP areas and receiving financial support to key Alive projects. We are working closely with our SEMLEP and NEP partners and with all Councils across the area including Aylesbury Vale.

Unitary status is not currently on the agenda for most Councils nor for Government

Councillor Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 13

Question to Cllr Stephen Hibbert from Cllr Anamul Haque

Please can we have up to date figures for people using food banks?

Response

The food banks work independently of the Council and are not regulated by the Council. I suggest you approach them directly

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 14

Question to Cllr Alan Bottwood from Cllr Julie Davenport

In relation to the 'two green sacks only' policy, how many section 46 notices resulted in fines between 1st June to 1st December?

Response

To achieve compliance with the two green sack policy we have deployed a combined strategy of communication, education and enforcement.

While most people on sack collections have complied with the two green sack policy without the need for formal action, it has been necessary to issue over 6,000 section 46 notices. As is the intention, this has had a positive impact on the vast majority of residents who were previously not complying, so that in the main no further action has been necessary.

In accordance with the statutory process, we have though had to issue 107 second stage notices.

We monitor these second stage cases closely to check for ongoing infringement of the two green sack policy, as this would make the offender liable for a fixed penalty notice (FPN). However to date, none have been identified that are suitable for such further action, although there are a couple of cases currently in the pipeline.

Enforcement, along with communication and education, continues to be an important tool for us in our efforts to keep the town clean and tidy.

Councillor Bottwood
Cabinet Member for environment

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Question 15

Question to Cllr Mary Markham from Cllr Nazim Choudary

Do you think Northampton should remain a town or become a 'city'?

Response

This is not an option as the opportunity rarely arises and is then only by invitation of the Monarch

Councillor Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 16

Question to Cllr Hallam from Cllr Beardsworth

This Council is owed £900,000 by CDNL for the relocation of the athletics track. Can you tell us what the impact you expect this to have on the capital program and the revenue budget?

Response

As was fully explained in the report to Cabinet the £900k was to be used to part finance the relocation of the athletics track scheme in the Council's Capital Programme (total cost £1,750k), with the remaining funds coming from section 106 contributions.

In the first instance the Council will seek to recover the full debt from CDNL through the liquidation process. However, CDNL may not have sufficient assets to settle the debt. If this is the case the shortfall in funding will need to be met from any proceeds arising from the capital receipt arising from the land development over and above £10.250m. If there are insufficient monies arising from the land the pressure will need to be managed within the existing capital programme funding envelope. There is only a minimal impact on the revenue budget arising from delayed cashflows.

Councillor Hallam
Cabinet Member for Finance

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Question 17

Question to Cllr Hallam from Cllr Beardsworth

Aside from any plans to repay the capital balance of the NTFC loan, the Council will repay £1.3million in interest on the loan over that period. What effect do you anticipate this having on the revenue budget and on frontline services?

Response

As was fully explained in the report to Cabinet the interest accrues on the loan at approximately £275k per annum, it could rise to £1.3m in total if the land is not sold until 2020. The land maybe sold sooner in which case the interest cost would be reduced. This will be paid from within existing debt financing budgets until the loans mature. The loans previously provided to NTFC would be used to fund the Council's existing Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The reason the Council can afford the interest costs of these loans from within existing budgets is that the Council recently had two loans mature (paying an interest rate of 5.68% and 7.03% respectively, costing £950k per annum) and could refinance those loans using the loans transferred back from NTFC. The savings arising from refinancing of the CFR will be used to offset pressures the Council is facing in its Budget in order to maintain frontline services.

Councillor Hallam
Cabinet Member for Finance

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Question 18

Question to Cllr Hadland from Cllr Beardsworth

In July of this year, a full review of the Conservative Area for Kingsthorpe was presented to the residents and the Conservation Committee. Since then, no work has been done to further this review. In the meantime, several planning applications that would have been within the Conservation area have been passed. After all this time, why have the findings of the review not been implemented?

Response

The information presented to the Conservation Area Advisory Group and in the leaflet distributed at the Group's Summer Fayre was a preliminary draft. In the light of feedback received and further consideration, it was agreed that further work was required before full public consultation on the final proposals. This work is underway and it is anticipated that it will be completed in the New Year so that public consultation can be carried out.

Councillor Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 19

Question to Cllr Eldred from Cllr Meredith

3Market Square events have been taken over by a private company called "Stage Right", having previously been extremely effectively run in house by the Council . Can you please explain the tendering process that occurred prior to this contract being awarded?

Response

In 2014, expressions of interest (EOIs) for delivering support to the council's events programme, including events on the Market Square, were sought and three responses were received and evaluated. As a result of the evaluation process, an agreement was subsequently entered into with Stage Right Productions who were deemed to best meet the council's needs in terms of quality and cost.

Councillor Eldred
Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

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Question 20

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Cllr Meredith

A motion passed with full support at NCC requiring them to work with Borough and District Councils to shorten the waiting time for improvements to people's homes under the Disability Facilities Grant program. What can NBC do to improve these waiting times?

Response

I welcome NCC's commitment to work collaboratively with the Borough and District Councils to minimise the amount of time it takes to assess and approve residents' applications for Disabled Facilities Grants. Although NBC has a well-funded Disabled Facilities Programme and does not operate a 'waiting list' for such grants, the main cause of the delay in this process is the extraordinary amount of time it is taking NCC's Occupational Therapy Service to assess applicants' needs and send the Council its recommendations. To improve waiting times, the Council's Head of Housing and Wellbeing has agreed to convene a meeting between the Manager of the Occupational Therapy Service and the relevant managers in the seven Borough and District Councils to explore better ways of working in order to shorten the process. These discussions will complement NBC's review of its own processes which is likely to lead to better case management and monitoring.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 21

Question to Cllr Hibbert from Cllr Davenport

Garages are boarded up, never repaired, weeds growing all around them, graffiti on - it makes areas look run down. I understand there is yet another study going on to determine what to do with them.

When is this due to be completed? What have they determined so far?

Response

Northampton Partnership Homes has commenced a desktop review of all garages to confirm their suitability for garaging a car, their future demand, and their future investment requirements. NPH and the Council have agreed a protocol for discussing each garage site and these discussions will enable decisions to be made on future use and investment. At present, there is no fixed timeline for this and each site will be considered on a ward by ward basis.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 22

Question to Cllr Hadland from Cllr Davenport

What safeguards are in place at the planning/permission stages to safeguard buyers of new homes from the liquidation of developers which can mean that streets in that development are not adopted by the Council?

Response

The construction of new roads on housing estates is the responsibility of the developer. If the roads under construction are to be adopted, it is Northamptonshire County Council's responsibility, as Highway Authority, to ensure that they are built to the appropriate standard and adequately lit and drained.

There are two ways that a new road may be offered to the Highway Authority for adoption to become maintainable at public expense:

1. The developer may complete the road and then offer it to the Highway Authority under Section 37 of the Highways Act 1980; or,
2. The developer may opt to enter into a legal agreement under Section 38 of the Highways Act 1980

A Section 38 agreement is always supported by a bond or cash deposit calculated by the Highway Authority and based on the cost of the works proposed. This bond or cash deposit can be called upon if the developer goes into liquidation or otherwise defaults on his responsibilities. For this reason, most Highway Authorities prefer Section 38 to Section 37, which provides no safeguards in the event of a developer going into liquidation. Unfortunately, the Highway Authority cannot insist that a developer completes a Section 38 agreement.

In the absence of a Section 38 agreement, solicitors may advise house buyers to retain part of the purchase price of the property to cover possible future road charges in order for the roads to be adopted.

Councillor Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 23

Question to Cllr Markham from Cllr Birch

Could the Administration look into the possibility of acquiring the student accommodation at Park Campus (obviously after the University relocates) so it could be used as NPH accommodation?

Response

The Council has granted planning permission for the redevelopment of the Park Campus to provide 800 dwellings. This involves the demolition of the existing university facilities, including the student accommodation. The proceeds to the university from the sale of the site for residential development are an important component of the funding for the new waterside campus.

Councillor Markham
Leader of the Council

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Question 24

Question to Cllr Hadland from Cllr Cali

The Council now hopes to retrieve the £10.25 million loan from NTFC by developing the surrounding land. Could the Administration give me an outline at this early stage in how it expects to do this?

Response

At the moment, the Council has commissioned some exploratory work on the site which will provide better information for developers, when the site is brought forward for development.

This will include work such as defining the reclamation works for the site.

Councillor Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning