

Item 6

**Questions Submitted by Councillors
and Members of the Public**



Question 1 – Cllr Anjona Roy

What is the Healthy Start voucher uptake in the West Northants area and how does this compare with update in February 2019?

Answer:- The Healthy Start voucher uptake is measured in 4 weekly cycles. The average uptake for Northamptonshire is approximately 45% (East Midlands – 52%). In West Northants, the uptake over the same period in the last 3years is as shown below:

- January 2019 - 57.4%
- January 2020 - 49.6%
- January 2021 - 45.5%

Source: <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/healthy-start-uptake-data/>

In light of the marked decrease in uptake, the following actions have recently been agreed AND to be implemented by June 2021:

- Promotion of the scheme to professionals including training (how to help individuals apply, eligible items and registered retailers)
- Promotion of scheme to members of the Public and the local community (how to apply, eligible items and registered retailers) This will include an update on the increase value of the voucher to £4.50 as from April 2021 and the launch of the digitalisation of the scheme.

Increase Retailer awareness and participation in the scheme including Community Pharmacists. (LPC- Local Pharmaceutical Council)

Please see participating Retailers currently accepting Healthy start vouchers in the link below. <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/healthy-start-vouchers/search-results/?submit=submit&pcode=nn1>

Additional Info - Public Health are leading a newly established partnership task group that includes maternity, CCG and NHFT that have agreed to review the Healthy Start scheme in Northamptonshire. The aim is to identify areas for improvement in the system and to establish improved ways to communicate the scheme to those most in need, leading to improved uptake and health and wellbeing. This group will report into the prevention workstream of the Local Maternity and Neonatal Services (LMNS)

Cllr Matt Golby



Question 2 – Cllr Danielle Stone

Who in the authority is monitoring our appointments in terms of equalities and unconscious bias? How is it reported?

Answer:- on the process for appointing to tiers 1-3, the senior tier 2 appointments comprised of both stakeholder panels and partner stakeholder panels in addition to interview panels. HR approached all Leaders and asked for them to identify Members to sit on the panels, this was one way we sought to ensure the process was free from bias. In terms of the composition of partner panels HR approached the Chair to determine which partners should be approached, they were contacted and asked to participate and put forward representatives. Again it was constructed in this way to seek to ensure there was less risk of bias within the process.

Below Corporate Director level the interview panels comprised of senior leaders, panel membership was determined by the Chief Executives and included subject matter experts. Wherever possible we sought to ensure there was a gender mix to panel interviews. This was harder to do in terms of ethnicity given the makeup of the existing workforces across the 8 sovereign councils. It should be noted that senior officers engaged in the panels had extensive interviewing experience and would have had prior training in terms of equality and diversity.

In respect of the format of the interviews, all questions were drafted by the HR team and input then received from the panel, particularly on the technical side. The same set of questions were used for candidates the same roles in each authority, and the panels used a scoring mechanism, the questions were set to test the skills and experience needed for 1st April onwards in the new Councils. This further reduced the risk of unconscious bias in the process. It should also be noted that the tier 1-3 appointment process was heavily supported by two experienced HR professionals who were also present on a number of the panels, ensuring that discrimination and bias was not part of the process.

In terms of monitoring of equality and diversity, this is monitored and reportable via the payroll system ERP Gold. Employees record their diversity information using self service and the new West and North Northamptonshire Councils will be able to continue to report on the makeup of their workforce as they can do now.

Cllr Malcolm Longley



Question 3 – Cllr Wendy Randall

North Northants and West Northants have settled on different terms and conditions for staff employed by each authority. Does this give North Northants the competitive edge when it comes to recruitment?

Answer:- The current negotiations with the Trade unions over day 1 terms and conditions cover 37 different areas and include things like sickness policy, business travel, leave as well as pay, job evaluation, grading structures. The unions have been clear from the outset that wanted the new Council to adopt the NJC (National Joint Council) arrangements including the setting of annual pay for the public sector. The current West Councils do not largely follow the NJC arrangements with the exception of some minor policy areas and we have advised the union that we will not be adopting NJC pay awards going forward while the North have committed to doing this.

However as part of the ongoing negotiations the West Council has agreed to mirror a number of the NJC arrangements and benefits that the unions wanted including using NJC job evaluation which is seen as fairer and more representative of the majority of the workforce, grading structures and a number of other key benefits which we think are most important to our staff including measures that give life balance like annual leave, special leave for those attending medical appointments or adopting etc. we are also reviewing redeployment cover for staff who may have to change location as part of the reorganisation.

While we have not committed to be bound by NJC pay awards because we think its important that we have an element of performance related pay and because we have a challenging first financial year. We have been clear that we want to be seen as an employers who is fair to staff and treats them equally and so we will review the 21-22 pay once the NJC negotiations are complete at the end of the calendar year.

We believe that our approach focuses on the full breadth of benefits to staff and what matters most to them and that its fair and equal and as such we will remain an attractive employer offering a clear progression path, a good range of benefits and great opportunities to thrive.

Cllr Malcolm Longley

West



Question 4 – Cllr Terrie Eales

What is the current gender pay gap in the sovereign authorities and what measures are being put in place to address this for WNC?

Answer:- There is a requirement to publically report on the gender pay gap for employers with over 250 people, using a snapshot of data at 31 March. Pay gap reporting is published on line here <https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/viewing/search-results?t=1&search=&orderBy=relevance>

You can compare via the website a number of employers together the last return shows the following.

2019/20 reported Difference in gender Pay	Employer size	Difference in hourly rates average
NCC	1000 to 4999	13%
Wellingborough BC	Less than 250	21.6%
Kettering Borough Council	<i>Not reported this year</i>	
Corby Borough Council	500 to 999	10.2%
Northampton Borough Council	250 to 499	16.4%

(Continued overleaf)



Question 4 – Cllr Terrie Eales (Continued)

What is the current gender pay gap in the sovereign authorities and what measures are being put in place to address this for WNC?

Answer (continued):- The new West Northamptonshire Council will be required to report their gender pay gap in for 30 March 2022 by 30th March 2023. WNC will seek to ensure that issues around any gender pay gap once the new council is in place is addressed through having a clear and non discriminatory pay policy in place, which is communicated to managers clearly, that we ensure managers and Directors apply the policy requirements rigorously. Appointments above the bottom of the grade will be monitored as they are now in through approval levels and through payroll and reporting mechanism. We will also ensure that a fair and transparent pay grading and job evaluation scheme is implemented and that there are appropriate mechanisms in place for employees to raise any issues regarding pay through the grievance policy and the job evaluation policy. We have agreed that a union representative will sit on our Job Evaluation Panel going forward to further ensure transparency for West Northants.

Cllr Malcolm Longley

Question 5 – Cllr Rufia Ashraf

What is the current BAME pay gap in the sovereign authorities and what measures are being put in place to address this for WNC?

Answer:- There is currently no requirement for the public sector to report on any BAME pay gap, the only requirement is in respect of the gender pay gap, for employers with over 250 people, using a snapshot of data at 31 March.

- Northamptonshire County Council's pay reporting can be found here <https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/Employer/ZdrHoQq0>
- Northampton Borough Council's is here <https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/Employer/AgdH4nop>
- The new West Northamptonshire Council will be required to report their gender pay gap in for 30 March 2022 by 30th March 2023.

WNC will seek to ensure that issues around any BAME or other pay gap once the new council is in place is addressed through having a clear and non discriminatory pay policy in place, which is communicated to managers clearly, that we ensure managers and Directors apply the policy requirements rigorously. We will also ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place for employees to raise any issues regarding pay through the grievance policy and the job evaluation policy. We have agreed that a union representative will sit on our Job Evaluation Panel going forward to further ensure transparency for West Northants.

Cllr Malcolm Longley



Question 6 – Cllr Emma Roberts

What are the figures for child poverty in the West Northants area?

Answer:- To directly answer the question put by the councillor;

The estimated proportion of children aged 0-15 years in poverty, as of 2018-19 (latest data available), in the West Northamptonshire council area is as follows;

- Daventry – 20.05%
- Northampton – 28.15%
- South Northamptonshire – 15.59%

This compares to an East Midlands Average of 26% and England average of 31%.

It is not possible to calculate the figure for West Northamptonshire Council as a whole at this time as the data is not available at that geography and cannot be directly combined without access to the raw data.

Cllr Fiona Baker



Question 7 – Cllr Jane Birch

Please can we have an update on what is happening to County Hall in Northampton?

Answer:- The current building is still being maintained by Northamptonshire County Council, some essential work is currently on-going to ensure it remains weatherproof. Some areas within County Hall have been brought back into use to create socially distanced work spaces since the Covid-19 pandemic began. In addition, some rooms are still used for coroner hearings while the Judges Lodges are still used for visiting judges. Other areas were made available for the West and North shadow committees should they need them, but with virtual meetings they are not currently required. The lower levels of the building still hosts the county's main computer server.

Some initial work was undertaken to explore potential future uses for the site. Owing to the pressures of Covid-19, this work has been put on pause. The asset will transfer to the West authority on Vesting Day and consideration for its future will be part of wider property strategy for the new authority.

Cllr Adam Brown

Question 8 – Cllr Winston Strachan

Are the Unitaries considering the harmonisation of residual a waste treatment facility?

Answer:- All eight authorities have been working on a review of waste infrastructure in Northamptonshire and the initial indications are that there may be financial and non-financial benefits if a residual waste treatment facility was developed. More work is required to establish if there is a robust business case compared with the option of continuing to use spare capacity in existing facilities elsewhere. These options will be explored in parallel with North Northamptonshire who must also consider its strategy for residual waste in the future. The existing contractual arrangements for residual waste are in place until 2023 and may be extended until 2025 if the Council decides to do so.

Cllr Phil Larratt



Question 9 – Cllr Winston Strachan

Who will take over the responsibilities for the maintenance of established land filled sites within the county boundaries?

Answer:- The County Council currently has responsibility for a portfolio of historic closed landfills in the County. These are not sites that have recently ceased accepting waste, but sites that were closed decades ago. (Sites which landfilled waste in recent years are the responsibility of the commercial site owner and the Environment Agency is the regulator). The responsibility for the monitoring and management of the historic closed landfills that are located in West Northamptonshire will transfer to West Northamptonshire Council on vesting day. Initially this work will be hosted by North Northamptonshire for up to 12 months, but WNC will continue to oversee this work under a formal agreement between the two new unitary authorities.

Cllr Phil Larratt

Question 10 – Cllr Winston Strachan

Could we be given an update progress report on the construction of HS2 and East/West Rail with particular reference to facilitating construction within West Northants Authority boundaries please?

Answer:- Members and residents are invited to keep up to date with overall progress of HS2 through the HS2 website and I'm sure we can remind Members of the address by including a link within the minutes. There is also a specific page for how HS2 are engaging with the communities of Northamptonshire which we can also include. Local Members have also been invited by HS2 to attend a series of briefings to update them on a range of elements related to the project. A specific briefing on Northamptonshire is scheduled for 9th March. If Members do not have an invitation to this meeting and would like to attend, I suggest they contact Graeme Kane (Director Place) at Northamptonshire County Council and he will ensure HS2 extend the invitation to you.

<https://www.hs2.org.uk/2020-progress/>

<https://www.hs2.org.uk/documents/northamptonshire-local-area-engagement-plan/>



Question 10 – Cllr Winston Strachan (continued)

NCC are actively involved in meetings with HS2 and other local stakeholders, including South Northamptonshire District Council as the Planning Authority. Discussions are underway ahead of formal applications regarding highway design of key structures and temporary structures such as construction compounds. There is also work underway with regard to cycle-proofing the route and implementing opportunities for wider cycling infrastructure.

In terms of the Enabling Works for HS2, a number of road junction improvements have already been completed and phase one of the A361 Chipping Warden Relief Road will be completed in the coming months. In addition, the County Council is currently delivering a number of additional highway improvements in communities which will be affected by HS2 construction traffic, using funding allocated through the HS2 Road Safety Fund. Meanwhile, pre-application discussions are currently ongoing prior to the start of HS2 main works construction.

While East-West Rail does not enter West Northamptonshire, work is currently under way at Bletchley to construct a new interchange station; although it remains uncertain whether there will be capacity to run any East-West Rail services to Milton Keynes Central (or indeed beyond to Northampton). Government recently allocated £760m to fund the main works construction of the Bicester – Bletchley phase of East West Rail.

Question 11 – Andrew Crisp – Hollowell and Teeton Parish Council

Provision of Street Lighting – funding of Cost of Electricity and Maintenance:

The majority of Parishes undertake responsibility for the provision of street lighting within the parish and precept for the funding of electricity supply and maintenance. There is an apparent unfairness in that those Parishes are also required to contribute to the funding of street lighting in areas where street lighting is provided and maintained by Northamptonshire County Council. If the areas maintained by NCC are transferred to the West Northamptonshire Council this apparent unfairness will be perpetuated.

A FOI request to NCC for information about street lighting within West Northamptonshire indicates that: The towns and village that you have requested information for equates broadly to the new West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority area covering Northampton Borough, Daventry District and South Northamptonshire (although that will include assets in other villages and main roads). The new unitary area contains 51.6% of the street light assets and we have used that percentage to convert to equivalent funding for that area in the table below:

Question 11 – Andrew Crisp – Hollowell and Teeton Parish Council (continued)

Financial Year	Electricity	Maintenance	DfT Funding (PFI Credits)	Total	West Unitary 51.6%
2019/20	£1,643,000	£9,153,718	-£5,184,072	£5,612,646	£2,896,125
2020/21	£1,626,000	£9,360,718	-£5,184,072	£5,802,646	£2,994,165

How is the funding of street lighting within West Northamptonshire being calculated to ensure this apparent unfairness is removed?

Answer:- Street lighting brings benefits to residents, drivers, visitors and businesses across the county by creating safe environments in which to live, visit, drive, and in more normal times, enjoy evening activities. Residents therefore benefit not only from the street lights on the street in which they live, but also in town and village centres that they visit for work, school and leisure. The funding of street lighting is applied equally across the new authority for the benefit of our communities and local economies.

Cllr Phil Larratt

Question 12 – Doreen Kimberlin – Creaton Parish Council

As a Creaton resident for almost 20 years I have, and continue to be, shocked at the state of the pavements and indeed roads, in Creaton. As an independent 90 year old, I use my mobility scooter to get to the local shop, to go to events and friends in the village when restrictions allow and to go out for fresh air.

It is dangerous to go on the road and I have been shouted at on 2 occasions by passing drivers telling me to use the pavement. If only! The pavements continue to be appallingly dangerous. There are numerous holes, the camber makes it most unsafe and the condition with mud makes some of them impassable. I got stuck in the mud unable to move recently whilst on the pavement on the A5199 going northwards out of Creaton towards the houses on the main road.

I am now unable to go out on my own and am reliant on my daughter's availability to accompany me and walk on the road with me, making motorists aware of my presence. This appalling state of all the pavements in Creaton is not new and there has been no investment for years. I fear for the safety of other residents not just myself, including those with pushchairs.

Would you please tell me what the new authority is going to do about the state of roads and pavements in Creaton as NCC has profoundly failed in its service. What additional investment is going to be put in to address the problem after so many years of neglect?



Question 12 – Doreen Kimberlin – Continued

Answer:-

I am sorry to hear of Ms Kimberlin's difficulty in getting out and about on her mobility scooter. Maintaining and improving the roads and pavements of West Northamptonshire will be a priority for the new authority as we know how important it is to ensure residents and visitors can enjoy the villages, towns and countryside of West Northamptonshire safely. We will continue to use our limited resources wisely to prioritise spend on the roads and pavements in most need, and campaign for greater funding in roads from Central Government so we can invest in the roads and pavements of our authority. In the meantime, footpath cleanliness is the responsibility of the local district council and so Mrs Kimberlin may wish to raise this with Daventry District Council.

Cllr Phil Larratt

Question 13 – Mary Clarke, Dave Berry, Pat Coomber-Wood and Debbie Egan – Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice have maintained a full advice service for Northamptonshire residents since the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. During that time we've had 14,956 client contacts, worked on 18,367 issues and helped people access almost £5million in benefits*. This is money that is spent in the local economy, benefiting businesses and stopping people from falling behind with rent, bills and Council Tax.

The full impact of Covid-19 is still to be seen, but is predicted to result in unemployment, spiraling debt and housing issues, making these services vital for keeping people out of poverty and avoiding homelessness.

The four Citizens Advice offices that cover Northamptonshire are independent charities, currently funded via different Council funding streams, with some funded through grant payments and others through commissioning, as well as over different durations (some have funding to 31st March 2022 and others to 31st March 2023).

We appreciate the funding we receive from the Council, which means we can reach the most deprived members of the community and particularly for re-awarding the grant funding for 2021/22 thereby ensuring we are able to support people affected by the pandemic.

Thank you. Can we take this opportunity to wish the Council every success with the new structure.

How will West Northamptonshire Council approach funding for vital community support services such as Citizens Advice in the new Authority; will you be working with North Northamptonshire to jointly fund services or do this individually and will there be opportunities to discuss this with the new Authority?

Question 13 – Mary Clarke, Dave Berry, Pat Coomber-Wood and Debbie Egan – Citizens Advice (Continued)

Answer:- The role of Citizens Advice and all our other voluntary and community sector groups is vital in supporting our residents and ensuring that they get early help to avoid a crisis, stay safe and stay well. We see the role of such groups as a vital part of our wellbeing offer and place based services in the future. This is why the voluntary sector sits within our Adults, Communities and Wellbeing Directorate in our new Council design.

The budgets for all services and contracts have generally been split between the authorities and in this case the budgets will have been split by their geography so that the funding continues in the areas supported or location of the service. But any funding provided via a contract at a county level will be hosted by one authority or the other who will have the budget to continue paying for that service.

As part of our budget planning we have assumed that all currently funded organisations (whether through contract or grant) will continue to be funded in year 1 so that we don't disrupt or stop any services and so we have time to review what we do, how we use them and consolidate our funding and arrangements for the west into a cohesive plan with clear outcomes and aims. This will be better for voluntary organisations who will have more certainty on their funding and we will work with them to design how the grants and contracts work in future.

Cllr Matt Golby



Questions 14 and 15 – Cllr Jonathan Harris

At one of the early Shadow Council meetings last year, I raised the issue of the expenditure being spent on consultants determining the procurement process for the future Highways contract. I made the comment that it would be important for the future administration to make final decisions. This should include the option of this provision being run internally as it is in many other local councils. At the time of asking the question, it was suggested that the new contract would be determined and most likely signed in Summer 2021.

- 1. Given that the Highways contract with KierWSP has now been extended to March 2022, what update can you provide on progress in regard to the procurement of the new contract which presumably will come into effect in April 2022?**
- 2. What contractual differences, if any have been made to the overall structure of the extended contract for this period and what additional improvement targets been set?**

Questions 14 and 15 – Cllr Jonathan Harris (Continued)

Answer:-

1. An update was recently provided to all Members of the authority. This provided an update on the procurement exercise, and explains that the new contracts will be in place for April 2022. It also invites all Members to attend a workshop regarding the procurement exercise and future contract. An invitation has been sent to all Members for a workshop on 4th March at 6pm.
2. The extension to the existing short-term contract with the current provider is based on the same terms. The only change is to the end of the contract.

Cllr Phil Larratt



Question 16 – Cllr Jonathan Harris

It would appear from figures provided, that the overall revenue budget for highways appears to be increasing slightly (£350K) between this current year and the next, however the budget allocated for this coming year is clearly split in two in order to serve both the West and the North. However the forecast seems to show approximately a £1 million overspend for the current year. The pattern over the last four to five years has shown overspends each year, on average of around the same amount - £1 million.

Why has the budget been set in such a way which seems to not reflect reality? The state of our roads and pavements has been a consistent bug bear of Northamptonshire residents for many years with an estimated backlog already in existence of some £100 million of reparations.

How are the dramatic improvements required going to be addressed by the new West Northamptonshire Council?

Question 16 – Cllr Jonathan Harris (Continued)

Answer:- The total revenue budget for West Northamptonshire for Highways costs is proposed to be set at £6.7m based on the best information available at the time of setting the budget. This amount of budget is deemed to be sufficient and realistic.

Previous overspends against the budget set is a matter for the County Council not West Northamptonshire. However, inspection of the publicly available reports show that, for example, the estimated forecast overspend in the current financial year is largely explained by the conscious decision to enhance the highways service during the winter months in order to improve the quality of the network.

Cllr Phil Larratt