

Question for Full Council Monday 25th January, 2016

Question 1

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Mr Norman Adams

[i]Currently 167 properties are subject to an additional 50% council tax due to being empty for over 2 years, of that number 39 are the councils own housing stock.

Council housing is less than 13% of the total properties in the borough but accounts for 23% of the property being empty for such a long period.

Are you content with this?

Response

I can confirm that 17 of the council homes managed by Northampton Partnership Homes have been empty for two years or more.

9 of these homes are in Little Cross Street (which is going to be redeveloped to provide new council homes) and 5 are in Eleonore House (which will soon benefit from extensive remodelling work that will substantially improve the scheme's facilities and accommodation). In both of these situations, the work is dependent on vacant possession being obtained.

I am content with the reasons why the 17 council homes are empty and the action that Northampton Partnership Homes is taking to redevelop them or bring them back into use

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 2

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Mr Norman Adams

In December NBC published 'A proposed new sheltered housing scheme on a site at Lakeview in Churchill Avenue is taking a step forward' recent developments due to come into effect April 2018 will restrict HB to LHA rate for all tenures and all tenants.

Question: Is this scheme still viable at a rent of £100.05 or less (Northampton 1 bed LHA rate) a week?

Response

Northampton Partnership Homes is working closely with the Council to develop options and designs for a new build scheme on the Lakeview House site. All of these design options will be subject to detailed discussions, consultation with local residents, full financial appraisal and viability modelling and, of course, planning permission.

Based on the information currently available in relation to the proposed Housing Benefit changes, and subject to agreement on the right density and number of homes, Northampton Partnership Homes is of the view that a new build scheme is still viable.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 3

Question to Councillor Alan Bottwood from Councillor Julie Davenport

Local authorities in Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford & Luton manage to recycle all hard plastic, please can Northampton Borough Council consider doing the same in the future?

Response

Yes, I am happy to give full consideration to the inclusion of the collection of hard plastic when I develop the specification for the new waste contract which will go live in 2018. There will of course be technical and financial considerations to be taken account of but I am happy to fully explore your suggestion and take it forward if viable to so do

Councillor Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 4

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Councillor Julie Davenport

We understand the Council will no longer adopt green spaces on new developments. What guarantees are being sought by the planning department that they will be maintained in 10, 20, or 50 years?

Response

The decision on whether the Council will adopt an area of green space will depend on the scale, nature and location of the development. In cases where the Council adopts the green space, a financial contribution will be secured to fund ongoing maintenance. This contribution will be agreed in advance in consultation with the Customers and Communities Directorate. In instances where the Council will not adopt the green space, the Planning Legal Agreement will include an obligation that requires the green space to be made available for public use in perpetuity and for a maintenance regime to be submitted to and approved by the Council prior to the occupation of any new residential development.

Councillor Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 5

Question to Councillor Brandon Eldred from Councillor Julie Davenport

Many Delapre residents feel 'Delapre Alive' enhanced the towns reputation for entertainment and helped local businesses by the increased trade it brought to the town. Would the Cabinet Member agree?

Response

In accordance with its commitment, this administration delivered the event for three years and I consider it had a positive impact on the Delapre area and the town as a whole. It is good to hear that local people share that view. Myself, and my cabinet colleagues continue to consider a number of other event options. These proposals will be communicated to you and other colleagues once they are firmed up. In the meantime, thank you for sharing with me the positive feedback you have received.

Councillor Eldred
Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

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Question 6

Question to Councillor Tim Hadland from Councillor Arthur McCutcheon

There is a new development on the very fringe of Northampton in Wootton Fields on Newport Pagnell Road. It will be approximately 270 dwellings when completed. How much section 106 money will come to Northampton or will it be kept entirely by South Northamptonshire District Council? Details of the section 106 money are vague at the moment for this development.

Response

At the time when the Borough was consulted on the fringe planning application, we requested that SNC should involve NBC when negotiating any related S106 agreement. Planning permission has since been granted by SNC following finalisation of a S106 agreement but NBC was not invited to get involved in the negotiation of the S106.

However, the S106 agreement does include obligations such as primary and secondary contributions, health care, off-site sports pitches and on-site play equipment, strategic leisure contributions. No affordable housing provision is included.

Councillor Hadland
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise & Planning

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Question 7

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Mr Neil Clarke

Northampton Borough Council's Cabinet discussed proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Policy and the Tenancy Strategy in December 2012

94% of respondents to the Tenancy Strategy agreed with the proposal to give older people a lifetime tenancy.

Question: Would you agree that now the Government as dictated that ALL tenancies MUST be for 2 years to 5 years flies in the face of Localism?

Response

The Government's proposal to phase out lifetime tenancies (set out in an amendment to the Housing and Planning Bill 2015) will not affect existing council tenants. Their security of tenure will not change, even if they decide to transfer to another council home.

Although I prefer the current arrangements – where the Council is able to make its own decisions on tenants' security of tenure, and set these out in its local Tenancy Strategy – we will obviously comply with any new legislation that is introduced.

It is my understanding that, at the end of the fixed term tenancy – which will normally be for 5 years, rather than the minimum of 2 years – the Council will be free to decide (in accordance with its Tenancy Strategy and Housing Allocations Policy) on whether or not to grant a new tenancy. Assuming this is the case, we will do everything we can to continue providing council tenants with accommodation for as long as they need it.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 8

Question to Councillor Alan Bottwood from Cllr Sally Beardsworth

1. Can you confirm that there are no postcodes for allotments?

After an ambulance drove straight past an emergency it was called to at Welford Road Allotments, and given that many older people have allotments, will the portfolio holder instruct his officers to put together an emergency protocol for the town's allotments to ensure they are easily and quickly found by emergency services ?

Response

Thank you for raising this matter with me. I am happy to liaise with the emergency services to see how the council can best assist them with locating and accessing our allotments.

Councillor Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Environment

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Question 9

Question to Councillor Stephen Hibbert from Mr Neil Clarke

Question for Council meeting Monday, 25 January 2016

To Councillor Hibbert Cabinet Member for Housing

Having read a article by local Housing campaigners that states that Northampton Borough Council sells properties at under £50k and buys them back at over £98k

Question: Could you confirm or otherwise, as NBC spent £1,392,840 on the purchase of 14 dwellings?

Response

Yes, I can confirm that the Council spent this money on the purchase of privately owned homes to help meet the housing needs of applicants on Northampton's Housing Register.

Unless the applicant is living in sheltered housing or other housing that is particularly suitable for elderly or disabled people, the Council is required (under the Right to Buy legislation) to sell its homes to qualifying tenants at a discount of up to £77,900. The valuation and purchase price will disregard any improvements that the tenant has made to their home at their own expense.

If a tenant buys their home from the Council under the Right to Buy and then sells it within 10 years, they must ask the Council if it wants to buy their home back at market value. If they sell their property within 5 years, they will normally have to repay all or part of their discount.

The Council's purchase of privately owned homes is partly funded by the use of the money that it receives from Right to Buy sales. As well as increasing the supply of social rented housing, these purchases provide the Council with the opportunity to acquire suitable, reasonably priced properties to meet local demand. The acquisition of these homes may also help us improve neighbourhoods and tackle anti-social behaviour and empty or badly managed housing.

Councillor Hibbert
Cabinet Member for Housing

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Question 10

Question to Councillor Mike Hallam from Cllr Danielle Stone

How many agency staff does the Borough Council have and at what cost?

Response

The Council has employed 36 agency staff during the current financial year (upto end of December 2015) at a cost of £74,705.85.

Councillor Hallam
Cabinet Member for Finance

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Question 11

Question to Councillor Alan Bottwood from Cllr Gareth Eales

How is the tree strategy being implanted and how quickly?

Response

In accordance with the cabinet report of 9 December 2015, Tree maintenance – Response to Overview and Scrutiny, a revised tree strategy is currently being developed and that work will be completed over the next few months. Implementation of the revised tree strategy will begin in April 2016, subject to spending approval from full council next month as part of the budget setting process.

Councillor Bottwood
Cabinet Member for Finance

