



# Cabinet

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held at the Council Chamber, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Tuesday 16 January 2024 at 6.00 pm

## Agenda

Public Session	
1.	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>
2.	<b>Declarations of Interest</b> Members are asked to declare any interest and the nature of that interest which they may have in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.
3.	<b>Minutes</b> (Pages 5 - 12) To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Tuesday 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2023.
4.	<b>Chair's Announcements</b> To receive communications from the Chair.
5.	<b>Urgent Business</b> The Chair to advise whether they have agreed to any items of urgent business being admitted to the agenda.
6.	<b>Report from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (if any)</b> None
7.	<b>Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022-23</b> (Pages 13 - 54)
8.	<b>The closure of Ridgway House, Towcester</b> (Pages 55 - 88)

9.	<b>Interim Bus Policy</b> (Pages 89 - 100)
10.	<b>Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy</b> (Pages 101 - 144)
11.	<b>Commissioning a unified digital network for WNC</b> (Pages 145 - 150)
12.	<b>Admissions arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled West Northamptonshire schools for 2025 intakes and co-ordinated schemes for 2025 intakes</b> (Pages 151 - 182)
13.	<b>Disposal of former Collingtree Smallholding, Watering Lane, Collingtree</b> (Pages 183 - 198)
14.	<b>Office Optimisation Phase 2 Costs</b> (Pages 199 - 210)
15.	<b>Procurement of bus shelter advertising franchise contract</b> (Pages 211 - 220)
16.	<b>New Public Mortuary</b> (Pages 221 - 252)
<b>Exclusion of the Press and Public</b>	
17.	<p><b>Exclusion of the Press and Public</b></p> <p>In respect of the following items the Chairman may move the resolution set out below, on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information (information regarded as private for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972) would be disclosed to them: The Committee is requested to resolve: "That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act of the descriptions against each item would be disclosed to them"</p>
18.	<b>Strategic Acquisition</b>
<b>Private Session</b>	

Proper Officer  
8 January 2024

### **Cabinet Members:**

Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Chair)	Councillor Adam Brown (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Fiona Baker	Councillor Rebecca Breese
Councillor Matt Golby	Councillor Mike Hallam
Councillor Phil Larratt	Councillor Daniel Lister
Councillor Malcolm Longley	Councillor David Smith

## **Information about this Agenda**

### **Apologies for Absence**

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### **Declarations of Interest**

Members are asked to declare interests at item 2 on the agenda or if arriving after the start of the meeting, at the start of the relevant agenda item

### **Local Government and Finance Act 1992 – Budget Setting, Contracts & Supplementary Estimates**

Members are reminded that any member who is two months in arrears with Council Tax must declare that fact and may speak but not vote on any decision which involves budget setting, extending or agreeing contracts or incurring expenditure not provided for in the agreed budget for a given year and could affect calculations on the level of Council Tax.

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West Northamptonshire Council  
The Guildhall  
St Giles Street  
Northampton  
NN1 1DE



## Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Council Chamber, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Tuesday 12 December 2023 at 6.00 pm.

### **Present:**

Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Chair)  
Councillor Adam Brown (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Rebecca Breese  
Councillor Matt Golby  
Councillor Mike Hallam  
Councillor Phil Larratt  
Councillor Daniel Lister  
Councillor Malcolm Longley  
Councillor David Smith

### **Also Present:**

Councillor Sally Beardsworth  
Councillor Jonathan Harris  
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere  
Councillor Rosie Humphreys  
Councillor Peter Matten  
Councillor Ian McCord  
Councillor Bob Purser  
Councillor Wendy Randall

### **Officers:**

Rebecca Purnell, Assistant Chief Executive  
Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)  
Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)  
Paul Hanson, Head of Democratic & Elections  
Sofia Neal-Gonzalez, Democratic Services Officer (minutes)  
Jane Carr, Director of Communities & Opportunities  
Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director - People Services & Deputy Chief Executive  
Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services  
Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place, Economy and Environment  
Gillian Baldock, Political Assistant to the Conservative Group  
Josh West, Political Assistant to the Labour Group

## 82. **Apologies**

Councillor Fiona Baker

83. **Declarations of Interest**

None

84. **Minutes**

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023 were approved and signed as a true and accurate record

85. **Chair's Announcements**

None

86. **Urgent Business**

None

87. **Response to the Report of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Integrated Care across Northamptonshire (iCAN) Scrutiny Review**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Matt Golby presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Financial commentary found within the report had been reviewed through scrutiny triangulation and it had been agreed that no further action was required.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Solid evidence of how the programme reflects lived experiences was requested.
- There had been no real detail provided about what the triangulation group had considered.

Councillor Matt Golby made the following comments.

- It would be difficult to give an accurate representation of how much money had been saved but the programme had improved the way people were discharged from hospital and their ability to remain at home.
- WNC had provided £350,000 to the programme. This was significantly less than the sum that had been provided by the wider system.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing advised that the ICAN programme had made a significant difference in lessening the escalation to level 4 within hospital. Members were advised that the amount of support provided had been doubled.

RESOLVED:

- A. Agreed the responses to the recommendations of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutiny review of Integrated Care across Northamptonshire as described in section 5 of this report.
- B. Thanked, the Task and Finish Group for its work on the iCAN programme
- C. Agreed that the West Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board ensures the delivery of the responses provided in this report.

**88. Revenue Monitoring Period 7 - Financial Year 2023-24**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that there had been a £2.5 million overspend in Period 7 and that Children's services had been stable for some time.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Could more in-depth breakdowns be provided.
- A question was asked about how confident the finance department were about cost pressures going forward, such as the increased demand in temporary accommodation.

Councillor Malcolm Longley made the following comments.

- The budgeting carried out in the council was robust.
- Internal auditors were in place within the Council, which helped to ensure that the processes were working correctly

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

- a) Noted the forecast outturn position for 2023-24 and associated risks.
- b) Approved the use of flexible capital receipts as detailed in section 7.
- c) Noted the deliverability assessment of West Northamptonshire Council savings requirement for 2023-24 summarised in section 8 and detailed in Appendix B
- d) Delegated authority to the Executive Director – Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for finance to apply any budget virements required to effectively manage the overall budget.
- e) Noted the Treasury Management update in Appendix C

**89. Period 7 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Monitoring Report 2023-24**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was noted that there had been a reduction in the disability assistance grant.
- How confident was the Council in its ability to continue to improve its position and reduce expenditure.

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that expenditure was reported to the capital assets board, which tended to balance well.

Councillor Adam Brown advised that the cost of removing the remaining cladding on the required buildings was around £1.3 million and was due to be completed within the next few days. He then thanked those involved in the project for their hard work.

Councillor Matt Golby noted that the facilities grant was maintained by the Health and Wellbeing Board and this underwent rigorous scrutiny to make sure that money was spent as effectively as possible.

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

- a) Approved the in-year additions to the Adults Services Capital programme as outlined in Section 6
- b) Approved the proposed budget adjustments and reprofiling outlined in section 7 and detailed in Appendix B.
- c) Noted the latest capital monitoring position for the General Fund and HRA.
- d) Noted the new capital schemes and changes to the Capital Programme since the report that was considered by Cabinet in September 2023.

## 90. **2024-25 Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, which had been previously circulated. It was noted that the report was a large piece of work and had been a team effort. The key points were then presented to members, this included the planned rise in council tax.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was queried whether the Council should take a more ethical view with regards to its investments in relation to current world issues.
- Could the treasury management report be presented separately and not within the main budget report.
- It was noted that there were transformation challenges and it seemed as though the risks within the budget cycle were growing.
- It was noted that the investment in Housing and Communities was less than other departments.
- The costs of school transport were queried.

Councillor Malcolm Longley advised that the report was a draft copy of the budget and that many items would be discussed in more depth before it was submitted to the final budget. Many of the risks within the report were the same year on year.

Councillor Dan Lister advised that school transport discussions were being undertaken.

Councillor Adam Brown observed that it was important to do the best for the people of West Northants and that the budget was particularly robust partially due to reserves.



RESOLVED: That Cabinet;

- a) Approved for consultation the 2024-25 Draft Budget, including:
  - i. an estimated net revenue budget of £860.2m (£409.2m excluding Dedicated Schools Grant) as set out in Appendix A
  - ii. an average Band D Council Tax of £1,778.25 for West Northamptonshire Council, which represents an average increase of 4.99%. (2.99% increase in 'core' Council Tax and 2% Adult Social Care Precept)
  - iii. proposed Fees and Charges as detailed in Appendix C
  - iv. provisional dedicated schools grant budget of £451m as detailed in Appendix D
  - v. the draft Capital Programme additions as set out in Appendix E.
- b) Note the estimated tax base for West Northamptonshire at 143,691.71 Band D equivalent properties, as set out in paragraph 6.56.
- c) Delegate authority to the Executive Director – Finance to agree and set the final tax base.
- d) Delegate authority to the Executive Director – Finance to take the necessary steps to introduce the new premiums on long term empty properties and second homes at the earliest opportunity as set out in paragraphs 6.59-6.61.
- e) For the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG):
  - i. Notes the provisional allocations and planned usage of the DSG for 2024-25 pending the final DSG settlement
  - ii. Following consultation with the Schools Forum, delegates authority to the Executive Director for Children's Services to determine the DSG 2024-25 schools funding formula, high needs funding arrangements and the Early Years Funding Formula in line with Department for Education guidance.

91. **2024-25 Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. Members were advised that there was a plan to increase the rents, with 80% of this coming from tenants' housing benefit. The number of right to buy properties purchased had dropped compared to previous periods.

Councillors made the following comments.

- The increase in rent was a surprise and concern.
- Members were reminded of the hardship that people are facing.
- It was noted that there were a significant number of brownfield sites, it was queried whether these could be used for the delivery of homes.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn advised that the Council was continuing to maintain a hardship fund.

Councillor Adam Brown made the following comments.

- There had been a visit from the Housing minister, with brownfield being part of the discussion, members were advised that every opportunity is looked at.

- It was advised that there was a good and improving relationship with Homes England.
- Without the raise in rents the general maintenance of the buildings would be affected.
- The Council would work closely with NPH to remain aware of how tenants were coping with the increase in rent

RESOVLED: Cabinet:

1. Approved for consultation the draft HRA budget 2024-25
2. Approved for consultation the 7.7% (£8.00) increase in average rents from £103.79 to £111.79 per week, in accordance with the government's amended Rent Standard with effect from the 1 April 2024.
3. Approved the 7.7% increase in tenants and leaseholder service charges with effect from the 1 April 2024 as set out in Appendix 5
4. Approved the 7.7% increase in garage rents and commuter surcharges with effect from the 1 April 2024. This will increase the average rent per garage from £10.96 to £11.80 and the commuter surcharge from £17.41 to £18.75 per week respectively, as set out in Appendix 5
5. Approved the draft 2024-25 management fee to Northamptonshire Partnership Homes in Appendix 4 to deliver the services in scope within the management agreement.
6. Approved for consultation the draft HRA Capital Programme for 2024-25 to 2028-29.

92. **Corporate Plan Performance Report - 2023-24 Q2**

The Chair presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated, then invited Cabinet members to give an update of their portfolios as stated in the report.

Councillors made the following comments.

- It was noted that there were many improved targets with fewer admissions into care homes.
- It was noted that there were still a significant number of vacancies.
- There had been a drop in housing residents prior to becoming homeless, was there a reason for this.
- It was queried whether 'green and clean' could be reviewed, specifically the green strategy.
- The length of time housing benefit claims were taking to be processed was queried, could time frames be reviewed.
- There had been 600 suspensions and 89 exclusions within schools, had there been discussions about how best to tackle this?
- The appointment of an Educational Psychologist had taken place. It was queried when this would begin to make a noticeable difference.
- Some residents had commented that the wait times when contacting the Council were too long.

Councillor Mike Hallam advised that the new telephone system is live with amendments ongoing, but that overall the statistics were good.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing informed members that the Educational Psychologist would aid in the continued improvement of the service but that it was hard to give a quantitative answer.

Executive Director Place & Economy advised that the Planning team had begun to challenge developers who were deliberately slowing down constructions and not completing them in a timely manner. Issues were being resolved.

Councillor Adam Brown advised that interventions were ongoing within the housing team with regards to homelessness prevention.

Councillor Phil Larratt advised that there was still a large amount of fly tipping occurring, and that heavy fines and enforcement would be used to counteract this problem. Councillor David Smith agreed that it was important to push enforcement on this issue.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the content of the appendix covering the second quarter of 2023-24.

93. **Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board (NSAB) Annual Report 2022-2023**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Matt Golby presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated. The key headlines were presented to members, and it was advised that an independent scrutineer had given a candid and honest report. They had found that there was good culture and challenge on the board. Members were advised that various learning events had been put in place, and many improvements made.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Could there be clarification on the 6 key safeguarding principles.
- It was noted that there had been a high turnover of care home managers.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing noted that the turnover of care home manager was being monitored.

Councillor David Smith advised that he was happy to take any questions away.

RESOLVED: Cabinet received the Annual Report of Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board 2022 – 2023 (Appendix A) and noted the findings.

94. **West Northamptonshire Council (Northampton) Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) 2023**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor David Smith presented the report, copies of which had been previously circulated.

Members were advised that this was a renewal that goes out for consultation every three years. There were only small changes made to the order which included, bike riding, scooters, and busking. It was advised that funding had allowed for the employment of two PSPO enforcement officers.

Councillors made the following comments.

- Education on how to behave in public spaces was important.
- Busking can add some character and entertainment to the town.
- How could smaller towns and villages be supported when enforcement is needed.

Councillor David Smith advised that buskers would only be approached should they become a nuisance or if they have been asked to leave by the police. Enforcement officers should be able to travel to any areas where they would be required

RESOLVED: Cabinet;

Approved the new Public Spaces Protection Order as set out in Appendix B for a period of three years.

The meeting closed at 7.51 pm

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

16<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2024

## CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION: COUNCILLOR FIONA BAKER

Report Title	Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022-23
Report Author	Rebecca Wilshire, Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the NSCP)

### List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	13/12/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	13/12/2023
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	13/12/2023

### List of Appendices

#### Appendix A – NSCP Annual Report 2022-23

##### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1. To present the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) Annual Report 2022-23, which outlines the partnerships achievements during the reporting period.

##### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1. West Northamptonshire Council is one of five strategic leads representing the multi-agency Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership, which is a statutory requirement of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 guidance (see Section 8 Background Papers)

- 2.2. The Partnership is required to produce an annual report that provides an overview of the partnership's achievements against the NSCP Business Plan.
- 2.3. The purpose of the partnership is to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in Northamptonshire. This is done by coordinating the work of those people and all organisations working in the county ensuring that what they do is effective.
- 2.4. The partnership is not an operational body. Its role is to ensure the coordination and effectiveness of the services provided to children, young people and their families by member organisations.
- 2.5. This report provides assurance to Members of the activities undertaken by the partnership and its agencies to safeguard children and young people across the county during the reporting period.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1. It is recommended that Cabinet receives the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership's Annual Report 2022-23 (Appendix A) and note the findings.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1. To accord with legislation or the policy of the Council; Under the statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018', the five key strategic lead agencies are accountable for safeguarding children and young people, including the Local Authority, who in turn are required to publish an annual report. (see Section 8 Background papers)

### **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1. Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) is a statutory multi-agency partnership led by five strategic leads in accordance with, and as stipulated within, 'Working Together 2018' statutory guidance.
- 5.2. The purpose of the partnership is to support and enable local agencies to work together in a system where:
  - Excellent practice is the norm.
  - Partner agencies hold one another to account effectively.
  - There is early identification of "new" safeguarding issues.
  - Learning is promoted and embedded.
  - Information is shared effectively.
  - The public can feel confident that children are protected from harm.
- 5.3. In addition, the Safeguarding Partnership's values are:
  - A child centred approach to safeguarding ensuring their voice is heard and understood;
  - Effective ways to identify and support children and families who would benefit from early help;

- A culture of continuous review and learning; and
  - Constructive and mutual challenge between partners to keep children safe.
- 5.4. The five strategic lead partners are: West Northamptonshire Council, North Northamptonshire Council, Northamptonshire Children’s Trust, Northamptonshire Police and Integrated Care Board.
- 5.5. All partners are expected to support and to deliver the highest standard of service. All partners share responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.
- 5.6. The Annual Report has been developed with contributions from statutory partners and has been reviewed and approved by NSCP Strategic Lead representatives.
- 5.7. This is the second Annual Report to be received by West Northamptonshire Council and informs future developments to safeguard children and young people in the West Northamptonshire area.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1. The Annual Report includes quantitative and qualitative data, key messages and impact of activities that relate to the three priorities set out in the NSCP Business Plan:
- Taking positive action early enough to protect children.
  - To support children, young people, and families at risk of exploitation; and
  - To work effectively as a partnership and support our staff.
- 6.2. Plans for 2023/24, as set out on page 24 of the Annual Report (Appendix A), include:
- Continue to strengthen our responses to the health and wellbeing of our children and young people.
  - Launch of the Child Exploitation video, Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (CERAF) toolkit and Child Exploitation Hub
  - Support the development of the Serious Violence Duty unit.
  - Continue to strengthen and increase our local bespoke local virtual and face-to-face training offer.
  - Strengthen hearing the voices of children and young people.
  - Consistency and promotion of good practice
  - Review of Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
  - Embed GCP2 Neglect toolkit and launch Public Neglect campaign.
  - Strengthen mapping missing children.
  - Strengthen education representation and create a Safeguarding in Education Subgroup

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1. Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1. The delivery and publication of the annual report does not sight any financial implications; however, it is for members to note the Partnership contributions which were committed for 2022/23 (see Table 1 below).

### 7.1.2. Table 1: Partnership Contributions 2022/23

<b>Partner Income 2022/23 from Strategic Partner agencies</b>	<b>Annual Contribution to NSCP Budget</b>
<b>North Northamptonshire Council</b>	<b>£28,700</b>
<b>North Northamptonshire Council, Designated Schools Grant (DSG)</b>	<b>£33,428</b>
<b>West Northamptonshire Council</b>	<b>£31,046</b>
<b>West Northamptonshire Council, Designated Schools Grant (DSG)</b>	<b>£38,592</b>
<b>Police Funding</b>	<b>£43,000</b>
<b>Health Authority Contribution</b>	<b>£48,949</b>

## 7.2. Legal

7.2.1. The Partnership of which West Northamptonshire is represented as one of five strategic leads is required by the government's statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' to produce and publish an annual report.

7.2.2. The Partnership governance and structure is informed by the governance arrangements document which is published on the NSCP website.

## 7.3. Risk

7.3.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. The report sets out the achievements of Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership throughout 2022-23 and is a statutory requirement in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' guidance.

## 7.4. Consultation and Communications

7.4.1. There is no statutory requirement to conduct public consultation in the writing of the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022-23. Statutory partners have been consulted with and provided contributions in the writing of this report. The Annual Report received endorsement of the Strategic Leads virtually 20 July 2023 following presentation on 7 June 2023 at the Strategic Leads Group.

## 7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

7.5.1. Not applicable.



## **7.6 Climate Impact**

7.6.1. There is no climate impact arising from the NSCP Annual Report 2022-23, however as a partnership we are committed to considering our impacts on the environment which are managed via the individual strategic lead partnership organisation via organisational policy and commitments.

7.6.2. The Council and NSCP are aware there are emissions associated with publishing web content and will seek to minimise the impact where possible.

## **7.7. Community Impact**

7.7.1. There is no known community impact arising from this report.

## **8. Background Papers**

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8.1. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 - [www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2)

8.2. Working Together to Safeguard Children has recently been updated and the 2023 version can be found here [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2023-statutory-guidance)

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# Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

## Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP)

Annual Report  
April 2022 – March 2023



North  
Northamptonshire  
Council



West  
Northamptonshire  
Council



Northamptonshire  
Integrated Care Board

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## Independent Chairperson foreword

I am pleased to introduce the Northampton Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual (NSCP) Report for 2022-23. Many children and families have continued to face a range of challenges following the pandemic and this resulted in increased demand for support and protection across the statutory, voluntary and community sector and education settings. The NSCP fully appreciates all the hard work of staff across the children's workforce in delivering their services.

This has also been a year of development for the NSCP in order to better co-ordinate and support agencies working together to safeguard children. It has also been a time of change with the completion of the new arrangements for Integrated Care Boards confirmed for Health commissioners and providers alongside the West Northampton and North Northampton Councils. The redesign of the NSCP sub-groups and Strategic Oversight Group aims to bring greater focus on agencies working together on key areas of priority in safeguarding – Neglect; Criminal Exploitation; Domestic Abuse; and supporting schools and education settings. The NSCP also reports regularly to the Leaders, Lead Members and Chief Executives of North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils, the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police & Chief Operating Officer of Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board.



In October 2022 Ofsted completed a Children's Services Inspection and the inspection report highlighted the improvements made in children's care & protection by Northampton Children's Trust, North & West Northampton Councils and the NSCP. The areas for development where multi-agency working is required form the partnership priorities for 2023-25.

The NSCP continues to offer a range of online and face to face safeguarding training for front line workers. This training programme also includes the learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews covering the vulnerability of children and babies under 1 including the risks of co-sleeping; the serious risks for young people who become involved knife crime and violence; and criminal exploitation.

For 2023-25 the Partnership priorities are: working with families to address the neglect of children; addressing the impact of Domestic Abuse for children; and further developing multi-agency working and awareness in the community of Criminal Exploitation of children and young people. We also want to have greater engagement with children and families to gain their feedback on safeguarding services and increase the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in NSCP activities.

The NSCP is not complacent about the importance of continually improving safeguarding across our local area. The Partnership will continue to actively promote agencies working together to address these challenges and support the workforce to deliver services that achieve positive outcomes for children.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jenny Coles." The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light blue horizontal line.

**Jenny Coles**  
**Independent Chairperson**

# 1. Introduction

## Demographics

Northamptonshire is located to the south of the East Midlands region, and is a county of mixed urban and rural areas, with populations focused around its larger towns, Northampton and Kettering.

As of 1 April 2021, Northamptonshire became two Unitary Authorities, known as North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire.

The population of Northamptonshire is in the region of 748,000 (approximately 44% in North Northamptonshire, 56% West Northamptonshire). Approximately 25% are Children and Young People.

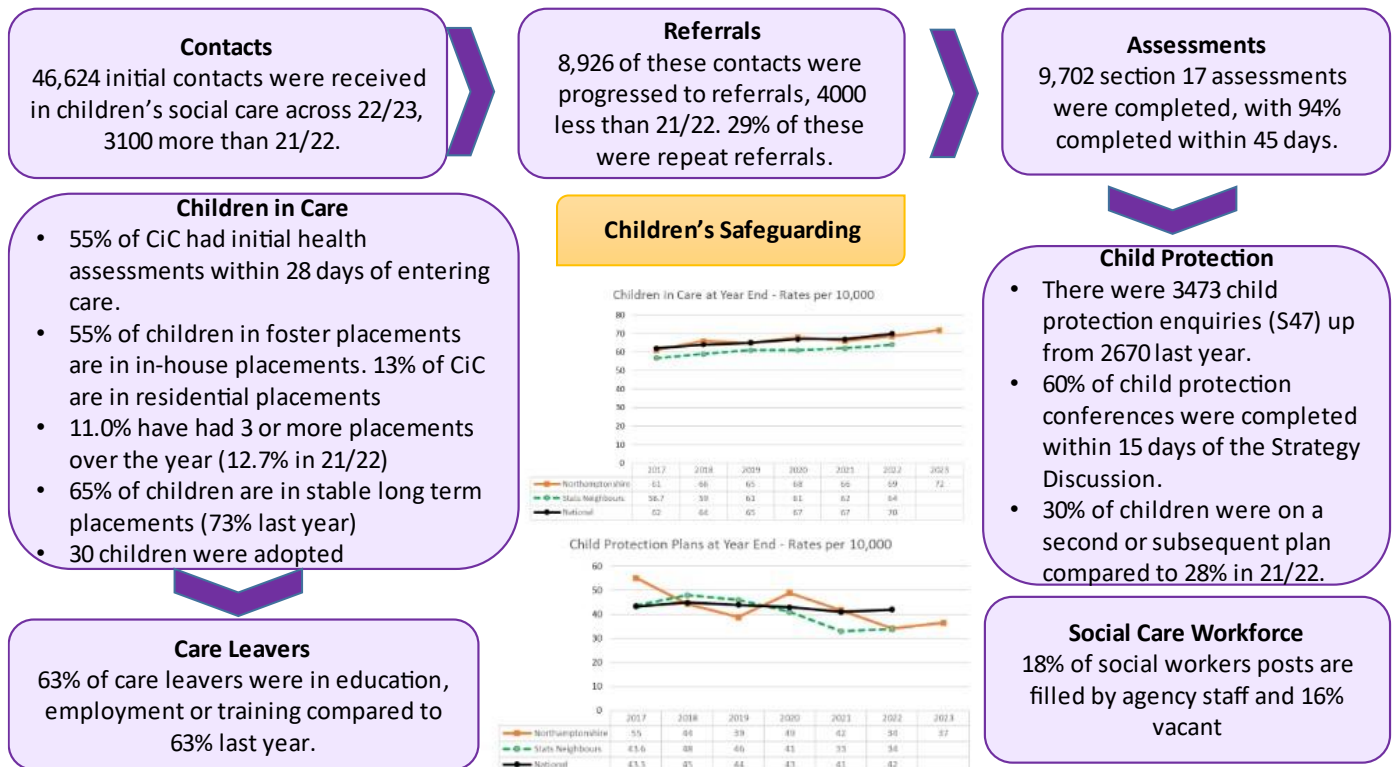
Since the previous Census in 2001 there had been an increase in non-white ethnic groups of 3.5%. It is also relevant to note a more rapid change in the number and proportion of those who describe themselves as 'White Other' becomes evident between 2001 and 2011. 'White Other' means not White British, Irish or Gypsy or Irish Traveller and therefore captures change within the predominantly 'White' European population.



# 2. Progress through 2022-2023

During the year, the partnership's response to safeguarding children has continued to be flexible and responsive to meet the demand, and support children and families effectively.

The below diagram sets out the numbers of contacts and referrals through Northamptonshire Children's Trust compared to the previous year:



Data shows an increase in the number of initial contacts received by children’s social care through 2022-23 of 3,100 on the previous year 2021-22.

Many families and children who have been managing just below the threshold for social care involvement have seen a reduction in support network and services available during the Covid 19 pandemic. Additional levels of need as a direct result of Covid-19, such as poverty, anxiety, non-school attendance, poor child and adult mental health, loss and bereavement have contributed to an increase in the number of families requiring support due to complexity of needs.

The pressure on these families has been further accentuated by the cost-of-living increase and as such they are likely to experience higher levels of need and risk and families presenting complex, multi-layered needs which are more acute. Whilst post-pandemic and cost of living increase are not specific to Northamptonshire, locally we have an underdeveloped Early Help offer which presents additional complexity in terms of availability of the support.



### 3. Progress of the NSCP Business Plan priorities for 2022-23:

1.	Taking positive action early enough to protect children and young people
2.	To support children, young people, and families at risk of exploitation
3.	To work effectively as a partnership and support our staff

#### Priority 1. Taking positive action early enough to protect children

##### Early Help

The aim is that children and families receive more appropriate help at an earlier stage, which makes a difference to their lives.

The Early Help Strategy is supported by a refreshed action plan with stronger ownership and driven by the Early Help Partnership Board. Early Help provision has been strengthened through additional staffing:

- Increased and strengthened Partnership Co-ordinator team within Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which supports the partnership Early Help response.
- All schools have a named link Partnership Co-ordinator from Northamptonshire Children’s Trust who communicates regularly and offers practical support with Early Help Assessment processes.
- Two Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Education Leads posts have been created, working directly with schools across West and North Northamptonshire, offering support and guidance

- Early Help partnership co-ordinators, Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) senior management, and partner representatives have completed multi-agency working sessions to enhance knowledge around threshold application, ensuring the right help at the right time for children and families.

### Early Help Assessments

- There has been a review of the Early Help Assessment within Northamptonshire Children’s Trust to ensure it supports the Supporting Families programme for data collection and outcomes achieved; a new closure summary was introduced, and a new Family Achievement log will be implemented during 2023-2024.
- 100% Supporting Families payment by results target achieved for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

**Independent scrutiny:** *The work of the Early Help Partnership Board is critical to drive improvements in the help that is offered to children and families at an early stage when problems are first identified. The additional staff mentioned above should help with this but it is critical that everyone understands the nature of the help needed by families when problems first emerge and what the practical and emotional support is that will make a difference. Recent Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews have shown that the necessary clarity about what should be offer at an early help stage is still a work in progress.*

### Neglect

Neglect continues to be the main Abuse Category in Child Protection Plans and the highest category for why children come into care.

Given the concerns relating to Neglect across Northamptonshire a key message is that Neglect is seen as a priority for the whole partnership and support this area to develop fully as we head into 2023-2024. A Neglect Sub Group has been created to monitor the extent of neglect in the county and co-ordinate a multi-agency response. The group was formed in the last quarter of the reporting period and has established a comprehensive three-year delivery plan, with identified measures of impact, in response to the issue of neglect and has established a well-attended multi-agency group and robust working group structure. A data scorecard is currently under development.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children’s (NSPCC) Graded Care Profile 2 toolkit continues to be rolled out across all agencies via a suite of face-to-face training facilitated by a group of trainers within the partnership to support practitioners to use the tool appropriately and effectively. Feedback from attending practitioners has been positive.

**Independent scrutiny:** *The work on neglect is a fundamental part of the NSCP's work. The score card must be outcome focused so that it measures the benefits to children and families and not just internal processes.*

### Turnaround programme

Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service has introduced the new Turnaround programme; this work provides support to the young people at the earliest opportunity to prevent further escalation into the criminal justice system.

### Housing Protocol for 16–17-year-olds

16–17-year-olds housing protocol has been refreshed and the action plan is progressed. Training on the protocol has been delivered jointly by Northamptonshire Children’s Trust and Housing in North and West Northamptonshire; this has increased staff knowledge and improved joint working.

### Safe sleeping campaign

The Northamptonshire Safer Sleeping campaign was re-run over from mid-December to 31 December 2022 through social media by North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council and partners. A multi-agency group oversaw this campaign which had advice on the baby’s sleeping position, planning a safe sleep space, riskier unsafe sleep situations such as parents/carers alcohol misuse and also newer advice on the cost of living and keeping warm

- Alcohol
- Drugs (both prescribed and recreational)
- Smoking
- Premature babies
- Safe Temperature



The assets were circulated on Facebook and Twitter and the following is the feedback received:

Media Platform	Reach	Post clicks	Reactions, comments
Facebook	13,467	132	23
Twitter	7,478	47	9

During the reporting period two deaths have been attributed to unsafe sleeping arrangements and the findings have been shared with the group responsible for the safer sleeping campaign to ensure messages are incorporated within the campaign.

### Family Hubs

The Family Hub and Start for Life Programme is a multi-million-pound project being developed by North Northamptonshire Council to improve life chances for children, young people and their families in North Northamptonshire and is moving forward at pace.

The project – which will see networks established to boost the provision of services aimed at families - has received £4million from government between 2022 and 2025 to help families build resilience and thrive.

Key areas where support will be provided are for:

- Mental health – during pregnancy and beyond
- Parenting
- Infant feeding
- Home learning – to promote early language and literacy development

The first two networks are set to be established in Wellingborough and Corby later in 2023, while further work will take place to create networks in Kettering and East Northamptonshire over the life of the programme.

Whilst North Northamptonshire Council is taking the lead in this innovative project, many other partners who deliver services to children and young people, including Northamptonshire Children’s Trust, health partners, the Police, education settings and the voluntary and community sector are fully committed and working together to launch and embed this collaborative development.

Family Hubs in West Northamptonshire are being developed by West Northamptonshire Council and work has started about Best Start in Life (BSiL) Initiatives. Whilst West Northamptonshire was not awarded any grant funding to support this development, public health is leading on this area of development which will be a top priority for 2023-2024.

Best Start in Life BSiL initiatives and development will be aligned in West Northamptonshire Council with the Local Area Partnerships (LAPs), where placed based services will be brought together to best serve the community and meet the needs of children, young people and families. Whilst West Northamptonshire are leading on this area, specifically through Public Health, this is a partnership with other agencies including the voluntary sector. 2023-24 will develop this area significantly.

A Peer-on-Peer review by colleagues in Lincolnshire in May 22 found:

[‘Clear vision for improvement for Children and Families Support Services in Northamptonshire Children’s Trust and commitment from all to work with families and partner agencies. Improved partnership working, with evidence of collaborative working’](#)

### Evidence of impact in addressing priority 1

- The number of Early Help Assessments have increased indicating our Early Help offer is improving. Schools and Children and Family Support Services are the main contributors, with around 400 more by schools during 2022-23.
- Increase in children and families supported via Early Help Assessments and stepped down to Early Help.
- Zero tolerance of young people being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.

- Re-referrals overall across the last quarter of 2022-23 saw increases but are overall lower than this time last year. It is anticipated that the strengthened model in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and developments in Children and Family Support Services/Early Help will continue to support appropriate reductions going forward. Steps have been taken to strengthen the Early Help partnerships with Partnership Support Team (Early Help MASH) being placed in the MASH pods and a leaner step-down process.
- Both Councils have a clear vision around developing family hubs and support families.

## Priority 2. Take positive action early enough to protect children, to support children, young and families who are at risk of exploitation and to effectively work as a partnership and support our staff

Through the reporting period, significant work has been undertaken to strengthen the county's response to Child Exploitation through various measures overseen and driven by the partnership's Child Exploitation Sub Group and its structure of Working Groups. Learning from local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews has supported and informed areas for development and strengthening our response to Child Exploitation which will continue as a priority through 2023-2024.

Findings from two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews relating to the deaths of two victims due to knife crime has supported and informed the Child Exploitation Sub Group structure, action plan and processes.

### Knife Crime

Knife crime is a priority for Northamptonshire Police. A specific Force wide operation is in place to address this concern – Op Sceptre. It is vital that professionals in Northamptonshire seek to reduce the very real risk of death and injury that knives cause within our county, and what we need to do to achieve this.

Northamptonshire Police have put measures in place to help tackle knife crime:

- Every day every Op Sceptre incident is discussed to ensure the right ownership and the right direction for the most effective way of dealing with it.
- We implemented the Knife Crime NICHE (police crime record system) template to make sure we investigate every single Op Sceptre related crime in the best way we can.
- We also developed an easy-to-use 'Op Sceptre Knife Crime Investigation Guide' which outlines the minimum expectations when dealing with any Op Sceptre related incident.
- Op Sceptre 'weeks of action' have been conducted.
- The LPAs (Local Policing Areas) identify Op Sceptre nominals at the TTCG (Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group) where a bespoke, longer-term prevention and intervention plan is agreed and implemented.
- We are working on a new approach with a company called Upskill. This targets individuals who will not engage with the Police.

These measures are in direct response to tackling knife crime in the county and from findings of two local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews which sadly involved the fatalities of two young people.

### Child Exploitation Hub

A Child Exploitation hub is in development with all statutory partners to co-locate agencies to address the needs of all criminally exploited children within the county, not just those at risk of or subject to Sexual Exploitation.

It is anticipated that the partnership will have a fully operational Child Exploitation Hub by the end of the next financial year and will ensure a joined up, co-ordinated response and package to these victims.



## Anonymous Case Study to demonstrate good practice

MG was a young person heavily entrenched in criminal exploitation with conclusive grounds National Referral Mechanism status and deemed a victim at significant risk of harm. Despite been part of a police operation deeming him as such, he could not breach the silent code of conduct which is the unwritten rule in these contexts.

Joint visits were undertaken with the police and social care to support him and his family, however, due to fear of retribution MG showed behaviours which were consistent with trauma responses and intervention at this point to reduce risk and vulnerability was not successful due to his reaction to attempted intervention. After two arrests in a matter of days for possession with intent to supply, he had a significant amount of debt bondage. When considering 'Reachable Moments' which often occurs when a young person is in hospital from being injured or in custody following arrest, MG was visited by his Social Worker and Youth Offending Service worker who reassured him that he was now safe.

Police worked closely with services and recognised the immediate risks to MG. MG was arrested in a trap house and a significant amount of Class A and monies seized. A couple of days later MG was stopped and searched, he was alone, he had 348 wraps of Class A and cannabis located in his bedroom. He was police protected. The level of risk was high because of the amount of debt bondage. MG was inconsolable and agreed to relocate with his family, sharing that he needed to be out of the area and recognised the risks he was facing. Appropriate multi-agency professionals meetings were arranged including a complex strategy meeting.

Police, Youth Offending Service, Social Care, Barnardo's were frequently in contact, and social care funded the whole family to go to a seaside town for 12 days, having positive family time and a chance for MG to recover and reflect. Family have shared how grateful they were and mother shared that it has been emotional seeing her child being able to be a child again after being exploited for so long.

Multi-agency professionals are to discuss the future care plan and how to keep the family together once they were out of the area and MG tried to rebuild his life. Professionals are still working with parents as partners. A mentor who was funded by social care remains heavily involved and has supported MG throughout this process giving him consistency and continuity and ability to speak with his primary and significant trusted adult.

## Response to Domestic Abuse

Processes have been refined to streamline how the safety of children at domestic abuse incidents is considered following their status as 'Victims' under the new Domestic Abuse Act. Under Operation Encompass, screening by Police ensures a notification is submitted, when appropriate, to schools, health services, Child and Family Support Services and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Teams where it is felt threshold for targeted Early Help is met.

***Independent scrutiny:** Assessing the impact of Operation Encompass would be helpful. Whilst information about domestic incidents is passed to agencies especially schools, the impact of this information sharing is not well known.*

## Community of Practice

A forum has been developed that allows multi-agency practitioners from across Northamptonshire to build relationships and mutual understanding, promote best practice, share learning, and build expertise in Child Exploitation across the system.

This forum uses the Tackling Childhood Exploitation (TCE) Practice Principles Partnership reflective tool to begin considering the extent to which these are already present within our local response to child exploitation and extra familial harm with a review to strengthening responses and multi-agency relationships.

## Lydia's story

A video has been developed to tell Lydia's story, a child sexual exploitation (CSE) survivor. Lydia provides a candid account of how she experienced child sexual exploitation as a child, and her thoughts and feelings towards

professionals. The video was split into two edits:

1. A public facing recording with Lydia's identity protected, to educate parents on spotting the signs of child sexual exploitation, and
2. An internal training tool, where Lydia has waived her anonymity in order to take part in an interview with professionals, to speak frankly about her experiences and the kinds of behaviours that professionals should be looking out for when dealing with young people at risk of child sexual exploitation.

### **Child Exploitation Film**

A new film focussing on child exploitation is being developed and filmed and due to be launched in early summer 2023. The video, primarily aimed at parents, has been specially commissioned for NSCP with funds from the Department for Education (DfE).

The film aims to highlight the signs of child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual exploitation (CSE) by sharing the stories of two young people who are being criminally exploited.

It is important to understand that young people who are caught up in this type of activity often do not see themselves as victims - as those who are exploiting them make them feel important, respected, and looked after. Parenting is difficult and child criminal exploitation is complex. We want to give parents greater understanding to help them spot any possible signs of exploitation and provide details of where to access help and support.

Northamptonshire Police has led on its creation on behalf of the partnership. The video is to be promoted widely via social and digital media channels, and through NSCP and partner websites.

In addition, the film will be shared with professionals and with schools and colleges in the county, an education pack will also be developed.

### **Hotel Watch**

Continues to educate hoteliers across Northamptonshire on how to identify and report child exploitation.

### **Vulnerable Adolescent Panel (VAP)**

During 2022, a Vulnerable Adolescent Panel Co-ordinator was appointed and the role of VAP has continued to strengthen.

The Vulnerable Adolescent Panel, won the Centre for Child Protection's 2022 Collaboration Award and was also awarded an NHS England Safeguarding Star, for its collaborative work in tackling child exploitation.

Panel feedback:

*"The Vulnerable Adolescent Panel is an impressive nomination with strengths in child protection, creativity, collaboration, and impact. The panel felt that protecting and safeguarding adolescents can be powerful when derived from a peer/community-wide approach that holds the child/children in a safe extra familial space – as this nomination evidenced.*

*There is strong information sharing leading to essential decision-making, important learning, communal responsibility, common vision, and shared aims linked to emerging and existing extra-familial risks for young people. This is an innovative and outstanding example of multi-agency collaboration drawing heavily on strength-based practice with huge potential to positively impact on professional development, community understanding, and keeping young people safe".*

**Independent scrutiny:** *The work of the Vulnerable Adolescent Panel (VAP) is critical to ensure the right coordinated action is taken for those young people who are identified as being at high risk of exploitation. The external recognition of the VAP is really helpful. The case study further below on the next page shows how the VAP can be effective.*



The Vulnerable Adolescent Panel heard 124 referrals in the year to 5 April 2023.

- 51 % of these referrals were for children not open to social care
- 30% were open to a social worker and 13% were open to YOS.
- 81% referrals were for males.
- The average age of young people referred into VAP was 15 years.

Themes identified by panel have included a gendered response by professionals to criminal and sexual exploitation, a need for practitioners to understand cannabis use by young people as an indicator of exploitation and a disproportionate number of referrals for young people with neurodevelopmental disorders. A number of these themes have also been identified in a recent Child Safeguarding Practice Review and by the child exploitation peer review. These themes are reported by panel into Child Exploitation Sub Group and inform the action plan of this group. Panel continues to challenge and educate professionals about use of appropriate language and understanding of the impact of exploitation upon young people's agency.

VAP continues to have excellent representation from across the system with regular attendance from agencies including police, Children and Families Support Service, Children's Social Care, Youth Offending Service, education, health including CAMHS, Barnados, Ngage, Action for Children. Information sharing at panel facilitates a clear understanding of risk and development of effective plans for young people at risk of exploitation. Actions identified to support individual young people have included identifying appropriate disruption processes (such as child abduction warning notices) and referrals into services such as school nursing, Independent Child Trafficking Guardians, Turnaround Project, Guiding Young Minds etc. Recommendations are also made where a support need for parents/carers is identified, this has included training for care homes, referrals to Parents Against Child Exploitation and to CAMHS MBAM workshops.

VAP has made a number of case escalations and has supported Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub referrals where information shared at panel has identified that threshold has been met. Where wider contexts of concern are identified by panel, referrals are made into Community 1 groups. This may be a result of a single referral or where a theme is identified across a number of referrals and has led to disruption action directed by Community 1 such as increased police foot patrols, review of street lighting and direction of youth support resources into identified areas. Intelligence shared by VAP with Community 1 has also supported ongoing workstreams such as the arson task force. In this way, VAP is able to drive a contextual response to child exploitation in our communities as well as ensuring that individual young people at risk and their families have access to appropriate support and intervention

#### **Anonymous Case Study to demonstrate good practice**

X was a 15-year-old who is frequently missing from home and attending the address of a young adult male with a previous history of grooming young people for sexual and criminal exploitation. It is believed that this adult male is grooming X to move and sell drugs. X was not attending school and disengaged from all support agencies. As a result of information shared at panel and placed on police systems, X was police protected after being found at a property of concern. A National Referral Mechanism [NRM] referral was made which was successful. The Vulnerable Adolescent Panel recommended that a Child Abduction Warning Notice be considered, this was put in place and was effective in disrupting the relationship with the adult male of concern. Following this, support agencies were able to re-engage with X and he returned to full-time education.

## Missing Children

- Development of Missing Children Steering Group working with Children's Society using Missing Children Benchmark Toolkit to review process and improve practice. This has resulted in ten workshops reviewing our intelligence led practice and operational processes against the legislation and local protocol, which will feed into a robust action plan to inform practice improvements.
- Dedicated Missing Co-ordinator role linked to Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Police, and Single Service Delivery (Youth Support Team) of missing Home Return Interviews with 80% completed within 72 Hours.
- The Missing Steering Group meets every six weeks. It has strong partnership attendance, and the present focus is to quality assure our processes, systems, and consistency, using the Children's Society benchmarking (national) tool. The group has completed the relevant checklists and identified areas of strength and need. Areas of strength include Northamptonshire Children's Trust's timeliness of return home interviews and how we gain consent from parents. Priority areas for improving our response to missing children are our processes for data capture and information sharing, and how we complete and manage risk assessments. Additionally, our response to looked after children going missing, and work with children's homes also need improvement.

## Evidence of impact in addressing Priority 2

- The last quarter of 2022-23 saw a sharp rise in the number of Public Protection Notices submitted by the police and a spike in knife crime related incidences. This was largely following two separate high profile knife crime incidents in Northampton and reflects the increased police provision but also the multi-agency resource and response to address this increasing issue in the county.
- There are stronger working relationships with a focus on improving outcomes for children, areas of increased collaboration include:
  - i: Commitment to get better understanding and better application of thresholds supported by refreshed threshold training;
  - ii: Partnership agreements to develop CE hub and streamline processes for Child at Risk of Exploitation;
  - iii: Agreement and plans for a review of MASH to support improved productivity and efficiency.
  - iv: Improved practice is evidenced in feed-back and compliments with some good outcomes for children who have suffered exploitation.
- Reduction in the numbers of first time entrance in the criminal justice system.

## Priority 3. To work effectively as a partnership and support our staff

### Training provision

The partnership contributed funding to develop and enhance the training offer available to all partners and staff. Please see Section 4 for further details.

The partnership has agreed to maintain this level of funding in 2023-24 as the requirement for bespoke training around the county's priorities is developed further.

### Local Learning

Learning Summaries are completed and disseminated across the partnership following all Rapid Reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews giving practitioners local context and enhancing their knowledge.

### NSCP Newsletters

Are produced bi-monthly and disseminated to a large cohort of practitioners across the county on local and national topics to increase and promote awareness of safeguarding.

### Quality of supervision to staff in Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Good quality supervision and support to staff has been a priority for Northamptonshire Children's Trust in the last year. Improved quality of social care practice and management oversight is helping to keep children safe, as evidenced in Ofsted visits and inspections, peer reviews and NCT internal quality assurance.

## Northamptonshire Children's Trust Ofsted Inspection outcome

The Trust has continued to improve services and achieved improved experiences and outcomes for children in the last year.

*'Children in need of help and protection in Northamptonshire receive much better support than they did at the time of the last OFSTED inspection in 2019'*. (Inspecting Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS), October, 2022)

### Multi-Agency Pre-birth Assessment meetings

Tracking of pre-birth cases between health and Northamptonshire Children's Trust has led to improvements in pre-birth assessments and care planning. Joint workshops enable effective working together, supports professionals and leads to better outcomes e.g. Tier 4\* health needs and placements.

*\*Tier 4 refers to specialist services for children and families with severe and complex needs, including child protection services, inpatient child and adolescent mental health services.*

### Health Summit

A Health Summit took place towards the end of the reporting period to give professionals the opportunity to come together to discuss the key priorities across Northamptonshire and consider how these will be conveyed and addressed to and by staff.

### Youth Offending Service (YOS) Multi-Agency Panel

The Youth Offending Service has designed and implemented a multi-agency partnership panel to support prevention and diversion of young people who are on the cusp of offending; this panel facilitates appropriate support by the right agency. Attended by professionals from the Youth Offending Service, Police, Children & Family Support Service, Office for the Police and Fire Crime Commissioner and Voluntary agencies it ensures a collaborative response and supports diversionary outcomes.

- Close relationships have developed to continually improve service delivery, for example review of the use of Police Powers of Protection (PP) in weekly meetings between police and Northamptonshire Children's Trust enables a thorough understanding of the reasons for PP and encourages learning to be fed back into the service; this matter is also under the scrutiny of the strategic partners.
- The issues in Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub concerning productivity and efficiency associated with application of thresholds have been acknowledged e.g. too many contacts/ referrals/ assessments that end with NFA's. Work on this is ongoing.
- Children and Families Support Services continue to deliver Partnership Network events which focus on topical issues, the most recent session was about *substance misuse support across Northamptonshire* with over 300 professionals logged onto the two-hour sessions.
- There continues to be an Early Help Assessment training programme for all professionals to attend.
- Children and Families Support Services continue to support parenting programmes and facilitate the use of Reducing Parental Conflict resources and deliver training to parents and professionals.
- Children and Families Support Services staff are facilitators of the Neglect Graded Care Profile 2 training and will be involved in the roll out delivery to all professionals in support of the Neglect Priority Plan.

### Evidence of impact

- The NSCP digital reach has grown in terms of the monthly number of new visitors to the website and a consistent monthly total of visitors. A very broad range of subject areas have been accessed.
- There has been a positive increasing take-up in signing up to the NSCP newsletter (an additional 700 over the reporting period) which demonstrates more staff are accessing resources, support, and guidance.
- Twitter followers have increased through the NSCP 100 days of safeguarding campaign which delivered key messages across a range of issues.
- Good training offer which includes Research in Practice and Making research count.

**Independent scrutiny:** *These figures demonstrate that the NSCP has got its messages out to more people in the various agencies and this is helpful. The NSCP now needs to go further and explore whether the information provided makes a difference to how practitioners do their work.*

Towards the end of the reporting period, the NSCP has refreshed and updated its governance arrangements and Business Plan with themed priorities for 2023-25, which will be taken forward in plans for 2023-24:

1.	Neglect: Taking positive action early enough to protect children and young people
2.	Exploitation: Ensure those children, young people and families who are most at risk are supported through robust multi-agency co-ordination, assessment support
3.	Domestic Abuse: Promote and implement a joined up multi-agency approach to protecting children and young people at risk of domestic abuse and violence

## 4. Training

### E-Learning Training

During 2022-23, across the partnership there was a total of 7829 E learning courses commenced, with 5960 course completions. This course completion rate and cost per course is in line with the previous year's outturn.

The range of courses being completed by practitioners remains consistent with previous years with many practitioners using the system to gain initial knowledge of safeguarding children and then moving on to explore some of the other subject specific courses available within the catalogue.

An annual piece of work undertaken by the Training & Development Sub Group is to review all e-learning content to ensure it is fit for purpose and aligned with the NSCP policies and procedures. This review is currently in progress. The below table indicates that Education colleagues are the biggest user of the eLearning programme with early years and schools/higher education utilising 56% of the licences. This is followed by the Voluntary Sector at 19% with other sectors having smaller usage. There is no recorded usage from the Police or Probation Service which is being explored by the partners.

Analysis and evidence of the impact these courses have had on practice is included below:-

- **98% stated that they would recommend this course to other people**
- **78% stated that participation in this e-learning course has supported me to make measurable improvements to my work practice.**
- **93% of learners who completed an impact evaluation agreed or strongly agreed the course they had taken had a positive impact on their practice;**
- **66% confirmed that they had shared the results of the learning with colleagues**

Evaluation is consistent with previous years data and continues to show the positive impact the e-learning package is having on practice and the value learners place on its availability through the partnership.

### Examples of feedback from participants in three-month post course evaluation

*We have been able to use the knowledge gained across the organisation with other key personnel also completing it. It has allowed us to become compliant with an aspect of our governing bodies requirements for safeguarding*

*Recognising signs of anxiety, stress, and more generally people behaving differently, and how to open conversations about what I have noticed. Communication, and understand when to speak and when to let others speak*

*I feel more confident in my understanding of the methods groomers use to radicalise young people as well as the signs and symptoms of a young person potentially at risk of being radicalised*



### Face-to-Face/virtual Multi-Agency Training

The partnership relaunched its face-to-face/virtual delivery training offer in the last two years after an extended period when no face-to-face offer was funded. Since 2021-22 the offer has expanded and now comprises the delivery of seven training courses to partners across Northamptonshire.

The courses being delivered are:-

1. Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Author training
2. Threshold and Pathways
3. Reducing Parental conflict
4. Domestic Abuse
5. Graded Care Profile 2
6. Trauma Informed Practice training
7. Working together to Safeguard Children

During 2022-23, 1556 practitioners attended a face-to-face/virtual course run by the NSCP. This is a 50% increase on 2021-22. Out of those courses offered the highest take-up was for the Trauma Informed Practice training, followed by Thresholds and Pathways and then Reducing Parental Conflict.

Agency take-up was positive with the Education Sector accounting for 32% of places, Northamptonshire Children's Trust with 18% of places and Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust with 16% of places, followed by the Police with 13%, Early Years Providers at 7% and the Voluntary Sector at 6%. Smaller percentages were made up from the other agencies.

## 5. Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs)

The purpose of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews is to identify improvements to be made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Learning is relevant locally, but it has a wider importance for all practitioners working with children and families and for the government and policymakers. Understanding whether there are systemic issues, and whether and how policy and practice need to change, is critical to the system being dynamic and self-improving.

Whilst no Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews have been published in the reporting period, learning from ongoing reviews has been progressed and informed work priorities.

Further information can be found under Appendix 3.

Learning Summaries are also produced where a Rapid Review is undertaken, but not progressed to a Child Safeguarding Practice Review – this supports and broadens professionals learning. A Rapid Review is undertaken when a case meets the criteria for notification to Ofsted and The Child Safeguarding Practice Review National Panel.

The aim of a rapid review is to enable safeguarding partners to:

- Gather the facts about the case, as far as they can be readily established at the time
- Discuss whether there is any immediate action needed to ensure children's safety and share any learning appropriately
- Consider the potential for identifying improvements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- Decide what steps should be taken, including whether or not to undertake a child safeguarding practice review

Further information regarding CSPRs can be found in the government guidance document: [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)



## 6. Other safeguarding updates through 2022-2023

### **Suicide Prevention Package in schools**

A school support package has been created to provide guidance for schools in Northamptonshire in the event of a suspected death by suicide in a school community. It was developed by local partners, including teachers and other staff in schools in Northamptonshire, and incorporating lessons learnt from the review of a local suicide case.

The effects of a suicide can be devastating and the impact felt by many. Schools need support to feel prepared on how to respond to a critical incident such as a death by suicide. Effective plans and actions are important to help those affected to grieve and recover and could support the prevention of further suicides.

The package offers guidance to support in decision making during this difficult time. Suicide deaths can be complex. This tailored package includes steps that can be followed in the event of suspected death by suicide in a school community. It also provides support to schools in improving emotional wellbeing and mental health of pupils in the short and longer term.

### **Children and young medically fit for discharge but experiencing delays in their discharge from hospital**

The Children's Transformation Team within the Integrated Care Board has developed a multi-agency paediatric escalation group to improve the experience of children and young people who are medically fit for discharge but experiencing delays in their discharge from hospital. The aim of this group is to support professionals across the system where solutions to discharge were outside the scope of the usual internal and multi-agency escalation processes to find a timely resolution.

The multi-agency escalation group is made up of representatives from across the children's system with social care, community NHS providers and acute hospital staff including Safeguarding Designate and Named leads attending and focuses on those children and young people who are:

- In an acute hospital bed, but medically fit for discharge and there were barriers to discharge
- In an acute hospital for mental health reasons
- In an acute hospital for physical stabilisation of an eating disorder
- Escalating needs in the community and the young person was at risk of presenting to an acute hospital

The purpose of the group is to:

- To have a system view of children and young people experiencing prolonged delayed discharges from hospital.
- To help find solutions to help overcome challenges or blocks within the discharge pathway for individual children and young people to find a timely resolution.
- To provide a system-wide, regular, point of escalation when needed.

- To provide assurance to the relevant regulatory bodies within Northamptonshire that necessary actions were being taken to ensure children and young people were cared for within the safest and most appropriate settings to meet their needs.

### Anonymous Case Studies to demonstrate Good Practice

#### Case 1

Young person in Care aged 17 years. The young person had been residing in hospital since August 2022. Young person had been admitted with self-harming behaviours from a placement in Northampton, which then served notice on admission as they felt unable to continue to meet the young person's needs. The young person was the responsibility of an out of area authority and there had been very little engagement with social and health care services from the originating area. The staff on the ward felt the young person was 'stranded' with no one taking responsibility for their ongoing care.

The escalation group supported the commencement of a proactive dialogue between the multi-disciplinary teams across both areas to formulate a discharge plan. The young person was discharged back to the originating area within two months.

#### Case 2

Child aged 2 years old who had been in hospital since birth. There had been challenges to discharge due to complexity of the care package and the family situation. The group were able to trouble shoot any barriers across social care and health to ensure there was wrap around multi-agency oversight of progression at each stage of the discharge pathway that would support child to go home.

#### Case 3

Child aged 10 years old with diabetes who was admitted to hospital three times over the course of months with unstable diabetic management at home. Family and young person were unable to safely manage his diabetes at home due to a variety of reasons that eventually meant the child could no longer live at home. The escalation meetings provided a forum to look at all aspects of the child's health and care support to ensure there was a multi-agency oversight and plan in place to support a safe discharge into an appropriate setting that could meet the child's complex needs.

### Safeguarding Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities receive services from all teams across Northamptonshire Children's Trust. There is also a dedicated Children with Disabilities team within Children's Social Care who support children and young people with the most profound, severe and complex needs and disabilities. The majority of children are supported under a Child In Need plan; however social workers in the team also carry out all other statutory social work tasks and interventions under Child Protection, Public Law Outline, Care Proceedings and Looked After Children's procedures thus ensuring that the children who required the specialised support of the team continue to receive them from professionals they know and trust.

In October 2022 Ofsted found that:

*Children with SEND who are supported by the Disabled Children's Team benefit from a consistent social worker who knows them well and have skills in capturing the voice of the child.*

*Practice in the disabled children's team to assess and support disabled children and their families is stronger. Social workers know their children well and use a wide variety of communication styles to gain the child's voice.*

Safeguarding Children with Disabilities is a priority across all team and services within Northamptonshire Children's Trust and the learning from Safeguarding Practice Reviews is shared and the learning is embedded. The Safeguarding Children with Disabilities training is promoted and the importance of practitioners attending is emphasised. Other training opportunities are available to Northamptonshire Children's Trust such as mandatory Oliver McGowan\* Training and events run by partners and Northampton Parent Forum Group.

*\*The Oliver McGowan Training on Learning disability and Autism is named after Oliver McGowan, whose death shone a light on the need for health and social care staff to have better training and is the government's preferred training for health and social care staff.*

Ensuring that the voice of the child and children's lived experiences is captured is central to the work in Northamptonshire Children's Trust and is particularly important when supporting children with disabilities and within safeguarding. A variety of communication tools and styles are used to ensure Children's voices are heard, especially if they do not communicate verbally.

Planning for transitions commences when children reach age 14 and children's transition to Adult Social Care is managed via a panel and a referral to Adult Social Care when they are 16 years old. This requires ongoing focus as it remains an area of some challenge and Ofsted highlighted this as an area that requires further development.

The Disabled Children's Team have strong relationships with colleagues in education, and health within the Integrated Care Board and Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust including CAMHs, Community Team for People with Learning Disability (CTPLD) and partners with the local Parent Forum Group (NPFPG) and Northamptonshire Carers. The strength of this partnership approach increases the opportunities to safeguard and support children and young people with disabilities.

Northamptonshire carers are commissioned to complete parent carers needs assessments and they also they provide support to siblings of children with disabilities and young carers.

With recent rapid reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews findings, Northamptonshire Children's Trust remains focussed on ensuring that the additional vulnerabilities of children with disabilities, especially in the context of safeguarding, is a key priority and area of focus.



### **Children and Families Fleeing Conflict**

In 2022-23 safeguarding partners have been working together to welcome and support families arriving in Northamptonshire as a result of fleeing conflict. Four Contingency Hotels have been in place for adults in the last year in Northamptonshire and several referrals were received from adults who claimed to be children (37 referrals), which resulted in a brief enquiry or age assessment being completed. Out of the 37 referrals, 8 have been assessed as being a child and have been accommodated as children in care.

The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) has been utilised for the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) to deliver a fairer and more equitable distribution of responsibility for UASC across the UK, ensuring they receive the support and accommodation they need. Since 1st Sept 2022 until end of March 2023, the National Transfer Scheme referrals in addition to spontaneous arrivals contributed to an increase in separated children being supported in Northamptonshire (267 between the age of 14 to 24 children in care or care experienced young adults at the end of March 23). The top three countries from where the young people have fled and seeking safety in the UK are Sudan, Eritrea and Afghanistan. These young people experienced trauma of losing their families and everything they ever loved and have endured long journeys to safety on their own. Some were illegally trafficked or left in the county, all these aspects requiring a prompt and collective response from professionals and communities.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched by the government on 14 March 2022. This scheme allows people living in the UK to sponsor a named Ukrainian national or family to come to live in the UK with them, providing they have suitable accommodation to offer. As part of the Government's Homes for Ukraine Schemes Northamptonshire Children's Trust undertook 1136 sponsor checks across North and West Northamptonshire and 15 social worker risk assessments in relation to the arrangements. Partners have worked together to ensure help in accessing local services, health, education and skills training, social care and learning English have been in place for these families and individual children to ensure they feel safe and settled.

### **Education**

Schools in the county continue to work extremely hard to safeguard their pupils, even though recovery from the Covid Pandemic has made things very difficult.

It seems that the achievement gap has widened in schools with our pupils from the most vulnerable families needing a great deal of extra support to catch up. The cost-of-living crisis has added to this very complex problem, as families face serious day to day pressures to meet their children's needs.

Research from across the country shows that children from more vulnerable communities frequently come into school with less developed repertoire of cognitive and linguistic skills. The number of pupils with Special Educational Needs has risen exponentially, and the Special Schools and Academies are over capacity, which leads to mainstream school educating pupils with increasingly complex needs.

There are new challenges all the time too, for example the availability of vapes to children and the ever-changing world of internet safety.

Despite these challenges, schools staff are dedicated to do all they can to ensure that children in their care are safeguarded. Across our county, leaders, teachers and support staff continue to strive for the very best outcomes in terms of resilience, life chances and academic achievement for all of our children.

Following the publication of The Care Review Implementation Plan in January 2023, the NSCP has taken the decision to include the Education sector as the fourth Statutory partner not only in anticipation of revised legislation in due course, but also recognising that education plays a critical role in keeping our children and young people safe and their contributions must be heard through every steam of the partnership's work.

It has been agreed to create a Safeguarding in Education Sub Group and plans and draft Terms of Reference are in development for the group to be in place during 2023-24.

A key objective of this group will be to gain children and young people's voices, views and thoughts about safeguarding and across the partnership's priorities.

Safeguarding in Education which works across both Local Authorities in Northamptonshire will be disaggregated from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and each Local Authority will have their own Safeguarding in Education Leads.



## Elective Home Education (EHE)

This data has been broken down between West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Councils:

### North Northamptonshire Council

The number of parents electing to home educate their children has continued to increase since the last report from 705 recorded as of 31 March 2022 to 803 recorded as of 31 March 2023.

Whilst the reason for the increase is unclear, reasons are now being recorded in accordance with categories set by the Department for Education (DfE) and are set out as below:

Physical Health	31	Risk of school exclusion	1	Suggestion/pressure from the school	0
Mental Health	136	Difficulty in accessing a school place	2	Dissatisfaction with the school - general	91
Health Concerns Relating to COVID-19	36	Philosophical or preferential reasons	158	Dissatisfaction with the school - SEND	48
Did Not Get School Preference	21	Religious reasons	17	Dissatisfaction with school - Bullying	65
Permanent exclusion	0	Lifestyle choice	<b>79</b>	Parent/guardian did not give a reason	27

### West Northamptonshire Council

902 children were electively home educated in West Northamptonshire at the end of March 2023. The cohort comprises 54 more children than one year ago. 37.4% of children educated at home have been educated at home for more than two years, the lowest proportion since August 2022. In broad terms, the higher the national curriculum year group, the more children are educated at home (between years 1-11). 46.8% of children electively educated at home are in national curriculum year groups 9-11. Children in national curriculum year group 2 or below account for 9.1% of the cohort.

There are a number of reasons why parents choose to educate pupils at home. West Northamptonshire is currently analysing the current data to understand and address some of the factors that are driving these decisions. There has been a recent increase in pupils who become Elective Home Education after parents state that they don't feel that schools are meeting the pupils needs. There has also been an increase in the numbers of permanently excluded pupils being removed to Elective Home Education following parents not wishing their children to attend any of the available alternative provisions. We are exploring this, along with commissioning a broader range of Alternate Provision providers to support needs. An ongoing support and monitoring programme is offered to all pupils who are Elective Home Education although there is no requirement for parents to take this up.

## **Children and Young People Missing Education and Children and Young People Absent from School**

This data has been broken down between West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council:

### North Northamptonshire Council

Children that have not turned up to school and where school are unable to trace the family (i.e. they are absent) remains consistent year-on-year: (these have usually left county or country without giving a destination). The number recorded as of 31 March 2023 is: 120

The number of children and young people without a school place (Missing Education) due to permanent exclusion who have not yet started at an Alternative Provision has increased significantly since the previous year:

- As of 31 March 2022 - Without a school place following a Permanent Exclusion: 23
- As of 31 March 2023 – Without a school place following a Permanent Exclusion: 63

This increase reflects the current lack of availability of suitable Alternative Provisions in the county.

### West Northamptonshire Council

Data up to Dec 2022 (latest data available) indicates that there was a total of 165 absent from school on the last day of December 2023. This is an improvement on the previous year's data and there are fewer children absent from school now than at any point in the two years for which figures are available. This time last year there were more

than twice as many children absent from school. Established and robust tracking procedures are in place to locate children absent from school in West Northamptonshire.

The reasons for Children missing Education are varied and can include the following:

- families newly arrived in the area (from UK or abroad) failure to take up provision offered (at 5+, or, at usual transition stages)
- parental reluctance to utilise alternative provision following permanent exclusion
- failure of a parent to ensure that a child being home educated is in receipt of suitable provision
- a child's name being removed from a school roll in error.

It is the responsibility of West Northamptonshire Local Authority to ensure that: -

- All pupils who may be absent from school (including independent, academies and free schools) are located
- Support is given to external local authorities to locate missing children who may have moved into West Northamptonshire
- Use is made of all available database systems to track children who are absent from school.
- Reasonable enquiries are made by schools, and then by Children Missing from Education teams within the local authority to locate children who are missing from school in a timely manner

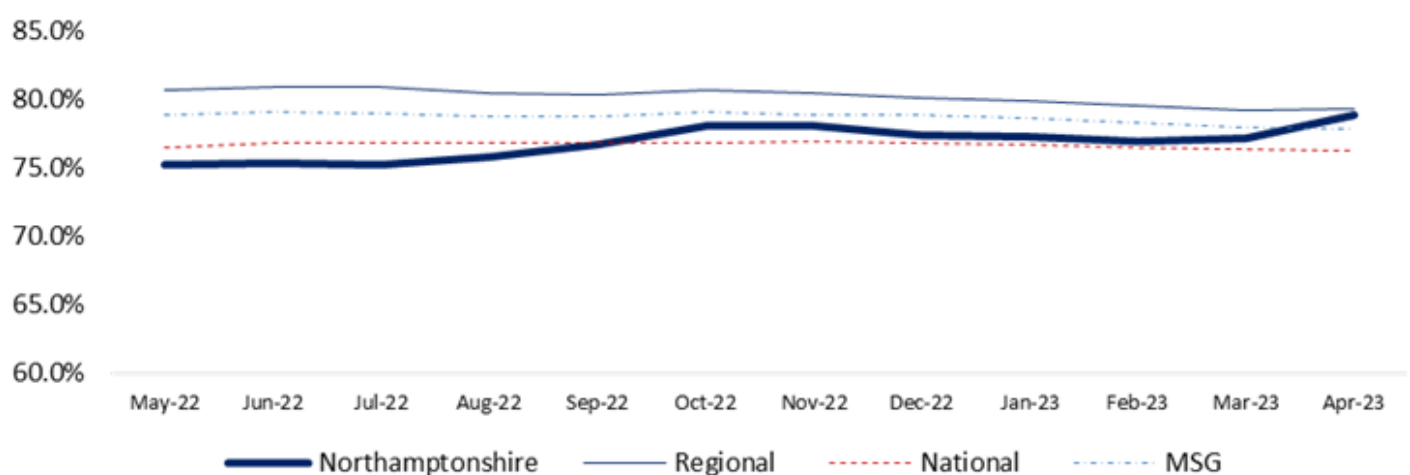
### Domestic Abuse

The partnership has recognised this is an area requiring strengthening and is in discussions with North and West Community Safety Partnerships to develop a single working group to ensure there is a proactive, consistent, joined up response to Domestic Abuse, recognising children who witness domestic abuse are also seen as victims. This is a themed priority for the partnership.

Domestic Abuse demand has continued to remain below forecasted levels as in previous years and the number of incidents continue to not follow along the seasonal variation expected given past data, 10.4% below the forecasted demand in the latest 3 months of this reporting period.

**Independent scrutiny:** *The reasons for this below expected rate need to be explored. It is possible that it represents a reduction in domestic abuse but other reasons are also plausible including a reduction in the trust victims have to report abuse and get the appropriate response.*

The Domestic Abuse conviction rate has significantly improved and in the last three months of the reporting period, Northamptonshire Police had a conviction rate of 84.1%, 8% higher than the national average.



Based on local data:

- 2022-2023 saw 403 community resolutions for domestic abuse.
- 62-71% were for standard risk offences.

- An increased use of OC8 (Community resolution) will have come from evidential difficulties outcomes more than other positive outcomes - taking some positive action.
- Analysis being conducted as to the effectiveness of a convicted criminal reoffending for domestic abuse for OC8 compared to other outcomes and this has shown promising early findings.

Other work through 2022-2023 has included:

- Changes in legislation around Domestic Violence Disclosure Schemes (DVDS) has prompted enhanced resource and activity around the stages of these Clare's Law applications.
- After a decline in performance, Northamptonshire Police's use of DVPN/DVPOs (Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders) has increased, promoting safeguarding and positive outcomes for domestic abuse cases.
- Domestic Abuse Matters training has been repeated to all officers across the force, including to all new officers in public facing roles.

### Children and Young People's Voices

- In response to feed-back from the young people, the young-person friendly Inclusive Language Guidance has been developed by Northamptonshire Children's Trust; this is intended to support the use of the most respectful, inclusive, and welcoming language when speaking or writing to and about our colleagues, children, young people and families. The 2022 Equalities Survey has been used to consult with staff in the development of this language guidance and feedback has also been sought from local community groups which support inclusivity and diversity.
- New participation group developed for children subject of Child in Need and Child Protection. The feedback on social workers has been provided to the service to help them make improvements and some specific sessions have been held on the topics that young people requested: Mental Health, Trauma, Sexual Health/Relationships, LGBTQ+, Life Skills, Job/Career (Five-year plan).
- Young people took part in a 'Mystery Shopper' exercise, where they described their experience of the first 15 steps when you entered One Angel Square and the William Knibb Centre. In response to their feedback Northamptonshire Children's Trust developed and delivered training for reception staff so they are better aware of children in care and how to communicate with them, display artwork from young people in offices, and have shared their feedback with Property Services to reflect in their strategies for the buildings.
- Northamptonshire Children's Trust organised two celebration morning and afternoon events to show our children and young people how much we value them. The day was filled with activities for the children and young people to take part in, including a climbing wall, bouncy castle and arts and crafts. Each young person was also given tokens they could spend on treats such as candy floss, ice cream and doughnuts. Children and young people were also presented with certificates, which they had been nominated for by their social workers and foster carers.  
*'This is the best day of my life'. (Child aged 11 at Children in Care awards)*
- YOS continue their good work with their Young People's forum and following the success of last year's International Youth Day an online offer has been introduced this year. The Young People's Forum helped successfully design and implemented the "end of Order questionnaire" to be more child & young person friendly. This is being extended wider to ensure the young people's voice within the Exit from custody are collated.
- Children's voices are captured well, and suite of direct work tools have been developed to achieve this by Northamptonshire Children's Trust Disabled Children's team. Good partnership working and use of multi-disciplinary team meetings to consider needs of our disabled children.
- Voice of the young people who are care experienced is heard well - Leaving Care Council, Corporate Parenting Board and Apprentices within Leaving Care Service.
- Northamptonshire Children's Trust practitioners gather young people's feedback that captures what has worked well for them and what if anything they would have changed using Signs of Safety as Practice model.

**Independent scrutiny:** *The projects mentioned above to capture the voices of children and young people are commendable. The NSCP is urged to continue these efforts but with a focus on hearing the voices of children and young people who have been abuse or neglected.*



### **Work of the Designated Officers\* (DO's) within Northamptonshire Children's Trust**

Designated Officers have continued to provide a responsive service for the whole of the children's workforce in Northamptonshire, with 2 FTE experienced Qualified Social Worker Designated Officers in post, supported, when necessary, by the Child Protection Chair service. Designated Officers are available for consultation by telephone and through submission of written consultation. The Designated Officers service runs a duty system to ensure availability is optimised and work in a North / West split when this is possible, whilst allowing for cross-cover (leave etc.)

#### **In 2022/2023:**

Designated Officers received 538 contacts - this is a 25% increase (n109) from 2021/2022 (n429)

- 27% (n149) contacts were managed as consultations, compared with 21% (n89) in 21/22 and
- 72% (n389) were managed as Designated Officers referrals, compared with 79% (n340) in 21/22

When the vast majority of cases from 2022/23 have concluded and a full dataset is available, findings are expected to reflect increased volume and associated consultations and referrals from the return of pupils to schools after the Covid-19 pandemic. On initial review of incomplete data for the year, timeliness of conclusion of cases continues to be positive, with most cases completed within 12 weeks. Where cases are complex or reliant on detailed criminal investigations (e.g. Police IT analysis or historic sexual misconduct claims) there is necessary and justified delay in these cases being concluded.

Increased referral and consultation volumes has put considerable strain on the Designated Officers service, concurrent with the introduction of a new IT system and changes to administrative support.

A clear pathway for consultations has been introduced, alongside a new referral process. This commenced in January 2023 and has helped to streamline the referral process. Further developments are continuing (moving consultations to a web-based form and opportunity for real-time feedback) which will be communicated to partners.

The new Designated Officers IT system ensures that referrals are easier to process and track. Whilst there have been expected initial teething problems with the new system, Designated Officers have worked closely with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to address issues and feel there is real benefit to data management – for the Designated Officers service and for referring partner agencies.

#### **Significant areas of work for Designated Officers in 2022/2023 have included:**

Children's residential homes continue to make regular referrals.

Designated Officers have identified a number of private residential children's homes referrals in connection with solo placements, where DOLs (Deprivation of Liberty) are in use for young people with significant needs. There are high staffing ratios per child for settings which have been created around the needs of a specific young person, however, Designated Officers have found that the staff employed tend to have limited knowledge and experience of care provision for children with complex needs.

Some of these agencies have a background in adult care, or through delivery of home care packages, and the placements are often unregistered. Designated Officers recognise these placements are commissioned to meet the requirement for local resources for children and young people who have high levels of needs, however, at times the commissioned agencies are not equipped to deal with this level of need.

**Independent scrutiny:** *The NSCP is urged to explore how it should respond to these issues.*

## Anonymous Case Study to demonstrate Good Practice

A home was set up for a young person in Northamptonshire, placed by another authority. The agency had experience of home care packages and were registered with Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The home took on the care of a 14-year-old with complex needs including ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), mental health needs and with a Deprivation of Liberty Order (DOLS) in place. Local staff were recruited to support this young person. Subsequent referrals to Designated Officers highlighted staff being afraid of the young person and lacked experience to manage his needs, despite training being provided. The young person was relocated with a more appropriate care package in place; however, the agency is now under scrutiny to ensure standards of care are addressed.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Designated Officers are involved in this process, as the service holds responsibility for allegations made in its area.

### **Other areas of support:**

Designated Officers are working closely with Northamptonshire Children's Trust's Independent Fostering Agency to implement training on managing allegations to both Independent Fostering Agency staff and Northamptonshire Children's Trust foster carers and are working to improve referral pathways.

Designated Officers continue to offer a responsive consultation service to the wider children's workforce so that appropriate referrals are made at the right time to support effective safeguarding management in all agencies.

*\*A Designated Officer is the person who should be notified when it has been alleged that a professional or volunteer who works with children has: behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child (possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child.*



## 7. Plans for 2023-2024

### **Launch of the Child Exploitation Hub**

- To implement the recommendations from the peer review including launching of a Child Exploitation hub
- Strengthen multi-agency training for Child Exploitation with a good understanding of the contextual aspects, strategic and operational framework.
- Further development of mapping children with repeated missing episodes, for themes, places and people of concern and share these findings across the partnership to improve the joint approaches.
- Strengthen Data intelligence and strengthen sharing information between police, education, social care and health in relation to children who go missing and are exploited to support preventative approaches and interventions

### **Family Hubs**

- The partnership is committed to supporting the development and launch of Family Hubs due for launch later in 2023.

- Initially starting with two key areas and then rolling out across North Northamptonshire in a phased approach. West Northamptonshire will also be developing Family Hubs as part of Better Start in Life (BSiL) initiatives.
- The Neglect Sub Group; will link with the Family Hubs around understanding the impact of early intervention, particularly in relation to neglect.
- The partnership is committed to developing further the Early Help Offer, children and families need early support to prevent crisis and prevent escalation of need.

#### **Serious Violence Duty Partnership**

- Contribute to the development of and strengthen the new Serious Violence Duty Partnership in supporting new initiatives to prevent and support children being exploited.
- There will be additional funding provided to the Youth Offending Service to focus on violence and knife crime, working closely with Police at the point of arrest or suspects.

#### **Review of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub/Front Door arrangements**

- A review of front door arrangements is planned to review the effectiveness of processes and identify any areas to strengthen productivity and efficiencies within the statutory framework timelines to ensure timely, proportionate and appropriate responses.
- Reduce workload to appropriate levels to focus on areas of business that are relevant for front door to statutory services and improve overall performance and ensure productivity and efficiency that is outstanding with skilled and confident staff and policies/procedures/ systems that support practice.

#### **Launch of Child Exploitation video**

- The video will be launched in June/July 2023 and will be promoted widely via social and digital media channels, and through NSCP and partner websites.
- An education pack will be developed that can be shared with professionals and with schools and colleges within the county.

#### **Launch of Neglect campaign**

- The campaign will consist of two elements that will run in parallel; public facing and to enhance professionals' knowledge.
- The campaign will continue until September 2024.

#### **Missing Children**

- Further development of mapping children with repeated missing episodes, for themes, places and people of concern and share these findings across the partnership to improve the joint approaches
- Data intelligence – shared information between police, education, social care, and health in relation to children who go missing and are exploited to support preventative approaches and interventions

#### **Create Safeguarding in Education Sub Group**

- The Safeguarding in Education Sub Group is already in development.
- A structure of Working Groups under the sub group will be developed to address specific areas the partnership wants to strengthen.
- This will include directly hearing the voices of children and young people through an ambitious phased approach initially through a survey for secondary children and young people to take part in.

#### **Strengthening hearing Children and Young People's Voice**

- Develop a mechanism, including focus by the Safeguarding in Education Sub Group, whereby all partnership meetings will start with a focus on a children/ren and young person/people – their experiences, feelings, wishes and thoughts

## Appendix 1 – Governance and Accountability

### Statutory and Legal Context

In July 2018, [Working Together To Safeguard Children 2018](#) was published. It replaced previous versions that set out the requirements for local authorities to establish Local Safeguarding Children Boards and is in accordance with Section 13 and the objectives set out in Section 14 of the Children Act.

Working Together 2018 was published in response to The Wood Report and sets out the requirements for a system that focuses on the needs and interests of children and families and not the other way around. In such a system, practitioners will be clear about what is required of them individually, and how they need to work together in partnership with others.

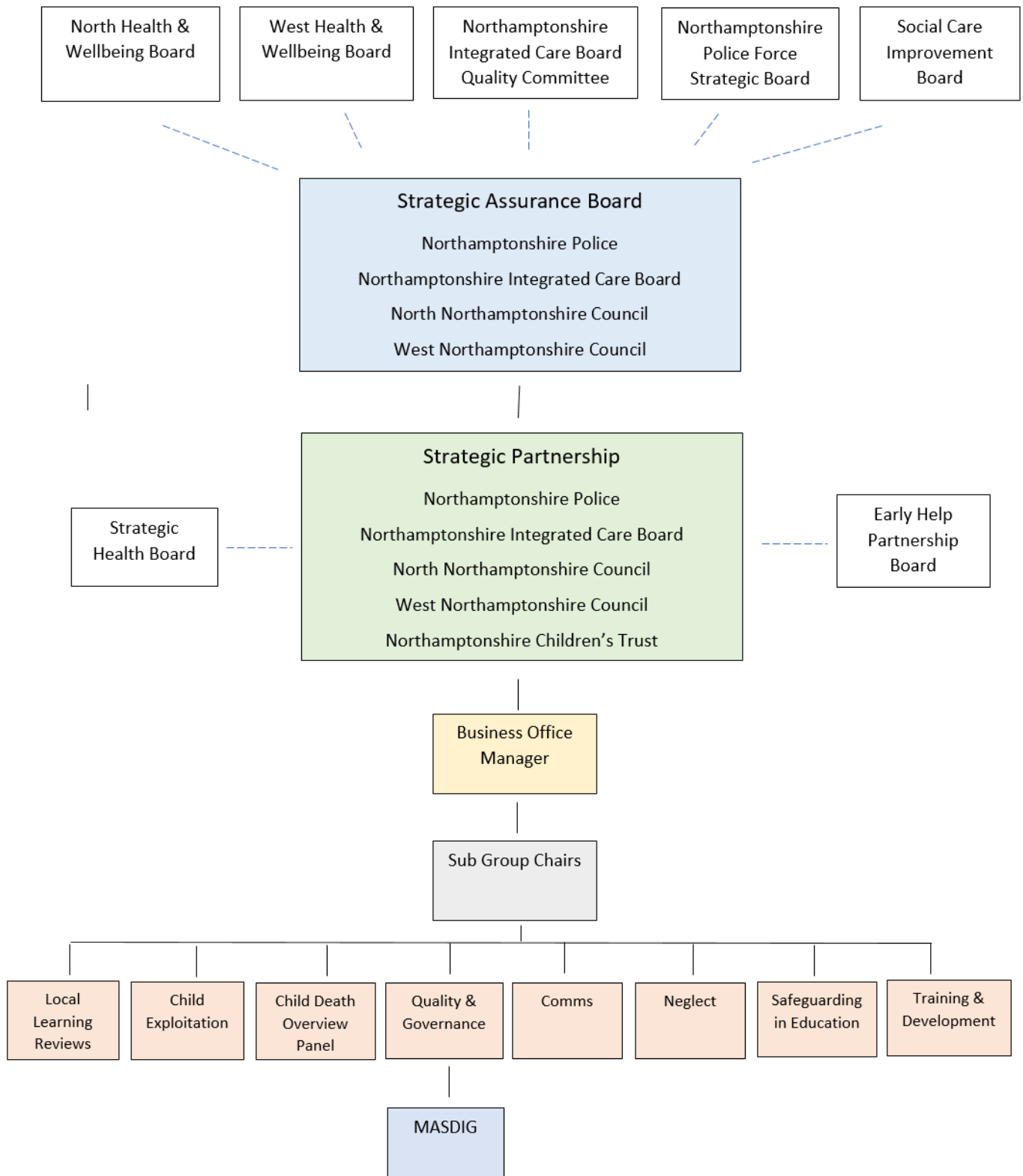
Local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties: section 17 of the Children Act 1989 puts a duty on the local authority to provide services to children in need in their area, regardless of where they are found; section 47 of the same Act requires local authorities to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.

The NSCP is not an operational body and therefore has no direct responsibility for the provision of services to children and their families. The NSCP's responsibilities are to hold partner agencies to account for their safeguarding arrangements and ensure the quality of those arrangements through policy, guidance, setting standards and monitoring.

The delivery of services to children and their families is the responsibility of the partners – the commissioning and provider agencies, not the NSCP itself.

[The Children Act 2004](#), as amended by the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#), strengthens this already important relationship by placing new duties on key agencies in a local area. Specifically, the police, clinical commissioning groups and the local authority are under a duty to make arrangements to work together, and with other partners locally, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

## Appendix 2 – NSCP Structure



### **Strategic Assurance Board**

The Strategic Assurance Board has been created and meets quarterly to have oversight of the partnership's activity.

The group consists of senior Strategic Leads:

- Chief Executive North Northamptonshire Council
- Chief Executive West Northamptonshire Council
- Chief Executive Integrated Care Board
- Chief Constable
- Elected members
- Strategic Leads as set out in the below Strategic Leads Group

### **Full Partnership**

The Full Partnership is scheduled to meet twice yearly.

These meetings were postponed during the Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions; however, meetings have now resumed and a Full Partnership meeting took place in March 2023 and the next is already scheduled for September in the next financial year.

### **Strategic Leads Group**

The Strategic Leads Group has continued to meet on a monthly basis through the first half of this reporting period and then revised to bi-monthly for the second half of the year, which will continue for the foreseeable future.

During 2022-23, Strategic Leads representation has remained consistent:

- Director of Children's Services for North Northamptonshire Council
- Director of Children's Services for West Northamptonshire Council.
- Assistant Chief Constable for Northamptonshire Police.
- Chief Nurse for Northamptonshire Clinical Commissioning Group / Integrated Care Board
- Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Children's Trust.
- Director or Safeguarding, Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Other members of the group are:

- Deputy Director of Children's Services for West Northamptonshire Council
- Detective Chief Inspector, Northamptonshire Police
- Head of Safeguarding, Integrated Care Board
- Head Teacher, Special School
- Head Teacher, Primary School
- Representative for the Office for Police and Fire Crime Commissioner.
- Independent Scrutineer

Towards the end of the reporting period, the decision has been made to consider education as a fourth statutory partner and as we head into the next financial year, a representative of the Secondary sector will be identified to join this group.

### **Independent Scrutineer**

Provides assurance in judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in Northamptonshire, including arrangements to identify and review Child Safeguarding Practice Review cases. His role is objective and acts as a constructive critical friend to promote reflection to drive continuous improvement.

- Attend the Strategic Leads Group and Strategic Partnership Group.
- Review the Partnership's annual report.
- Review audits and performance data, including Section 11 and Section 175 audits.
- Determine the effectiveness of arrangements to identify and review local child safeguarding reviews.
- Involvement in the escalation and conflict resolution process.

- Have regular direct contact with frontline practitioners to receive frontline practice feedback.
- Ensure the voice of the child is at the heart of all aspects of safeguarding and receive direct feedback from children, young people and their families to monitor the effectiveness of their voice and experiences with performance and practice.
- Embed scrutiny as a positive process and measure throughout the partnership with learning as the outcome.
- Ensure informed challenge from elected Members takes place.

The Independent Scrutineer is tasked with specific themed projects and towards the end of this reporting period has started a project looking at how neglect is addressed across the partnership. The findings of this review will feature in next year's report alongside the focused activity of the Neglect Sub Group.

### **Sub Groups**

NSCP Sub Groups have continued to meet on a virtual bi-monthly basis.

### Quality and Governance

Aims to develop a culture of open, honest, and meaningful challenge and scrutiny, in order to identify areas of good practice and areas of concern and to make recommendations for action and improve safeguarding and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of single agency and multi-agency safeguarding processes incorporating audit, performance analysis and views of children, families and practitioners.

The Sub Group has processes in place to manage:

- Section 11 and Section 175
- Multi-Agency Practice Review
- Scorecard key performance data

The Multi-Agency Practice Review process has been reviewed and refreshed and a schedule developed to consider key priorities over the next twelve months.

### Training and Development

Due to an increased agreed training budget for 2022-23, the sub group has developed a schedule of face-to-face training through classroom and/or virtual platforms, which will continue to develop and increase through 2023-24:

- Reducing Parental Conflict
- Working Together
- Domestic Abuse
- Child Safeguarding Practice Review for Authors
- Trauma Induced

E-Learning is under a more comprehensive management system, which will allow the creation of bespoke training courses to be accessed via the same on-line platform. These courses will focus on local learning and priorities identified through scorecard data and learning from local reviews.

### Local Learning Review

Responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of local arrangements to safeguard and protect children through individual Rapid Reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, ensuring dissemination of lessons learned, and monitoring implementation of actions arising from case learning.

A focus and key achievement in the past year has been to strengthen the Rapid Review process to ensure well informed and comprehensive Rapid Review reports are created that clearly identify learning.

*Please see Appendix 3 for statistics and further information on the reporting period.*

### Child Exploitation

Aims to understand and reduce the prevalence of child exploitation in Northamptonshire and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating responses to tackling child exploitation by meeting the aims and objectives set out in the Northamptonshire Child Exploitation Strategy.

The sub group has focused on agreeing a comprehensive Child Exploitation Strategy supported by an inclusive Delivery Plan and Working Group structure (that sits under the main sub group).

#### Neglect Sub Group

This sub group has been newly formed towards the end of this reporting period following an increase in identifying neglect from reviews and audits.

The sub group has developed a Neglect Strategy and comprehensive two-year Delivery Plan, along with a structure of Working Groups under the main sub group to monitor and progress improvements.

A public facing campaign to increase awareness of neglect is currently being planned for the next financial year.

#### Communication Sub Group

The sub group focuses on the publication of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and a review was published in March 2023.

The group is also responsible for oversight of the NSCP Website and creation of newsletters and bulletins – two areas that the group has found difficult in gaining momentum on and will be a focus of 2023-24.

Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) – The purpose of CDOP is to undertake a comprehensive and multiagency review of all child deaths, to better understand how and why children across Northamptonshire die, with a view to detecting trends and/or specific areas which would benefit from further consideration.

The national process of reviewing child deaths was established in April 2008 and updated in Chapter 5 of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. It is the responsibility of the Child Death Review Partners to ensure that a review of every death of a child normally resident in their area is undertaken by a CDOP. Child death review partners are local authorities and any clinical commissioning groups for the local area as set out in the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

A Joint Agency Review meeting is held for all unexpected child deaths within 72 hours of the death to allow immediate learning and support for the bereaved families to be identified and provided.

All data from Child Death Reviews is submitted to the National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) for the purposes of data analysis and learning at a national level.

Plans for 2023-24 include strengthening the administration of the process as well as providing a single point of contact for bereaved families.

*Please see Appendix 4 for statistics for the reporting period.*



## Appendix 3 – Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

During the current review period, seven cases have been referred to the sub group for consideration of review. Four of these were agreed to meet the criteria for a rapid review. Only one of these led to the commencement of a new Child Safeguarding Practice Review within the annual review period.

This contrasts with the previous 2021/22 review, where four new Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews were commissioned within that year. Additionally, at the start of the previous review period, there were a number of reviews which had commenced prior to April 2021 and were still being progressed. The challenges of managing this level of case review activity were highlighted in the previous annual report and these have to a large extent continued throughout the current review.

The position as of 31 March 2023 is that the overview report for the most recently commissioned review is still being finalised. All other reviews have been finalised and signed off by strategic partners although there are a number awaiting publication during 2023-2024.

The range of safeguarding issues explored in the reviews which have been completed this year include:

- Unsafe sleeping in the context of alcohol misuse and neglect
- Risks relating to fathers or partners who are not visible to agencies
- Assessing safeguarding risks in relation to conceal pregnancies
- Managing unanticipated outcomes in care proceedings
- A range of different risk issues for vulnerable adolescents

There has been focused activity around strengthening the Rapid Review process in identifying learning which is taken forward through a Composite Action Plan combining learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

Making a difference has focused on various areas of learning:

### **Voice of the child**

Sadly, by the nature of our work, in most of our case reviews children and young people are unable to speak directly in their own voices within our review processes.

There is an absolute expectation that the voice of the child is heard and that the child's lived experience is understood to the very best of our ability in rapid reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews. Reports are structured in such a way as to make this mandatory. We achieve this by:

- Ensuring that front line practitioners and wherever possible family members can describe from their own experience the child or young person's personality, opinions, interests and aspirations.
- Where recordings of the child or young person's own words are available, these are highlighted within the review process.
- Critical evaluation of case records within the scope of reviews, to establish whether the voice of the child is heard, and the child's lived experiences adequately explored and understood within safeguarding practice.

### **Making a difference: Supporting practitioners through safeguarding topic briefings**

The safeguarding partnership has been producing and disseminating focused briefings on safeguarding topics for several years now. These are currently known as Tea Break Guides - with the implication that the guides can be used to support topic learning as an agenda item in team meetings or potentially in more informal discussion settings. Many of the guides have been developed by members of the LLR subgroup, based on learning from case reviews over the years.

Within the current review period the following guides were published or updated on the NSCP website:

- Cross border working
- Neglect of medical needs
- Describe non-compliance

- Cannabis

The topic guide on cannabis was updated to reflect the fact that for some young people in our communities, and the parents and adults working with them, cannabis use is very common and almost normalised. A key CSPR in progress during the current review found that there could be a lack of professional curiosity about the financial implications of significant cannabis use young person - how is the young person funding this habit, and does this put them at risk of criminal exploitation?

The updated guide on cannabis has been published in the new format which we hope is more engaging and helpful.

The LLR Sub group has recognised that we need to understand if practitioners are accessing focused safeguarding topic guidance, whether it provides them with information that helps them in their practice, and to what extent this is making a difference for children and young people that they are working with. We will be seeking feedback from practitioners to explore these issues.

### **Making a difference – learning from good practice**

The nature of rapid reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews is that they focus on cases where typically there is a tragic outcome for a child or young person and their family, and which is immediately recognised.

Recognising effective practice and good outcomes in individual cases is harder - cases need to be monitored over time to ensure that services can engage with and support children and families, and that families can then make and sustain changes over time. Studying cases with good outcomes has a number of advantages. It is much easier to seek feedback from families and children to understand their experiences in accessing support, and what might be further improved. We can also ask practitioners what aspects of the context that they work in help them to achieve this good outcome - for example is the role designed in such a way that they can engage with families over time and build an effective working relationship? What is the impact of supervision in achieving a good outcome?

The LLR sub group has had learning from good practice as a standing agenda item for some time and several good practice cases have been presented, including some examples with contributions by young people. The subgroup will continue to encourage cases to be submitted and to support a more reflective level of analysis to better understand what works in achieving good outcomes and how this might be embedded and generalised across teams and services

### **Making a difference: Vulnerable adolescents**

Risks for vulnerable adolescents were at the heart of two of our reviews this year. One of these reviews was partially thematic in its approach, looking at the risks for a group of young people who had been victims or perpetrators of knife crime. This has allowed reflection on the wide range of risks and issues that can interact to lead to negative outcomes for young people.

These include the impact of neurodiversity, emotional well-being and mental health needs including self-harm, complex family histories and dynamics, in some cases resulting in adolescent neglect, school exclusion, substance misuse, criminal exploitation, homelessness and financial exploitation, and a culture of carrying knives amongst young people in some of our communities.

There have been a number of initiatives across the safeguarding partnership over the past year focused on strengthening the partnership response to exploitation of vulnerable adolescents, and the findings of our reviews have fed into this. A specific piece of work already completed within the LL subgroup is the previously mentioned updated Cannabis Tea Break Guide

## Appendix 4 – Child Death

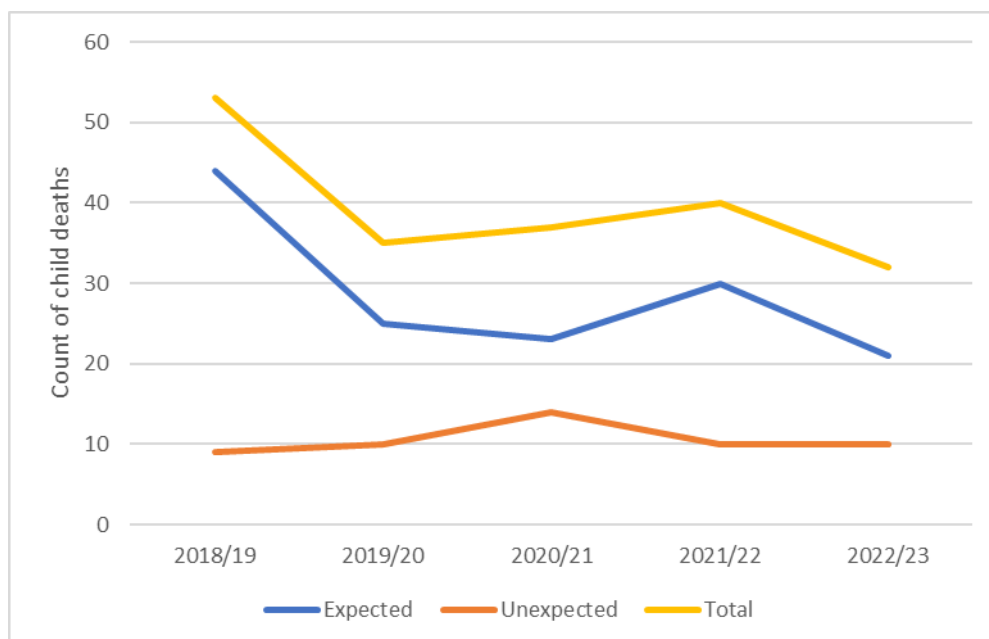
There were 32 deaths last year (2022/23), lower than the previous year and the overall trend since 2018/19 is broadly down (table 2 and figure 3). However, for unexpected deaths, the trend remains flat since 2018/19 despite increases in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Given that there are small numbers in the data, detailed analysis and conclusions to be drawn are limited.

Table 2. Child death notifications by year

Conclusion	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Expected	44	25	23	30	21
Unexpected	9	10	14	10	10
Not known	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>32</b>

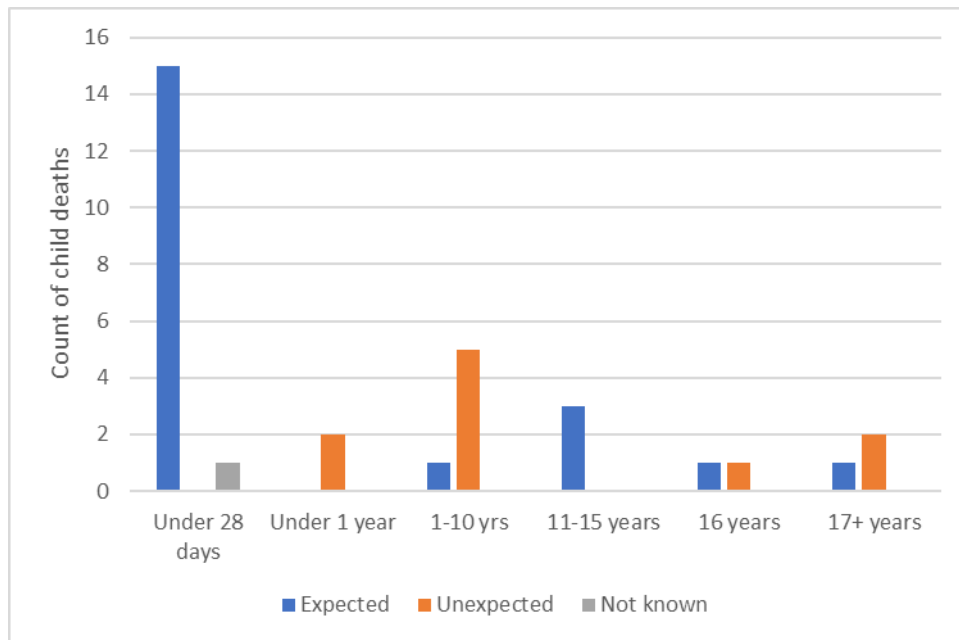
Fig 2. Five year child death notification trends



### Notifications by age

In 2022-23, 50% of all child deaths across Northamptonshire occurred in the first year of life with unexpected deaths occurring more commonly in this age group than any other (fig 3). This is as seen in national figures reported by NCMD.

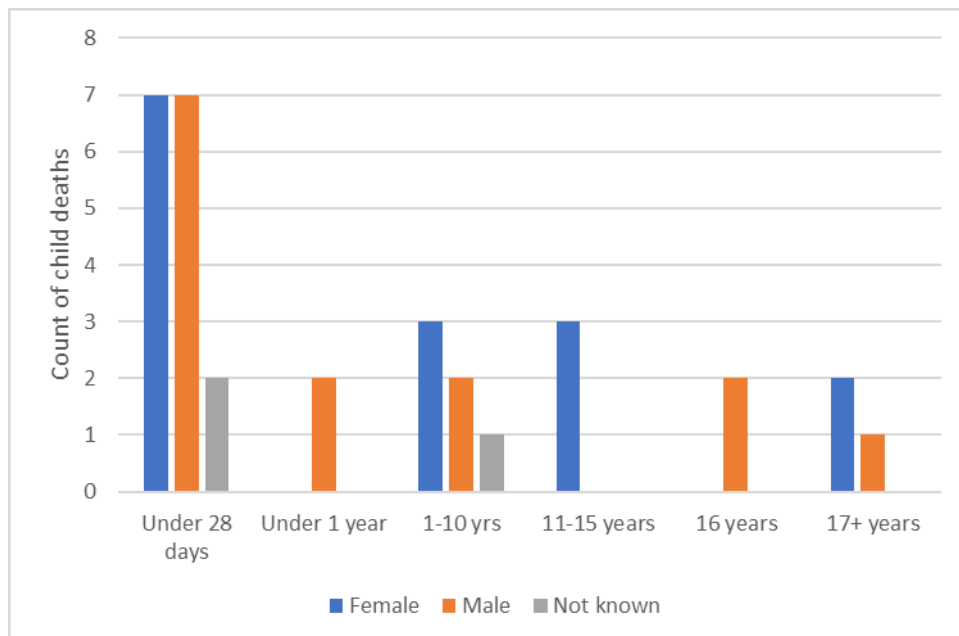
Fig 3. Child death notifications by age-range



**Notifications by gender**

In 2022-23, 47% of child deaths were female and 44% were male. There were 3 deaths where gender was no specified (fig 4).

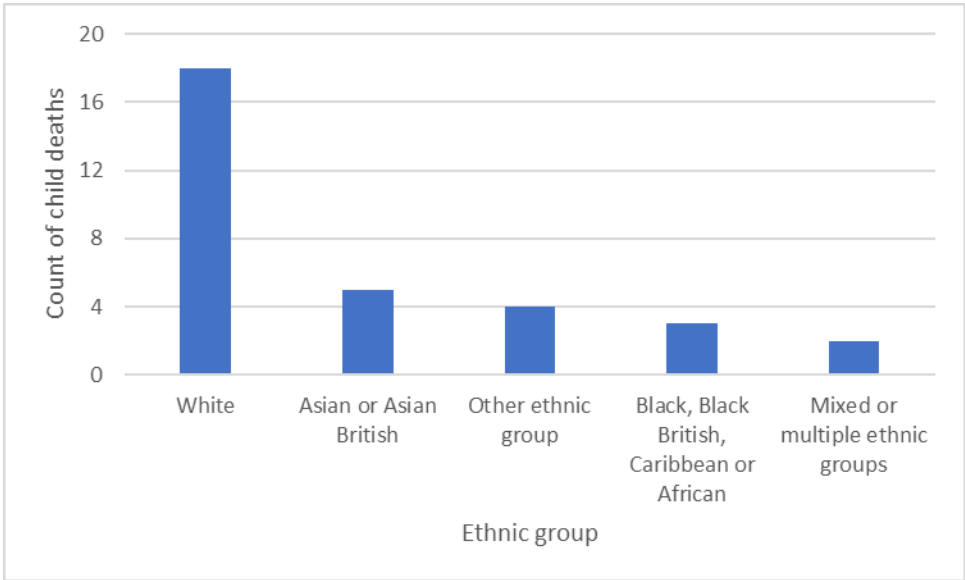
Fig. 4. Child death by gender



**Notifications by ethnicity**

Of the 32 deaths in 2022/23, about 56% were of White ethnicity, 16% Asian and 9% Black (fig 5).

Fig. 5. Child death by ethnicity



## Appendix 5 – Partner Contributions for 2022-2023

<b>Partner Income 2022/23 from Strategic Partner agencies</b>	<b>Annual Contribution to NSCP Budget</b>
<b>North Northamptonshire Council</b>	<b>£28,700</b>
<b><i>North Northamptonshire Council DSG</i></b>	<b>£33,427</b>
<b>West Northamptonshire Council</b>	<b>£31,046</b>
<b><i>West Northamptonshire Council DSG</i></b>	<b>£38,592</b>
<b>Police Funding</b>	<b>£43,000</b>
<b>Health Authority Contribution</b>	<b>£48,949</b>



# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

### CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE & PUBLIC HEALTH – COUNCILLOR MATT GOLBY

<b>Report Title</b>	The closure of Ridgway House, Towcester
<b>Report Author</b>	Neil Cox, Assistant Director – Safeguarding & Wellbeing Services neil.cox@westnorthants.gov.uk

#### List of Approvers

<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	Catherine Whitehead	21/12/2023
<b>Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	13/12/2023
<b>Other Director</b>	Stuart Lackenby	13/12/2023
<b>Communications Lead/Head of Communications</b>	Becky Hutson	13/12/2023

#### List of Appendices

Appendix A – Consultation Report

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment – Residents (contact Democratic Services for a copy)

Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment - Staff (contact Democratic Services for a copy)

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Cabinet is asked to support the proposal to close Ridgway House, a council owned residential care home based in Towcester, as the design and layout of the home means it has become unable to meet the increasingly complex needs of people requiring residential care and support

- 1.2 A decision to close the home would result in the commencement of a safe closure programme which would support the movement of residents into alternative accommodation and work with staff on an individual basis around their employment options.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 Ridgway House in Towcester has 25 rooms and, as of the date of this report, 17 people resident at the home. The home has an allocation of 17.27 care staff to support full occupancy and currently 3.08 fte care vacancies with agency staff and overtime used to maintain safe staffing levels.
- 2.2 The top floor of the building cannot be used because of health and safety risks, in addition to this the environment does not support the safe care of high needs residents.
- 2.3 The service has the lowest occupancy across the three homes and has an overall inspection rating as “requires improvement” with the last inspection published 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022.
- 2.4 Infection Control audits carried out by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have highlighted challenges with the environment and insufficient facilities to offer personal care to customers. None of the rooms have ensuite facilities and require up to 8 people to share bathrooms reducing the ability of staff in the home to support people’s dignity and respect.
- 2.5 There are longstanding and considerable difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff across all three of the internal care homes, including Ridgway House, as well as the two additional homes which form part of a PFI agreement, Turn Furlong and Longlands. The recent pay increases put in place by Council for front line workers and ongoing recruitment initiatives have meant that the workforce numbers have remained stable. However, this activity has not provided the increase in numbers that are required to deliver a full staffing establishment meaning the home is unable to utilise its full bed capacity. There remains a considerable high dependency on agency staff to support the safe staffing levels in the home.
- 2.6 The building is over 40 years old and whilst it would have been compliant at the time of build it would not meet today’s CQC accessibility of facility requirements for new-build care homes due to the lack of ensuite facilities and reduced accessibility for wheelchairs/hoists. Added to this, there is insufficient space for the environment to be improved or increased in size. The home requires increasing intervention just to maintain it as a safe environment. A condition survey in 2020 highlighted that to maintain the home at just a basic habitable standard would require a minimum investment of approximately £1 million over the next 10 years.
- 2.7 The number of people who need registered care home provision in what is now West Northamptonshire has remained at a consistent level through the transition from Northamptonshire County Council to West Northants Council. However, the needs of people in registered care homes are now more complex with an increasing number of people requiring nursing care rather than the residential care which Ridgway House is registered to deliver. Whilst the work force is skilled and able to meet these more complex needs the environment and building limits the ability to meet these high needs or vary the CQC registration.



- 2.8 Following a consultation process which sought feedback from key stakeholders to gain an understanding of their experience of Ridgway House, their priorities on options to influence future service design, and to ascertain how best to mitigate impact of proposals the recommendations outlined in section 3 of this report have been put forward.

### **3. Recommendations**

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It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- a) Consider the outcome of the public consultation exercise on the future options for Ridgway House.
- b) Approve the commencement of a safe closure programme with immediate effect, which will support residents to move to alternative residential care accommodation within the area.
- c) Approve the commencement of formal consultation with affected staff members on their redeployment into other council services in accordance with established HR policies and processes.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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4.1 The recommendations seek:

- a) To enable the Council to prevent Ridgway House becoming both unsustainable and unsafe to the point that there is risk to the wellbeing of the care homes residents.
- b) To ensure that residents receive the high quality of care in a setting that is suitable and meets both their needs and the needs of future residents.
- c) To ensure the Council is able to deliver best use of its available adult social care budgets in meeting its statutory duties.

### **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 The Care Act 2014 places a statutory duty on West Northamptonshire Council to provide care and support to people that have assessed and eligible social care needs alongside responsibilities to ensure a sufficient supply of residential and nursing care services through effective market development activities. It is important to note that the Care Act also requires the Authority to offer choice so that people have reasonable options in the type and location of care they need when this is arranged and paid for by the Council.
- 5.2 The Council's strategic objective, through the existing Adult Social Care Transformation Programme, is to support people to live independently within the community for as long as possible. Whilst there are a broad range of services to fulfil this objective, including home care and extra care housing, there are a number of people whose care and support needs are such that long-term residential and nursing care services are required.

- 5.3 Permanent residential and nursing care is only considered for those with the most complex needs that cannot be supported within alternative care settings such as home care or independent living with on-site care through extra care housing schemes.
- 5.4 Typically needs may include frailty and mobility, advanced dementia, highly complex physical care needs around physical disability or the requirement for on-site nursing support, and in a number of cases all of these combined. In line with national trends, there is an increasing need for more complex care within residential and nursing settings. This is partly related to national demographic changes associated with an ageing population living longer with ongoing care needs but also the positive impact of social care strategy to increase the number of people remaining independent at home for longer with more complex conditions, which can mean that when they need residential or nursing care a greater intensity of care and support is required.
- 5.5 WNC, along with most other local authorities, supported the care home sector with covid grant funding, including the workforce development fund during the pandemic. Despite increased levels of demand the additional grant funding during the pandemic did support short term sustainability in the care home sector. Post pandemic the enhanced levels of demand linked to the NHS recovery plan and the associated high Discharge to Assess (D2A) activity combined with a slowdown in ability to recruit care workers has led to a more unstable care home market in many parts of the UK including West Northamptonshire.
- 5.6 Across WNC there is a total supply of 2787 bed places for all forms of residential and nursing care services across 107 Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered care homes. These include the 5 homes provided/run by the Council which account for 235 of overall bed places

#### *Fair Cost of Care (FCoC)*

- 5.7 In recognition of the imminent Adult Social Care Reforms (Proposed reforms to adult social care including cap on care costs) - House of Commons Library (parliament.uk) WNC, alongside several other East Midlands local authorities, commissioned the services of Care Analytics , a specialist in the financial analysis of care markets and the cost of care, to undertake a 'Fair Cost of Care' (FCoC) detailed cost analysis exercise.
- 5.8 All providers operating in the care home market within the area of the local authority were sent a detailed survey designed to capture the necessary operational and contextual detail to draw out the inherent costs of delivering care in the local market.
- 5.9 In compliance with the latest language contained within the guidance and resulting grant conditions for additional funding, WNC is committed only to "moving towards" the calculated FCoC rates (including any future inflationary uplift as negotiated). Guidance is published on the Government: [Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund 2022 to 2023: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/market-sustainability-and-fair-cost-of-care-fund-2022-to-2023-guidance)
- 5.10 The Council's Fair Cost of Care Rates applicable to Ridgway House is £861 per week for 2023/2024. As a result of the issues detailed within this paper and the resulting impact on occupancy Ridgway House is currently operating at a rate of £1,474 per week, significantly in excess of the Council's established rate. This presents a significant challenge for the

where it is cost of delivering care is significantly higher than the cost it is commissioning care from the independent sector.

#### *Public consultation*

- 5.11 A 28-day public consultation on the future options for Ridgway House took place between 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023 and 19<sup>th</sup> November 2023.
- 5.12 The consultation was conducted by the Adult Social Care Team, with support from the Council's Communications Team, who carried out the consultation in compliance with WNC's Consultation and Engagement Policy and Standard of Required Practice. The consultation was designed to gather stakeholder feedback on the experience of life in Ridgway House, to gain an understanding of future aspirations and priorities on options to influence future service design, and ascertain how best to mitigate impact of proposals.
- 5.13 Identified stakeholders included: residents, residents' family carers, WNC employees, Councillors, local health partners and interested members of the public. Due to the breadth of potential stakeholders a questionnaire was devised to capture feedback.
- 5.14 To ensure those affected were informed, meetings were held with the affected staff group, residents and family members to explain the reasons for consultation, the process that would be followed and answer any questions they may have. All parties were also offered the opportunity of a 1:1 meeting to discuss the consultation further or receive support submitting their responses.
- 5.15 An online version of the questionnaire and details of the consultation was made available on a dedicated internet page on WNC's consultation hub. The online questionnaire was open to all but also enabled respondents who were residents and/or their family carers to answer specific questions about their experience of the care provided within Ridgway House.
- 5.16 A total of 187 people responded to the consultation via a full completion of the questionnaire, 181 of which were completed online, with:
  - 12% of responses coming from staff
  - 12% of responses coming from residents and their families
  - 63% of responses coming from interested members of the public
  - 13% coming from other stakeholders such as Councillors and other professionals.
- 5.17 All responses from the people who have experienced life at Ridgway House commented on how satisfied they were as a result of the quality of care they receive.
- 5.18 The top aspects of a good quality care home identified by respondents were:
  - People being treated with respect and dignity.
  - Feeling safe
  - Staff being helpful and caring.
  - The quality of food and drink available

- Having privacy when wanted

5.19 Respondents were all asked to consider two proposed options, as outlined in section 6 of this report, to gain an understanding of future aspirations and priorities on options to influence future service design and ascertain how best to mitigate impact of proposals.

5.20 When asked questions about the two proposed approaches to the future of Ridgway House, the responses were:

- **Approach 1 – No change:** There was a slight preference towards agreement with this proposal, with the strongest preference coming from residents and their families; the most frequent reason cited for this was to avoid disruption for the residents and for them to remain close to their families. However, there was a general recognition across respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with this option that the facilities in the home need to improve.
- **Approach 2 – Safe closure programme:** Responses from all groups of respondents showed a preference towards disagreeing with this as an option; this was on the basis that it would cause disruption for residents, families and staff, and also because there is a lack of alternative care provision in the Towcester area. Again however there was a general consensus from responders that facilities within the home need to improve to support the people living there in future.

5.21 Whilst a significant number of respondents disagreed with the recommended option of implementing a safe closure programme, there was a general consensus that the facilities in the building needed to be improved, however, unfortunately there is no way of achieving the level of improvement required without closing the home. The reasons for disagreement with the closure programme focused on the potential disruption this would cause for residents and the need to keep residents close to their families and friends in the Towcester area, both of which are issues that can be managed within the closure programme.

## 6. Issues and Choices

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6.1 No change: To make no change to the existing facilities would mean that occupancy levels would continue to decline and the service difficulty in providing safe staffing levels is only likely to increase. The condition of the buildings is likely to result in further practical challenges and it is likely that residents would need to be moved to alternate provision at either a time when there needs can no longer be managed within the home or at a point of crisis.

6.2 Safe closure programme: A programme of safe closure would involve stopping new admissions to the service and recruitment to any staff vacancies within the home. Residents' care and support needs would be reviewed and we would work with them and their families to identify alternative arrangements for their care. The closure would be managed in accordance with Managing Care Home Closures Good Practice Guide and management Checklist approved by the CQC. For the affected staff group we would engage the council's appropriate HR policies and

undertake a process of redeployment of staff into our other care settings, with redundancy only where unavoidable. As far as possible we would seek to resettle people with the redeployed staff into Council delivered homes to support continuity of care and maintain friendship groups as far as possible.

## **7. Implications**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

7.1.1 Closure of Ridgway House would result in a saving of £1.377m which is the current operating budget of the home. Of the total saving approximately £120,000 will be realised when the building is demolished, disposed of or repurposed as this budget will need to be set aside for building related costs incurred following closure of the home. There may be a consequential impact on the Independent Care budget in Adult Social Care should residents in Ridgway House choose to be placed in a residential care home within the independent care sector. It will not be possible to quantify this impact until residents have been supported through the process of finding a suitable alternative care provision.

7.1.2 The Council will seek as far as possible to redeploy affected staff into alternative roles in line with the existing HR policies and procedures that are in place.

7.1.3 Separate decisions would be taken on the use of the site for WNC services or its disposal if closure is approved. Due to its condition and reasons for closure reuse of the current building in this form is not viable and there is a likelihood that demolition costs would be incurred, but these should be offset by the value of re-use or disposal of the site.

### **7.2 Legal**

7.2.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide care and support for people who meet the eligibility criteria as set out in the Care Act 2014 and supporting legislative framework. This duty sits alongside both Council and NHS strategies and plans. The Council's statutory duty extends to the provision or arrangement of services that could help prevent people developing needs for care and support or delay people deteriorating such that they would need ongoing care and support.

7.2.2 The Council may meet that duty by providing the care and support itself or by arranging for a person other than it to provide a service. The legislation anticipates that needs for care and support can be met in a variety of ways, including Council- funded long-term care and support packages, i.e., community care, residential and nursing care and the provision of homecare.

7.2.3 Cabinet may lawfully take a decision which results in the closure of a residential care home and the relocation of residents provided it conscientiously takes into account the outcomes of the consultation. The consultation should satisfy the following: (i) be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage; (ii) sufficient reasons must be given for any proposal so as to enable intelligent consideration and response and (iii) adequate time must be given for consideration and response. Details of the consultation and its results are set out in paragraphs 4.11 to 4.21 above and Appendix A.

7.2.4 When making a decision as to changes in service provision the Council must comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and in particular section 149 of the Public-Sector Equality Duty (“PSED”). Cabinet must also take this into account when making a decision on the future of Ridgway House. The PSED is set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (“the Act”) and provides that the Council is to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity by removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic and by taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics to which the PSED applies include age as well as the characteristics covered by the previous equalities legislation applicable to public authorities (i.e. disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief and sex). In relation to Ridgway House the Council has not identified any protected groups on whom there is a potential impact caused by a potential closure of Ridgway House.

7.2.5 Cabinet should be aware that a decision to close a care home may engage a residents Human Rights under Article 8 of the European Convention - the right to respect for one's private and family life, his home and his correspondence, if the resident is forced to move against their will. Public authorities may only interfere with Article 8 rights where this is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society. This can include consideration of the economic well-being of the country. For a public authority this would include decisions in the best interests of its residents. The Convention recognises that there are situations where a public authority is allowed to decide what is in the best interests of its citizens and may therefore restrict individual rights in the interests of the wider community. Cabinet should therefore consider whether such a breach is justified and proportionate under Article 8(2). This means weighing up the strategic direction to support alternative residential care or alternative housing against the impact on individual residents. To minimise any potential breach of Article 2 (Right to life) Article 3 (Right to be free from degrading treatment) or Article 8 (Right to family life) as a result of the relocation of residents best practice should apply, including the assessment of individual needs under the Care Act 2014 and then to provide appropriate care and support of those assessed eligible needs.

### 7.3 Risk

#### 7.3.1 Risk(s) associated with the proposal:

Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
The movement of residents into a new care setting has a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing.	All residents will be supported to find a new home which is suitable to meet their needs. For residents moving into any of the councils other internal care homes, as far as possible we will support people to move with friendship groups and staff who have been supporting them during their time at Ridgway House.	Amber
Staff start to leave the service once the safe closure programme	Agency staffing will need to be utilised to ensure that the home continues to operate with a safe staffing level that can provide the	Amber

begins resulting in an inability to ensure safe staffing.	required level of care and support for the remaining residents.	
Building issues arise during the programme.	Building maintenance will continue with regular condition reports will be updated to ensure that the programme is informed	Amber
The refusal of residents/families to relocate to alternative accommodation	The council would need to follow the necessary legal processes available to authorise the conveyance of residents to alternative accommodation	Amber
It proves difficult to dispose of or find a suitable new use for the building or site, resulting in an extended period of holding costs.	The council will engage in its established process for determining the future use of its buildings at the point of decision to align any future use with the date of the home closing to minimise any period of time for which the building will be left unused.	Amber

### 7.3.2 Risk(s) associated with not undertaking the proposal

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>Residual Risk</b>
The occupancy at the care home continues to decline to a level which makes it unsustainable.	Staffing levels will need to be adjusted according to the number of residents who reside in the home.  Residents may need to be relocated in the home to ensure they can be supported at the same time with a reduced number of staff.	Amber
Further buildings issues arise which require residents to either be relocated within the home or temporarily relocated elsewhere	Building maintenance will continue to monitor the condition of the building and carry out essential maintenance as required.  Plans will be developed in conjunction with Health & Safety and Resilience colleagues to ensure plans are in place to support the safe movement of residents should the need arise.	Red

## 7.4 Consultation and Communications

7.4.1 As outlined in section 5 of this report a public consultation has been undertaken to gather stakeholder feedback on the experience of life in Ridgway House, to gain an understanding of future aspirations and priorities on options to influence future service design and ascertain how best to mitigate impact of proposals. A copy of the full report outlining the details and results of this consultation can be found at appendix A of this report.

## 7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 No comments received.

## 7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 The existing building is not designed or constructed to meet modern standards of insulation and airtightness. Removing it from the Council's estate would support progress towards the Council's 2030 net zero operations goal. Conversely, it does represent a significant amount of embedded carbon. Therefore, as part of considering options for the future of the site these factors would be taken into account.

## 7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 The vacant site would have the potential for anti-social behaviour and criminal activity including fire-setting. Therefore security arrangements will be put in place until the site is disposed of or put to a new use. The costs of these are reflected in the savings mentioned in 7.1.1.

## 8. **Background Papers**

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None





**West  
Northamptonshire  
Council**

**Proposed Future of Ridgway House Residential  
Care Home**

**Consultation Analysis Report**

**December 2023**

**Author: Assistant Director – Safeguarding & Wellbeing Services, People Directorate, West Northamptonshire Council**

**Owner: People Directorate, West Northamptonshire Council**

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## 1. Introduction

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023 West Northamptonshire Council commenced with a public consultation exercise on the options for the future of the council owned residential care home at Ridgway House, Towcester.

West Northamptonshire Council wants to be able to ensure it is in a position to offer high quality care which continues to meet the changing needs of its residents both now and in the future.

Ridgway House has 44 rooms; however it is significantly under occupied as the design of the building means that the facilities available within the home are unable to meet the needs of an increasing number of people who require residential care. Similar to other care settings the home has also experienced recruitment challenges and has been carrying a significant number of staffing vacancies for some time.

The Council wanted to seek views on its proposals for the future of Ridgway House. It wanted to hear about the experiences of people who reside in the home and their families, along with staff and other interested stakeholders. This report is the analysis of the consultation results received.

## 2. Background

Ridgway House has the lowest occupancy across the council's three internal care homes and it is only able to operate at a maximum of just above half its physical capacity as the first floor is not accessible to people with care and support needs and subsequently had to reduce its CQC registration to deliver care to 24 rooms.

The building is over 40 years old and whilst it would have been compliant at the time it was built it would not meet today's CQC accessibility of facility requirements for new build care homes. There are no ensuite facilities, reduced accessibility for wheelchairs/hoists. Added to this there is insufficient space for the environment to be improved or increased in size. The home requires increasing intervention just to maintain it as a safe environment. A condition survey in 2020 highlighted that to maintain the home at just a basic habitable standard would require a minimum investment of approximately £1 million over the next 10 years.

Up to 8 people have to share bathrooms reducing the ability of staff in the home to support people's dignity and respect.

The number of people who need registered care home provision has remained at a consistent level through the transition from Northamptonshire County Council to West Northants Council. However, the needs of people in registered care homes are now more complex with an increasing number of people requiring nursing care rather than the residential care which Ridgway House is registered to deliver.

Whilst the work force is skilled and able to meet these more complex needs the environment/buildings limit the ability to meet these high needs or vary the CQC registration.

### **3. Consultation Methodology**

The following section outlines the methods of consultation used to generate the material/ data for analysis.

The consultation was conducted by the Adult Social Care Team, with support from the Council's Communication Team, who carried out the consultation in compliance with WNC's Consultation and Engagement Policy and Standard of Required Practice.

Identified stakeholders included: residents, residents' family carers, WNC employees, Councillors, local health partners and interested members of the public. Due to the breadth of potential stakeholders a questionnaire was devised to capture feedback.

At the outset of the consultation period the Assistant Director – Safeguarding & Wellbeing Services met with both the affected staff group, residents and family members to explain the reasons for consultation, the process that would be followed and answer any questions they may have. Paper copies of the consultation questions were made available within the Care Home to all residents, relatives and staff members. (Appendix A). All parties were also offered the opportunity of a 1:1 meeting to discuss the consultation further or receive support submitting their responses.

An online version of the questionnaire and details of the consultation, was made available on a dedicated internet page on WNC's consultation site Citizenspace, which is where all of the Council's consultations are published. [www.westnorthants.citizenspace.com](http://www.westnorthants.citizenspace.com)

The online questionnaire was open to all. However, it was set up in a way which distinguished respondents who were residents and/or their family carers, who were able to answer specific questions about their experience of the care provided within Ridgway House.

The questionnaire was broken down into two main sections. The first section sought to gain a qualitative and quantitative understanding of residents, and residents' families, experiences of the Care Home, whilst the second section sought to gain an understanding of future aspirations and priorities on options to influence future service design and ascertain how best to mitigate

the impact of proposals. In this section respondents were asked to consider and respond to three proposed options:

- The first option was to make no change to the existing facilities would mean that occupancy levels would continue to decline and the service difficulty in providing safe staffing levels is only likely to increase. The condition of the buildings is likely to result in further practical challenges and it is likely that residents would need to be moved to alternate provision at either a time when their needs can no longer be managed within the home or at a point of crisis.
- The second option was to implement a programme of safe closure would involve, stopping new admissions to the service and recruitment to any staff vacancies within the home. Residents' needs would be reviewed and we would work with them and their families to identify alternative arrangements for their care. For the affected staff group we would engage the council's appropriate HR policies and undertake a process of redeployment of staff into our other care settings, with redundancy only where unavoidable. As far as possible we would seek to resettle people with the redeployed staff into Council delivered homes to support continuity of care and maintain friendship groups as far as possible.

An offer was made to translate the questionnaire into another format, including easy read, however no requests were made for a translated version.

The consultation and online questionnaire were also promoted to a large number of key stakeholders, including:

- Members of West Northamptonshire Council's Consultation Register
- Local community and voluntary sector organisations and faith groups
- Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board
- Healthwatch Northamptonshire
- Local Councillors
- Other interested parties

This consultation was also posted and publicised via the Council's Facebook, Twitter and other social media accounts. Respondents were given the opportunity to participate through these social media sites, although no responses were received via them.

As the closure of the Care Home was one of the two proposed approaches, WNC Adult Social Care staff offered to meet with every resident and/or their family carer on an individual basis to explain the situation to them and to seek their views on the proposals.

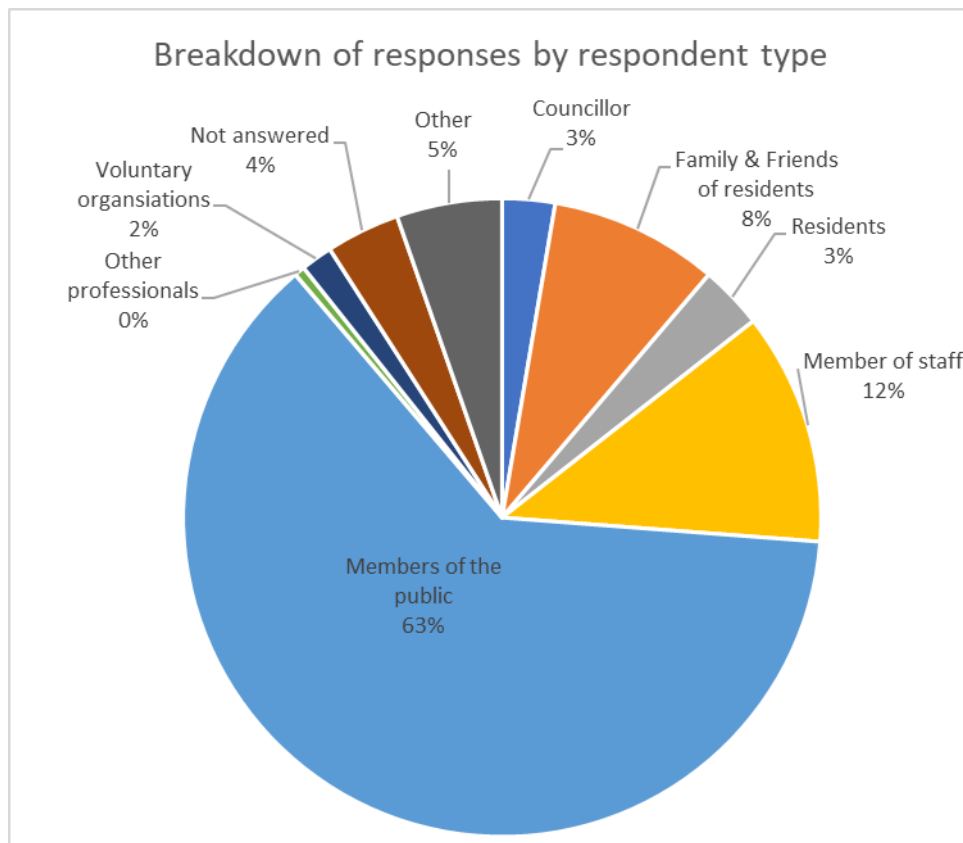
The consultation began on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023 and ended on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2023, giving 28 days of consultation.

## 4. Summary of Feedback

The following is a short summary of the findings. A copy of the paper questionnaire can be found in appendix A.

A total of 187 people responded to the consultation via a full completion of the questionnaire, 181 of which were completed online. No requests were received for a one-to-one discussion from any of individuals within the groups who received this offer.

A breakdown of the 187 responses by the respondent type they recorded is provided in the chart below:



Not all responders answered all of the questions within the questionnaire which creates a disparity in the total number of responses against some questions when compared to the overall breakdown of returned questionnaires. Within the responses from residents/families' multiple family members of individuals living in the home were able to submit responses and the results outlined are based totality of responses received from this group.

### Experience of Ridgway House

Residents and their families were asked an additional set of questions about their experience of the Care Home, there were 18 responses to this set of questions.

- 4 respondents stated they/their relative has lived in Ridgway House for between 1 – 2 years, 5 had lived there for 2 - 3 years, 2 had lived there for 4 - 5 years and 7 had lived there for more than 4 years.
- 4 of these responses related to a resident/residents who had been a long-term resident in another care home other than Ridgway House.
- The main reasons residents/their families chose Ridgway House was because of its affordability and it was close to the community the person moving in had resided in, or it was close to their relatives previously.
- When asked what they like about living at Ridgway House most respondents highlighted the quality of the care provided by the staff as being the main positive.
- All of the respondents who answered the question about their level of satisfaction of the care received at Ridgway House stated they were very satisfied with the quality of care received scoring it 10 out of 10.

### Most important features of a Care Home

All respondents were asked what they thought were the most important features of a good quality care home.

- The following statements are listed in order of the weighted score they received, this was calculated by multiplying the frequency of responses against the rating they received as follows.
  - 1 = Not at all important
  - 2 = Not very important
  - 3 = Somewhat important
  - 4 = Important
  - 5 = Very important

The table below shows the features of a good quality care home in order of the weighted score they attracted, from highest to lowest:

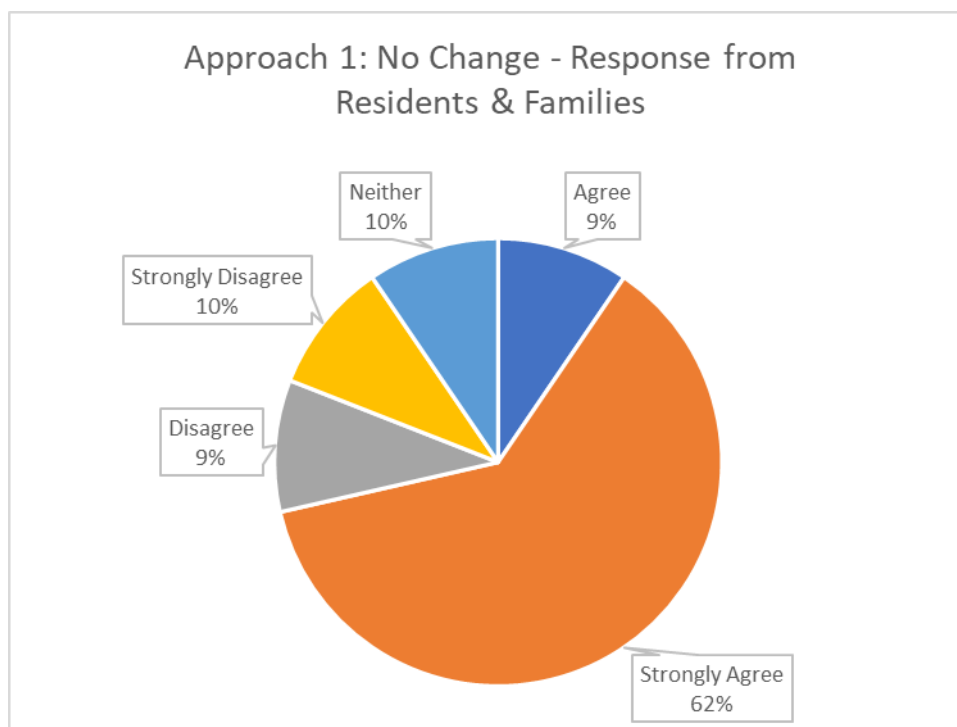
People who live here are treated with respect and dignity
Feeling safe
Staff are helpful and caring
There is good quality food and drink available
To have privacy when wanted
The home can meet the needs of residents as they change
People who live here can be sociable when they want to
Making and having friendships
There are things to do

Visitors can come when they want to
The home is close to where relatives live
People who live in the home are helped to do things outside the home
To have gardens / outside space
People from outside the home can come in for events
The building looks good and is well looked after
The bedrooms have plenty of space
Feeling comfortable in shared and private locations

**Proposed approaches.**

**Approach 1 – No change**

Response from Residents/Families



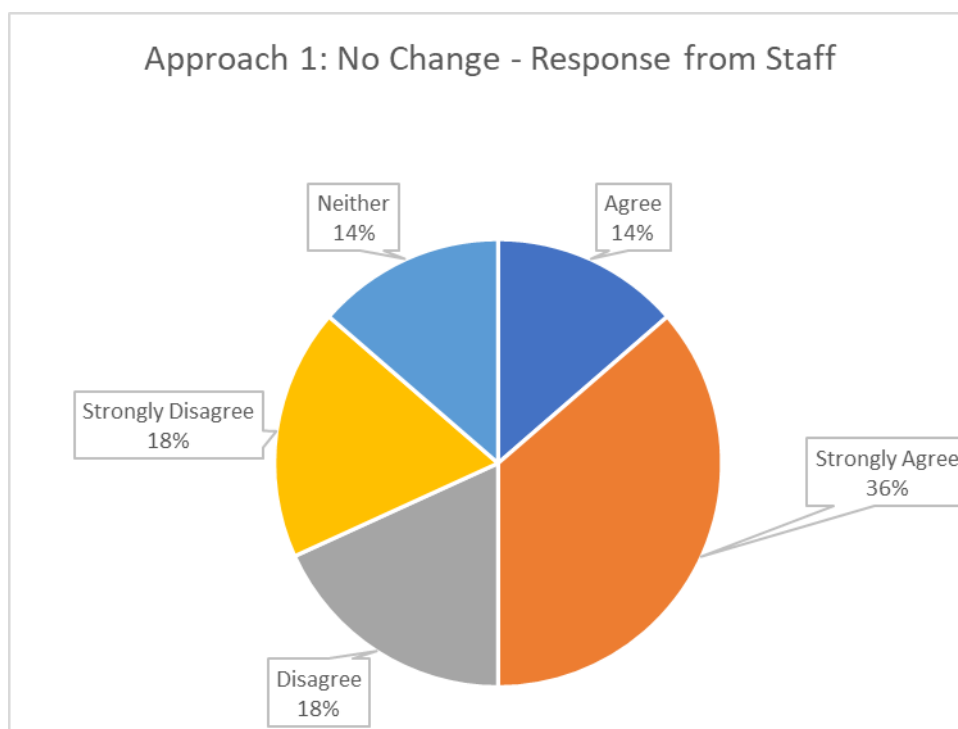
- There were 22 responses to this option from Residents/Families with a range of views expressed within them. Cumulatively “strongly agree/agree” to making no changes made up 71% of the responses received, with a further 19% “strongly disagreeing/disagreeing” and the remaining 10% opting for “neither agree or disagree” or “don’t know”.
- Of those that “agreed/ strongly agreed” with making no changes they recognised the need to improve facilities in the building and concerns about the design of the building,



however the impact on residents and them needing to remain in the original community, along with maintaining the relationships residents have built were the most commonly cited reasons for holding this view.

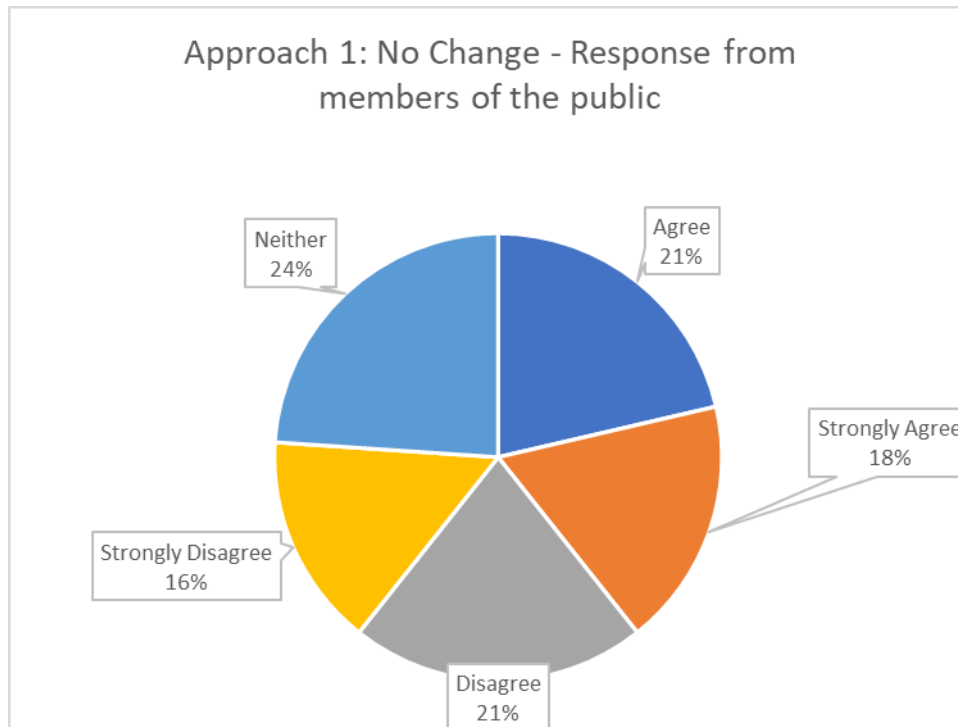
- Those that “disagreed/strongly disagreed” with making no change identified the outdated facilities within the home and the inability to meet current CQC standards as the main reason for this.

### Response from Staff



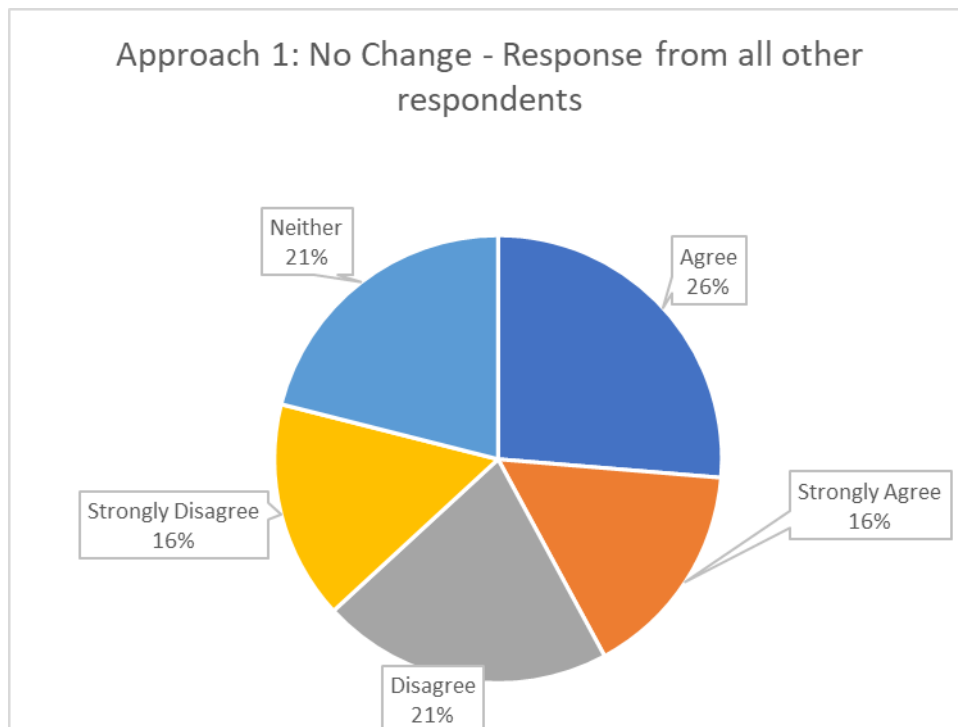
- There were 22 responses to this option from staff who expressed a range of views with 50% who “strongly agreed/agreed” with no changes being made. A further 36% “strongly disagree/disagreed” with the option of no change whilst the remaining 14% either opted for “neither agree or disagree” or “don’t know.”
- Those that “agreed/strongly agreed” provided a range of reasons for holding this position which included a feeling that residents should be able to stay in their home as they are happy and part of the community and that any other option would cause them disruption.
- Of those that “disagreed/strongly disagreed” with making no changes they cited the need for facilities to be improved, particularly the lack of ensuite facilities as being the main reason for this.

Response from the general public



- There were 117 responses to this option from members of the general public.
- Within this group there was a real split of opinions with a relatively even spread of responses across all of the options available, as outlined in the chart above.
- The respondents who “agreed/strongly agreed” with this option recognised the need for modernisation of facilities but cited the need for a care home facility and affordable care in the Towcester area as the reason for holding a preference for this option.
- Of those that “disagreed/ strongly disagreed” with making no changes they cited the building not being fit for purpose and the under utilisation of the building as being the main reasons for this.

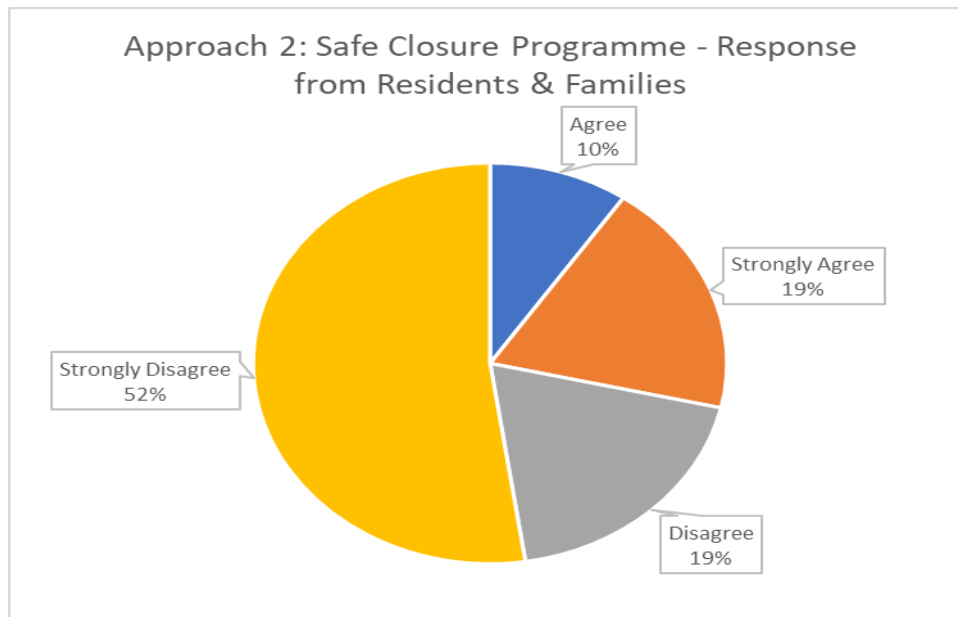
Response from other stakeholders



- There were 19 responses to this option from other stakeholders
- This group also displayed a split of opinions with a relatively even spread of responses across all of the options available, as outlined in the chart above.
- Of the responses from people within this group “strongly disagreed/disagreed” with no changes being made at the home this was due to the current suitability of the building and its facilities and the subsequent need for improvements to be made.
- Of those that “agreed/ strongly agreed” with making no changes they did so on the basis of not wanting to cause disruption to the residents and the need for a council run care home in the area.

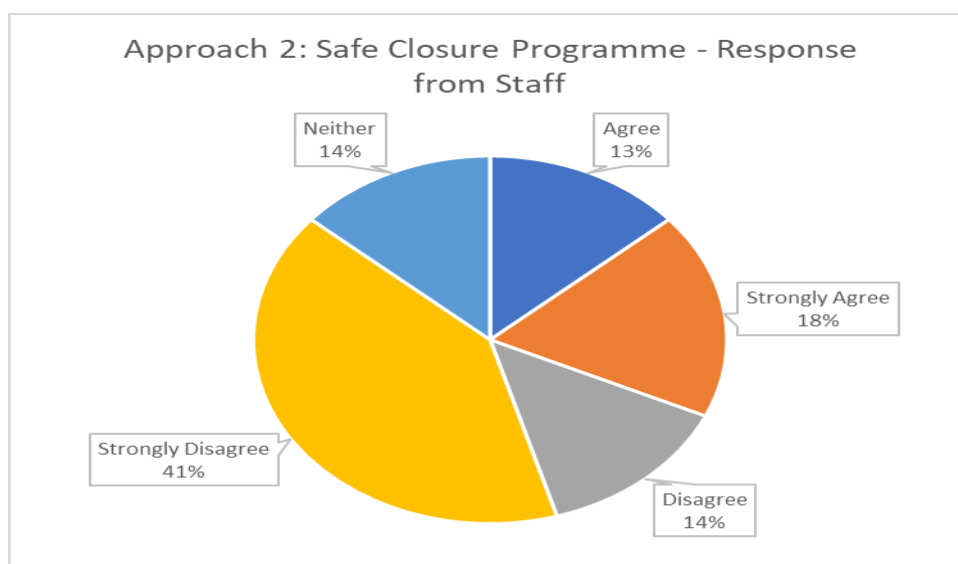
**Approach 2 – Implement a safe closure programme.**

Response from Residents/Families



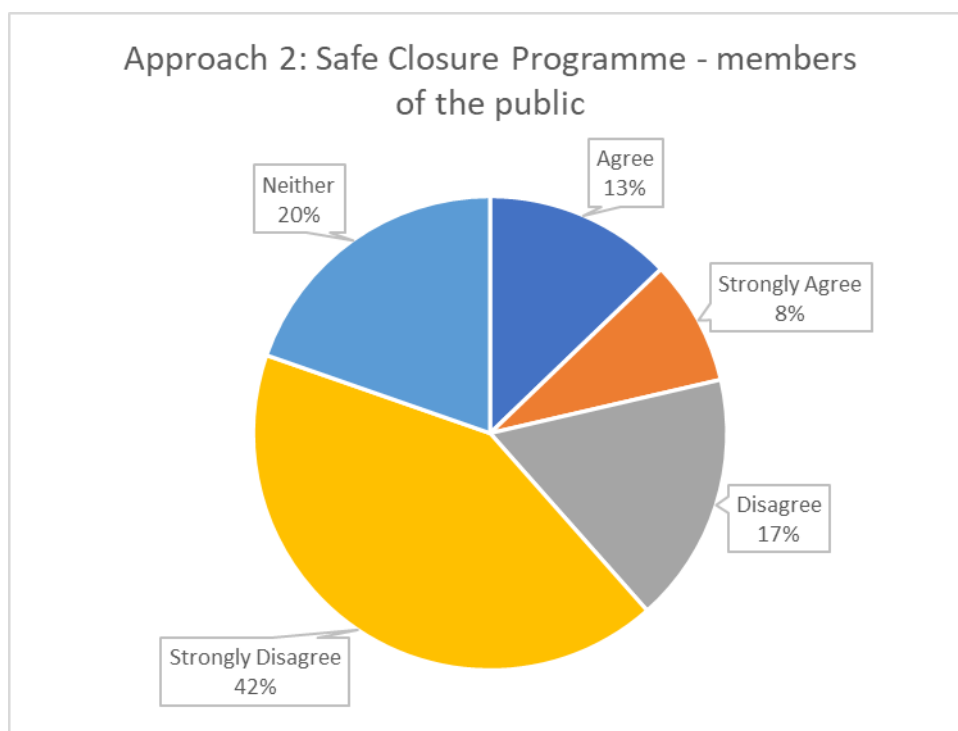
- There were 22 responses to this option from Residents/Families with a range of views expressed within them. Cumulatively “strongly disagree/disagree” made up 71% of responses, whilst “strongly agree/agree” accounted for 29% of responses.
- Those that “agreed/strongly agreed” with the safe closure programme made a number of different comments alongside their response, which recognised the limitations of the building and its design that they agreed with this way forward if it could be implemented as described.
- Of those that “disagreed/ strongly disagreed” with this option they cited the unsettling impact on residents and residents needing to remain in the area and close to relatives as being the main reasons for doing so.

Response from Staff



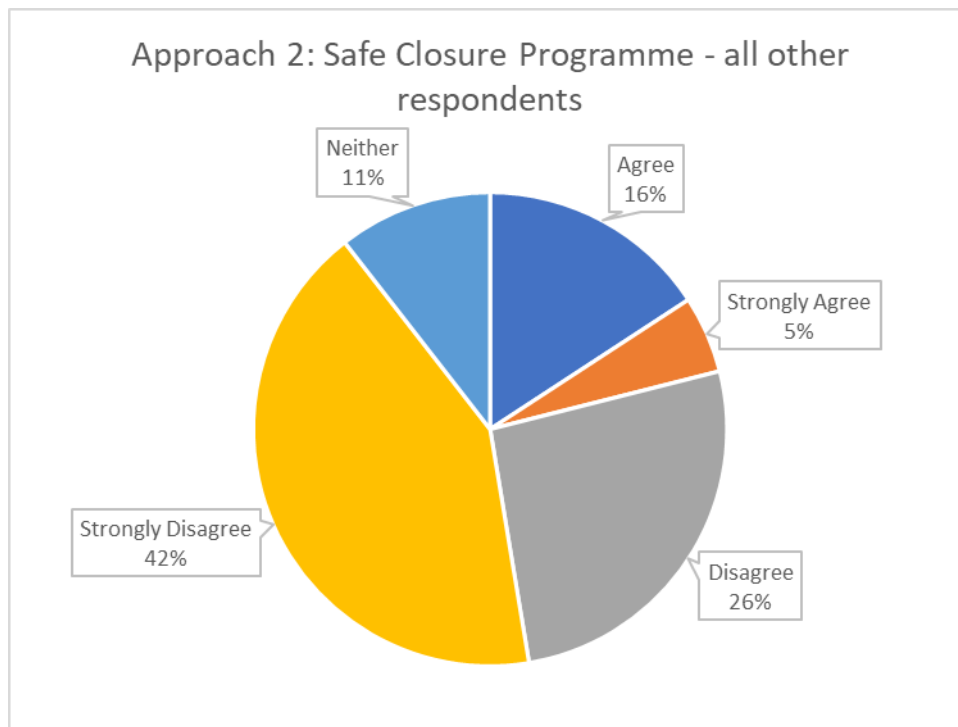
- There were 22 responses to this option from staff with 55% opting for “strongly disagree/disagree” as a response. 31% opted for “strongly agree/agree” with the 14% of remaining respondents opting for “neither agree or disagree.”
- Those that “strongly disagreed/disagreed” with the safe closure programme put forward a number of different comments alongside their responses which included the detrimental impact of closure on staff, residents and families alike and the lack of alternative provision in Towcester for people to move to.

Response from the general public



- There were 117 responses to this option from interested members of the public.
- The majority of responses from people within this group, 59%, “strongly disagreed/disagreed” with a safe closure programme, with 21% “strongly agreeing/agreeing” and the remaining 20% “neither agreeing or disagreeing.”
- Of those respondents that “strongly disagreed/agreed” with this approach they identified the detrimental impact local employment, the disruption this would cause to residents and staff and the need for residential care facilities within the Towcester area.
- Those that “strongly agreed/agreed” with the safe closure programme did so on that basis that they felt the facilities in rooms were not suitable and the residents within the home deserved better facilities than they had.

Response from other stakeholders



- There were 19 responses to this option from other stakeholders.
- The majority of responses from people within this group, 68%, “strongly disagreed/disagreed” with a safe closure programme, with 21% “strongly agreeing/disagreeing” and the remaining 11% “neither agreeing or disagreeing.”
- Of those respondents that “strongly disagreed” with this approach they identified the need for care homes locally and the unsettling impact this would have on residents and families.
- Those respondents that “strongly agreed/agreed” with this option did so on the basis that they felt closing the home was the best way forward.

## 5. Conclusion

This consultation was designed to gather stakeholder feedback on experience of life in Ridgway House, to gain an understanding of future aspirations and priorities on options to influence future service design and ascertain how best to mitigate the impact of proposals.

The majority of responses, 63%, were received from interested members of the public, with 24% of responses coming from staff and residents/families.

All responses from the people who have experienced life at Ridgway House commented on how satisfied they were as a result of the quality of care they had received.

The top aspects of a good quality care home identified by respondents were:

- People being treated with respect and dignity.
- Feeling safe
- Staff being helpful and caring.
- The quality of food and drink available
- Having privacy when wanted

When asked questions about the two proposed approaches for the future of Ridgway House, the responses are summarised as follows:

- **Approach 1 – No change:** There was a slight preference towards agreement with this proposal, with the strongest preference coming from residents and their families; the most frequent reason cited for this was to avoid disruption for the residents and for them to remain close to their families. However there was a general recognition across respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with this option that the facilities in the home need to improve.
- **Approach 2 – Safe closure programme:** Responses from all groups of respondents showed a preference towards disagreeing with this as an option; this was on the basis that it would cause disruption for residents, families and staff, and also because there is a lack of alternative care provision in the Towcester area. Again however there was a general consensus from responders that facilities within the home need to improve to support the people living their in future.

## **Appendix A: Copy of the Paper Version of the Consultation Questionnaire**

### **Consultation on the future of Ridgway House**

We are reviewing the current and future usage of our residential care service at Ridgway House in Towcester, which is wholly-owned by the Council.

West Northamptonshire Council wants to be able to ensure it is in a position to offer high quality care which continues to meet the changing needs of its residents both now and in the future.

The home has 35 rooms, however, the first floor is not accessible to people with care and support needs and subsequently the registration of the home has had to be reduced to 25 rooms. The design of the building means that the facilities available within the home are unable to meet the needs of an increasing number of people who require residential care. Similar to other care settings the home has also experienced recruitment challenges and has been carrying a significant number of staffing vacancies for some time.

#### Background

Ridgway House is located within a residential area in Towcester and is currently home to 19 residents.

The building is over 40 years old and whilst it would have been compliant at the time it was built it would not meet today's Care Quality Commission (CQC) accessibility of facility requirements for new build care homes. There are no ensuite facilities, reduced accessibility for wheelchairs/hoists. Added to this it not possible for the home to be improved because of the disruption it would cause existing residents whilst work is undertaken, and because of restrictions due to its location it is not possible to increase the size of the home.

The home requires increasing intervention just to maintain it as a safe environment; a condition survey in 2020 highlighted that to maintain the home at just a basic habitable standard would require a minimum investment of approximately £1 million over the next 10 years.

The top floor of the building cannot be used because of Health and Safety risks in particular around safe evacuation of residents in the event of fire, in addition to this the environment does not support the safe care of high needs residents.

Infection Control audits carried out by CQC have highlighted challenges with environment and stated the home is very dated/tired looking and identified a number of holes in walls and the corners of walls damaged causing them to be porous.

Added to this there is insufficient space for the environment to be improved or increased in size.

The number of people who need registered care home provision has remained at a consistent level over the years. However the needs of people in registered care homes



today are more complex with an increasing number of people requiring nursing care rather than the residential care which Ridgway House is registered to deliver.

Whilst the work force is skilled and able to meet these more complex needs the environment/buildings limit the ability to meet these high needs or vary the CQC registration.

We are seeking views from stakeholders on the future for Ridgway House to enable decision makers to understand the impact of any future decision that is made.

We are also interested to know how you feel about living at Ridgway House if you are a resident.

### The future

We would like to understand the impact of allowing the current position at Ridgway House to continue or what the impact would be if we commenced with a safe closure programme of the home. Further details on each of these courses of action is outlined within the questionnaire.

Please could you take about **15-20 minutes** to tell us your views on the options put forward for Ridgway House by completing this questionnaire. Your feedback will be used to help us gain a better understanding of our opinions on the options for the future and will help inform any future decision making process. Your feedback will be part of a report with other people's feedback, so you will not be personally identified.

You do not have to answer all of the questions. If you don't want to answer a question, or don't know the answer, then move on to the next question.

You can ask a friend, relative or an advocate to help you complete the questionnaire, but please remember that it is your views and your experiences that are important to us, rather than the views of anyone that helps you.

If you prefer, you can also get in touch using the below contact details for someone independent from social services and your care provider (e.g. an independent advocate) to help you to complete this questionnaire.

We really would like to hear your views, however, if you do not wish to take part in this survey then please discard this questionnaire.

Once completed please return this questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope (you don't need to put a stamp on the envelope) by **19<sup>th</sup> November 2023** to:

Consultation on future of Ridgway House 2023  
Assistant Director – Safeguarding & Wellbeing Services  
Ridgway House  
1 Swinneyford Road,  
Towcester,  
Northamptonshire,  
NN12 6HD

Please contact us either by email [care.feedback@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:care.feedback@westnorthants.gov.uk) or telephone on 01604 361002 if you have any queries, comments or would like a copy of this questionnaire in another format, including easy read or large print.

**Thank you for helping us by completing this questionnaire.**

**1) In what respect are you answering this questionnaire?**

**Please tick (✓) relevant answer**

I live at this home permanently	<input type="checkbox"/>
I live at this home temporarily or use it for respite care	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a family carer of someone living at this home	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a friend of someone living at this home	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a member of the public	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a member of staff employed by West Northamptonshire Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a Councillor	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a business supplier to home	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a professional e.g. GP, district nurse, etc	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a member of a voluntary or community organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify	

We are interested to hear about what it is like to live in Ridgway House Care Home. If you are not a resident/family member of a resident of Ridgway care Home please go to question 8.

**2) How long have you/ your family member been a resident in Ridgway House Care Home?**

Less than a year	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 1 year but less than 2 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 2 years but less than 3 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 3 years but less than 4 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 4 years or more	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3) Have you/ your family member ever been a long term resident in another Care Home, other than Ridgway House Care Home? (please do not include any time spent in respite care)**

**4) Why did you choose Ridgway House Care Home?**

**5) What do you like about living at Ridgway House Care Home?**

**6) On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'very dissatisfied' and 10 is 'very satisfied', overall how dissatisfied or satisfied are you with the care you receive at Ridgway House Care Home?**

Very dissatisfied										Very satisfied	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		Don't Know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

We would be interested to find out what you think are the most important features of a Care Home like Ridgway House.

**7) What do you think are the most important features of a good quality Care Home?**

	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Don't know
Having some control over how people in the home live their lives					
Accessible bathroom and toilet facilities					
Feeling comfortable in shared and private locations					
Feeling safe					
The building looks good and is well looked after					
The bedrooms have plenty of space					
To have privacy when wanted					
To have gardens / outside space					
The home can meet the needs of residents as they change					
There is good quality food and drink available					
There are things to do					
People who live here can be sociable when they want to					
Making and having friendships					
Visitors can come when they want to					
People who live here are treated with respect and dignity					
Staff are helpful and caring					
People from outside the home can come in for events					
The home is close to where relatives live					
People who live in the home are helped to do things outside the home					

**8) Are there any other features that you think help to make a good quality Care Home that are not listed above?**

**The future of Ridgway House**

When considering the future of the home, as we are unable to redevelop or refurbish the home due to the disruption the extensive changes required would cause for

residents, the options for the future are to either maintain the home as it currently operates or commence with a safe closure programme.

To make no change to the existing facilities would mean that occupancy levels would continue to decline and the service difficulty in providing safe staffing levels is only likely to increase. The condition of the buildings is likely to result in further practical challenges and it is likely that residents would need to be moved to alternate provision at either a time when there needs can no longer be managed within the home or at a point of crisis.

A programme of safe closure would involve, stopping new admissions to the service and recruitment to any staff vacancies within the home. Residents needs would be reviewed and we would work with them and their families to identify alternative arrangements for their care. For the affected staff group we would engage the council's appropriate policies and undertake a process of redundancy or redeployment of staff into our other care settings. As far as possible we will seek to resettle people with the redeployed staff into Council delivered homes to support continuity of care, friendship groups and the change in environment and care arrangements as much as possible.

**9) Option 1 is to make no change to the existing facilities, and for the home to continue to operate in the same manner that it does now.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with this approach.**

**Please tick (✓) relevant answer**

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither agree or disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please tell us why?**

**10) Option 2 is to implement a safe closure programme; this would result in stopping new admissions to the home and supporting residents to find suitable accommodation. It would also mean undertaking a process of redeployment or redundancy with the current staff group. The council would however attempt to, as far as possible, restle people with their friendship groups and redeploy staff.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with this approach?**

**Please tick (✓) relevant answer**

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither agree or disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please tell us why?**

**11) Do you have an alternative option we should consider for the future of Ridgway House Care Home?**

**Please tick (✓) relevant answer**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you said "Yes", please tell us what this is:

**12) Is there anything else you think we should consider as part of the above mentioned proposed options?**

**13) Do you have any other comments you would like to make?**

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it in the pre-paid envelope (no stamp required) by 19<sup>th</sup> November to:**

Consultation on future of Ridgway House 2023  
Assistant Director – Safeguarding & Wellbeing Services  
Ridgway House  
1 Swinneyford Road,  
Towcester,  
Northamptonshire,

NN12 6HD

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# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

### CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT, HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT & WASTE SERVICES - COUNCILLOR PHIL LARRATT

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Interim Bus Policy</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	<b>James Povey, Transport Strategy and Development Manager</b>

#### List of Approvers

<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	Catherine Whitehead	21/12/2023
<b>Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	13/12/2023
<b>Other Director</b>	Stuart Timmiss	22/12/2023
<b>Head of Communications</b>	Becky Hutson	13/12/2023

#### List of Appendices

#### Appendix A – Consultation Feedback report on draft Interim Bus Policy

##### 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. To seek Cabinet approval for the proposed Interim Bus Policy, following completion of the recent Bus Network Review and public consultation on the draft Interim Bus Policy wording. The proposed Interim Bus Policy will enable the Council to maintain support for local bus services and the communities they serve until a new Local Transport Plan is developed and adopted by early 2025.

1.2. The report also provides an update on funding for local bus network support, following recent announcements from the Department for Transport.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 1.3. Following a Bus Network Review during 2022-23 an updated interim bus policy is being recommended for adoption. This will guide activity in the next 12 months ahead of the adoption of a new Local Transport Plan which will include a more comprehensive set of updated transport policies. The draft bus policy wording has been subject to public consultation and has been well received. It is therefore recommended that this policy be adopted.
- 1.4. The remainder of the report provides an update on funding for local bus network support, and how decisions will be made on how this is spent to best support the local bus network in line with the new bus policy.

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- a) Agree the adoption of the Interim Bus Policy, which will be updated alongside a wider set of transport policies as part of the Local Transport Plan process by early 2025.
  - b) Note changes in funding for the local bus network for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- The Council and customers will receive the maximum benefit from the option proposed.
- Consistency with previous decisions concerning local bus network support.

## **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 During 2022-23 the Council has completed a review of the bus network in West Northamptonshire. This provided advice on how to achieve a future sustainable network that is both stable and financially viable. This was in response to a request from the Department for Transport (DfT) to all councils to review their bus networks post-Covid. It was also an opportunity for WNC as a new council to review and define an updated policy and approach to local bus provision.
- 5.2 Local buses in West Northamptonshire face considerable challenges. Following the Covid pandemic, bus passenger levels have still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels and are around 80% of previous levels. Concessionary travel levels are lower than this, and this has been the experience nationally. At the same time of reduced demand, bus operators are experiencing problems with driver shortages and cost inflation related to pay, fuel and maintenance costs.
- 5.3 The Bus Network Review is split into two reports. Report 1 provides an overview of existing services operating within West Northamptonshire and provides an analysis of the commercial viability of these with an associated RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating of them. The report goes onto to discuss gaps in the network and various ways in which these are, or can be filled, as well as risks and opportunities facing the local bus network. Report 2 builds on Report 1 and aims to provide a framework for decision making to inform a future bus network which serves West Northamptonshire to its full potential. As part of this it recommends a new interim bus policy, to

guide decision making in the short term, ahead of the adoption of a new Local Transport Plan in late 2024/early 2025 which will define a new overarching transport policy framework for the Council. Both reports and the draft policy wording were discussed at the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 11 September 2023.

5.4 The draft wording for the interim bus policy is:

The needs of our communities to access employment, education, healthcare, retail and leisure is recognised and this mobility can be achieved through the provision of high quality, efficient and reliable public transport.

- Priority 1: The Council will encourage the commercial operation of local public transport services, through partnership working and infrastructure investment.
- Priority 2: Where there are unmet needs and gaps in the commercial bus network provision, the Council will seek solutions through supported local bus services or community transport initiatives, where funding is available, and it is consistent with Council policies and priorities.
- Priority 3: The Council will fund and administer concessionary travel for elderly and disabled residents in line with national regulations.

5.5 Following the Scrutiny meeting, a six-week public consultation, from 29 September to 12 November, was undertaken on the Interim Bus Policy priorities.

## 6. Issues and Choices

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6.1 There were 734 responses in total to the public consultation. 527 of these completed the survey fully, and 207 partially completed the survey and did not respond to all the questions. A review of all survey responses gave the following results:

- Priority 1: The Council will encourage the commercial operation of local public transport services, through partnership working and infrastructure investment. **67% (495) agreed, 4% (29) disagreed and 29% (210) had no view or gave no response.**
- Priority 2: Where there are unmet needs and gaps in the commercial bus network provision, the Council will seek solutions through supported local bus services or community transport initiatives, where funding is available, and it is consistent with Council policies and priorities. **63% (465) agreed, 3% (18) disagreed and 34% (251) had no view or gave no response.**
- Priority 3: The Council will fund and administer concessionary travel for elderly and disabled residents in line with national regulations **60% (440) agreed, 2% (12) disagreed and 38% (282) had no view or gave no response.**

This demonstrates that there is positive support for the interim bus policy, and we are recommending the policy consulted on is adopted without amendments.

- 6.2 A number of key themes were evident from the additional feedback we invited on our policy wording and support for the local bus network. In summary these were as follows (not ranked):
- Improvements requested to rural services including villages around Brackley, Towcester and Daventry
  - Maintaining and Improvements requested to existing services (frequency, hours of operation etc.)
  - An urban service requested to connect West Hunsbury to Northampton via Mere Way Tesco
  - Improved connectivity requested for villages close to the boundary with Milton Keynes (Deanshanger / Potterspury)
  - Positive feedback on Ability Community Transport.
- 6.3 A very small number of comments we received on the Council’s support for the concessionary travel scheme (ENCTS), and suggestions for enhancing this scheme to permit travel by certain groups before 9.30am. Other enquiries were also received recently for this to be investigated as such enhancements (which can also include passes for carers) are funded by some other councils. The DfT in late November published new guidance on reimbursing operators under the ENCTS. The Council needs to undertake some analysis on what the budget implications are for the changes to reimbursement rates effective for 2024/25 onwards. Any changes to the current ENCTS, including any enhancements, will require formal consultation and the financial impact would need to be assessed. Further work will be undertaken on this in 2024, with a view to including any policy changes in the new Local Transport Plan due for adoption in early 2025. Any changes would then come into effect from 1 April 2025.
- 6.4 At their meeting on 11 April 2023, Cabinet agreed the 2023/24 Bus Subsidy Budget. Since then there have been a number of funding announcements from the DfT, which have significantly altered the outlook for the extent of support the Council can provide to the local bus network. The DfT funding commitments only extend to 2024/25 currently and there is no certainty beyond this, although there have been indications that the Council may receive a multi-year BSIP settlement. The current budget for bus network support is as follows:

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>2023/24 (£,000s)</b>	<b>2024/25 (£,000s)</b>
Council budget	315	315
DfT Local Authority Bus Subsidy (Revenue) Grant	109.5	
Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus – Grant	687*	687
Bus Service Improvement Plans Third Phase allocations		2,421

\*Received in year and we have 12 months to spend this following receipt so will be spent across 2024. Funding is subject to a number of conditions including that it will be spent on bus measures and the Authority must maintain their bus budgets from all sources.

- 6.5 In line with priority 1 of our bus policy the Council will be developing proposals for how this funding is allocated in 2023/24 and 2024/25 with its Enhanced (bus) Partnership, as well as being guided by the findings and recommendations of our Bus Network Review. The Enhanced Partnership will aim to agree the funding allocations at their meeting on 17 January 2024, which will enable procurement activity to proceed for any supported bus services. The Council has

majority voting rights on the Enhanced Partnership and representation includes the Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways, Transport & Waste Services, and the Assistant Director for Highways and Transport. Details can be found on our webpages.

- 6.6 The funding can be used among other things to support/contract bus services, fund enhanced marketing and promotions activity and fund ticketing initiatives, with the overall aim to maintain and grow the local bus network and increase patronage. Given the uncertain funding outlook, decisions to financially support new bus services will need to be made carefully, and will aim to fund services that have some prospect of becoming commercially viable in the near future. This will reduce financial risk to the council and the prospect for services to be withdrawn if the DfT grants diminish in future. Where possible, and subject to consideration against alternative spend proposals, we are looking to bring forward solutions in response to some of the consultation feedback outlined in section 6.3, where gaps in the current bus network have been identified, in line with priority 2 of our policy.
- 6.7 The above represents a direction of travel in line with the Bus Network Review undertaken, and the policy wording proposed. A further area of focus that came from the Bus Network Review was for the Council to consider the potential for better integrating its transport budgets to realise efficiencies and deliver improved public transport provision. With some of the funding we have in 2024 we will seek to progress this, particularly with respect to community transport support and Home to School transport provision.

## **7. Implications**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 There are no resource or financial implications to the Council arising from the proposals. Some of the initiatives to be funded by DfT grant funding may require additional consultant or temporary staff resource to support their delivery but this will be funded as part of the grant. Any bus contracts procured will only cover the period for which grant funding is secure, or include suitable break clauses, to ensure the council faces no financial risk.

### **7.2 Legal**

- 7.2.1 The proposed interim bus policy will enable the Council to maintain support for local bus services and the communities they serve until a new Local Transport Plan is developed and adopted early 2025. Production of a Local Transport Plan is a statutory requirement of the Transport Act 2000 and Local Transport Act 2008 which requires the Council to set out its plans and policies for transport including how those plans and policies are to be implemented.

### **7.3 Risk**

- 7.3.1 Overall there are considered to be no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. The proposed policy wording aligns with national and local policy, and is informed by the Bus Network Review and a public consultation exercise. Cabinet have been asked to note the revised funding for bus network support, and this will be spent through close working with the bus network operators through our Enhanced Partnership

line with our procurement rules. Decisions on which bus services to support will be informed by a consideration of financial sustainability of the investment decision, so as to minimise the risk that new supported services will need to be withdrawn at a future date when the funding situation changes.

#### **7.4 Consultation and Communications**

7.4.1 The 6-week public consultation survey, which ran from 29 September 2023 to 12 November 2023, was hosted on the West Northants Council consultation hub and promoted via the Council's media channels. Details of consultation was circulated to local media and stakeholders, including West Northants Residents Panel and members of the West Northants Consultation, MPs, town/ parish councillors, bus and community transport operators, transport focus and stakeholder groups for the older people and disabled people.

7.4.2 During the Bus Network Review there was stakeholder engagement undertaken, which included bus operators and parish councils. A summary of consultation results and feedback has already been covered in preceding sections, and a fuller report is included as an annex.

7.4.3 The outcome of the Cabinet meeting will be communicated via the Council's corporate communication channels, outlining the next steps for the interim bus policy.

#### **7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 The Bus Network Review and draft interim bus policy were discussed at the Council's Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 September 2023. Feedback included the need for better marketing of bus services to employers and students, and through our Enhanced Partnership and the funding available in 2024/25 we will aim to improve this. The committee also agreed to invite a representative from Stagecoach to a future scrutiny meeting.

#### **7.6 Climate Impact**

7.6.1 The bus policy will have a positive climate/environmental impact by supporting local bus provision and seeking to grow bus patronage. This will result in less car use and reduced congestion, reducing vehicle emissions. By supporting the local bus network and working closely with operators through our enhanced partnership, we will encourage investment by operators in newer and cleaner fleet with reduced emissions.

#### **7.7 Community Impact**

7.7.1 In advance of the bus policy consultation an Equality Impact Screening Assessment was undertaken which identified no negative impacts. This assessment will be revisited as part of work on the Local Transport Plan which will include a wider set of public transport policies.

7.7.2 As outlined in the Bus Network Review reports local bus provision varies widely across the authority area, with some communities being served by commercial services, some by the small number of services currently contracted by the council, and others by community transport

options. The bus policy wording addresses how the council will work to address unmet need and gaps in provision.

## **8. Background Papers**

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[WNC Bus Network Review Report 1 \(2023\)](#)

[WNC Bus Network Review Report 2 \(2023\)](#)

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## Appendix A – Consultation Feedback report on draft Interim Bus Policy

### Introduction

A public consultation was undertaken on the West Northamptonshire Council Interim Bus policy consultation between 29 September 2023 and 12 November 2023, a duration of 6 weeks.

As well as an overview of the bus policy background the council's online consultation hub included links to the two reports from the recently completed Bus Network Review. This Bus Network Review recommended an updated policy position covering the council's support for the local bus network, and the wording of this policy based on the analysis undertaken. The new Bus Policy wording would guide activity over the next 12 months, in advance of a more comprehensive update to the council's suite of transport policies when the new Local Transport Plan is adopted by early 2025.

As well as being encouraged to complete the online survey, participants were also able to email the council's bus team with any feedback, and there was also an option for a paper survey to be printed and submitted by post.

### Results and Feedback

There were 734 responses in total to the consultation, of which 527 were fully completed.

Across all 734 responses we received the following results against the question asking participants whether they agreed with the 3 bus priorities stated in the policy:

- Priority 1: The Council will encourage the commercial operation of local public transport services, through partnership working and infrastructure investment. **67% (495) agreed, 4% (29) disagreed and 29% (210) had no view or gave no response.**
- Priority 2: Where there are unmet needs and gaps in the commercial bus network provision, the Council will seek solutions through supported local bus services or community transport initiatives, where funding is available and it is consistent with Council policies and priorities. **63% (465) agreed, 3% (18) disagreed and 34% (251) had no view or gave no response.**
- Priority 3: The Council will fund and administer concessionary travel for elderly and disabled residents in line with national regulations **60% (440) agreed, 2% (12) disagreed and 38% (282) had no view or gave no response.**

A review of the 527 fully completed survey responses gave the following results:

- Priority 1: The Council will encourage the commercial operation of local public transport services, through partnership working and infrastructure investment. **82% (433) agree**
- Priority 2: Where there are unmet needs and gaps in the commercial bus network provision, the Council will seek solutions through supported local bus services or community transport initiatives, where funding is available and it is consistent with Council policies and priorities. **77% (406) agree**
- Priority 3: The Council will fund and administer concessionary travel for elderly and disabled residents in line with national regulations **72% (382) agree**

Overall from all the survey responses received this demonstrates that there is positive support for the interim bus policy.

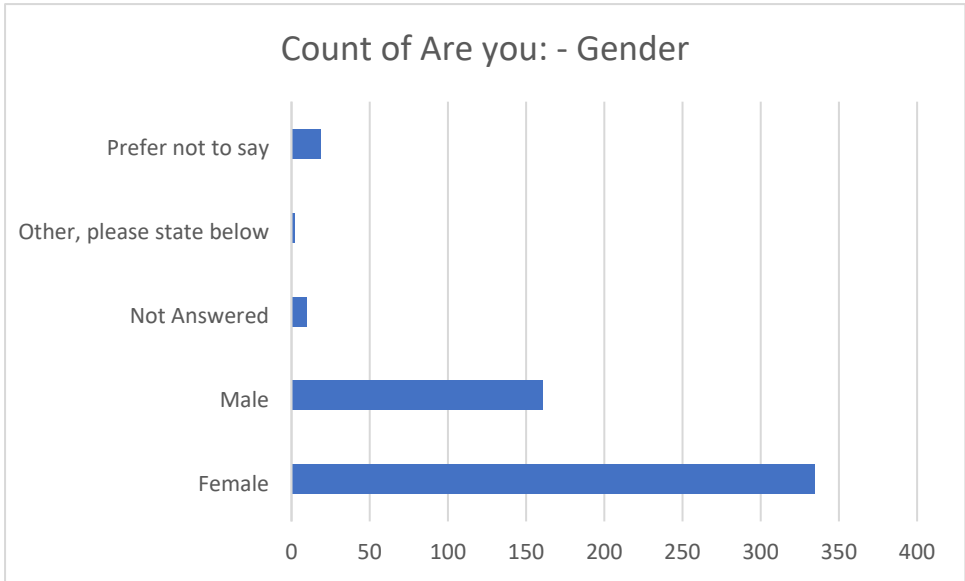
We received 324 comments to the question consultation when we asked respondents if they wished to provide further comments on the priorities, or to tell us anything else regarding local bus services. This has provided us with lots of useful feedback. The key themes, which are not in any rank order, are:

- Improvements requested to rural services including villages around Brackley, Towcester and Daventry
- Maintaining and Improvements requested to existing services (frequency, hours of operation etc.)
- An urban service to connect West Hunsbury to Northampton
- Improved connectivity for villages close to the boundary with Milton Keynes (Deanshanger / Potterspury)
- Positive feedback on Ability Community Transport

## **Demographic information on respondents**

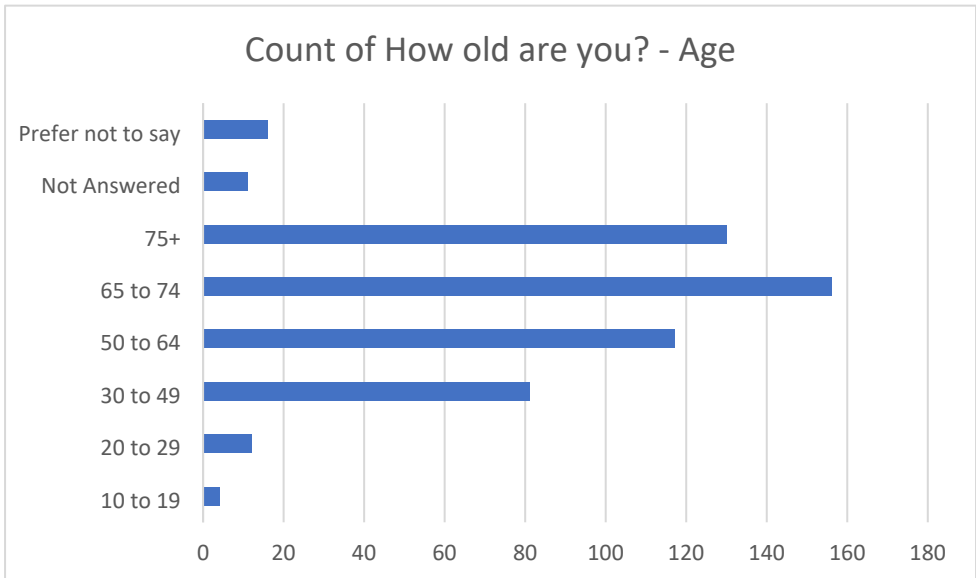
### Gender

Of the 527 fully completed surveys responses, 31% (161) were male, and 64% (335) were female, with 5% not answering/prefer not to say.



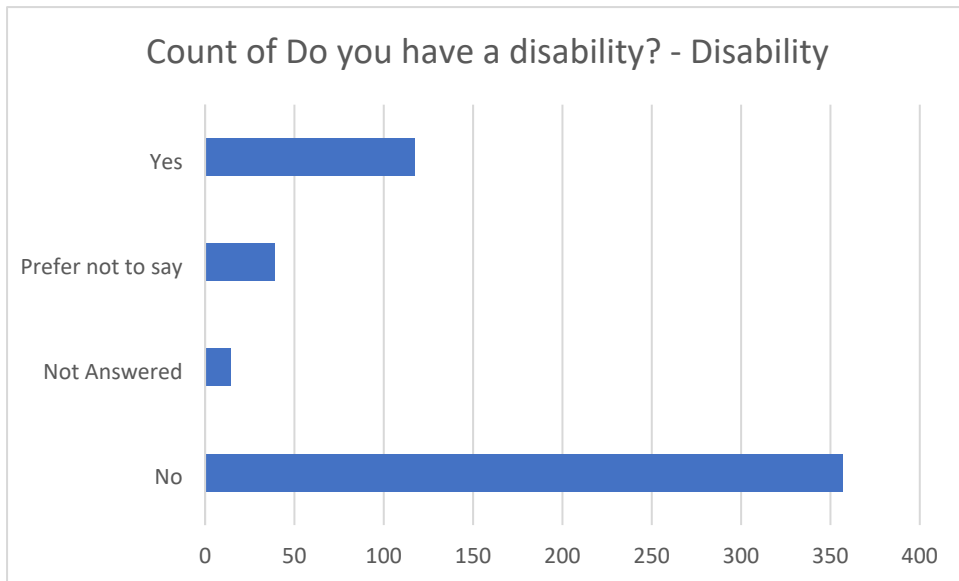
Age

More than half of completed responses were from people over the age of 65. 25% (130) of respondents were 75+, 30% (156) were 65-74, 22% (117) were 50-64, and 15% (81) were 30-49.



Disability

22% (117) of completed responses were from people with a disability.



### Religion, Sexuality and Marital Status

49% of completed responses were from people who identified as Christian, and another 49% did not provide an answer or preferred not to say.

70% of responses were from people identifying as heterosexual. 25% either didn't answer or preferred not to say. 2% identified as bisexual and 1% as other.

53% of responses were from people who were married, 14% from widow/widowers, 13% from single people, 6% were cohabiting and 11% preferred not to say or didn't answer.



# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

## CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION AND GROWTH – COUNCILLOR DANIEL LISTER

Report Title	Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy
Report Author	<p>Louis Devayya Senior Economic Growth Officer <a href="mailto:Louis.Devayya@WestNorthants.gov.uk">Louis.Devayya@WestNorthants.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Vicky Hlomuka Head of Economic Growth &amp; Inward Investment <a href="mailto:Vicky.Hlomuka@WestNorthants.gov.uk">Vicky.Hlomuka@WestNorthants.gov.uk</a></p>

### List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	13/12/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	13/12/2023
Other Director	Jane Carr	12/12/2023
Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	13/12/2023

### List of Appendices

#### Appendix A – Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy

##### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report introduces the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy for the whole county. It has been co-produced by West Northamptonshire Council & North Northamptonshire Council, as well as strategic partners & stakeholders from across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.

- 1.2. The report also sets out the intention to develop a new private sector-led Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) to oversee and drive the delivery of the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy, in partnership with West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1. The Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy sets out to establish an approach to nurturing and enhancing the visitor economy; currently one of Northamptonshire's unsung economic heroes. Developed over an 18-month period, and working closely with North Northamptonshire Council, this Strategy covers the whole county and has drawn on a wide range of evidence and insight, together with numerous contributions from across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.
- 2.2. The Strategy has four principal goals. With a timeframe to 2030, these include a focus on:
- Visits and Value
  - Great People
  - Better Business
  - Inspirational Places
- 2.3. As per the guidance and requirement from Visit England, it is also proposed to establish a LVEP, made up of a representative group of senior industry figures, drawn from both West and North Northamptonshire, to steer the delivery of the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy. The LVEP will focus on four clear objectives:
- Collaboration
  - Dynamic & Tailored Marketing
  - Planning for the Future, and
  - Improving Quality & Skills

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- 3.1.1 Approves the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy attached at Appendix A;
- 3.1.2 Supports the proposal to continue to work closely with colleagues in North Northamptonshire, wider stakeholders and private sector representatives to begin to develop a LVEP. A future report will be brought to Cabinet which will set out detailed implementation plans and financial implications related to the development of the LVEP.
- 3.1.3 Delegates authority to the Director of Communities & Opportunities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth to undertake any activity to develop the plans for LVEP development, ahead of these being brought back to the Cabinet for approval.

#### 4. Reason for Recommendations

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- 4.1 To support the visitor economy enabling economic benefits for the entire County, resulting in increased Gross Value Added (GVA), pride in place, inward investment and jobs.
- 4.2 To strategically grow the tourism offer, working collaboratively with North Northamptonshire Council, businesses, education providers and other relevant stakeholders in order to further deliver beneficial economic growth as a result of increased visitors and spend.
- 4.3 To explore the County-wide benefits of having an accredited LVEP, which would include expert support to drive the visitor economy and the potential of future funding only available to LVEPs

#### 5. Report Background

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- 5.1 The support given by the former Councils across Northamptonshire to the county's visitor economy reduced after the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies 2010. There followed the subsequent merger of the Explore Northamptonshire Destination Management Organisation (DMO) into the Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership.
- 5.2 A 'DMO' plays a crucial role in promoting and marketing specific destinations within the country to attract tourists. Visit England, as the national tourism agency, focuses on showcasing the diverse attractions, cultural heritage, and experiences offered by different regions across England. These DMOs work on developing and implementing strategic marketing initiatives to boost tourism, support local businesses, and enhance the overall appeal of the destinations they represent. Their efforts contribute to the economic growth of regions by attracting visitors and fostering a positive image of the destination both domestically and internationally.
- 5.3 Since 2016 a private sector-led consortium has operated *Northamptonshire Surprise*, which has engaged with attractions/employers, delivered promotional activity and maintained a tourism website. This organisation has also run recent marketing campaigns on behalf of the two Councils and has been consulted in the preparation of the new Tourism Strategy. *Northamptonshire Surprise* is recognised by VisitEngland as operating as a DMO.
- 5.4 In March 2021, the government announced an independent review to assess how DMOs across England are funded and structured, and how they perform their roles, in order to establish whether there may be a more efficient and effective model for supporting English tourism at the regional level, and if so, what that model may be. Its report and consultation response analysis was published in September 2021.
- 5.5 The review was led by Nick de Bois, Chair of the VisitEngland Advisory Board, acting in an independent capacity. The review examined the extent to which the current DMO landscape:
  - is economically efficient, effective and sustainable (with regard to funding, structure and performance)
  - best enables the government to meet its leisure and business tourism policy objectives at a national, regional and local level

- engages within the wider local and regional economic landscape, and the current focus on English devolution and levelling up
- 5.6 With a view to making recommendations about:
- whether DMOs might be structured or funded differently, and if so how any proposals might maximise post-COVID recovery and long-term success
  - what the role of DMOs should be, bearing in mind existing other local structures such as local enterprise partnerships, mayoral combined authorities, local authorities and other similar local/regional bodies; and where these might intersect
  - how DMOs should best engage with, and be engaged by, VisitEngland, VisitBritain and DCMS, as well as wider government/public bodies where relevant
- 5.7 The review makes 12 recommendations in total, six of which are directed at the government, four at DMOs themselves and one each for local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and local authorities. This document sets out the government’s response to the recommendations.
- 5.8 One of the key recommendations which was validated in the UK Government’s response to the de Bois Review of destination management was the establishment of accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnerships. VisitEngland worked in close consultation with DMOs to develop the initiative, holding a series of round table discussions across England in autumn 2022 with more than 100 participants.
- 5.9 VisitEngland is creating a portfolio of nationally supported, strategic and high-performing LVEPs. These LVEPs will provide strong local leadership and governance in tourism destinations all over the country. The new LVEPs work in collaboration locally, regionally and nationally on shared priorities and targets. Their mission is to support and grow the visitor economy through robust destination management, strong stakeholder relationships and clear planning.
- 5.10 LVEPs will work closely with VisitEngland, with ongoing support from their team of five new Regional Development Leads. As well as having nationally recognised status, LVEPs provide strong leadership and management of their destinations. They will help to shape and deliver national strategy and activities. Their important role is promoted across government and national agencies, ensuring the local visitor economy is an active and valued contributor to Levelling Up and the wider economy. LVEPs are able to access expert advice, specialist toolkits and training programmes from VisitEngland in areas ranging from commercialisation, distribution, accessibility and sustainability to business support and marketing. An important strand of support will be highlighting available Government funding streams as well as developing and providing a ‘toolkit’ to help LVEPs with bids to those streams.
- 5.11 Both North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils agreed that a new strategy would be required following the local government re-organisation. In January 2022, the procurement for this strategy took place and Tomorrow Tourism was successfully appointed and work commenced at the beginning of February 2022 to develop the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy.
- 5.12 It is recommended to adopt this strategy covering the entirety of Northamptonshire as a strategy covering a substantial geographical area is needed for a LVEP. This strategy is a



work with VisitEngland and secure support and future Government funding for tourism, which Government have stated must be at a size larger than West or North Northamptonshire individually.

- 5.13 West Northamptonshire Council, the same as North Northamptonshire Council, will still deliver specific activities at a local level, but would work with wider partners for larger initiatives when appropriate and necessary, as set out within the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy.
- 5.14 The Strategy seeks to stem the recent and relative decline of the county's visitor economy. If Northamptonshire's visitor economy had grown at the same pace as our neighbours in Cambridgeshire over the past decade it would have resulted in £36m more spending by overnight visitors and some 660 jobs either safeguarded or created.

## 6. Issues and Choices

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- 6.1 The reason for collaborating with North Northamptonshire Council to develop a county-wide tourism strategy aligns with the requirements of the new LVEP's having to be across a certain sized geography, which neither local authority area would be large enough to apply for.
- 6.2 Furthermore, the evidence sourced to develop the strategy outlined the lack of awareness or differentiation between West and North Northamptonshire from a consumer/visitor perspective, meaning the offer is stronger and clearer as Northamptonshire. Given the similar identity, perception and offer, it is therefore logical to develop the strategy and the future LVEP.
- 6.3 However, this does not mean that neither West Northamptonshire Council or North Northamptonshire Council cannot and will not deliver local initiatives specific to West or North Northamptonshire.
- 6.4 The agreed aims for creating this strategy are:
- **Increased Visits and Value:** Increase the number of staying visitors from outside the county and encourage day visits from closer to home.
  - **An Inspired & Skilled Workforce:** Develop local talent into a motivated workforce to fill vacancies, boost hospitality standards and increase pride in the place.
  - **Business Growth & Collaboration:** Support and raise awareness of our visitor economy businesses, empowering them to collaborate locally and compete nationally.
  - **Inspirational Places:** Promote the county as a destination for investment and tourism, attracting and expanding on our unique, diverse and contemporary offer.
- 6.5 A comprehensive evidence base has informed this strategy. This includes:
- A full audit of all visitor economy assets in the county including accommodation, visitor attractions, food & drink, event and retail;
  - An assessment of demand, particularly relating to consumers, their perceptions of the county, propensity to visit and key drivers as well as a market review to identify broader trends and visitor insight;

- A range of workshops, surveys, consultations and presentations to ensure that businesses and other stakeholders have had ample; opportunity to contribute to the strategy along with a review of delivery models and governance structures.

6.6 A number of key factors and insight from the research have provided the basis on which the strategy is built:

- The county has a wide-ranging array of natural and built assets and a particularly strong visitor attractions base which can be a foundation for driving new and repeat business.
- However, there is also a need for new investment, in, for example, accommodation, with improved accessibility and better linkage through path networks and new travel options.
- Visitor perceptions of the County are generally positive but awareness is low.
- Partnership marketing is a key that can help unlock the potential; and stronger collaboration is critical to progressing all four strategic goals.
- Sustainability and accessibility are principles that must be woven into the strategy from the start, underpinned by the United Nations Sustainability Goals and best practice access principles.
- Improving the skills of our residents and helping the future workforce to secure employment within the tourism and visitor economy sectors is a fundamental cornerstone for future success.
- Support for businesses in their journey towards being ambassadors for the place will help ensure visitors return time and again.

6.7 A wide range of options have been debated to inform the development of this strategy. A series of Roundtable meetings were held with different stakeholders including those representing education, natural resources, town councils, the VCSE, culture, heritage and the tourism industry. As a result, the final strategy reflects these broader perspectives and can be seen to represent a consensus amongst the sectors.

6.8 The aims will be delivered with reference to four central objectives relating both to activities and to ways of working:

6.8.1 **Dynamic and tailored marketing** – this is fundamental to increasing visitor numbers and activity will naturally focus on attracting visitors from outside of the county particularly on short breaks for both leisure and business. Activity will also engage those that already live and work in Northamptonshire as there are many opportunities and benefits for residents to also enjoy what is on offer. Research indicated a major interest from residents to visit local tourism attractions, for example, and that helps to sustain an offer which is notable in both its quality and diversity.

6.8.2 **Improving Quality and Skills** – this remains a national challenge post-Brexit but is perhaps more pronounced in Northamptonshire due to intense competition from other growing sectors like logistics. Jobs in the visitor economy can lead to good prospects and rapid promotion for motivated local people. The county has an in-built advantage given its leadership on tourism

studies with over 25 courses offered by the University, Northampton College and other providers. With these foundations, there is a real opportunity for the county to be a national exemplar that can support local people in receiving the skills they need and help growth businesses recruit staff. In addition to providing a pipeline of skilled recruits, our small businesses need support in key areas such as accessibility, action on net-zero and digital advancement. This part of the delivery programme will tackle these priorities to provide a boost to quality and productivity.

- 6.8.3 **Planning for the Future** - there is a lot already going on with major regeneration schemes reshaping our town centres and new green and blue routes providing compelling new leisure and tourism opportunities which businesses can get behind. These opportunities need to be joined up and developed as part of the 'tourism product' on offer, connected to the travel trade and promoted by the new Northamptonshire LVEP. Without doubt there are other investments that can help raise the profile of the county and create additional reasons to visit. These opportunities may be leisure or business focussed, rural or urban-based, linked to existing regeneration schemes or completely new. For example, an increase in higher end hotel accommodation is one asset that would undoubtedly help the county grow its visitor economy.
- 6.8.4 **Collaboration** – this is also a key objective in its own right and is embedded across the Strategy. New and innovative ways of working will be developed, to embed the strategic leadership which has started to develop over the last 18 months, and also because the complexity of the sector which demands that effective partnerships are forged to guarantee longer term success. There is a need to develop and support a culture of high-quality organisations working in a connected way to favour of the visitor economy. While the LVEP will spearhead this endeavour, the two Councils will need to provide some early leadership in support of the wider objective.
- 6.9 This Strategy runs from 2023 to 2030 with the delivery of much of it to be coordinated by a LVEP for Northamptonshire. Anticipated outcomes following the adoption of this strategy and the associated action plan include the following:
- Increased value of staying leisure visitors
  - Increased overall visitor spending
  - Creation of new jobs
  - Improved accommodation offer and standards
  - Creation of new businesses
  - Reduced carbon emissions
  - Increased inward investment
  - Increased pride in place
  - Increased Gross Value Added
- 6.10 The alternative option would be to not have a Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy. However, this would not be a recommended approach as both councils wouldn't have a clear direction or plan to address the challenges faced by the declining visitor economy in Northamptonshire. Without a dedicated strategy, the county might miss out on valuable opportunities to attract more visitors, generate increased spending, and create jobs which can be realised by delivering county-wide initiatives.

- 6.11 Additionally, without a coordinated effort through a joint strategy, the potential for collaboration with industry, education, and other stakeholders may remain untapped. The alternative of not having a strategy could result in a fragmented approach, where each authority operates independently, possibly leading to duplicated efforts, inefficiencies, and a lack of a unified vision for the development of the visitor economy.
- 6.12 By not adopting the Tourism Strategy, Northamptonshire might also miss the chance to align itself with the national framework set by Visit England and the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport. The absence of a strategic plan would prohibit the county's ability to establish a LVEP, which is crucial for implementing effective policies and initiatives at the local level.
- 6.13 **Next steps are as follows:**
- 6.13.1 Both local authorities to consider the Northamptonshire strategy at their respective Cabinet/Executive meetings with the intention to launch publicly, engaging with partners, stakeholders and local businesses
- 6.13.2 To begin working collaboratively with the private sector, with the support and guidance of Visit England, to develop a proposal for a Northamptonshire LVEP. Once developed, both local authorities to provide detailed plans and financial implications to be mutually agreed by the relevant bodies ahead of submitting to Visit England for LVEP accreditation.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 The development of this strategy has been funded jointly between West and North Northamptonshire Councils. UK Shared Prosperity Funding has been utilised to offset most of the cost of this work, along with the Economic Growth budget.
- 7.1.2 At this stage the Strategy does not include any reference to future costs and there are no immediate resource or financial implications arising from the recommendations. This reflects the fact that it is a joint-Council initiative and that the delivery arrangements and the proposals for the LVEP are yet to be put in place.
- 7.1.3 Maximising the use of existing resource, such as both Councils' tourism assets and staff, and measures to support local businesses, will also play an important role.

### **7.2 Legal**

- 7.2.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

### **7.3 Risk**

- 7.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

### **7.4 Consultation and Communications**

7.4.1 An extensive range of stakeholders have been engaged and consulted during the development of this strategy, from across the Visitor Economy sector including private, public and Voluntary sector organisations.

#### 7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 This report has not been considered by Scrutiny, but will be subject to call in.

#### 7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 In shaping the Northamptonshire Tourism Strategy, the UN Sustainability Development Goals have been integrated for a purpose approach. The initiatives align with economic growth (goal 8) and sustainable infrastructure (goal 9), while also emphasising the responsible tourism practices for community wellbeing (goal 11) and environmental stewardship (goals 12 and 13). By reducing carbon footprints and fostering inclusivity, this strategy not only enhances the region's appeal but reflects a commitment to global sustainability goals and responsible travel practices.

#### 7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 Delivery of this strategy will have many positive impacts for residents across Northamptonshire. It is a countywide approach designed to start us on a positive journey to managed growth, supported by both Councils working closely together, and seeking a strong and collaborative approach with the industry, key stakeholders and other public sector partners, taking account of a broader development agenda, encompassing innovation and best practice to make Northamptonshire stand out - not just as a great place to visit but also as a place to live, work, to run a business.

### 8. **Background Papers**

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8.1 [The de Bois Review: an independent review of Destination Management Organisations in England](#)

8.2 [Government Response to the Independent Review of Destination Management Organisations in England](#)

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# Northamptonshire Visitor Economy Strategy 2023 - 2030

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## Foreword

Our vision is to build a greater sense of pride across Northamptonshire and drive economic growth by attracting people to visit the county. Through collaborative and creative work across the entire visitor economy, we will provide visitors with compelling reasons to visit and to stay, delivering great times for each and every one. Visitors will leave wishing they had stayed longer and vowing to return.

Our diverse offer gives visitors a huge selection of experiences and activities to enjoy. It covers everything from medieval battlefields to motorsport, from festivals to forest bathing. Our trendsetting accommodation, fit for all pockets will reach new heights of quality and service. Our natural countryside provides many opportunities for visitors to discover new peaceful places as they enjoy a range of distinctive experiences, local food and drink and independent retail, all wrapped up in renowned hospitality.

This strategy is not just about supporting a diverse and attractive offer, it is about how our offer is packaged and presented, and how our industry works effectively together and is supported on its journey towards greater success. It is about developing strong links between people, places and sectors - to better connect up everything and everybody – resulting, ultimately, in the county’s visitor economy being way more than the sum of its parts.

The strategy sets out recommended actions on a number of shared priorities to ensure that Northamptonshire’s visitor economy can reach its potential while also improving the place local residents call home – making it greener, more accessible and always inclusive and welcoming. The move towards more local tourism and staycations is hard-wired into our goals, which include:

- **Visits and Value** - Increase the number and value of staying visitors from outside the county and encourage day visits from closer to home.
- **Great People** - Develop local talent into a motivated workforce to fill vacancies, boost standards and increase pride of place.
- **Better Business** - Support our visitor economy businesses to grow and to collaborate locally in order to be able to compete nationally.
- **Inspirational Places** - Attract investors to help deliver the further development of this unique, diverse and contemporary offer.

This strategy sets out long-term goals and short and mid-term actions that will invigorate the visitor economy and establish a new ambition for the industry in Northamptonshire. We invite you to play a role in delivering it – turning strategy into action – to realise the extensive benefits for the sector, for residents and for an unsung county that represents the best of England.

Cllr. Helen Howells  
North Northamptonshire Council  
Council

Cllr. Daniel Lister  
West Northamptonshire



## Executive Summary

This Strategy sets out to transform the fortunes of the visitor economy – currently one of Northamptonshire’s unsung economic heroes. Developed over an 18 month period this work has uncovered and drawn on a wide range of evidence that has underpinned the approach and content, supported by a wide range of contributors from across the economic landscape including public stakeholders, businesses and the third sector. A number of key factors have provided the basis on which our strategy is built:

- The county has a wide ranging array of natural and built assets and a particularly strong visitor attractions base which can be a foundation for driving new and repeat business but there is also a need for new investment, in for example, accommodation.
- Visitor perceptions of the County are generally positive but awareness is low.
- Partnership marketing is a key that can help unlock the potential - and stronger collaboration is critical to progressing all four strategic goals.
- Sustainability and accessibility are principles that will be woven into the strategy from the start, underpinned by UN Sustainability Goals and best practice access principles.
- Improving the skills of our people and helping youngsters into the workforce is a fundamental cornerstone for future success.

Our strategic goals are to increase the value that visitors bring, inspire a new and skilled workforce into the industry, support local visitor economy businesses to grow and identify future investments that will help further define and boost Northamptonshire’s visitor economy over time.

This strategy has been informed and supported by a great many different people and organisations and for successful delivery will need to connect, communicate and collaborate with all local, regional and national stakeholders with an interest. A new private sector-led Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) will be established, made up of a representative group of senior industry figures, to steer the delivery of this plan and make sure that the potential is realised, focussing on four clear objectives:

- Collaboration
- Dynamic & Tailored Marketing
- Planning for the Future, and
- Improving Quality & Skills

A sharp focus on these objectives by the LVEP will help inform and further develop the Draft Action Plan given at the end of this document. Dynamic and tailored marketing will aim to engage and welcome more visitors from far afield but also stimulate a vibrant local market to take more trips in the county, locking in wellbeing benefits for communities and residents alike. There will be a greater effort to join up policies in support of the visitor economy with for example new forms of accommodation, such as glamping sought after by newer markets, prioritised in some of our best blue and green areas, with those areas also better linked by

path networks and new travel options. Supporting businesses in their journey towards being ambassadors for the place will help ensure visitors return time and again.

## Section 1

### Introduction

1. The visitor economy will play a significant role in the future development of Northamptonshire's economy, generating revenue and creating jobs for local people, supporting numerous sectors such as hospitality, transport, food and beverage, retail and events. It will also boost the regional economy, underpin local start-up businesses and help support investment in infrastructure that is of benefit to both residents and visitors. It contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage, encourages the conservation of local sites and gives both residents and visitors the opportunity to experience a wide range of experiences and activities. The visitor economy has the potential to enhance the quality of life of residents, encourage regional, national and international visitors to the county and is part of what makes this area unique.
2. Our strategic approach to nurture the county's visitor economy will lead to a wider range of benefits for local communities, businesses, residents and visitors. By identifying and capitalising on the diverse, and often unique offer, we can better pinpoint where investment is best applied. Our strategic approach can help to manage the impact of tourism on the environment and conserve the natural and cultural assets that attract visitors in the first place. Additionally, it will stimulate a stronger connection to other policy areas and foster closer collaboration between public, private and voluntary sectors, leading to a more cohesive and coordinated effort to promote our attractive but currently under-utilised destination. Ultimately, our well-planned and executed strategy, underpinned by timely and accurate data, will create long-term sustainable growth. This document is the guiding framework that will enable this to happen.

### Current Performance

3. National statistics show over 18 million visits to North and West Northamptonshire spending close to £1 billion a year<sup>1</sup> which supports over 30,000 jobs across the county and 3,000 businesses<sup>2</sup>, including a wide range of attractions, hotels, pubs and other venues that visitors enjoy. People come to explore local attractions, picturesque countryside, travelling for leisure, on business and to meet family and friends. They spend money in shops, at events and in bars and restaurants. With around 99% of local businesses being SMEs<sup>2</sup> this spending supports many small, local and start-up businesses which add a distinctive flavour to many parts of the county, across our towns, villages and countryside. The fact that the visitor comes to enjoy the experience is clear, but this is also what differentiates the visitor economy from most other industries. It drives local spending, local impact and a *flow-through effect* where visitors'

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<sup>1</sup> VisitBritain (2023) Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS); Visit Britain (2023) Great Britain Day Visits Survey (GBDVS); Office for National Statistics (2023) International Passenger Survey

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) Business Register and Employment Survey

spending creates a virtuous circle as it is re-spent in other parts of the county's economy.

4. Over 2.0 million domestic visitors a year typically stay in the county<sup>3</sup>, of which 74% stay in West Northamptonshire, reflecting the larger geographic area and also easier access. West Northamptonshire draws 71% of total overnight spend which reflects the type of accommodation stock.
5. A Market Review, undertaken to inform this Strategy, using 2022 data indicates that Northamptonshire's visitor economy is marked by a more local catchment than other, perhaps more established, tourism destinations. As well as attracting visitors from further away, a pillar of this strategy is also to play to this strength by developing ways in which people who live in and around the county can also benefit from enjoying such a diverse and exciting offer on their doorstep and in so doing stimulate the potential to expand the reach of visitors.

*A note on the statistics used in this document*

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the visitor economy across the world and another casualty was national research that tracks visitors to and around the UK. Without visitors arriving, surveys of travellers inbound to the UK and those that measure domestic tourism were halted. Further lockdowns in early 2021 meant more gaps in the data and it was only in 2022 that the national surveys fully restarted – but on a different basis so breaking the trend.

When reporting volume and value for domestic overnight tourism and day visits we refer to 2021/22 data as the baseline year. Other Office for National Statistics sources, reporting on areas such as employment levels, were drawn from the most up to date data available at the time. An additional market review drew on big data sources, reflecting visitor activity in 2022.

6. Much of the partnership marketing activity proposed should therefore play to this local strength and highlight to people who live in and around Northamptonshire how they can benefit from having such a diverse and exciting offer on their doorstep. More local visitors will also bring other benefits, such as encouraging new local food and drink producers and suppliers to the market.
7. In terms of total domestic overnight trips, the county is in 38<sup>th</sup> place in the England league table (out of 48) but in terms of spend per trip the county is in 33<sup>rd</sup> place showing a positive tourism performance<sup>3</sup>. Encouraging further numbers of people to stay rather than come for a day will help drive greater economic impact.
8. The county welcomed some 150,000 international visitors in 2022<sup>4</sup> and business travel is a buoyant part of that mix. Five core inbound markets to the county mirror national trends but Northamptonshire outperforms England in relation to visitors from the USA and Spain - that is there are proportionally more visitors to the county from these

<sup>3</sup> VisitBritain (2023) Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS)

<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) International Passenger Survey

markets than to the UK as a whole. There are opportunities to bolster these core overseas markets with a wider programme of travel trade activity including building trade and press relationships, attendance at FITUR<sup>5</sup> and partnerships with VisitBritain.

9. Current performance leads us to conclude that over the longer term the strategy needs to consider investment in other new primary reasons to visit which should be explored and piloted within the first three years of delivery activity. This will generate greater trip-taking from further afield. Action will support the examination of a range of transformational projects aimed at either business and/or leisure markets. These new *reasons to visit* will over time create new market growth, longer-stays and higher spending per head and drive economic prosperity for the local area, benefitting both businesses and residents in the county.
10. If Northamptonshire's visitor economy had grown over the past decade at the same pace as our neighbours in Cambridgeshire it would have resulted in £36m more spending by overnight visitors and some 660 jobs either safeguarded or created. This strategy aims to move the county up the league table and deliver this potential.

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<sup>5</sup> The major international tourism trade fair held in Madrid in January of each year

## Northamptonshire's Visitor Economy Asset Base

11. A comprehensive geo-located asset audit revealed that there are 4,478 establishments across the county, covering accommodation, food and drink, attractions, retail, sport & entertainment, festivals, events, and meetings and conferences.
12. **Accommodation** - The audit showed the county's split of 561 serviced/non-serviced accommodation establishments is about average in density terms for England, although West Northamptonshire is particularly strong in terms of serviced stock such as hotels, B&Bs and pubs. Northamptonshire as a whole has a higher-than-average number of branded budget hotels, with particular clusters in West Northamptonshire often near to major road arteries. The majority of the larger hotels, non-serviced accommodation and campsites are also in West Northamptonshire. Both North and West Northamptonshire have an undersupply of city/town centre serviced accommodation when compared to the Great Britain average.
13. **Restaurants and cafés** dominate the food offer, with a number of mobile caterers also operating at the county's festivals and events. As would be expected the distribution of the county's 1,321 restaurants, cafés, pubs and nightclubs is more uniform across the study area with population centres seeing greater numbers, shown particularly in Northampton and Kettering. North Northamptonshire has an undersupply of catering units whereas West Northamptonshire has an oversupply when compared with the GB average.
14. As a broad and overall estimate, some 20% of spending in restaurants and cafés is likely to be related to visitor spending, but some cafés and pubs will be more reliant on visitor income depending on their location. Quality, when measured against the Food Standards Agency's scheme, sees 81% of establishments in the county receiving the highest score with North Northamptonshire having a higher proportion of establishments achieving these high scores.
15. **Visitor Attractions** - There is an even distribution of the county's 184 visitor attractions across the county, with clusters around the main centres of population and relatively more in the West than the North. A further 111 churches continue to hold an interest for a niche market, reflecting a strong historic heritage. Experiences dominate the visitor attractions sector, with historic houses and other properties, museums and country parks also remaining popular. Golf clubs, as well as spectator sports (particularly first-class cricket and premiership rugby), remain important both for the local visitor and as a trip motivator for those further afield. This asset class is high quality, a credit to the county and benefiting from easy access by a wide market catchment.
16. **Retail** – The county has a strong retail offer with 773 independent shops and 945 multiples across the country. The West has a greater number of independent shops while the North more multiple retailers. Shops and amenities make up 46% of supply, food and drink 37%, and clothes and fashion retailers 12%. The urban centres host much of the retail, both in terms of comparison and convenience categories. Rushden Lakes attracts some 7 million visits a year with the North generally attracting more day visitors while the West attracts more staying visitors.

17. In terms of quality of the retail offer over the last five years, Northamptonshire has been below the national average in the percentage of both Premium and Mass retailers, but above average for the Value offer. West Northamptonshire has a slightly higher quality retail offer.
18. Overall, the North/West split in **entertainment** venues is very even. A total of 257 (57%) of pubs, bars and nightclubs are located in West Northamptonshire, many of these being located in Northampton.
19. **Festivals and events** are an important component of Northamptonshire's visitor economy, with 256 events annually distributed evenly across the area, though with a pronounced nucleus in the urban centres. The size and scale of events is varied with the larger flagship events (such as Formula 1 and Moto GP at Silverstone) attracting hundreds of thousands of people and having significant economic impact. However, these remain outliers and there are many attractions that only run one or two events each year but which nevertheless are important as part of a diverse visitor economy, helping local communities showcase themselves and providing social benefits for residents as well as visitors.

**Case Study: Vinterjazz: A 3-week-long musical feast in Copenhagen, Denmark**

During the course of the 10 days the total audience numbers reached more than 250,000 people. Visitors are divided evenly among the age groups 0-35 years, 36-55 years and 56 years or older. Nine out of ten visitors are Danish. Foreign visitors are primarily Swedish, Norwegian, German, British and American. Established in 1979, 10 days, 100 venues, more than 1,200 concerts. One of Europe's biggest jazz festivals. Always starts the first Friday of July and last 10 days. The concerts takes place at clubs, cafes, bars, concert halls and open-air stages in the city's parks and squares and along the harbour front.

20. **Meetings and conferences** can deliver high economic impact. The county's location is a huge advantage for business tourism – particularly footloose corporate meetings, conferences and events. Northamptonshire prides itself on being easy to reach and a great place for business. The reality is that the current business product does not always support this objective in terms of higher value, large conferences and exhibitions. The county does benefit from proximity to the M1 and the increase in pubs with meetings capacity has helped sustain a smaller meetings market which can be developed further.

## Visitors' Perceptions of Northamptonshire

21. A representative sample of 1,000 people from across the United Kingdom were quizzed on their perceptions of Northamptonshire along with their expectations and actual experiences. The awareness of the county is limited. Whilst people may know roughly where it is, spontaneous associations are most likely to be 'Northampton', 'Silverstone' 'countryside' or 'nothing'. The ease of access is generally recognised with the principal road network well understood. At the heart of the challenge therefore is a simple lack of knowledge about what the area has to offer. The county's land-locked location, with

other counties on all sides, doesn't help with clarity, nor does the strength of the offer in many of those neighbouring counties. This in itself presents an opportunity for Northamptonshire in promoting and marketing a wider offer to build and raise awareness.

22. There is no tangible difference in views between those who would wish to visit West Northamptonshire or North Northamptonshire or how either audience perceive the county. This lack of difference in awareness of places and interest in visiting the various attractions combine to suggest that knowledge of the area is not strong enough to drive differentiation at this stage. Such insight strongly supports the decision for both councils to work together as more will be gained for both areas through collaborative promotion of the whole area.
23. To strengthen Northamptonshire's position as a leisure destination, it is important to convey a clear message of what there is to see and do. Whilst awareness and knowledge are low, perceptions are generally positive. Importantly, there are currently no actively negative associations with the area and so the focus should be on giving clear 'reasons to visit' and ensure that information and inspiration are easily accessible to prospective visitors. The potential to develop local itineraries or suggested combinations of trips that string elements of the stay together could be beneficial. Such a position supports collaborative efforts generally and partnership marketing in particular.
24. The country is seeing a cost-of-living crisis and central bank forecasts suggest no significant GDP growth until 2026. So, the medium-term outlook is constrained with visitors seeking out cost-effective trips and looking for new ways to spend leisure time. Northamptonshire is not perceived to be expensive and has affordable accommodation and visitor attractions. The parks, landscapes, villages and other amenities can offer many low-price or free family activities. Taking advantage of this current challenging economic context is built into the Action Plan.

## The Views of Businesses and Stakeholders

25. Some 500 individuals responded to surveys aimed at three different Northamptonshire audiences: visitor economy businesses, interested stakeholders and residents.
26. Businesses drew attention to a challenging macro-economic business environment and noted specific challenges such as securing the necessary investment and staff / recruitment difficulties. Opportunities identified were usually specific to individual businesses but more general ideas included widening the attractiveness and awareness of the area, increasing the independent retail offer and developing new arrangements for marketing and promotion.

*"A general lack of joined up thinking and sustainable planning by relevant authorities which would provide opportunities for local suppliers & traders." Respondent, February 2023*

27. Stakeholders believe the most important intervention needed to realise a new vision should be a focus on people and organisations working effectively together and better connecting activities relating to the visitor economy to the Councils' other strategic and development priorities. Diverse partnerships to improve outputs and delivery, and longer-term capital-intensive strategic interventions, were also deemed important.
28. In terms of strategic priorities, improving marketing and promotion ranked highly for both businesses and stakeholders, followed by a drive to become more accessible and sustainable, and improving collaboration between public and private sectors. Stakeholders also noted the importance of skills and workforce development, town centre investment, support to local businesses, improvements to the visitor experience and the need to ensure benefits to local communities and residents  
*“Investing in a range of activities to populate a year-round programme of arts and cultural events and supporting organisations to attempt larger scale cultural projects with ambitions for drawing larger crowds from further afield would be a positive element of the strategy moving forward.” Respondent, Survey of Visitor Attractions, August 2022*

## The Views of Residents

29. In terms of the benefits brought by a thriving visitor economy, residents concluded that it gave an opportunity for resources for environmental protection – whether that was conserving natural resources, improving biodiversity or protecting special places. They also saw the same type of opportunity to support the cultural fabric of the place, noting also that economic benefits included investment in the public realm – an opportunity where the visitor economy can contribute for mutual benefit. Top concerns were litter, overcrowding and instances of different types of visitors clashing, such as cyclists and drivers.
30. A variety of product strengths were identified by all respondents including the special nature of the county, its river, the history, heritage, stately homes, and the cultural environment.

## The Policy Context

31. Like other sectors, parts of the visitor economy are currently suffering from difficulties in recruitment, but this masks other more underlying structural challenges including securing clear and attractive employee pathways; encouraging all employers to be dedicated to upskilling and retaining people; and to supporting an educational system that is fully motivated to developing the talent pipeline.
32. This is not just a Northamptonshire or regional issue and reflects the impacts of both Brexit and the COVID pandemic. The former cut off a pipeline of ready workers from eastern Europe while COVID meant staff left the workforce and have not returned. The strategic implications of these trends are profound, both for individual businesses and the sector as a whole.



33. This strategy will connect closely and in partnership with Northamptonshire’s new Local Skills Improvement Plan where businesses will have a strong voice in local skills planning by working closely with further education providers, local leaders and other stakeholders. The councils also include promotion of better training, further education and employment opportunities for young people in their priorities for the future. Improving training and skills for the sector, and tackling the underlying structural issues is an important part of this strategy.
34. Northamptonshire as a whole has successfully secured over £10m of funding from the UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Fund to be delivered by March 2025. The funding will contribute to a variety of visitor economy projects including:
- Events to attract visitors to High Streets
  - A new Visitor Centre at Rushden Lakes
  - New and improved cycleways and paths, resulting in increased active travel
  - Decarbonisation and improving the natural environment
  - Support for new business start-ups and continued support at all stages of development
  - Driving employment growth, with tailored support and training to help people into work.
  - Employment support for the existing workforce to upskill

#### **A Local Visitor Economy Partnership for the county**

The councils will jointly apply to be the area’s Local Visitor Economy Partnership, working with a range of other local and regional partners to deliver more joined up support for the sector and drawing on other expertise from organisations, such as VisitEngland. As an officially recognised partnership accreditation will allow the county to forge better connections to national partners, participate in national and international campaigns, foster peer to peer networking and allow Northamptonshire easier access to Levelling Up and other government funding.

## **UK Consumer Trends and Tourism Trends**

35. Domestic tourism has seen a steady rise in the United Kingdom in recent years, with more and more Britons opting to stay closer to home for their holidays. This trend has been driven by a range of factors, from COVID to cost considerations, to a desire for safety, authenticity and less carbon intensive travel options. With the pound weaker against other currencies and ongoing economic uncertainty, many people are likely to devote a greater proportion of their income to more practical expenses. According to VisitBritain’s Domestic Sentiment Tracker, two thirds of people are concerned about the cost-of-living crisis, with retirees and older independents the most pessimistic. This is likely to encourage people to take fewer trips, choose cheaper accommodation, look for more free things to do and spend less on eating out. Most consumers are planning to spend less on holidays this year. This typically favours domestic travel and other value travel options and, given wider growth forecasts, is likely to persist through to 2025,

resulting in a unique opportunity for Northamptonshire to capitalise and benefit from the current economic climate.

36. One of the key drivers of domestic tourism in the UK is the sharing economy. The rise of platforms such as Airbnb and VRBO has made it easier and more affordable for people to travel within the country. These platforms provide a range of accommodation options, from budget-friendly apartments to luxury homes, which cater to the different needs and preferences of travellers. Digitalisation, the growth of AI and travel apps will continue to provide more immersive and interactive experiences at booking stage, within destination and at review stage. Remote working offers more options for increased 'Blesisure' (part business travel, part leisure travel) that combines both types of trips in different ways.
37. Another factor that has contributed to the growth of domestic visitor trends in the UK is the availability of affordable travel options. With low-cost public travel, it has become easier and more affordable for people to travel within the country. This has encouraged more people to take weekend and short breaks, or visit friends and family in different parts of the country, although higher fuel prices are likely to be a dampening factor for those not using public transport.
38. Moreover, many people are looking for unique and authentic travel experiences, which is also driving domestic tourism. The county has a rich cultural heritage, and offers a range of experiences, from historic landmarks to unspoilt countryside. Tourists, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, seek experiences that are off the beaten path and are willing to travel to new areas to find them. This combined with the increasing popularity of outdoor activities has seen more people taking advantage of the opportunity to experience the UK's landscapes in a more active and engaged way. With countryside that is relatively unknown yet accessible, these trends favour counties like Northamptonshire and can be exploited by a digital-first marketing plan that prioritises social media channels to reach new audiences.
39. The glamping and outdoor holiday market has grown rapidly over the past decade, due to a focus on nature and wellness and the rise of both social media and the experience economy. A trend towards structures like cabins that can provide year-round occupancy, together with a shift towards longer stays of higher value, mean that glamping is no longer only a summer option, increasing its potential. Consumer behaviour has shifted to a longer booking season and demand for greater flexibility in booking terms. Accommodation and experiences centred around Northamptonshire's trails and countryside, including the River Nene can directly meet this trend.
40. There is also a growing consumer concern about the climate crisis and a reported willingness to travel closer to home to reduce the carbon footprint. Consumers' growing environmental concerns also tie in with a consumer commitment to improve wellbeing and increased demand for greener wellness travel options. Beauty/spa treatments are the most sought-after wellness holiday activity with healing, nature-based wellness holidays becoming increasingly popular. These holidays offer a connection with nature, outdoor activities and foster environmental awareness. They appeal to those concerned about climate impact by prioritising well-being while minimising the ecological footprint. In recent years, the UK has also seen a surge in popularity of staycations. Partly this

trend has been driven by the desire to spend more quality time with family and friends, as well as to escape the hectic pace of everyday life. Overseas holidays are less likely to be taken than UK holidays due to the current cost-of-living crisis meaning an element of UK based 'staycation' preference is likely to continue.

41. VisitEngland research suggests that domestic overnight travel is returning to pre-pandemic levels, although the cost-of-living crisis has had an impact on day trips with 44% of the public stating they may reduce or stop taking them. However, the impact of personal finances in reducing day trips is counter-balanced by consumers that are increasingly 'comfortable' post-COVID with everyday activities and who discovered many more local destinations during the pandemic. As a result, VisitEngland reports a rise in most day-trip activities compared to 2021, with the exception of trips to 'outdoor parks or scenic areas' – a destination type that was very popular throughout the pandemic.

## Section 2

### Our Vision and Strategic Goals

42. Our vision is to build a greater sense of pride across the county and drive economic growth by inspiring people to visit Northamptonshire, to stay longer in the area and keep returning again and again. Through collaborative and creative work across the entire visitor economy, we will provide visitors with compelling reasons to visit, to stay and deliver great times for each and every one. Visitors will leave wishing they had stayed longer and vowing to return.
43. With this strategy in place, the visitor economy is set to make a growing contribution to Northamptonshire's overall economic prosperity, providing income and jobs, boosting the rural economy and helping underpin our commitment to net-zero. The visitor economy is already important supporting some 4,500 businesses employing over 30,000 people but it can work smarter still given clear leadership, clarity on the priorities, and concerted collaborative actions.
44. This strategy provides the opportunity for wider impact and benefits of economic prosperity and pride of place to be harnessed. These wider benefits will align to our Northamptonshire Integrated Care Strategy, Live Your Best Life Ambitions, and the work beneath this within our Health and Wellbeing Boards and Local Area Partnerships.
45. Our strategic goals are as follows:
  - 1. Increased Visits and Value**
    - Increase the number of staying visitors from outside the county and encourage day visits from closer to home.
  - 2. Inspired & Skilled Workforce**
    - Develop local talent into a motivated workforce to fill vacancies, boost hospitality standards and increase pride in the place
  - 3. Business Growth & Collaboration**
    - Support and raise awareness of our visitor economy businesses, empowering them to collaborate locally and compete nationally.
  - 4. Inspirational Places**
    - Promote the county as a destination for investment and tourism, attracting and expanding on our unique, diverse and contemporary offer.

#### **The Scale of Northamptonshire's Visitor Economy**

Tourism is already important to the county. A mix of 560 accommodation businesses and 180 high quality visitor attractions combine with other parts of the visitor economy to drive spending of £1 billion a year with over 18 million visits.<sup>6</sup>

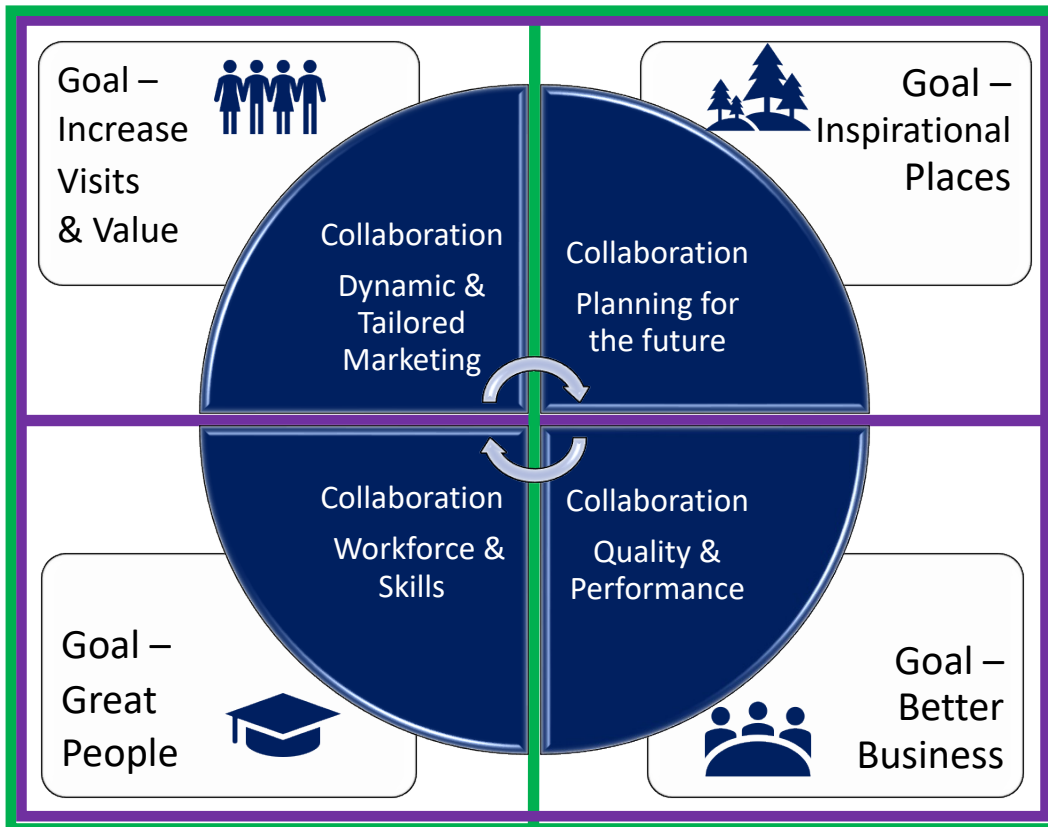
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<sup>6</sup> VisitBritain (2023) Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS); Visit Britain (2023) Great Britain Day Visits Survey (GBDVS); Office for National Statistics (2023) International Passenger Survey

This supports 30,000 jobs and 3,000 businesses across the county, the majority of them small businesses rooted in their local community.<sup>7</sup>

## Core Objectives

46. The figure below shows how four core objectives will help deliver our goals of increasing visits and value, creating inspirational places, great people and better business. These are:
1. Collaboration
  2. Dynamic & Tailored Marketing
  3. Planning for the Future, and
  4. Improving Quality & Skills
47. The cross-cutting themes of sustainability and accessibility, represented in green and purple in the box below, are fundamental elements of each goal and objective, where every action taken will also be viewed through these two lenses.



48. Collaboration is embedded across the Strategy with new measures to be developed and agreed to ensure effective delivery, reduced duplication and to promote a culture of high performance across the network. This will include supporting existing partnerships, developing new approaches where needed and adopting the latest technology to keep

<sup>7</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) Business Register and Employment Survey

groups informed and on track. It will mean regular conferences, events and training sessions, and ensuring that ownership for delivery is organised at the right level, accountability is clear and success measures are agreed and monitored.

49. In particular, this document aligns to eight of the UN's Sustainability Goals where this strategy can directly contribute to the aims of, for example, good health and wellbeing, education, work and economic growth, sustainable communities and climate action. See the Appendices for more details.
50. For action on accessibility, we draw inspiration from the three principles of accessible tourism ensuring that all our customer-facing activities deliver the right information; that facilities fully meet the need; and that there is plenty of responsive and well trained staff who understand the needs of visitors with impairments.
51. These objectives and themes reflect feedback gained throughout an in-depth research phase and backed up by interviews with senior leaders, surveys of visitor attractions, tourism businesses, residents and stakeholders, together with industry gatherings, workshops and consultation events.

The development of this strategy has been guided by an evidence-based approach which has included significant primary research examining the county's visitor profile, the asset base (its 'product'), planning policy, economic and employment impact, perceptions of Northamptonshire together with an assessment of the way the visitor economy is organised in other parts of the country. We think this is the first time that such a range of insight specifically for the county has been drawn together and it provides us with firm foundations on which to build.

## Cross Sector Collaboration

52. Collaboration is at the heart of this Strategy.
53. Both councils have identified that policy development for the visitor economy needs to use the county as the defining unit. Tourists know nothing about administrative boundaries but recognise counties and research has backed up the logic for us to work together in support of the whole county. This was particularly evident in the survey of consumers undertaken as part of the initial research phase. Strong coordinating measures have been put in place to make joint working timely and effective and both authorities are keen to encourage a range of partnerships and activity. Related work on broader visions for both areas is underway and will inform the direction set out in this strategy.
54. After some turbulent years, not least the COVID-19 pandemic, the time is right to rejuvenate working relationships to harness the full extent of an acknowledged, but largely unrealised, opportunity. This spirit of partnership will be extended across the public, private and voluntary sectors, both in the county and beyond our boundaries where this makes sense. But it is closer to home where we need to start, establishing

new ways of connecting where we know many partners are keen to work collectively to realise the potential. A survey of businesses and stakeholders indicates widespread agreement that a focus on people and organisations working effectively together is critical to realising our Vision.

55. In Year 1, we will establish a new Local Visitor Economy Partnership to oversee the delivery of this strategy, which initially will be serviced by the two Councils until its governance and other arrangements are formally established. Recruitment to an official Board, and of a Chair, will be subject to an open process and will seek to secure a diverse group of experts drawn from a range of backgrounds. The Board's role will reflect national and local requirements and encompass the broad range of priorities as set out in this document including marketing activity, support to businesses, skills and workforce development, product development and resource management. The Draft Action Plan set out in the Appendix may evolve after scrutiny by the new Chair and Board.
56. The LVEP Board will wish to review the ways in which collaboration can be enhanced across and between public, private and voluntary sectors. Drawing on suggestions made as part of the recent consultation this may include:
  - An annual visitor economy conference.
  - A dedicated network for our visitor attractions given the strength of this sector and the opportunities it gives for local tourism and extending the length of stay.
  - A high-impact Northamptonshire Marketing Group with the remit to strengthen collaboration, energise and activate a new brand, and produce the right insight to deliver effective marketing arrangements.
57. Staff from the two councils will be dedicated to support these new working arrangements with resources devoted to partnerships, delivery and evaluation. The arrangements will be fully aligned to national objectives and have the support of VisitEngland, reflecting the new Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Northamptonshire.
58. The strategy roll-out from the launch stage needs an appointed Board to manage the process and include members experienced in all areas of tourism management, business and local government. Industry and other partners will be invited to be at the forefront of efforts to ensure that what is done is consumer-relevant, joins up different partners and has measurable impact.

## Dynamic & Tailored Marketing

59. Encouraging our loyal and local market, as well as reaching out and attracting new visitors needs a collective and cohesive effort with everyone pulling in the same direction. Both groups of visitors offer opportunity. We know that Northamptonshire's visitor economy is marked by a more local catchment than many other destinations which has a number of advantages:
  - The number of repeat visitors is higher with customer loyalty likely to be easier to win and maintain.

- Visits are more likely to be more spontaneous, can be more easily stimulated by local offers and are less affected by issues like bad weather and traffic congestion.
  - They support local services and small businesses, have a lower carbon impact and give an opportunity for health and other benefits for our residents.
  - Local visitors are more likely to support and invest into the local and circular economy
60. While local visitors are important there is also an acknowledged longer-term need to draw in new spending by building greater awareness of the county and attracting leisure and business visitors from further afield. These visitors can be encouraged to stay for short-breaks and longer stays by a combination of concerted marketing activities, better packaging of complementary assets, greater levels of cross-selling and longer-term investment.

#### **Blue and Green Infrastructure Opportunities**

The 91-mile River Nene, threading its way through Northamptonshire's Nene Valley, is one of the longest rivers in the UK and offers a superb opportunity to attract many different types of visitor to enjoy a quintessentially and internationally important English landscape shaped over millennia. A mix of history, cultural heritage, natural habitats, trails, boating and numerous other activities await the visitor. The river can be further linked to bring in other marine experiences such as the Grand Union canal network and the museum at Stoke Bruerne. The county has numerous country parks of which eight are nature reserves or wetlands of importance. These assets will be better connected and promoted while small businesses developing new products will also be supported.

61. How we reach these audiences who live further away and encourage them to come to the county is a key challenge and one which is not about the size of marketing budgets, but about the delivery of a more sophisticated mix of awareness raising, PR, social media and other activity. The need for an innovative approach to putting Northamptonshire on the map supports the engagement of a creative agency to help deliver an integrated campaign, overseen by the Northamptonshire Marketing Group. This will include working closely with VisitBritain on the US and European markets.
62. A range of branding and promotional approaches have been used in the county over the years targeted at both consumers and businesses and aimed at attracting all sorts of visitors to stay, work, visit and experience the county. These campaigns have often lacked investment when compared with better resourced destinations and their ability to reach consumers has been largely limited to websites and PR activity. More major campaigns drawing on the county's local food and drink, its history, culture, natural heritage and outdoors will provide a strong basis to interest markets from further afield.
63. It is however universally agreed amongst all stakeholders involved that the most important factor in making this happen is better collaborative working: across sectors, products and places and to connect these opportunities together, package them and promote them collectively. The new Board will have oversight of this mission. We have not tried to second-guess how the branding and marketing plan might look in this



document – so for example, have not identified target customers as the foundations need to be put in place first.

#### **Case Study: Wildfoods Festival, Hokitika, New Zealand**

Wildfoods Festival is an annual food festival in Hokitika, New Zealand, held in March. This creative food festival is known for a vast collection of unusual foods, including huhu grubs, lamb's testicles and more. Not for the faint of heart, this unique food and drink festival is for the adventurous, although some stalls provide more normal types of food. Even if you don't come for the strange food, there are plenty of other activities to enjoy, including a Feral Fashion competition, a firework display and plenty of local musical entertainment.

## Planning for the Future

64. Regeneration schemes now underway in many Northamptonshire towns will undoubtedly help attract visitors. Examples include
  - the Market Square project in Northampton which includes a new large event space with a planned annual events programme, which is part of the Towns Fund and Future High Street Fund £33 million investment;
  - the Watermeadows project in Towcester which will enhance the visitor experience of this much-loved natural area; and
  - the Corby Towns Fund which is investing £20m in improvements to include an arts and community centre.
65. Active travel and Greenway projects will also support local visitors to find their way around more easily, such as the *Smart Move Northamptonshire* scheme. Planning policy clearly supports the sector with, for example, the North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy Vision stating its strong focus on growing investment in tourism, leisure and green infrastructure and the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy stating that tourism, visitor and cultural industries form an important part of the economy for both urban and rural areas. The night-time economy can also be further developed in our towns offering other opportunities for businesses, visitors and residents.
66. While planning policy is supportive of the visitor economy, it has not always been possible for it to proactively set out a new vision for the type of facilities that will put the county on the map. This is unsurprising as land-use planning in Northamptonshire has historically been undertaken at a more local level. However, the two new Unitary authorities have a commitment to a county-wide approach to the visitor economy, and offer an unrivalled opportunity to think differently. Future investments relating to the Visitor Economy will be looked on favourably where they meet planning policy requirements and aid the delivery of this strategy.
67. The Strategy will support the continued development of a network of traffic-free routes and trails reflecting broader net zero ambitions and meeting visitors' increasing demands for lower carbon leisure breaks. Given our strong local market, these facilities will also give residents new leisure options closer to home to enjoy, relax and feel at one

with nature. Numerous benefits relating to health, wellbeing, net zero and bio-diversity will accrue for both our residents and visitors as well as the wider environment. Further development of the countryside and the network of walks and trails will underpin a strengthened sustainable rural tourism offer and also support previous investments by adding to existing clusters. There are opportunities to encourage new visitors with alternative forms of accommodation such as glamping and camping, and these types of facilities will be encouraged, particularly near trails and local natural assets.

68. The visitor attractions sector is a diverse and buoyant part of the county's asset base, much of which is built on a rich seam of natural and built heritage which is way ahead of most of England in terms of its historical significance. Well over 100 churches alone offers rich pickings for niche markets in architecture and ancestry. Equally important is much of the landscape and wildlife, recognised in areas such as the Nene Valley Special Protection Area.

**Case Study: Tarraco Viva – Tarragona**

Spreading ancient history in an attractive way that provokes reflection about our past. That was the aim when Tarraco Viva was set up in 1999. "History for everyone" could be the motto for this international festival dedicated to spreading the history of Roman times. Tarraco Viva has become a benchmark event thanks to both the proposals that it makes and the quality that it offers. Military life and daily life; the legions, the theatre, the gladiators, the homes, the cuisine, the writings, the engineering, the fashion... all recreated with a common denominator: exactness. Getting to know the past is not something that is confined, rather it is the best way to understand the present and, therefore, to be able to choose the future. You will probably discover that you are more Roman than you thought! Welcome to Tarraco...

69. In general, however, the consumer remains largely unaware of many of these assets or their place in history. There is an opportunity to further develop, package and present this authentic offer in a more compelling way, attracting both new and repeat visitors. A range of product development is also needed including new accommodation that is rooted in the place, making better connections between places and cross-promoting assets in a way that increases their appeal and makes it easy for the visitor to purchase. Other destinations, such as Ireland, have adopted a structured process to developing their small businesses and we will support such a *Visitor Experience Development Planning* process to engage businesses connected to both Blue and Green infrastructure to maximise their potential. Additionally, relatively simple actions will also be reviewed, with visitor attractions invited to agree a set of core opening hours for example, which will increase visitor numbers and extend the effective operating season.

**Case Study: The Wild Atlantic Way**

*Visitor Experience Development Planning* has helped businesses on the west coast of Ireland make strong connections to the natural and cultural heritage around them and be part of telling a compelling story of the area. This work has helped deliver a consistent message that inspires visitors to recommend and return. This is

more than providing a great individual tourism experience – it is about businesses understanding and playing their part in incorporating the unique natural and cultural signature of the place and then telling that story with passion.

70. To grow the visitor economy over the longer term, Northamptonshire would benefit from new investments that create additional reasons to visit, particularly to attract people living further away. These opportunities may be leisure or business focused, rural or urban based, linked to existing regeneration schemes or completely new. The evidence base that informed this strategy revealed some product shortcomings, including a lack of higher-end hotels and a scarcity of contemporary conferencing and exhibition space.
71. A Futures Review, overseen by the LVEP, will answer the question *What sort of attractors can now help put Northamptonshire at the centre of the tourism map?* Building on the evidence base produced to inform this strategy, the Review will:
1. Involve the industry, stakeholders and residents in a discussion about new and creative opportunities, rooted in Northamptonshire’s heritage and history, that embody the county as a whole.
  2. Examine new and emerging international leisure and business tourism concepts that can provide the county with a palette of development opportunities to consider.
  3. Examine the fit between these concepts and the wide range of development sites already identified in regeneration plans across the county.
  4. Review ways in which larger scale visitor economy projects can be better connected into the councils’ other strategic and development priorities.

#### **Case Study: Silverstone**

Some strategic sites have already seen significant and recent investment, for example, the interactive museum Silverstone Circuit, a recent 197-room hotel operated by Hilton and *The Wing* conferencing space with five exhibition halls and 12,500 m<sup>2</sup> of meetings and events space. This will drive further growth and help the wider economy of the sub-region.

## **Improving Quality & Skills**

72. There is an acknowledged need to improve the quality of elements of the offer and also a pressing challenge to encourage more people to take up a career in hospitality, tourism and events. Currently these issues are linked and this objective seeks to address them via a range of actions, the majority of which will be as a result of a strategic partnership with the county’s educational institutions, business support organisations, Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP) and other providers.
73. When measured by online reviews, the quality of serviced accommodation is lower than other parts of England. This partly reflects the age of some of the stock and will be addressed by a mix of investment, business support and training. Town centre regeneration schemes have already meant the withdrawal of some older

accommodation stock that may have previously dragged down quality. Many new innovative business concepts are emerging in the county and continue to help lift quality standards and diversify the offer.

74. We highlight the need for collective action to address the recruitment crisis in the industry which is reducing business capacity, productivity and profitability. Working with colleges, universities, and other bodies, we will work to develop a talent pipeline of motivated and skilled employees to provide increased numbers into the industry. Working together, we need to design a new way to fill roles such as chefs, food service teams, kitchen staff and front of house. The exact activity and partnership arrangements will be developed after more discussions with the educational sector and agencies involved. We see this task as one that crosses counties and so may result in a multi-partner / agency work programme.
75. The new Local Skills Improvement Plan presents an opportunity to prioritise the visitor economy, as there is currently a limited focus on the talent pipeline within education, little employer engagement in schools and the potential to extend the central careers hub offer to help deliver the strategic approach needed. A key goal of this strategy is to address this issue – with indicative actions are set out in the Draft Action Plan below.
76. The county’s strengths in travel and tourism education, particularly the University of Northampton’s portfolio of relevant courses at under-graduate and graduate level, can also be levered for mutual benefit with students, lecturers and professors all able to contribute positively to the delivery of this strategy. A strong connection will be made between academics and practitioners via specific projects set out in the Draft Action Plan.

#### **Producing Tomorrow’s Travel and Tourism Leaders**

Northamptonshire is well placed to support the visitor economy with 25 further and higher education courses offered by 14 colleges and universities. These range all the way from Level 1 vocational training courses in Hospitality, through level 3 diplomas in food and beverage apprenticeships to degree and post-graduate courses in Events Management, International Tourism and Hotel Management. This gives a great basis to encourage a home-grown workforce that can help professionalise the sector and act as long-term ambassadors for the county.

77. In addition to workforce development, support will also be offered to our many small businesses to help them address other key issues that align to this strategy:
  - Access for All – via an option of having an access audit and help with the production of an AccessAble Guide
  - Net-Zero Action – to ensure that businesses can drive down energy costs, reduce carbon, reflect visitor requirements and help develop local supply chains.
  - Digital Advance – to ensure that businesses are keeping up with and effectively using the latest business management technology.
  - Work Readiness – to ensure that people entering the workforce have the practical and knowledge skills to make a great impression, solve problems, communicate effectively and be customer focussed.

### Access Able

A priority cross-cutting theme is being better at welcoming all types of visitors who may have differing needs, whether that's a parent with a pushchair, a wheelchair user, an older person or a visitor with dementia. Northamptonshire will aim to become a UK inclusion exemplar, encouraging all businesses that welcome visitors to create their own accessibility guide, both because it's the right thing to do and because of the scale of the opportunity. With a market that is 19% of the total population, with total spending power of over £15bn a year, and who stay longer than average, this is one key to unlock new visitors to the county.

78. This strategy sets out a blueprint for Northamptonshire to boost the economic value of the visitor economy with a focus on four core themes – attracting more visits and value; developing our people and workforce; supporting local businesses; and providing the impetus to attract new investment that inspires new places and spaces. This is a countywide approach designed to start us on a positive journey to managed growth, supported by both unitary authorities working closely together, and seeking a strong and collaborative approach with the industry, key stakeholders and other public sector partners. The new Local Visitor Economy Partnership, chaired and led by the industry, will be the way in which this strategy is delivered, taking account of a broader development agenda, encompassing innovation and best practice to make Northamptonshire stand out - not just as a great place to visit but also as a place to work, to run a business and to invest.

## What does Success Look Like?

79. This Strategy runs from 2023 to 2030 with the delivery of much of it to be coordinated by a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Northamptonshire. The targets below relate to the main strategic goals and will be reviewed by the LVEP Board, along with an assessment of the early priorities and funding opportunities.
80. This Strategy will drive significant benefits for the county and is foreseen to create over 2,000 additional jobs and over 200 new start-up businesses directly supporting places, residents and communities. More staying visitor spending will mean greater economic impact flowing through local supply chains. Implementation will see Northamptonshire rise up the tourism league table with a foreseen 7% growth in visitor nights resulting in a place in England's top 20 tourism counties.

## Our Strategic Targets

### *Increased Visits and Value*

- **Boost Value** – Increase the value of staying leisure visitors by 8% in real terms over the period of the strategy (measured by visitor spending).
- **Increase Turnover** – Increase overall visitor spending from £972m to £1.1 billion in nominal terms over the seven year period (+13%).
- **Correct Perceptions** – Repeat the consumer survey every 3 years to track the proportion of people who *Don't know what there is to see and do in Northamptonshire*, reducing the current 2022 baseline of 35%.

### *Inspired & Skilled Workforce*

- **Create Jobs** – Facilitate the creation of 2,100 additional jobs in the visitor economy over the seven year period of the Strategy (+7%)
- **Offer Opportunity** – Provide a pathway to encourage both younger people and older workers to benefit from jobs in the visitor economy (*numerical target to be confirmed*).
- **Improve Quality** – Establish a strategic partnership to drive up standards of accommodation by bringing 75% of the County’s accommodation stock into the two top quartiles (current baseline 60%).

### *Business Growth & Collaboration*

- **Stimulate Local Enterprise** – Support the development of 210 new businesses rooted within the County’s visitor economy. (+7%)
- **Act on Net Zero** – Encourage 25% of the County’s professional accommodation sector to sign up to a recognised sustainability standard or undertake related activity (140 Businesses).
- **Provide a Welcome for All** – Encourage 50% of the County’s visitor attractions to sign up to a recognised accessibility scheme or undertake related activity (92 businesses).

### *Inspirational Places*

- **Increase the amount of Investment and Maximise its impact** – Provide visitor economy expertise to 5 regeneration partnerships to help attract visitors to these revitalised destinations.
- **Generate Community Value** – Improve residents’ perceptions of the value of tourism by increasing the proportion who *Strongly agree that visitors bring benefits to the community* by 15% (Baseline 40%).
- **Inspire new offers** – Working with 30 businesses, attract more short break leisure visitors by developing and packaging two new offers focussed on the County’s Blue and Green infrastructure.

## **Monitoring**

81. The Strategy will be monitored quarterly and reviewed annually by the LVEP, working closely with other partners, the industry and the Councils. Leads will be identified to champion the core priorities, focussing on collaboration, dynamic and tailored marketing and workforce and skills. Roles and responsibilities will be identified and the draft Action Plans modified as a result of more detailed work and agreement by the LVEP Board.

## Appendices

### Northamptonshire's Strengths and Weaknesses

#### Strengths

- A rich network of natural assets, attractive landscapes and picturesque villages, with a high quality tourism product
- A rich and varied set of visitor attractions across the county
- A peerless cultural heritage including numerous historic locations and assets, churches, stately homes, museums and other architecture of note
- New investment in visitor welcome to engage the local market and motivate additional trips
- Recent related investment, such as Rushden Lakes, driving new footfall, combining with a regenerated 'high street' offer and commercial partnerships with room for growth
- A comprehensive food & drink offer including many new restaurants and pubs giving a robust base on which to further develop
- A rich artists and makers community, growing through creativity and entrepreneurship.
- Sporting success with cricket, rugby, football and motorsport all at elite level
- World-renowned experience and destination of Silverstone Park, offering a global identifier for Northamptonshire as a location
- An established set of outdoor activities and experiences based around walking, cycling, natural trails, waterways and country parks
- A willingness of local stakeholders for collaborative working across visitor attractions and other elements of the visitor economy.
- An unmatched visitor catchment, central location and a good transport network – fast and easy access with 4.8 million living within an hour and a further 24 million within 2 hours.
- Recent consumer trends support increased interest in Northamptonshire and its range of tourism assets.
- A legacy of best quality footwear with headquarters of current icons such as Doc Martens
- Universities and college network offering numerous travel and tourism courses

#### Weaknesses

- A legacy of the past management of the wider county and consequently little recent track record in an aligned approach to the visitor economy in terms of its direction, involvement or governance
- Low general national visibility, a county that is not widely recognised, with limited consumer knowledge of the county's offer
- Yet to be associated with famous and major 'household name' visitor attractions
- Limited accommodation and customer facilities to attract overnight stays / lack of alternative / active accommodation to suite a lucrative staycation market

- Some issues relating to customer service levels, particularly in parts of the accommodation sector
- Lack of central government investment , unclear funding sources, with a risk of change in central government policy affecting the delivery of this new strategy.
- Little connectivity between tourism and hospitality, businesses viewed as competitors rather than collaborators .
- Poor connectivity across the county, lack of public transport to smaller attractions, access that relies on driving
- Locals don't feel pride to promote the county / a confused identity (public/ media perception)
- Little engagement / packaging for travelling fans with e.g. Cobblers games.
- Residents / local people not that engaged
- Lack of focus on regenerative tourism
- Impact of staff shortages and skills development needs /a lack of service quality

## Opportunities and Threats facing Northamptonshire

### Opportunities

- To develop a new brand for Northamptonshire tourism that everyone can support, endorse and champion for mutual benefit
- To build an offer suitable for longer stay national and international markets in the mid to long term (5 – 10 years)
- To develop robust and relevant datasets that generate compelling insight for tactical decision making and to quantify success over the longer term
- To capitalise on the natural offer and rural strengths in the county, developing and packaging further experiences to capitalise on health and wellbeing trends
- To modernise the accommodation offer - broadening it to include glamping options and reflecting other contemporary trends for e.g. mixed spaces for co-working and community space
- To develop sustainable travel options – for example hop-on-hop-off electric buses and boats and embed sustainable and accessible practices across the visitor economy
- To develop cross-marketing opportunities for increasing dwell time, length of stay, spend power and repeat trips.
- To create impactful promotional campaigns with video material, media coverage and PR to drive opportunities
- To collaborate with local colleges and the University of Northampton to support apprenticeship programmes and courses to build a skilled employment base
- To create win-win public/private partnerships (e.g., Council assets for private investment)
- To create a range of itineraries tailored to a variety of audiences and designed to extend the length of stay



## Threats

- Multiple local destinations may reduce the opportunity of a shared buy-in to a single county-wide umbrella brand and related messaging
- Long standing and invested stakeholders may find it harder to agree to a collective vision and a more strategic approach
- Actioning the delivery of the strategy is reliant on having the requisite resources and capabilities
- There is a need to review current planning policies in order to unlock growth of certain sectors, such as accommodation and conferencing product
- There is a need for the transport strategy to better reflect the visitor and support public transport movements across/around the county
- There is a need for an investment plan to scope and enable inward investment to support longer term growth
- There is a national challenge regarding finding, upskilling motivating and retaining hospitality staff. This is made far more acute in the county because of other competing growth sectors such as logistics.
- Wider economic growth may reduce or affect areas of high landscape value important for tourism.

## Cross-Cutting Themes

### ***Our Eight Core United Nations Sustainable Development Goals***



### ***Our Three Accessibility Pillars***



## Draft Action Plan

Goal 1 - Increase the number of staying visitors from outside the county and encourage day visits from closer to home				
Key actions	Implementation of key actions	Timescale (S < 1Yr / M 1 – 3 yrs. / L >3 yrs.)	Lead organisation	Resources needed (L/M/H)
1.1 Prepare the ground for revitalising marketing and promotional arrangements	1. Identify and engage all core public and private sector partners who have a part to play in growing the visitor economy. Agree working relationships that prioritise collaboration and action.	Short	NLVEP & Partners	Low
	2. Assess the product offer and priority source markets and develop a <i>Marketing Opportunities Framework</i> that identifies priorities and delivery arrangements	Short	NLVEP & Partners	Low
	3. Agree a county-wide protocol for marketing activity to include partner roles, collaborative arrangements, brand guidelines, promotional norms and funding opportunities.	Short	NLVEP & Partners	Low
	4. Establish new marketing partnerships to include a Visitor Attractions Network aimed at incentivising the more local market to make multiple trips. e.g. multi-site discounted promotions etc.	Short	NLVEP & Partners	Low
1.2 Build collective knowledge about longer distance staying visitors	5. Draw insight from the Market Review and other sources to identify trip purpose, key geographic target areas and the core offers that will underpin promotions.	Medium	NLVEP & Partners	Low
	6. Develop travel trade activity for both domestic and overseas markets centred on in-county partners and VisitBritain particularly US and Spain – capitalising on the <i>History, Houses &amp; Heritage</i> theme.	Medium	NLVEP & Partners (incl. VB)	Medium
1.3 Re-present, reposition and raise awareness of Northamptonshire and its offer	7. Appoint a full-service creative agency to develop a new narrative that supports the county brand, partners' brands / destinations and related content. Run an industry-focussed 3 year campaign connecting also to other inward investment and business promotion requirements.	Medium	NLVEP & Partners - Northamptonshire Marketing Group	High
1.4 Capitalise on the business tourism market	8. Subject to the results of point 5 above, develop a <i>Meet in the Middle</i> campaign to encourage business visitors to the county.	Medium	Northamptonshire Marketing Group	Medium

Resources Column to far right - L - Low cost considered to be up to £25k, M – Medium cost considered to be £25k – £100k with H – High cost anything above £100k 29

## Draft Action Plan

Goal 1 - Increase the number of staying visitors from outside the county and encourage day visits from closer to home				
Key actions	Implementation of key actions	Timescale (S < 1Yr / M 1 – 3 L >3 yrs.)	Lead organisation	Resources needed (L/M/H)
1.5 Raise visitor awareness of new product, trails, facilities and accommodation	9. Natural Offer & The Blue Way - Audit the current product, its distribution and connections. Work with partners and accommodation providers to package discrete sections that can offer a high quality short-break experience for visitors	Short	Destination Nene Valley	Medium
	10. Trails – Audit the current product, its distribution and connections. Work with partners and accommodation providers to package sections that can offer soft-walking short-break experience for visitors	Short	Councils	Medium
	11. Identify operators, sites and support businesses to accelerate the development of new glamping, camping and self-catering accommodation concepts	Medium	NLVEP & Partners	Medium
1.6 Invest in Facilities & Services focussed on the Blue Way, trails and footpaths	12. Assess existing investment plans for the Blue Way, footpaths and trails, survey visitor requirements accessibility and amend / add to current product mix.	Short	Councils	Medium
	13. Prioritise investment in those areas that will attract visitor use and support business development under Goal 3.	Medium	Councils	High
1.7 Unlock opportunities to boost local visitors	14. Draw on the Bus Service Improvement Plans and other transport surveys to understand current visitor usage, identify modal split for visits to main attractions and identify constraints to visitor use.	Short	Specialist	Low
	15. Work with the visitor attractions network to incentivise public transport usage by local visitors.	Medium	Visitor Attractions Network	Medium
	16. Regularly audit the county’s festivals & events to provide a complete picture of opportunities with a view to making strategic investments in those with potential	Short	NLVEP	Low
	17. Provide support to the local authority service areas and/or partners, responsible for identifying new opportunities to design/establish/attract and acquire new festivals and events to the county, with a view to making strategic investments that help to fulfil these opportunities	Short	NLVEP	Low

Resources Column to far right - L - Low cost considered to be up to £25k, M – Medium cost considered to be £25k – £100k with H – High cost anything above £100k

## Draft Action Plan

Goal 2 - Develop local talent into a motivated workforce to fill vacancies, boost standards and increase pride in the place				
Key actions	Implementation of key actions	Timescale (S < 1Yr / M 1 – 3 yrs. / L >3 yrs.)	Lead organisation	Resources needed (L/M/H)
2.1 Build the capacity and foundations to be able to respond to the workforce challenge	<b>18.</b> Agree Terms of Reference and scope for a 'Workforce Taskforce' with key strategic partners – universities, chambers, industry and potentially neighbouring authorities and focus on targeting populations affected by inequalities.	Short	NLVEP & Partners, educational & Industry bodies	Low
	<b>19.</b> Build a mutually supportive wider network of all interested partners who can benefit from this initiative and survey to identify requirements.	Short	NLVEP & Partners	Low
	<b>20.</b> Audit the funding options and bid for funding to run the network	Short	NLVEP & Councils	Low
2.2 Encourage new talent towards the visitor economy	<b>21.</b> Develop materials and engage with careers services in schools and further education, and a targeted approach in areas of high economic inactivity to boost the appeal and raise the opportunity of a career into the hospitality sector	Medium	NLVEP & Partners	Medium
	<b>22.</b> Hold an Annual Northamptonshire Visitor Economy Jobs Fair ensuring reach to areas and populations experiencing high levels of unemployment and barriers to employment	Medium	NLVEP & Partners & Specialist	Low
2.3 Encourage education and industry to do even more	<b>23.</b> Encourage all education partners to adopt for example, Hospitality Accreditation from People 1st	Medium	NLVEP & Partners	Low
	<b>24.</b> Support businesses into customer service training programmes dealing with the cross-cutting themes set out in this strategy.	Short	NLVEP & Partners & Specialist	Medium

Resources Column to far right - L - Low cost considered to be up to £25k, M – Medium cost considered to be £25k – £100k with H – High cost anything above £100k

## Draft Action Plan

Goal 3 - Support our visitor economy businesses to collaborate locally and compete nationally				
Key actions	Implementation of key actions	Timescale (S < 1Yr / M 1 – 3 yrs. / L >3 yrs.)	Lead organisation	Resources needed (L/M/H)
3.1 Improve comparative insight available to visitor economy businesses	<b>25.</b> Assess interest and potential of establishing an online How's Business? survey that tracks the performance of all sectors of the county's visitor economy and allows peers to benchmark their performance against their sector and the wider industry.	Short	NLVEP & Partners & Industry	Low
3.2 Increase the quality of the offer in terms of sustainability, accessibility and visitor experience	<b>26.</b> Develop / buy in a Green Action Toolkit and related support to help businesses reduce their carbon footprint, reduce costs and offer a service aligned to today's visitor.	Short	NLVEP & Partners	Medium
	<b>27.</b> Develop a Purple Action Plan and related support to help businesses improve the accessibility of facilities and offer an inclusive welcome.	Short	Specialist	Medium
	<b>28.</b> Evaluate all actions in this Plan through Accessibility and Sustainability lenses and incorporate relevant actions in each key action as necessary.	Medium	NLVEP & Partners	Medium
	<b>29.</b> Develop a Visitor Experience Development Plan, which can provide the next step in helping businesses to embrace the uniqueness of the area and tell its compelling story.	Medium	NLVEP & Partners & Specialist	Low
3.3 Increase the productivity of visitor economy businesses	<b>30.</b> Establish a dedicated Visitor Attractions Network to connect up, share best practice and inform other strands of this Action Plan.	Short	NLVEP & Partners	Low
	<b>31.</b> Source a training company to offer training on all aspects of business digitalisation including DMS, booking engines, TXGB etc..	Short	NLVEP & Partners & Specialist	Low
	<b>32.</b> Support all employees, through their employers, trainers and partners, to be the best versions of themselves, valued, developed and rewarded across all sectors of the Northamptonshire visitor economy.	Long	NLVEP & Partners	Low

Resources Column to far right - L - Low cost considered to be up to £25k, M – Medium cost considered to be £25k – £100k with H – High cost anything above £100k

## Draft Action Plan

Goal 4 - Identify and attract investors to help inspire the further development of our unique, diverse and contemporary offer				
Key actions	Implementation of key actions	Timescale (S < 1Yr / M 1 – 3 yrs. / L >3 yrs.)	Lead organisation	Resources needed (L/M/H)
4.1 Establish robust long-term governance for the visitor economy	<b>33.</b> Establish a new Board and Chair – with clear terms of reference and responsibilities including diverse representation across the visitor economy. Further to that, establish new working groups to agree and progress the actions in the Strategy.	Short	Councils	Low
	<b>34.</b> Complete the application for the Board to formally become the Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Northamptonshire	Short	Councils	Low
	<b>35.</b> Hold a Visitor Economy Conference to involve, inspire and report to a wide range of partners and to inform the next annual work programme.	Annually	NLVEP & Partners	Low
4.2 Increase the understanding of the potential of the visitor economy	<b>36.</b> Undertake a Futures Review to enable a long term and agreed Visitor Economy Investment Framework with a view to engaging property interests, investors and central government. With a focus on major visitor attraction feasibility and all types of accommodation, sites and financial incentives.	Short	Councils	Medium
	<b>37.</b> Develop a Datahub to draw relevant insight together and better understand sectors and the wider economy's performance.	Medium	NLVEP & Partners	Medium
4.3 Optimise the potential of the visitor economy	<b>38.</b> Join the dots across the policy landscape in favour of the visitor economy focussing particularly on connectivity (transport and digital), skills and training, and planning policy. Report annual progress to the Councils and visitor economy partners.	Long	Councils	Low

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# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

**CABINET MEMBER FOR HR & CORPORATE SERVICES: COUNCILLOR MIKE HALLAM**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Commissioning a unified digital network for WNC</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Matthew Newman</b> , IT Operations Manager, <a href="mailto:matthew.newman@westnorthants.gov.uk">matthew.newman@westnorthants.gov.uk</a> <b>Chris Wales</b> , Chief Information Officer, <a href="mailto:chris.wales@westnorthants.gov.uk">chris.wales@westnorthants.gov.uk</a> <b>Rob Ferrari</b> , Head of IT Operations, <a href="mailto:rob.ferrari@westnorthants.gov.uk">rob.ferrari@westnorthants.gov.uk</a>

### List of Approvers

<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	Catherine Whitehead	20/12/2023
<b>Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	20/12/2023
<b>Other Director</b>	Rebecca Purnell	15/12/2023
<b>Communications Lead/Head of Communications</b>	Craig Forsyth	05/01/2024

### List of Appendices

None

### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval to procure a new single unified digital network covering the entirety of the West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) estate and providing continuing provision of contractual services to our partners in the Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and North Northamptonshire Council (NNC).

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 The current WNC network comprises equipment and service contracts inherited from our four predecessor authorities. The hardware is old, difficult to maintain, prone to failure and poses an increasing cyber security risk. As it is four networks joined together and not a single design, it inhibits the continued aggregation of staff and services and does not facilitate working as a single organisation.
- 2.2 The network requires consolidation from four separate networks into a single high performing agile network suitable for a modern workforce. This delivers significant benefits and, after a short dual-running period, will also cost less to run annually for a better service.

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
  - 3.1.1 Delegate to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Chief Information Officer and the Executive Director of Finance authority to award a contract for the provision to the Council of replacement network equipment and services, in compliance with the Council's procurement processes and procurement legislative requirements.

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 Ensure the Council has secure network hardware that receives manufacturer support.
- 4.2 Erase service differences across former council sites and equipment.
- 4.3 Reduce the complexity and effort (and thus money and risk) in running network services.
- 4.4 Make cost efficiencies where possible.
- 4.5 Allow for other dependent systems and tools to be unified, speeding up service delivery.
- 4.6 Meet our continued contractual obligations to NNC via the IAA.

## **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 Upon vesting WNC in April 2021, the Council inherited four sets of digital networks from its four respective predecessor authorities. Given the long contract times on some of the third-party services that form the network (e.g. Internet connectivity) and the usable lifespan of inherited equipment (e.g. WiFi access points, firewalls), we have only now reached the point where most of these are due for renewal – and so making this the most economical time to procure a new single, unified network to replace the four we inherited.
- 5.2 During the local government reform (LGR), the Council also inherited the responsibility of sole IT provider to the newly created Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT). It also retained responsibility for the provision of IT services for all former Northamptonshire County Council staff and services and their successors, including those now at North Northamptonshire Council (NNC). This responsibility is codified in the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) between the Council and NNC and requires the provision of fit and proper digital networks unless or until this responsibility is disaggregated under the provisions of the IAA.

- 5.3 A major part of our existing digital network service is supplied by contract by EastNet, a consortium of local councils and this arrangement runs until September 2025. This contract does not have scope to be extended further and therefore new services must be procured in any event.

## 6. Issues and Choices

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### 6.1 Issues

- 6.1.1 The current digital networks within the Council carry several risks and deficiencies, owing to the lack of a single architecture design as well as advances in technology since their original implementations.
- 6.1.2 *End of Life Hardware* – a significant proportion of the existing network hardware is already “end-of-life”. This means it will receive less contractual support from the manufacturer and be increasingly expensive and time-consuming to manage, pose an increasing security risk, and be increasingly incompatible with newer technologies.
- 6.1.3 *No Support for hybrid working (WAN design)* – as we have four legacy digital networks, it is not possible for our staff and users to securely access their required applications interchangeably in any location, complicating office location and HR planning.
- 6.1.4 *Low resilience* – there are several single points of failure across the existing networks as well as a heavy reliance on the One Angel Square datacentre, the location of most WNC applications. Any failure at these locations will adversely impact the availability of services and applications.
- 6.1.5 *High management/maintenance overheads* – the variety of models, manufacturers and ages of network equipment inhibits both efficient management of the network (as it is difficult to train staff effectively in so many different standards) and comprehensive reporting, making administration difficult.
- 6.1.6 *Staying abreast of network security* – with continual advances in the sophistication of cyber security attacks, equipment digital and services must constantly be kept up-to-date to ensure protection of vital data and public services. As our current equipment approaches end-of-life, we will need to invest if we intend to stay protected against ever-evolving cybercrime.

### 6.2 Choices

#### 6.2.1 Option 1 – **Do Nothing.**

- 6.2.1.1 It is possible to continue running the existing network equipment and opt not to replace it, negating any planned short-term costs.
- 6.2.1.2 This carries significant risks that may materialise at short notice and require significant investment to address, including but not limited to: loss of manufacturer support and problem resolution; inability to replace broken equipment; escalating maintenance overheads; failure to meet required security and compliance standards; incompatibility of new systems and tools.
- 6.2.1.3 Whilst this remains an option for considerations of cost, the risks are not considered acceptable from a professional IT perspective.
- 6.2.1.4 We would not have a compliantly procured network should replacements not be sourced before the existing EastNet arrangement ends in September 2025.

## 6.2.2 Option 2 – Partial Implementation.

6.2.2.1 Commence a partial upgrade of the network, targeting specific areas of weakness.

6.2.2.2 A targeted partial upgrade would reduce the upfront costs of the work but fail to fully remedy any of the risks or issues; it would be akin to “patching up” a system in need of replacement.

6.2.2.3 The overall costs of reaching a complete replacement would likely increase substantially owing to the complexity of doing the work in phases.

6.2.2.4 Until such time as a full implementation could be completed, most of the risks and issues would remain.

6.2.2.5 While this remains an option to help spread the cost of the replacement, it does not represent a good overall value-for-money proposition for the Council, and perpetuates risks considered not acceptable from a professional IT perspective.

6.2.2.6 We would not have a compliantly procured network should replacements not be sourced before the existing EastNet arrangement ends in September 2025.

## 6.2.3 Option 3 – Full Implementation.

6.2.4 Commence a holistic, co-ordinated upgrade of the network ensuring that all devices are fully supported and the given issues in section 6 are resolved.

6.2.5 This options fully addresses the given risks and issues and is recommended as such from a professional IT perspective.

## 7. Implications (including financial implications)

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### 7.1 Resources and Financial

7.1.1 The following table shows the estimated capital cost of the proposed solution for the Council. This cost is included within the Council’s proposed capital programme. Separate advice will be given to NNC on the cost of any equipment it will need to make for sites owned by NNC and supported by the Council.

Capital Cost	2023/4	2024/5	2025/6	2026/7	2027/8	2028/9
WiFi - Replacement of EoL APs	£110,009					
WiFi - Additional APs		£84,200	-	-		
LAN - 106 Switches (config/install)		£682,640				
WAN - Infrastructure & Set-Up		£75,031				
Security - Firewall hardware		£150,000				
Security – VPN remote access		£240,000				

<b>Capital Total</b>	<b>£110,009</b>	<b>£1,231,871</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>
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7.1.2 The following table shows the estimated annual revenue costs needed by the Council to fund this system, compared with the existing system costs. It should be noted that a proportion of the current costs are recharged to NCT and NNC. Any overspend or underspend compared with the current costs would cause recharges to rise and fall proportionately.

7.1.3 As the numbers given are a ceiling of estimated costs, the final split of recharges and exact costs will be determined at the point of entering into new contracts. The below represents the upper threshold of those costs.

Revenue	2023/4	2024/5	2025/6	2026/7	2027/8	2028/9
WiFi – Replacement of EoL APs						£4,050
LAN - 188 License/Support		£11,280	£11,280	£11,280	£11,280	£11,280
WAN - Dual running cost		£21,719	141,174			
WAN – 138 circuits		£32,582	£390,982	£390,982	£390,982	£390,982
Proxy - Product (cloud Based)		£78,000	£78,000	£78,000	£78,000	£78,000

<b>Current budget</b>	<b>£506,751</b>	<b>£506,751</b>	<b>£506,751</b>	<b>£506,751</b>	<b>£506,751</b>	<b>£506,751</b>
<b>New revenue total</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£143,581</b>	<b>£621,436</b>	<b>£480,262</b>	<b>£480,262</b>	<b>£484,312</b>
<b>Current running costs</b>	<b>£506,751</b>	<b>£506,751</b>	<b>£253,391</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>
<b>Net change from current</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£143,581</b>	<b>£368,076</b>	<b>-£26,489</b>	<b>-£26,489</b>	<b>-£22,439</b>

7.1.4 The figures given above have been produced in consultation with industry specialists and represent a modest saving once fully implemented, mostly down to the selection of simpler and more effective technologies than those in our current estate (notably, a replacement of ‘MPLS’ with ‘SD-WAN’ technology).

7.1.5 The temporary surge in costs during 2024/5 and 2025/6 is due to the need for a lengthy dual running period; installation of a new digital network takes months and the organisation cannot be left without a working one in the interim. Budgetary provision has been made for this over the listed years.

## 7.2 Legal

7.2.1 The Council will comply with all relevant legislation during the commissioning, procurement, installation and operation of the new services.

## 7.3 Risk

7.3.1 Due to the age of the existing network equipment, if replacement solution is implemented, maintenance on the existing equipment will cease and the service will be unavailable.

7.3.2 In addition, WNC risk a breach in security if an upgrade to the network equipment is not completed.

7.3.3 It is a risk to colleagues, office optimisation projects if WNC does not have a suitable network to perform the necessary organisational changes due to the minimum standards of the current fragmented network.

## 7.4 Consultation and Communications

7.5 Following cabinet approval, the major stakeholders will be consulted. These will include Northampton Partnership Homes, Northampton Children’s Trust, Northampton Leisure Trust, the Libraries Service and Community Libraries groups, North Northamptonshire Council.

7.6 Clear and effective communications and consultation activities will be key to ensuring that all stakeholders are fully informed and engaged in the project and understand the key drivers and factors for these.

7.7 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.8 Overview and Scrutiny Committee have not considered this issue.

7.9 **Climate Impact**

7.10 Modern network devices use less energy than the ones in place currently. This will have a positive impact by reducing the overall energy used within the lifetime of the contract. In addition, the Council will seek to maximise energy and CO<sub>2</sub>e savings through delivery of the project.

7.11 **Community Impact**

7.12 With a unified and modern network making remote and office working easier and more secure and accessible, it is likely that those services can operate more effectively and meet community needs more easily.

**8. Background Papers**

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8.1 Glossary of Terms , WNC Future Network Design and Current Network Design.



# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

## CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION: COUNCILLOR FIONA BAKER

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Admissions arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled West Northamptonshire schools for 2025 intakes and co-ordinated schemes for 2025 intakes</b>
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<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Jo Savage, Team Leader – School Admissions Jo.savage@westnorthants.gov.uk</b>
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### Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	Catherine Whitehead	20/12/2023
<b>Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	08/01/2023
<b>/Head of Communications</b>	Becky Hutson	20/12/23

### List of Appendices

**Appendix A** – “Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools in West Northamptonshire for 2025 intakes”

**Appendix B** – “WNC Primary co-ordinated scheme for 2025 intakes”

**Appendix C** – “WNC Secondary co-ordinated scheme for 2025 intakes”

### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The local authority (LA) has a duty to act in accordance with the statutory provisions of the School Admissions Code (2021) and with laws relating to school admissions. School admission arrangements for all schools must be agreed annually and it is the duty of

admission authorities to ensure that admission arrangements are compliant with the School Admissions Code. The purpose of this report is to provide the necessary information to allow the council to determine the admission arrangements for its schools (Community and Voluntary Controlled schools) for the 2025 intakes.

- 1.2. Each year, all local authorities must formulate and publish on their website, a scheme to co-ordinate admissions to the normal year of entry for all publicly funded schools within their area. Applications will be processed in accordance with the timetables set out in these schemes. The purpose of the report is to allow the council to agree the co-ordinated schemes for the 2025 intakes.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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### **2.1 Admission Arrangements:**

There are no proposed changes to the admission arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools. No consultation was required.

- **Appendix A** “Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in West Northamptonshire for 2025 intakes”.

### **2.2 Co-ordinated schemes:**

The dates in the co-ordinated scheme timetables are set annually. The scheme then details how applications will be processed. No consultation was required.

- **Appendix B** “WNC Primary Co-ordinated Scheme for 2025 intakes”.
- **Appendix C** “WNC Secondary Co-ordinated Scheme for 2025 intakes”.

## **3. Recommendations**

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### **3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet/Committee:**

- a) Approve the admission arrangements as detailed in Appendix A
- b) Approve the primary co-ordinated scheme as detailed in Appendix B
- c) Approve the secondary co-ordinated scheme as detailed in Appendix C

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 The above are all statutory requirements

## **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 All admission authorities must determine admission arrangements every year, even if they have not changed from the previous year and no consultation has been required. This is a statutory requirement that must be carried out by 28 February in the determination year.

- 5.2 It is the duty of local authorities to formulate and publish a co-ordinated scheme for the admission of pupils to all schools in the area annually for the next Offer year.



## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1 The admission arrangements remain unchanged from the previous year.
- 6.2 The main co-ordinated schemes remain unchanged from the previous year. The timetable in Section 1 has been updated for the new offer year in line with nationwide deadlines and time constraints.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposals.

### **7.2 Legal**

There are no legal implications arising from the proposals.

### **7.3 Risk**

Risk – That WNC does not fulfil statutory obligations as required by the School Admissions Code (2021).

Mitigation - WNC must determine the admission arrangements for 2025 for its Community and Voluntary Controlled schools by 28 February 2024 and WNC must adopt a co-ordinated scheme for 2024 intakes

Risk - Admission arrangements may be considered to be unfair or not compliant with the School Admissions Code. A consequence of this could be that WNC would be reported to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

Mitigation – admission policies have been checked for compliance with the School Admissions Code (2021).

### **7.4 Consultation and Communications**

Consultation was not necessary as per the School Admissions Code (2021) as no changes have been proposed to the admission arrangements for 2025 intakes and the co-ordinated schemes have not changed substantially from the previous year.

The scheme will be communicated via publication on the Council’s website, in line with annual requirements.

### **7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

There has been no engagement with Scrutiny. A co-ordinated scheme has to be adopted by the local authority every year to explain how we will process applications for the specified year’s intakes for schools’ normal points of entry to ensure each child only receives one offer of a school

place. This is a statutory requirement as per the School Admissions Code (2021). The main schemes have not changed since last year. There are no equalities implications – the schemes and are bound by the School Admissions Code (2021).

#### **7.6 Climate Impact**

No implications arising from any recommendations that are being proposed.

#### **7.7 Community Impact**

No implications arise

### **8. Background Papers**

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- 8.1 School Admissions Code (2021) [School admissions code 2021 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/91222/school-admissions-code-2021.pdf)

# Admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools in West Northamptonshire for 2025 intakes

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## 1. Aims

This policy aims to:

- Explain **how to apply** for a place at community and voluntary controlled schools in West Northamptonshire
- Set out the schools' arrangements for allocating places to those who apply
- Explain **how to appeal** against a decision not to offer your child a place

## 2. Admission Authorities

The admission authority of a school varies according to the type of school. As shown below in Table 1, the local authority (WNC) is responsible for determining the admission arrangements of community and voluntary controlled schools.

<b>Type of school</b>	<b>Admission Authority</b>
Academies/Free Schools/UTCs	Academy Trust
<b>Community Schools</b>	<b>Local Authority</b>
Foundation Schools	Governing Body
Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools	Governing Body
<b>Voluntary Controlled (VC) Schools</b>	<b>Local Authority</b>

**Table 1:** Admission authorities and school type (governance)

### 3. How to apply for a place in the Normal Admissions Round

The **normal admissions round** is the period during which parents/carers can apply for state-funded school places at a school's normal point of entry (reception for primary and infant schools and year 3 for junior schools), using the Common Application Form (CAF) provided by their home local authority.

Parents/carers should use the application form provided by their home local authority (regardless of which local authority the schools are in) to express a preference for a minimum of 3 state-funded schools, in rank order. Parents/carers living in the West Northamptonshire Council area should visit the [WNC School Admissions website](#).

All parents/carers who submit an on-time application (i.e., by midnight on 15 January) will receive an offer for a school place directly from their local authority on National Offer Day (16 April or the next working day).

Please note: attendance at a particular nursery that may be attached to or run by a school, does not guarantee admission at that school. An application must be made for any transfer from nursery to primary/infant school, and from infant to junior school.

### 4. Allocation of places at community and voluntary controlled schools in West Northamptonshire

Community and voluntary controlled schools in West Northamptonshire are mostly organised into two generic groups. The schools in each of these groups generally share the same oversubscription criteria, although certain features of a school's admission arrangements may vary from school to school (e.g., the Published Admission Number (PAN) and linked area). The groups are as follows:

- Primary and infant schools – rural
- Primary schools – urban

The oversubscription criteria for each of these groups are listed below, along with specific details of each school within the group. The community and voluntary controlled schools which have over-subscription criteria unique to their school are listed separately.

Abbreviations:

CE = Church of England (a voluntary controlled school)

CEVC = Church of England Voluntary Controlled

PAN = Published Admission Number

## 4.1 Primary schools – rural

<b>School</b>	<b>PAN</b>	<b>Linked Area*</b>
Ashton CE Primary School	8	Ashton
Blisworth Community Primary School	30	Blisworth
Bramptons Primary School, The	14	Church Brampton and Chapel Brampton
Brington Primary School	10	Brington (including Nobottle, Whilton and Whilton Locks)
Brixworth CEVC Primary School	75	Brixworth, Scaldwell
Bugbrooke Community Primary School	30	Bugbrooke
Clipston Endowed VC Primary School	15	Arthingworth, Clipston, Great Oxendon, East Farndon, Kelmarsh, Marston Trussel (including Thorpe Lubenham and Hothorpe)
Cosgrove Village Primary School	9	Cosgrove
Crick Primary School	30	Crick
Croughton All Saints CE Primary School	20	Croughton
Denton Primary School	15	Brafield-on-the-Green, Denton
East Haddon CE Primary School	12	East Haddon, Holdenby
Flore CE Primary School	20	Brockhall, Flore
Gayton CE Primary School	12	Gayton
Greatworth Primary School	15	Greatworth, Marston St. Lawrence
Harlestone Primary School	8	Althorp, Harlestone
Harpole Primary School	30	Harpole
Helmdon Primary School	18	Helmdon (including Astwell and Falcutt)
John Hellins Primary School	30	Potterspury (including Furtho)
Long Buckby Infant School	54	Long Buckby (including Buckby Wharf), Watford
Maidwell Primary School	10	Draughton, Lamport (including Hanging Houghton and Faxton), Maidwell
Overstone Primary School	30	Overstone
Pattishall CE Primary School	27	Cold Higham (including Grimscote), Pattishall (including Astcote, Dalscote, Eastcote and Fosters Booth)
Pitsford Primary School	10	Pitsford
Roade Primary School	60	Roade
Stoke Bruerne CE Primary School	12	Shutlanger, Stoke Bruerne
Syresham St. James CE Primary School	15	Syresham (including Crowfield)
Walgrave Primary School	24	Hannington, Holcot, Old, Walgrave

School	PAN	Linked Area*
West Haddon Endowed CE Primary School	30	West Haddon, Winwick
Whittlebury CE Primary School	12	Whittlebury
Yardley Gobion CE Primary School	20	Grafton Regis, Yardley Gobion
Yardley Hastings Primary School	15	Yardley Hastings
Yelvertoft Primary School	20	Clay Coton, Lilbourne, Stanford, Yelvertoft

**Table 2:** Primary Schools (Rural)

\*The above linked areas refer to parishes and are defined by Parish boundaries

## How places are allocated

### Oversubscription Criteria

If the school is oversubscribed and after the admission of children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan naming the school as appropriate provision, remaining places will be allocated to children who meet the criteria set out below, in order:

1. Looked after children and all previously looked after children
2. Children who live in the linked area for the school
3. Children with a sibling\* continuing at the school at the time of admission of the child
4. Other children

### Allocation of places up to Published Admission Number (PAN)

If the PAN is exceeded within any criterion, priority will be given to applicants whose home address is closest to the school.

### Tie-breaker

Where two or more applications cannot otherwise be separated, random allocation will be used to decide who is allocated a place.

\*Please note: for Long Buckby Infant School, the sibling link will also exist if the sibling is attending the linked junior school (Long Buckby Junior School).

## 4.2 Primary schools – urban

School	PAN
Barry Primary School	60
Boothville Primary School	90
Bridgewater Primary School	90
Chiltern Primary School	30
Delapre Primary School	90
Duston Eldean Primary School	60
Earl Spencer Primary School	60

School	PAN
Hopping Hill Primary School	60
Hunsbury Park Primary School	45
Kingsthorpe Grove Primary School	60
Kingsthorpe Village Primary School	30
Lyncrest Primary School	30
Millway Primary School	60
Vernon Terrace Primary School	30
Whitehills Primary School	60

**Table 3:** Primary Schools (Urban)

## How places are allocated

### Oversubscription Criteria

If the school is oversubscribed and after the admission of children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan naming the school as appropriate provision, remaining places will be allocated to children who meet the criteria set out below, in order:

1. Looked after children and all previously looked after children
2. Children with a sibling continuing at the school at the time of admission of the child
3. Children whose home address is closer to the preferred school than any other school
4. Other children

### Allocation of places up to Published Admission Number (PAN)

If the PAN is exceeded within any criterion, priority will be given to applicants whose home address is closest to the school.

### Tie-breaker

Where two or more applications cannot otherwise be separated, random allocation will be used to decide who is allocated a place.

## 4.3 Schools with unique oversubscription criteria

### Brackley Junior School

The Published Admission Number (PAN) for the normal point of entry (year 3) is **60**.

### Oversubscription Criteria

If the school is oversubscribed and after the admission of children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan naming the school as appropriate provision, remaining places will be allocated to children who meet the criteria set out below, in order:

1. Looked after children and all previously looked after children

2. Children who live in the linked area for the school: Halse, Radstone, Steane and Whitfield
3. Children with a sibling continuing at the school or Waynflete Infants' School at the time of admission of the child
4. Children who attend Waynflete Infants' School
5. Children whose home address is closer to the preferred school than any other school
6. Other children

### **Allocation of places up to Published Admission Number (PAN)**

If the PAN is exceeded within any criterion, priority will be given to applicants whose home address is closest to the school.

### **Tie-breaker**

Where two or more applications cannot otherwise be separated, random allocation will be used to decide who is allocated a place.

## **Grange School, The**

The Published Admission Number (PAN) for the normal point of entry (reception) is **60**.

### **Oversubscription Criteria**

If the school is oversubscribed and after the admission of children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan naming the school as appropriate provision, remaining places will be allocated to children who meet the criteria set out below, in order:

1. Looked after children and all previously looked after children
2. Children who live in the linked area for the school
3. Children with a sibling continuing at the school at the time of admission of the child
4. Children whose home address is closer to the preferred school than any other school
5. Other children

### **Allocation of places up to Published Admission Number (PAN)**

If the PAN is exceeded within any criterion, priority will be given to applicants whose home address is closest to the school.

### **Tie-breaker**

Where two or more applications cannot otherwise be separated, random allocation will be used to decide who is allocated a place.

### **Linked Area**

Drayton and the Middlemore Development

## **Long Buckby Junior School**

The Published Admission Number (PAN) for the normal year of entry (year 3) is **54**.

### **Oversubscription Criteria**



If the school is oversubscribed and after the admission of children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan naming the school as appropriate provision, remaining places will be allocated to children who meet the criteria set out below, in order:

1. Looked after children and all previously looked after children
2. Children who live in Long Buckby, Buckby Wharf or Watford
3. Children who have a sibling continuing at the school or Long Buckby Infant School at the time of admission of the child
4. Children who attend Long Buckby Infant School
5. Other children

### **Allocation of places up to Published Admission Number (PAN)**

If the PAN is exceeded within any criterion, priority will be given to applicants whose home address is closest to the school.

### **Tie-breaker**

Where two or more applications cannot otherwise be separated, random allocation will be used to decide who is allocated a place.

## **5. Definitions**

### **5.1 Looked After Children (LAC)**

A 'looked after child' is a child who, at the time of making an application to a school, is:

- a) In the care of a local authority, or
- b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in exercise of its social services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989)

### **5.2 Previously Looked After Children (PLAC)**

Previously looked after children are children who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they:

- a) were adopted under the Adoption Act 1976 (see Section 12 adoption orders) or the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (see Section 46 adoption orders), or
- b) became subject to a child arrangements order (as defined in Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 and as amended by Section 12 of the Children and Families Act 2014), or
- c) became subject to a special guardianship order (see Section 14A of the Children Act 1989 which defines a 'special guardianship order' as an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian (or special guardians)).

This includes children who appear (to the admission authority) to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. A child is regarded as having been in state care outside of England if they were in the care of or were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other provider of care whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

## 5.3 Sibling

A sibling is defined as a child's brother or sister. A sibling must be living at the same permanent address and as part of the same family unit (one or two parents plus children) to qualify for a sibling link. For School Admissions purposes, the term sibling includes:

- half-brothers and half-sisters
- step-brothers and step-sisters
- adopted children
- children in foster care
- children living in the same family unit, even if they are not biological brothers and sisters – for example when the parents are not married/in a civil relationship.

Cousins are not regarded as siblings.

Please note: for WNC infant schools, the sibling link will also exist if the sibling is attending the linked junior school.

## 5.4 Home Address (child's)

The child's home address is defined as the address at which the child normally resides with their parent/carer on the closing date for applications (15 January).

When we refer to a child's home address, we mean the permanent residence of the child. This address should be the child's only or main residence which is;

- owned by the child's parents/carers, or
- leased to or rented by the child's parents/carers under a lease or written rental agreement of not less than six months' duration.

When parents live separately and the child spends time with each parent, the home address will be treated as the place where the child sleeps for most of the school week (i.e., Sunday night – Thursday night inclusive).

If the child spends equal amounts of time at two addresses, the parents must agree which address they wish to be the child's main address.

Places cannot be allocated on the basis of an intended future change of address unless house moves have been confirmed through the exchange of contracts or signing of a formal lease.

Documentary evidence of ownership or rental agreement may be required together with proof of actual permanent residence at the property concerned.

## 6. Multiple Birth Groups

In the case of twins or other siblings from a multiple birth, if the last child to be admitted to a particular school is from a multiple birth group, all other children in the group will be offered places at the school, even if it means exceeding the Published Admission Number.

In the case of siblings in the same year group, where there is only one place remaining, places will be allocated over the published admission number to accommodate all siblings unless this would make the class too large and prejudice the education of the other children or when this would breach infant class size limits.

## 7. Distance Measurements

Distances are measured on a straight-line basis from the address point of the child's home to the address point of the school, using a geographical information system. Each address has a unique address point established by the most valuable elements from the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NPLG), Ordnance Survey Master Map, Royal Mail Postal Address File and The Valuation Office Agency. The address point for a property does not change.

In the case where there are multiple applications from the same shared dwelling (e.g., flats) or where the distance between two or more children's homes to the school (using the system referred to above) is identical, random allocation using an online computerised randomiser will be used to decide which child gets priority. Random allocation will be carried out by someone independent of the school.

## 8. Children below Compulsory School Age

Where children below compulsory school age are offered a place at the school, they will be entitled to attend the school full-time in the September following their fourth birthday.

Parents/carers may defer their child's entry to the allocated school until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which the child reaches compulsory school age, and not beyond the beginning of the final term of the school year for which the offer was made when the place will cease to be available for the child.

Where parents/carers wish, children may attend part-time until later in the school year but not beyond the point at which they reach compulsory school age.

## 9. Admission outside the normal age group

Parents may seek a place for their child outside of their normal age group, for example, if the child is gifted and talented or has experienced problems such as ill health. In addition, the parents of a summer born child may choose not to send that child to school until the September following their fifth birthday and may request that they are admitted out of their normal age group – to reception rather than year 1.

### 9.1 Requests for admission to reception outside the normal age group (summer born children)

All children are entitled to a full-time school place in the September following their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday and most parents are happy for their child to start school at this point. However, parents/carers of summer born children (those born between 1 April and 31 August) who do not reach compulsory school age until a full year after they would normally start school, may wish to delay their child's start to school until the September following the child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

If parents wish to delay their summer born child's start at school until the September after their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, there are 2 options:

1. Parents can make an in-year application for a **year 1** place for the September following their child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday as other children in the child's age group already attending school will be moving from reception to year 1 at this point. It is important to remember that some schools are likely to be full in year 1 and unable to offer a place
2. If parents do not want their child to miss their reception year, they may request that their child is admitted out of their normal age group i.e., into reception instead of year 1. Please note, this

is a 'request' and parents do not have the right to insist that their child is admitted to a particular age group. The school's admission authority is responsible for making the decision about which year group a child should be admitted to.

Parents/carers of summer born children who wish to delay their child's school start by a full year but would like them to start in Reception, should still make their application for a Reception place for their child's normal year of entry before the primary application deadline of **15 January** in the offer year (the academic year in which the child turns 4). If a delay is agreed, this application can be withdrawn.

Parent/carers should also, if possible, make their request for admission out of the normal age group to the admission authority (WNC) by the same date - **15 January**. This is to enable sufficient time for requests to be processed prior to National Offer Day (16 April or the next working day). Requests will however still be considered after this date.

Parents/carers requests to apply for a Reception place at a WNC community or voluntary controlled school for the September following their child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday should be made in writing to [admissions@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:admissions@westnorthants.gov.uk). In their request, parents/carers should identify which school they would like to make their request for and provide some information about their child to explain why they think that their child should be educated out of their normal age group and start school in Reception rather than year 1. It is important for parents/carers to provide any additional evidence to support their request if they have any as this information will help the admission authority to make their decision on the appropriate year group for the child, e.g., parents/carers may be able to provide a report from the child's Early Years setting or evidence from a health or social care professional.

The request will then be considered by WNC who have to decide on the appropriate year group for the child. The decision will be made on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned. Parents/carers will then be informed in writing of WNC's decision on which year group the child should be admitted to when they start school (i.e., reception or year 1).

## 9.2 General requests for admission outside the normal age group

Parents/carers wishing to seek a place for their child out of their normal age group at a community or voluntary controlled school for any other year group than reception, or for reception after the start of the new school year in September, must put their request in writing to the School Admissions team at [admissions@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:admissions@westnorthants.gov.uk) giving reasons why they are requesting a place out of the normal age group and supplying any evidence they feel is relevant as well as submitting an in-year application to the local authority.

The LA (WNC), as the admission authority of the school, will consider the request and make a decision on the appropriate year group for the child on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned. WNC will then inform parents in writing their decision about the year group the child should be admitted to prior to the application being processed.

Parents and carers do not have a right to appeal if they are offered a place at the school but it is not in their preferred age group.

## 10. Children moving to the UK from overseas

Documentary evidence to verify an address may be required if an application is made following a move to the UK or as a result of an impending move to the UK. A copy of the rental agreement or an exchange of contract letter is usually sufficient. WNC reserves the right to seek further documentary evidence as necessary.

## **11. Children of UK Service Personnel (UK Armed Forces) and Crown Servants**

Special conditions apply to applications from UK Armed Service Personnel and Crown Servants. For families of service personnel with confirmed posting to their area, or crown servants returning from overseas to live in that area, the admission authority will endeavour to allocate a place in advance of the family arriving in the area, provided the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares a relocation date and a Unit postal address or quartering area address.

## **12. Late Applications**

Late applications are any common application forms (for the normal point of entry) received by the local authority after its statutory deadline of 15 January. Late applicants will not receive an offer of a school place by the local authority on National Offer Day (16 April or the next working day).

Late applications will be processed in the subsequent rounds of allocations between May and July (for more details, refer to the local authority's co-ordinated scheme).

## **13. In year applications**

An in-year admission refers to an application for a school place made during the school year or an application for admission to a school made at the start of the school year for any year group other than the normal year of entry. The normal years of entry are: Reception for entry to primary schools and year 3 for entry to junior schools.

Applications for in-year admissions to voluntary controlled and community schools in West Northamptonshire, should be made online to the local authority on WNC's website and places will be allocated according to the school's oversubscription criteria.

## **14. Waiting Lists**

Following an unsuccessful application, parents/carers can request that their child's name be placed on the waiting list.

Waiting lists for all year groups in all community and voluntary controlled schools are held by the LA and each added child will require the list to be ranked again in line with the school's published oversubscription criteria. Priority will not be given to children on the basis that they have been on the waiting list the longest.

Waiting lists will be held until 31 December. If you wish your child's name to remain on the waiting list for the remainder of the academic year, you will need to inform the School Admissions team, in writing via email by 31 December and again by 31 March to renew your interest. A new application will be required for a new academic year.

## 15. Appeals

If a parent/carer's application for a place at the school is unsuccessful, they will be informed why admission was refused and have the right of appeal against the decision not to offer their child a place at the school.

Parents or carers wishing to appeal against the decision not to offer a place at any of the schools named in these admission arrangements should complete the online appeal form on the WNC website. Please visit [the Appeals page](#) for more information and to complete the form.

If parents or carers wish to submit supporting evidence after lodging their appeal, it should be e-mailed to [appealsteam.NCC@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:appealsteam.NCC@westnorthants.gov.uk) within 10 working days of the submission of the appeal.

Appeals against decisions not to offer a place at a school in the normal admissions round, must be lodged in writing, giving the reasons for appeal, by the date published on the Appeals website. Appeals submitted after this deadline will still be heard, but there is no guarantee they will be heard before the end of the school year in which the application is made.

NB: For appeals against decisions not to offer a place at a school resulting from an in-year application, the appeal must be submitted before the end of the academic year for which the application was submitted.

# WNC Primary Co-ordinated Scheme for admissions in September 2025

## Section 1

### Timetable for Primary Co-ordinated Scheme for September 2025 intakes

Date	Event
10 September 2024	Online applications open and information to parents/carers available on WNC website
12 December 2024	Reminder letter sent via schools to parents/carers of Year 2 children at infant schools advising them of the need to apply for a junior school place. Email also sent to schools to remind parents/carers of the need to apply for reception.
15 January 2025	<b>Closing date for applications</b> (statutory). Late applications, i.e. those received after midnight on 15 January 2025, will not be processed until additional rounds of allocations (see below)
11 February 2025	WNC sends applications to other Local Authorities (LAs) and Own Admission Authority (OAA) schools (if applicable)
15 February 2025	EHC team to have informed the School Admissions team about any pupils with an EHC Plan, and details of the named school (statutory)
28 February 2025	OAA schools send ranked lists to WNC (if applicable)
21 March 2025	WNC applies agreed Scheme for West Northamptonshire schools, informing other LAs of offers to be made to their residents
15 April 2025	Primary schools informed by WNC of the final results via S2S, which may include offers made to pupils living in other LAs
16 April 2025	<b>National Offer Day</b> - offers made to parents/carers by WNC
By 18 April 2025	Schools final allocation lists (ATFs) uploaded onto the S2S secure site
7 May 2025	School Admissions begins to share late applications with other LAs
9 May 2025	Cut-off date for consideration for inclusion in first round of reallocations
19 May 2025	First round of reallocations begins (process can take a number of weeks and parents/schools informed at end of round of new offers)
13 June 2025	Cut-off date for consideration for inclusion in second round of reallocations
23 June 2025	Second round of reallocations begins (parents and schools to be informed at end of round of new offers)
4 July 2025	Cut-off date for consideration for inclusion in third round of reallocations
11 July 2025	Third round of reallocations begins (parents and schools to be informed at end of round of new offers)
18 July 2025	Where no previous application has been submitted, places at junior schools are allocated to children living in the West Northamptonshire Council area who are currently in infant schools. Letters sent to parents/carers to advise them of the places offered.
1 August 2025	Co-ordination of in-year application process commences

## Section 2

### Elements of the Scheme

#### 2.1 Regulations

The School Admissions (Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations (2008) require all local authorities (LAs) to have a scheme to co-ordinate admission arrangements for all publicly funded schools in its area (excluding special schools). The purpose of a co-ordinated scheme is to establish mechanisms for ensuring, as far as is reasonably practicable, that every child living within the LA who has applied for a school place in the normal admission round, receives an offer of a single school place on the same day – National Offer Day (16 April or the next working day). All schools **must** comply with the agreed scheme.

#### 2.2 Applying for a place in a primary, infant or junior school at the normal point of entry

The normal point of entry to primary or infant school is reception. The normal point of entry to junior school is year 3. The LA co-ordinates the process of allocating places at these schools in these year groups.

#### 2.3 Information for parents

Please note that throughout this scheme, the term “parent” refers to both individual parents as well as those with parental responsibility for the child, e.g. carers.

The ‘Applying for a Primary School Place in West Northamptonshire for 2025-26’ composite prospectus will be available in PDF format on the School Admissions pages of WNC’s website from September 2024. Alternatively a hard copy can be obtained by contacting the School Admissions team.

The prospectus contains information about:

- How to apply online
- Key dates for the application and allocation process
- Primary, infant and junior schools in each area of West Northamptonshire
- The Published Admission Number (PAN) for each school
- Each school’s oversubscription criteria
- Whether individual schools were oversubscribed for September 2024
- Children with special educational needs
- Home-to-school transport
- The process for late applications

#### 2.4 Application forms

The Common Application Form (CAF) allows parents to apply for a reception place at any primary or infant school, or year 3 at junior school, and to give reasons for their preferences. If parents apply directly to a school, the governing body/academy trust must inform the LA and parents should be advised to complete a CAF. **All** applications are co-ordinated by the LA (WNC) up to and including 31 July 2025.

Parents are encouraged to apply online wherever possible. Requests for paper application forms (for those who do not have access to the internet) should be made to the WNC School Admissions team and parents are recommended to use recorded delivery when posting a completed application form to the School Admissions team. Please note, WNC does not accept responsibility for applications received after the closing date due to parents using insufficient postage.

Applications received after 15 January 2025 will be considered late applications and will not be processed until after National Offer Day (16 April or the next working day).

Parents can submit any additional paperwork (e.g. proof of a house move) electronically or by post to the School Admissions team at WNC, clearly stating the name of child, date of birth and the name(s) of the school(s) that are being applied for.

#### 2.5 Applications for academies, foundation, voluntary aided and free schools



The LA applies the oversubscription criteria and ranks applicants for some own admission authority (OAA) schools but if the school applies their own criteria, applications will be sent to OAAs by the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1 and schools will be asked to rank applicants as described in 2.11.

## **2.6 Residence in another LA**

Parents residing in one LA who wish to apply for a reception place at a primary or infant school, or year 3 at a junior school located in a different LA, must apply using the CAF (online or paper) for the LA in which they live (i.e. their home LA).

## **2.7 Applications for schools outside the LA**

Parents residing in the WNC area should use the WNC CAF even if the schools for which they wish to apply are in a different authority. On receipt, applications for schools outside the WNC area will be logged on the Admissions database and information relating to those preferences and any additional information will be electronically forwarded to the relevant maintaining LA by the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1.

## **2.8 Exchange of information**

LAs must exchange information on applications received and potential offers to be made by the dates specified in the scheme (see Section 1). A maintaining LA must inform the home LA if it intends to offer a place at one of its schools to an applicant living in a different LA area. LAs should exchange information on applications across their borders and seek to eliminate multiple offers across LA borders wherever possible. The exchange of data must, where possible, be carried out using secure data protection systems.

## **2.9 Supplementary Information Forms (SIFs)**

If additional information is required by the admission authority of an academy, foundation, voluntary aided or free school in order to apply its oversubscription criteria, this will be detailed in their admission arrangements and in the specific section about that school in the LA's composite prospectus. Parents may be required to complete a SIF. Links to SIFs for schools requiring them will be available on the WNC website from September 2024. Alternatively, contact details for each school are included in the LA's prospectus so parents may contact schools directly to obtain a SIF. **SIFs must be returned to the preferred school by 15 January 2025 unless otherwise stated in the schools' admission arrangements.**

## **2.10 Multiple Applications**

If more than one application is made for a child prior to the closing date, only the latest dated application form will be processed. Any previously submitted application forms will not be processed.

If an offer of a school place has already been made by the LA and the applicant has chosen to submit further applications to be processed in reallocation rounds, the latest-dated application will take priority over any previous applications. If it is possible to offer a place at one of the preferences on the latest-dated application, an offer will be made and the previous offer will be withdrawn without further reference to the applicant. Applicants must place any requests to withdraw applications in writing to the School Admissions team (by letter or email) prior to the reallocation round.

Where there may be multiple applications from parents who are separated, parents will need to refer to section 2.22 of this scheme for further guidance.

## **2.11 How the co-ordination process produces the offer of a single school place**

All schools have a Published Admissions Number (PAN). This is the number of places available at the normal point of entry. Admission authorities must consider all the applications they receive and, if there are more applications than places available, they must apply their oversubscription criteria to all applicants. This process can be carried out by the School Admissions team on behalf of OAA schools as part of a Service Level Agreement (SLA). Any school wishing to use this service should inform the School Admissions team by 1 August in the year prior to the year of admission. School Admissions will always confirm any offer made with the school in question.

All OAA schools are responsible for returning a ranked list of all applicants to the LA by the date stated in the scheme timetable (unless they have an SLA with School Admissions agreeing they will carry out this process on their behalf). Some schools will be oversubscribed, others undersubscribed. The surplus places at

undersubscribed schools will be allocated to children who were unable to obtain places at their preferred schools.

Schools using random allocation as a tie-breaker, or as part of their oversubscription criteria, must send lists which include the names of all applicants in their randomised ranked order to the School Admissions team. The ranked list must include all children and not just those ranked up to the school's PAN. This procedure will enable the School Admissions team to identify why a place has been refused.

For LA schools (community and voluntary controlled schools), the School Admissions team will be responsible for applying the oversubscription criteria if the number of applications exceeds the PAN of the school.

The LA must allocate a place at the highest preference school where the child can be offered a place. If a child is eligible for a place at more than one school, the applicant's order of preference will be considered and the highest preference will be offered.

- If a child qualifies for a place at all 3 preference schools, the LA will offer a place at the school that is ranked highest on the CAF. The child's name will then be removed from the ranked list(s) at the lower preference schools where they qualified for a place so that other children may be offered a place at these schools
- If a child can be offered a place at only one of their preference schools, they will be offered a place at that school regardless of the preference order on the common application form
- If a child cannot be offered a place within the PAN of any of their preferred schools, the LA will offer a place at the nearest school with a place available (i.e. the nearest school which has not reached their PAN and therefore has a place/places available at the time)
- If a child is offered a place at a school which wasn't their first preference, they can request to be added to the waiting list for any of the schools which was a higher preference than the school offered.
- Parents have the right to appeal against refusal of a place at any school for which they have applied, unless a higher preference has been allocated. Information about how to make an appeal is published on the LA's website.

Where it is not possible to offer a place at any of the preferred schools, a place will be allocated at the school closest to the home address where places are available at the time of allocation. Some children in this situation will be eligible for assistance with transport costs. Parents will be referred to the school travel assistance pages of WNC's website.

A single place will be identified for each child by the end of this co-ordination process. When schools have more applications than places available, places will only be allocated up to the limit of the school's PAN. The admission authorities of OAA schools **must** notify their LA of their intention to increase the school's PAN and reference to the change should be made on the school's website. Where further capacity is required to provide every child with a school place, the LA will consult relevant schools to reach an agreement.

The LA will publish details of how places were allocated on its website after National Offer Day.

## **2.12 Protocol for children with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans**

Reviews of EHC Plans, discussions with parents about preference and placement enquiry procedures, will all be undertaken by the EHC team at WNC. Placement decisions will be made by the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1. The admission of children with EHC plans, where the school is named in the plan, will take priority over all other children.

The EHC team will inform parents of the school allocated for their child on or around or around the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1. There may be circumstances where parents have not been informed of the school allocated by this date and/or a school has not yet been named. In these cases, schools may be required to admit children over PAN if it is subsequently named on a child's EHCP.

The offer of a school place will be made by the EHC team who will also amend the EHC plan accordingly.

## **2.13 Notification of offers to all schools or other Local Authorities**

As part of the co-ordinated process, other LAs will be informed electronically by the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1 of any offers of school places that WNC is able to make to their residents. All schools, including OAA schools, will be informed of the final offers, which may include offers made to pupils

living in other LAs, by the date shown in the scheme timetable in Section 1. Schools **must not** communicate with parents until *after* the offer from WNC has been sent on National Offer Day.

## 2.14 Applying for a place in a Junior School

The normal point of entry to junior schools is year 3 and the LA co-ordinates the process of allocating places to these schools in this year group.

Parents of children who are in year 2 at an infant school and who want them to attend a year 3 in a junior school in September 2024 need to apply for year 3 places in junior schools using the Common Application Form.

Parents of children in year 2 at an infant school should not apply for a place in year 3 at a primary school on the Common Application Form as this form is only used for applications to schools for the normal point of entry. Year 3 is **not** the normal point of entry for a primary school. Instead, applications for a place in year 3 in a primary school for September 2024 should be made on an in-year application form in accordance with the LA's in-year process from June 2024.

## 2.15 National Offer Day

The School Admissions team will notify all on-time applicants of their school offer on National Offer Day (16 April or the next working day) by email (for all online applicants) or by post (a first class letter will be sent to all applicants who submitted a paper application). This communication will include notification of the school place that has been offered and, if necessary, information about how to appeal against the decision not to offer a place at a particular school. Breakdowns of how places were allocated in accordance with each school's oversubscription criteria will be published on the WNC website. Links to this page will be provided on all offer emails and letters.

The School Admissions team will assume that the place has been accepted unless communication from the parent is received to advise to the contrary.

## 2.16 Rejection of a school place

Parents will be required to notify the School Admissions team in writing (by email or letter) if they **do not** propose to accept the school place offered. These places will then be reallocated during the rounds of reallocation.

OAA schools must inform the School Admissions team if they are notified by a parent that the school place is being rejected so that the School Admissions team has an accurate picture of the available school places prior to the reallocation dates. Schools should not reallocate these places themselves. Instead, they will be reallocated during the LA's rounds of reallocation.

## 2.17 Late applications

Every effort will be made to encourage parents to complete application forms by the closing date of **15 January 2025**. If an application form is received *after* midnight on 15 January 2025, it will not be considered until all the on-time applications have been processed. Late applicants will not receive an offer of a school place on National Offer Day (16 April or the next working day). Late applications will be considered from the relevant reallocation date published in the scheme timetable in Section 1.

Parents will not be allowed to change the order or schools listed as preferences after the closing date. After this date, changes to preferences must be made on a late application form and will be processed in the further rounds of allocation (see Section 1).

For OAA schools applying their own criteria, WNC will forward any late applications directly to the schools for their consideration (by the agreed timelines). If places are not available at the preferred school, the School Admissions team must be informed by the school so that a place can be offered at an alternative school with places available.

NB: The co-ordinated process in West Northamptonshire continues up to and including 31 August of each year. From 1 September, the in-year process commences.

## 2.18 Right to appeal

Parents have the right to appeal against refusal of a place at any school for which they have applied. Parents will be advised of the appeal process on their allocation email/letter.

The admission authority must establish an independent appeals panel to hear the appeal. The panel will decide whether to uphold or dismiss the appeal. Where a panel upholds the appeal the school is required to admit the child.

## **2.19 Waiting lists**

Parents who have been refused a place at a school (this could either be on National Offer Day or after making a late application) may wish to place their child's name on a waiting list. Parents must contact the School Admissions team in order to request that their child's name is added to a school's waiting list. Following Primary National Offer Day, there will be no distinction drawn on school waiting lists between on-time and late applications: all applications will be ranked in accordance with schools' oversubscription criteria.

The School Admissions team will hold a waiting list for every school until 31 August 2025. From this point, OAA schools managing their own in-year admissions will maintain their own waiting list which must be kept until at least 31 December in the Offer year. The School Admissions team will retain a waiting list for all community and voluntary controlled schools and all OAA schools opting into the in-year co-ordination scheme until 31 December. Following this date, waiting lists will be cleared. If parents still wish their child's name to remain on the new waiting lists which will be established for the following term, they will need to request this in writing (via email) to the School Admissions team. A new application is not required. Waiting lists will be cleared each term, so if a parent wishes to remain on a waiting list for a whole academic year, they would make a request in writing to the School Admissions team by 31 December and 31 March. A new application form is required for a new academic year.

## **2.20 Rounds of reallocations**

Any remaining places or places that become available after National Offer Day will be allocated in rounds of reallocation (see timescales in Section 1) by the School Admissions team. In each round of reallocations, each school's oversubscription criteria will be applied to its waiting list to determine who should be allocated any available places. The LA continues to co-ordinate the allocation of places at all schools up to and including 31 July. This requires all schools which are their own admission authority choosing to apply their own oversubscription criteria to ensure clear and up-to-date communications with the School Admissions team regarding the ranking lists for each round of allocations.

## **2.21 Child's home address**

Unless otherwise stated in a school's admission arrangements, the child's home address is defined as the address at which the child normally resides with their parent/carer on the closing date for applications (15 January).

When we refer to a child's home address, we mean the permanent residence of the child. This address should be the child's only or main residence which is;

- owned by the child's parents/carers, or
- leased to or rented by the child's parents/carers under a lease or written rental agreement of not less than six months' duration.

Places cannot be allocated on the basis of an intended future change of address unless house moves have been confirmed through the exchange of contracts or signing of a formal lease.

Other admission authorities may have different definitions of a child's home address. Parents are advised to check the school's individual admission arrangements on their website or in the LA's composite prospectus.

Documentary evidence of ownership or rental agreement may be required together with proof of actual permanent residence at the property concerned.

## **2.22 Parents who do not live together**

WNC's definition of a child's address states that when parents live separately and the child spends time with each parent, the home address will be treated as the place where the child sleeps for most of the school week (i.e. Sunday night – Thursday night inclusive).

If the child spends equal amounts of time at two addresses, the parents must agree which address they wish to be the child's main address.

The LA can only process one application. Where more than one adult shares parental responsibility and if the adults live at different addresses, it is important that an agreement be reached on which schools to apply for, prior to making the application.

If multiple applications are received for the same child with conflicting addresses and/or preferences, or the School Admissions team is made aware of a dispute between two parents, all applications will be placed on hold and will **not** be processed until:

- a new single application is made, signed by all parties; or
- written agreement is provided from both parents indicating which application they have agreed on; or
- a court order is provided confirming which parent's application carries precedence.

If no agreement can be made, parents are recommended to seek legal advice. If an agreement cannot be reached before the closing date, this may affect the chances of a child being allocated a place at their preferred school/s.

Further information on parental responsibility can be found on the [DfE website](#)

## **2.23 Children who are part of a multiple birth group**

Under paragraph 2.16 (g) of The School Admissions Code (2021), infant class size restrictions may be exceeded where a child who is part of a multiple birth group is allocated as the 30<sup>th</sup> pupil. For community and voluntary controlled schools, the admission number will be exceeded to accommodate the other children from this birth group. These children will remain as 'excepted pupils' for the time they are in an infant class (reception, year 1 and year 2) or until class numbers fall back to the current infant class limit. Own admission schools may have another policy in place.

## **2.24 Random allocation**

Random allocation, when used, will be observed by someone independent of the school.

## **2.25 Definition of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children**

The highest priority in the oversubscription criteria for all schools must be given to 'looked after children' and 'previously looked after children'.

A 'looked after child' is a child who, at the time of making an application to a school, is:

- a) In the care of a local authority, or
- b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in exercise of its social services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989)

Previously looked after children are children who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they:

- a) were adopted under the Adoption Act 1976 (see Section 12 adoption orders) or the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (see Section 46 adoption orders), or
- b) became subject to a child arrangements order (as defined in Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 and as amended by Section 12 of the Children and Families Act 2014), or
- c) became subject to a special guardianship order (see Section 14A of the Children Act 1989 which defines a 'special guardianship order' as an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian (or special guardians).

This includes children who appear (to the admission authority) to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. A child is regarded as having been in state care outside of England if they were in the care of or were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other provider of care whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

## **2.26 Sharing information with schools**

When sharing information regarding the co-ordinated scheme with schools, WNC will:

- Supply information about what is required in the co-ordination process;
- Provide useful tips to schools;
- Be clear about the dates when information should/must be returned to the LA.

If schools already have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the School Admissions team, the team will carry out the agreed work and will share with the school the outcome of applications made to the school by sending out lists of successful applicants.

Schools wishing to establish an SLA for elements of the co-ordination process should contact the School Admissions team as soon as possible to discuss their requirements.

## **2.27 Relevant Area**

In accordance with The Education (Relevant Areas for Consultation on Admission Arrangements) Regulations 1999, WNC has determined its relevant area as West Northamptonshire and all adjoining local authorities.

# WNC Secondary Co-ordinated Scheme for admissions in September 2025

## Section 1

### Timetable for Secondary Co-ordinated Admissions for September 2025 intakes

Date	Event
10 September 2024	Online applications open and information to parents/carers
10 October 2024	Generic reminder letters sent via schools for parents of Primary and Junior school children, advising them of the need to apply for a year 7 place. Email sent to schools for them to remind parents of the need to apply
31 October 2024	<b>Closing date for applications</b> (statutory). Late applications, i.e. those received after midnight on 31 October 2024, will not be processed until additional rounds of allocation (see below)
26 November 2024	West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) sends applications to other Local Authorities (LAs) and Own Admission Authority (OAA) schools
15 January 2025	Own Admission Authority schools send ranked lists to WNC
7 February 2025	WNC applies agreed Scheme for West Northamptonshire schools, informing other LAs of offers to be made to their residents
15 February 2025	EHC team to have informed the School Admissions team about any pupils with an EHC Plan, and details of the named school (statutory)
28 February 2025	Secondary schools informed by WNC of the final allocations, which may include offers made to pupils living in other LAs
3 March 2025	<b>National Offer Day</b> - offers made to parents/carers by WNC and Secondary schools informed via S2S (Statutory)
By 5 March 2025	Schools final allocation lists (ATFs) uploaded onto the S2S secure site
From 21 March 2025	Start to share late applications received with other LAs
4 April 2025	Cut-off date for consideration for inclusion in first round of reallocations
23 May 2025	Cut-off date for consideration for inclusion in second round of reallocations
27 June 2025	Cut-off date for consideration for inclusion in third round of reallocations
15 April, 2 June and 7 July 2025	Additional rounds of allocations will start on these dates
18 July 2025	Places allocated to children living in the West Northamptonshire Council area, currently in Primary school and who have not submitted an application for a place in year 7. Letters sent to parents to advise of the places offered
1 August 2025	In-year co-ordination commences

## Section 2

### Elements of the Scheme

#### 2.1 Regulations

The School Admissions (Co-ordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations (2008) require local authorities (LAs) to have a scheme to co-ordinate admission arrangements for the normal admission round and late applications for all publically funded schools in its area (excluding special schools). The purpose of a co-ordinated scheme is to establish mechanisms for ensuring, as far as reasonably practicable, that every child living within the LA who has applied for a school place in the normal admission round, receives an offer of a single school place on the same day - National Offer Day (1 March or the next working day). All schools must comply with the agreed scheme.

#### 2.2 Applying for a place in a secondary school at the normal point of entry

The normal point of entry to secondary school is year 7 and the LA co-ordinates the process of allocating places at these schools in this year group.

#### 2.3 Information for parents

Please note that throughout this scheme, the term "parent" refers to both individual parents as well as those with parental responsibility for the child, e.g. carers.

The 'Applying for a Secondary School Place in West Northamptonshire 2025-26' composite prospectus will be available in PDF format on the School Admissions pages of WNC's website from September 2024. Alternatively a hard copy can be obtained by contacting the School Admissions team.

The prospectus contains information about:

- How to apply online
- Secondary schools in each area of West Northamptonshire
- How to complete a common application form
- The Published Admission Number (PAN) for each school
- Each school's oversubscription criteria
- Whether individual schools were oversubscribed for September 2023
- Key dates for the application and allocation process
- Children with special educational needs
- Home-to-school transport
- The process for late applications
- Contact details for the WNC School Admissions team

#### 2.4 Application forms

The Common Application Form (CAF) allows parents to apply for a year 7 place at secondary school and to give reasons for their preferences. If parents apply directly to a school, the governing body/academy trust must inform the LA and parents should be advised to complete a CAF. All applications are co-ordinated by the LA (WNC) up to and including 31 July 2025.

Parents are encouraged to apply online wherever possible. Requests for paper application forms (for those who do not have access to the internet) should be made to the WNC School Admissions team and parents are recommended use recorded delivery when posting a completed application form to the School Admissions team. Please note, WNC does not accept responsibility for applications received after the closing date due to parents using insufficient postage.

Applications received after 31 October 2024 will be considered as late applications and will not be processed until after National Offer Day.



Parents can submit any additional paperwork (e.g. proof of a house move) electronically or by post to the School Admissions team at WNC, clearly stating the name of child, date of birth and the name(s) of the school(s) that are being applied for.

## **2.5 Applications for academies, foundation, voluntary aided and free schools**

The LA applies the oversubscription criteria and ranks applicants for some own admission authority (OAA) schools but if the school applies their own criteria, applications will be sent to OAAs by the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1 and schools will be asked to rank applicants as described in 2.11.

## **2.6 Residence in another LA**

Parents resident in one LA who wish to apply for a place in year 7 at a Secondary school located in a different LA, must apply using the Common Application Form (online or paper) for the LA in which they live (i.e. their home LA).

## **2.7 Applications for schools outside the LA and for West Northamptonshire schools from families living in other LAs**

Applications from residents in the WNC area for schools in other LAs will be logged on the Admissions database and information relating to those preferences and any additional information will be electronically forwarded to the relevant maintaining LA by the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1.

Similarly, the School Admissions team will receive applications forwarded from other LAs for schools in West Northamptonshire. These will be recorded and passed on to OAA schools as appropriate. If the application is for a community or voluntary controlled school, the School Admissions team will process applications along with all other applications for WNC schools.

## **2.8 Exchange of information**

LAs and admission authorities in the area must exchange information on applications received and potential offers to be made by the dates specified in the scheme (see Section 1). A maintaining LA must inform the home LA if it intends to offer a place at one of its schools to an applicant living in a different LA area. LAs should exchange information on applications across their borders and seek to eliminate multiple offers across LA borders wherever possible. The exchange of data must, where possible, be carried out using secure data protection systems.

## **2.9 Supplementary Information Forms (SIFs)**

If additional information is required by the admission authority of an academy, foundation, voluntary aided or free school in order to apply its oversubscription criteria, this will be detailed in their admission arrangements and in the specific section about that school in the LA's composite prospectus. Links to SIFs for schools which require them will be available on the WNC website from September 2024. Alternatively, contact details for each school are included in the LA's prospectus so parents may contact schools directly to obtain a SIF. **SIFs must be returned directly to the preferred school by 31 October 2024 unless otherwise stated in the schools' admission arrangements.**

## **2.10 Multiple applications**

If more than one application is made for a child prior to the closing date, only the latest dated application form will be processed. Any previously submitted application forms will not be processed.

If an offer of a school place has already been made by the LA and the applicant has chosen to submit further applications to be processed in reallocation rounds, the latest-dated application will take priority over any previous applications. If it is possible to offer a place at one of the preferences on the latest-dated application, an offer will be made and the previous offer will be withdrawn without further reference to the

applicant. Applicants must place any requests to withdraw applications in writing to the School Admissions team (by letter or email) prior to the reallocation round.

Where there may be multiple applications from parents who are separated, parents will need to refer to section 2.21 of this scheme for further guidance.

## 2.11 How the co-ordination process produces the offer of a single school place

All schools have a Published Admissions Number (PAN). This is the number of places available at the normal point of entry. Admission authorities must consider all the applications they receive and, if there are more applications than places available, they must apply their oversubscription criteria to all applicants. This process can be carried out by the School Admissions team on behalf of OAA schools as part of a Service Level Agreement (SLA). Any school wishing to use this service should inform the School Admissions team by 1 August in the year prior to the year of admission. School Admissions will always confirm any offer made with the school in question.

The LA must allocate a place at the highest preference school where the child can be offered a place. If a pupil is eligible for a place at more than one school, the applicant's order of preference will be considered and the highest preference will be offered.

- If a child qualifies for a place at all 3 preference schools, the LA will offer a place at the school that is ranked highest on the CAF. The child's name will then be removed from the ranked list(s) at the lower preference schools where they qualified for a place so that other children may be offered a place at these schools.
- If a child can be offered a place at only one of their preference schools, they will be offered a place at that school regardless of the preference order on the common application form;
- If a child cannot be offered a place within the PAN of any of their preferred schools, the LA will offer a place at the nearest school with a place available (i.e. the nearest school which has not reached their PAN and therefore has a place/places available at the time);
- If a child is offered a place at a school which wasn't their first preference, they can request to be added to the waiting list for any of the schools which was a higher preference than the school offered.
- Parents have the right to appeal against refusal of a place at any school for which they have applied, unless a higher preference has been allocated. Information about how to make an appeal is published on the LA's website.

All OAA schools are responsible for returning a ranked list of all applicants to the LA by the date stated in the scheme timetable (unless they have an SLA with School Admissions agreeing they will carry out this process on their behalf). Some schools will be oversubscribed, others undersubscribed. The surplus places at undersubscribed schools will be allocated to children who were unable to obtain places at their preferred schools.

Schools using random allocation as a tie-breaker, or as part of their oversubscription criteria, must send lists which include the names of all applicants in their randomised ranked order to the School Admissions team. The ranked list must include all children and not just those ranked up to the school's PAN. This procedure will enable the School Admissions team to identify why a place has been refused.

For LA schools (community and voluntary controlled schools), the School Admissions team will be responsible for applying the oversubscription criteria if the number of applications exceeds the PAN of the school.

Where it is not possible to offer a place at any of the preferred schools, a place will be allocated at the school closest to the home address where places are available at the time of allocation. Some pupils in this situation will be eligible for assistance with transport costs. Parents will be referred to the school travel assistance information on WNC's website.

A single place will be identified for each child by the end of this co-ordination process. When schools have more applications than places available, places will only be allocated up to the limit of the school's PAN. The admission authorities of OAA schools **must** notify their LA of their intention to increase the school's PAN and reference to the change should be made on the school's website. Where further capacity is required to provide every child with a school place, the LA will consult relevant schools to reach an agreement.

The LA will publish details of how places were allocated on its website after National Offer Day.

## **2.12 Protocol for children with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans**

Reviews of EHC Plans, discussions with parents about preference and placement enquiry procedures, will all be undertaken by the EHC team at WNC. Placement decisions will be made by the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1. The admission of children with EHC plans, where the school is named in the plan, will take priority over all other children.

The EHC team will inform parents of the school allocated for their child on or around or around the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1. There may be circumstances where parents have not been informed of the school allocated by this date and/or a school has not yet been named. In these cases, schools may be required to admit children over PAN if it is subsequently named on a child's EHCP.

The offer of a school place will be made by the EHC team who will also amend the EHC plan accordingly.

## **2.13 Notification of offers to all schools or other local authorities**

As part of the co-ordination process, other LAs will be informed electronically by the date shown on the scheme timetable in Section 1 of any offers of school places that WNC is able to make to their residents. All schools, including OAA schools, will be informed of the final offers, which may include offers made to pupils living in other LAs, by the date shown in the scheme timetable in Section 1. Schools **must not** communicate with parents until *after* the offer from WNC has been sent.

## **2.14 National Offer Day**

The School Admissions team will notify all on-time applicants of their school offer on National Offer Day (1 March or the next working day) by email (for all online applicants) or by post (a first class letter will be sent to all applicants who submitted a paper application). This communication will include information about how to find out how school places have been allocated in the WNC area and, if necessary, information about how to appeal. In addition, breakdowns of how places were allocated in accordance with each school's oversubscription criteria will be published on the WNC website. Links to this page will be provided on all offer emails and letters.

The School Admissions team will assume that the place has been accepted unless communication from the parent is received to advise to the contrary.

## **2.15 Rejection of a school place**

Parents will be required to notify the School Admissions team in writing (by email or letter) if they **do not** propose to accept the school place offered. These places will then be reallocated during the rounds of reallocation.

OAA schools must inform the School Admissions team if they are notified by a parent that the school place is being rejected so that the School Admissions team has an accurate picture of the available school places prior to the reallocation dates. Schools should not reallocate these places themselves. Instead, they will be reallocated during the LA's rounds of reallocation.

## **2.16 Late applications**

Every effort will be made to encourage parents to complete application forms by the closing date of **31 October 2024**. If an application form is received *after* midnight on 31 October 2024, it will not be considered until all the on-time applications have been processed. Late applicants will not receive an offer of a school place on National Offer Day (1 March or the next working day). Late applications will be considered from the relevant reallocation date published in the scheme timetable in Section 1).

Parents will not be allowed to change the order or schools listed as preferences after the closing date. After this date, changes to preferences must be made on a late application form and will be processed in the further rounds of allocation (see Section 1).

For OAA schools applying their own criteria, WNC will forward any late applications directly to the schools for their consideration (by the agreed timelines). If places are not available at the preferred school, the School Admissions team must be informed by the school so that a place can be offered at an alternative school with places available.

NB: The co-ordinated process in West Northamptonshire continues up to and including 31 August of each year. From 1 September, the in-year process commences.

### **2.17 Right to appeal**

Parents have the right to appeal against refusal of a place at any school for which they have applied. Parents will be advised of the appeal process on their allocation email/letter.

The admission authority must establish an independent appeals panel to hear the appeal. The panel will decide whether to uphold or dismiss the appeal. Where a panel upholds the appeal the school is required to admit the child.

### **2.18 Waiting lists**

Parents who have been refused a place at a school (this could either be on National Offer Day or after making a late application) may wish to place their child's name on a waiting list. Parents must contact the School Admissions team in order to request that their child's name is added to a school's waiting list. Following Primary National Offer Day, there will be no distinction drawn on school waiting lists between on-time and late applications: all applications will be ranked in accordance with schools' oversubscription criteria.

The School Admissions team will hold a waiting list for every school until 31 August 2025. At this point, for OAA schools managing their own in-year admissions (i.e. opting out of the LAs in-year co-ordination scheme), waiting lists will be handed over and must be kept until at least 31 December in the Offer year. The School Admissions team will retain a waiting list for all OAA schools opting into the in-year co-ordination scheme until 31 December. Following this date, waiting lists will be cleared. If parents still wish their child's name to remain on the new waiting lists which will be established for the following term, they will need to request this in writing (via email) to the School Admissions team. A new application is not required. Waiting lists will be cleared each term, so if a parent wishes to remain on a waiting list for a whole academic year, they would make a request in writing to the School Admissions team by 31 December and 31 March. A new application form is required for a new academic year.

### **2.19 Rounds of reallocation**

Any remaining places or places that become available after National Offer Day will be allocated in rounds of reallocation (see timescales in Section 1) by the School Admissions team. In each round of reallocations, each school's oversubscription criteria will be applied to its waiting list to determine who should be allocated any available places. The LA continues to co-ordinate the allocation of places at all schools up to and including 31 July. This requires all schools which are their own admission authority choosing to apply their own oversubscription criteria to ensure clear and up-to-date communications with the School Admissions team regarding the ranking lists for each round of allocations.

### **2.20 Child's home address**

Unless otherwise stated in a school's admission arrangements, the child's home address is defined as the address at which the child normally resides with their parent/carer on the closing date for applications (31 October).

When we refer to a child's home address, we mean the permanent residence of the child. This address should be the child's only or main residence which is;

- owned by the child's parents/carers, or

- leased to or rented by the child's parents/carers under a lease or written rental agreement of not less than six months' duration.

Places cannot be allocated on the basis of an intended future change of address unless house moves have been confirmed through the exchange of contracts or signing of a formal lease.

Other admission authorities may have different definitions of a child's home address. Parents are advised to check the school's individual admission arrangements on their website or in the LA's composite prospectus.

Documentary evidence of ownership or rental agreement may be required together with proof of actual permanent residence at the property concerned.

## **2.21 Parents who do not live together**

WNC's definition of a child's address states that when parents live separately and the child spends time with each parent, the home address will be treated as the place where the child sleeps for most of the school week (i.e. Sunday night – Thursday night inclusive).

If the child spends equal amounts of time at two addresses, the parents must agree which address they wish to be the child's main address.

The LA can only process one application. Where more than one adult shares parental responsibility and if the adults live at different addresses, it is important that an agreement be reached on which schools to apply for, prior to making the application.

If multiple applications are received for the same child with conflicting addresses and/or preferences, or the School Admissions team is made aware of a dispute between two parents, all applications will be placed on hold and will **not** be processed until:

- a new single application is made, signed by all parties; or
- written agreement is provided from both parents indicating which application they have agreed on; or
- a court order is provided confirming which parent's application carries precedence.

If no agreement can be made, parents are recommended to seek legal advice. If an agreement cannot be reached before the closing date, this may affect the chances of a child being allocated a place at their preferred school/s.

Further information on parental responsibility can be found on the [DfE website](#):

## **2.22 Random allocation**

Random allocation, when used, will be observed by someone independent of the school.

## **2.23 Definition of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children**

The highest priority in the oversubscription criteria for all schools must be given to 'looked after children' and 'previously looked after children'.

A 'looked after child' is a child who, at the time of making an application to a school, is:

- a) In the care of a local authority, or
- b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in exercise of its social services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989)

Previously looked after children are children who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they:

- a) were adopted under the Adoption Act 1976 (see Section 12 adoption orders) or the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (see Section 46 adoption orders), or
- b) became subject to a child arrangements order (as defined in Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 and as amended by Section 12 of the Children and Families Act 2014), or
- c) became subject to a special guardianship order (see Section 14A of the Children Act 1989 which defines a 'special guardianship order' as an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian (or special guardians)).

This includes children who appear (to the admission authority) to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. A child is regarded as having been in state care outside of England if they were in the care of or were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other provider of care whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

## **2.24 Admission of children out of their normal year group (out of cohort)**

WNC's policy is for children to be educated within their correct chronological year group where possible, with the curriculum differentiated as necessary to meet the needs of individual children. This is in line with DfE guidance which states that "in general, children should be educated in their normal age group".

Parents/carers may however seek a place for their child out of their normal age group, for example, if they are currently being educated out of their normal age group. They must put their request in writing to the School Admissions team (for community and voluntary controlled schools) and directly to the school for schools who are their own admission authority, at the time of application for their normal age group.

The admission authority of the school will consider the request and make a decision on the basis of the circumstances of each case and in the best interests of the child concerned.

The admission authority of the school **MUST** set out clearly for parents the reasons for their decision about the year group a child should be admitted to.

Parents/carers do not have a right to appeal if they are offered a place at the school but it is not in their preferred age group.

Please see further information in the School Admissions Code (2021) about the admission of children outside their normal age group.

## **2.25 Sharing information with schools**

When sharing information regarding the co-ordinated scheme with schools, the local authority (WNC) will:

- Supply information about what is required in the co-ordination process;
- Provide useful tips to schools;
- Be clear about the dates when information should/must be returned to the LA.

If schools already have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the School Admissions team, the team will carry out the agreed work and will share with the school the outcome of applications made to the school by sending out lists of successful applicants.

Schools wishing to establish a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the co-ordination process should contact the School Admissions team as soon as possible to discuss their requirements.

## **2.26 Relevant Area**

In accordance with The Education (Relevant Areas for Consultation on Admission Arrangements) Regulations 1999, WNC has determined its relevant area as West Northamptonshire and all adjoining local authorities.



# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

## CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE: COUNCILLOR MALCOLM LONGLEY

Report Title	Disposal of former Collingtree Smallholding, Watering Lane, Collingtree
Report Author	James Aldridge Head of Property Strategy and Estates <a href="mailto:James.Aldridge@westnorthants.gov.uk">James.Aldridge@westnorthants.gov.uk</a>

### List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	20/12/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	20/12/2023
Other Directors	Stuart Timmiss – Executive Director Place, Environment and Economy	03/01/2024
	Simon Bowers – Assistant Director Assets and Environment	03/01/2024
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Craig Forsyth	05/01/2024

### List of Appendices

None

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek authority to dispose of the former Collingtree Smallholding off Watering Lane, Northampton by way of a public works concession contract (“PWCC”) to secure a series of assets for the Council’s policy goals and service delivery.

## 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 West Northamptonshire Council holds the freehold interest of the former Collingtree Smallholding site which extends to approximately 27 acres (11 ha). The site is just off the A45 on Watering Lane, close to Junction 15 of the M1 Motorway and adjacent to the Hilton Hotel. Northampton town centre is approximately 4.5 miles from the site.
- 2.2 The site was promoted by the then Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) as a residential development site, and it was allocated as part of the Northampton Local Plan Part 2. The allocation provided an indicative 265 dwellings.
- 2.3 The Council is now seeking to progress this disposal of the site. In support of this, it commissioned consultants to provide strategic advice on disposal options taking due consideration of the varying degree of forms of housing delivery solution (elderly care, self-build plots, etc). As the site is within the control of the Council, it is able, through the disposal, to influence the housing mix to best meet its own operational objectives. This could include delivery of social housing and properties needed for the Council's services.
- 2.4 It is also proposed that ten self-build plots are delivered. This would help the Council to meet its statutory duty to ensure sufficient self-build plots secure planning permission.
- 2.5 In line with the Council's environmental goals, it is proposed that disposal seeks the delivery of a local heat network, smart grid, and energy centre to support low carbon use, while also providing the Council with a long-term income stream. In addition, the appointed developer would provide all necessary infrastructure (roads and utilities) to service any retained plots for the Council.
- 2.6 Given the way in which the Council is looking to bring this scheme forward, it is proposed that this will be completed using a PWCC. PWCCs are used by public authorities to deliver services or construct infrastructure by allowing the use of private capital with the return to the private sector coming from exploitation of a public asset (in this case, the right to build and sell houses) whilst taking market risk (fluctuation in sales demand and values).
- 2.7 This arrangement is likely to reduce headline capital receipts compared to a simple disposal but would be more beneficial financially than a simple disposal because of the revenue savings available from the assets provided for service provision.
- 2.8 In summary, the procurement and disposal would require the provision of:
  - a) All site infrastructure, including that required to serve the sites and assets to be provided to the Council.
  - b) A heat network and smart grid, unless it becomes clear that they are impractical or would materially adversely affect land values.
  - c) A policy-compliant proportion and mix of social housing, to become part of the Council's social housing stock.
  - d) Assets for service delivery.



- e) Ten plots for self-build/custom-build housing.
- f) A plot suitable for a private sector care home.

2.9 The main risks are the variability of the housing market and planning risks, which affect all forms of disposal, and the relative unfamiliarity of the proposed form of disposal, which is more specific to the option recommended. This would be mitigated by clear explanation.

### **3. Recommendations**

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3.1 That Cabinet authorises the Assistant Director Assets & Environment in consultation with the Executive Director Finance and Portfolio Holder for Finance to agree terms for the disposal of the former Collingtree Smallholding, Watering Lane, Collingtree and enter any documentation required to implement or in connection with this disposal, in accordance with paragraph 6.18 with any minor variations found to be necessary or expedient.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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4.1 The land is not required in its current state by the Council to meet operational needs.

4.2 The site was being held with future residential development in mind.

4.3 The development will see a site identified within the Northampton Local Plan Part 2 brought forward for development within the identified plan period to support housing supply.

4.4 To comply with the obligations on the Council to obtain the best consideration reasonably obtainable in a freehold land disposal.

4.5 Disposal by means of a public works concession contract would allow the Council to secure assets which are valuable in delivery its statutory duties and policy goals, whilst delivering efficiencies.

4.6 To generate capital receipts and/or provide the Council with assets that are of equal or greater value to the Council than the initial capital receipt would have been.

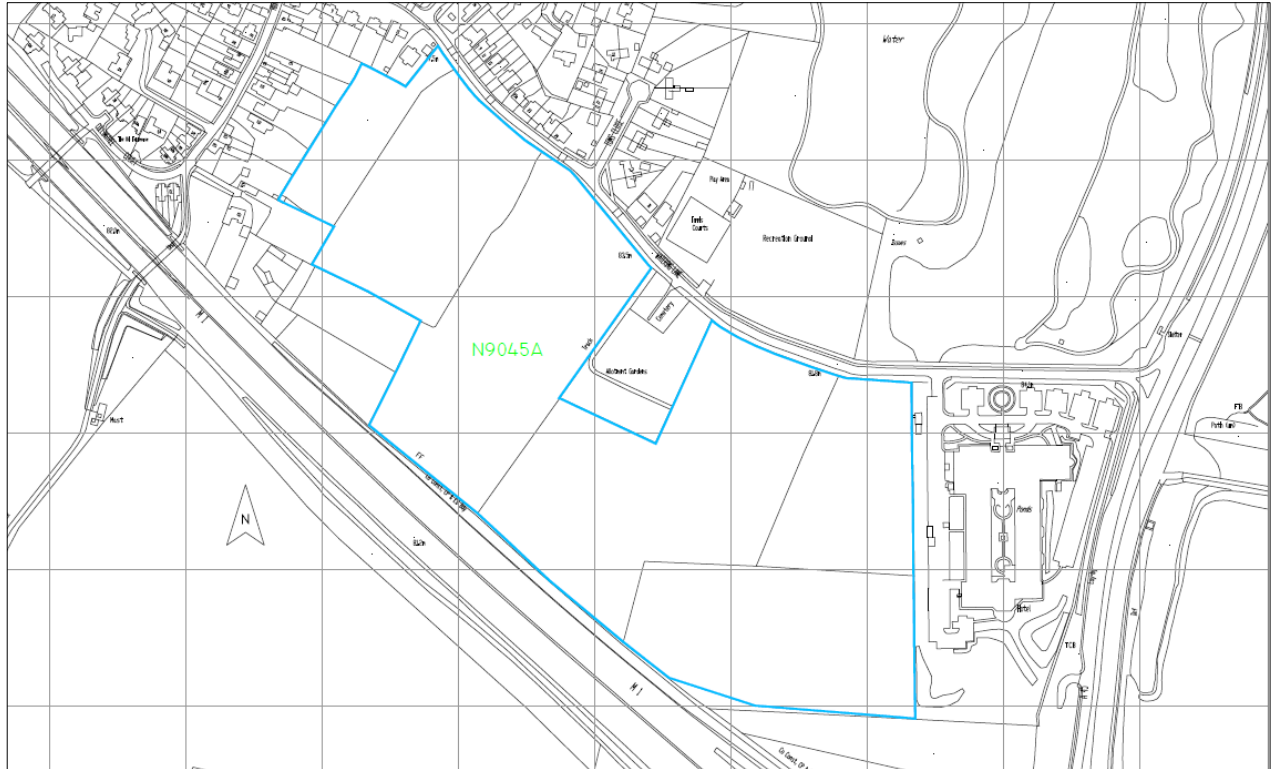
### **5. Report Background**

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#### **The Site**

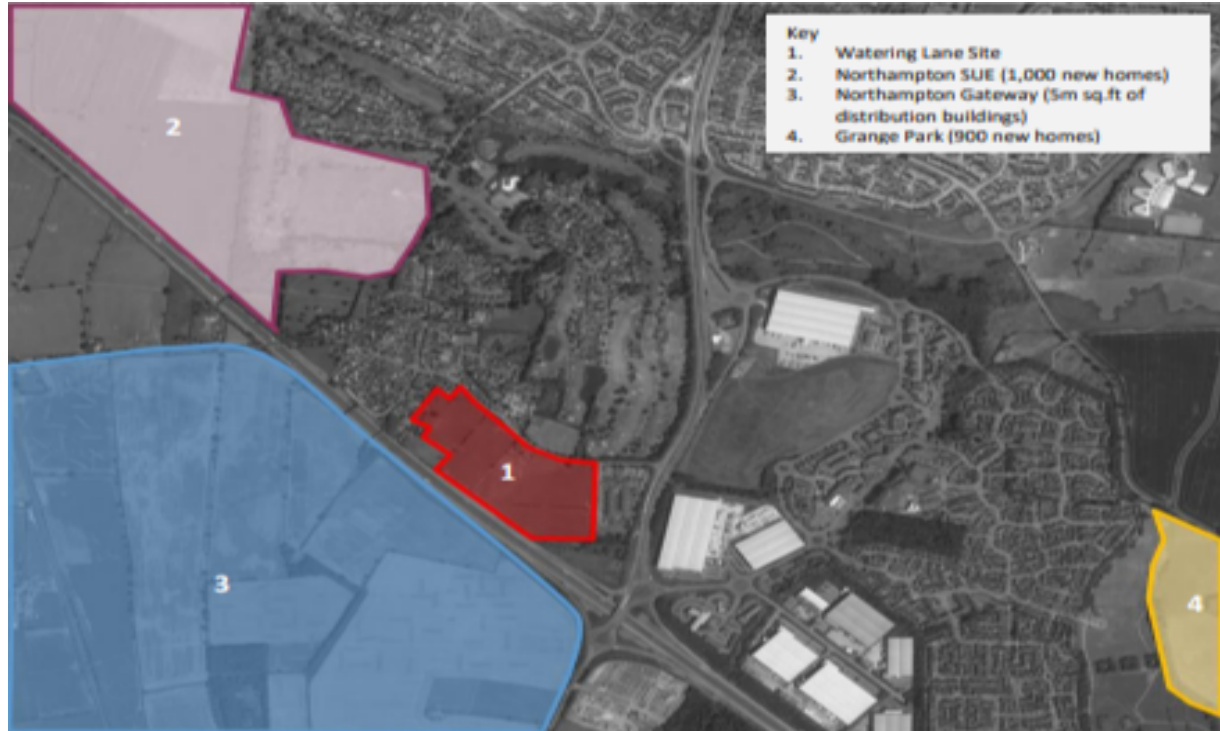
5.1 The former Collingtree Smallholding formed part of the Northamptonshire County Council portfolio. The site extends to approximately 27.127 acres (10.978 hectares) and is situated just off the A45 off Watering Lane, close to Junction 15 of the M1 Motorway and adjacent to the Hilton Hotel, as shown on Plan 1.

## Plan 1: Collingtree Smallholding



- 5.2 The site previously formed part of the Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) portfolio and was being held with future development in mind. The site had until recently been let on a farm business tenancy for agricultural purposes while the development proposals were being formed. As the Council is looking at undertaking intrusive and non-intrusive surveys on the site, this tenancy was not renewed to minimise potential exposure to crop loss compensation, but also to de-risk the proposed disposal process.
- 5.3 The site is allocated as part of the Northampton Local Plan Part 2 under site reference 1104 (Watering Lane, Collingtree). The allocation provided an indicative 265 dwellings of which a minimum 200 dwellings were assumed to be deliverable within the plan period (2011 – 2029). The site also sits within proximity to several other significant development sites including the Northampton SUE (1,000 new homes), Northampton Gateway (5m sqft of warehouse and distribution), and the residential extension of Grange Park (c900 new homes). The allocations are shown on Plan 2.

## Plan 2: Development plan allocations in the area



- 5.4 West Northamptonshire Council (WNC), and Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) before it, identified the site as a key residential development opportunity and since its allocation in the Local Plan, has received strong unsolicited interest from regional and national volume housebuilders who are keen to acquire the site.
- 5.5 While the site has been allocated as a residential development site, given the breadth of services provided by West Northamptonshire Council, it would be remiss of the Council not to consider how the site (or parts of it) could be used to meet its wider operational needs and statutory duties. While delivering such needs might result in a lower, or even nil, capital receipt the revenue savings by providing or delivering such uses may be of equal or greater value.
- 5.6 Consideration has been given to using the site to deliver:
- Affordable housing (above the level which might be secured under planning policy allowing for viability testing).
  - Children's homes.
  - An elderly person's home.
  - Supported living accommodation.
  - Self-build plots.
- 5.7 In line with the Council's Sustainability Strategy including its net zero goals and its Estate Climate Strategy, consideration has also been given to the creation of an environmentally sustainable development. Specific proposals are discussed later in this report.

## Development and delivery options

- 5.8 The Council commissioned Public Sector Plc (PSP) to undertake an assessment of the site and provide advice, not only on the disposal method that would yield the highest capital receipt but also the impact on value of deploying various alternative housing options (self-build, elderly care etc.). While the site has an allocation for 265 houses, it is possible that a simple disposal to a volume housebuilder might not be the most cost effective or advantageous delivery model for the Council.
- 5.9 Allocations such as this often assumed to result in disposal to bulk housebuilders and are generally calculated on a dwellings per hectare basis. Such an assessment would not necessarily consider a more diverse, mixed, delivery method. For example, it is possible, with appropriate master planning, that greater densities could be delivered, or varied approaches (elderly care) could drive higher values, whilst staying within wider site constraints such as highways.
- 5.10 The PSP team was asked to model the potential delivery of a range of residential led solutions and used its expertise to suggest others. The options assessed included:
- PLC / volume housebuilder disposal (“PLC”).
  - SME housebuilder disposal (“SME”).
  - Self-build.
  - Specific private rented sector provision (“PRS”).
  - Residential care home.
  - Net zero carbon homes.
- 5.11 PSP provided an indicative layout plan for the development. While a more detailed planning assessment will be needed for an actual scheme, this shows how the site could be configured into individual development plots. This highlighted that it may be possible to increase the density of the scheme beyond the current allocation, the extent of which will be dependent on planning consideration and the level of green space buffer that may be required between the scheme, Collingtree Village, and the M1. The indicative scheme is shown on plan 3.

### Plan 3: PSP indicative layout plan



5.12 As with many large-scale development sites, Collingtree Smallholding has several constraints that will impact on the density, phasing, and ultimate costs and value of development. These include:

- Volatility in build costs (a general issue, not isolated to the current scheme).
- Noise and air pollution from the M1.
- Traffic and access into the site with potential highways improvements (A45).
- Disruption to the local community during the construction phase.
- The sites being adjacent to a conservation area.

5.13 Some of the above constraints can, and need to be, mitigated on site, such as green space buffers between the development and the M1. Others, such as the off-site highway works are likely to have an impact on development costs. While highway Improvements required for the Northampton Gateway site have already enhanced the junction with Watering Lane and the A45, it is possible that this will require further development as existing infrastructure may not be sufficient to accommodate the traffic movements from any proposed scheme. A detailed traffic impact assessment would be completed as part of any future planning process.

5.14 The options considered by PSP were:

- |          |   |  |
|----------|---|--|
| Option 1 | - | PLC housebuilder sale.   |
| Option 2 | - | SME-led with self-build.                                       |
| Option 3 | - | PLC-Led with SME and self-build.                               |
| Option 4 | - | PLC / SME / self-build and PRS.                                |
| Option 5 | - | PLC / SME / self-build / PRS mix and private sector care home. |

- Option 5B - As Option 5 + 20% increase in density.
- Option 6 - PLC / SME / self-build / PRS mix and net zero carbon homes.
- Option 7 - Self-build only.
- Option 8 - PLC only including flats and extended through buffer zone.

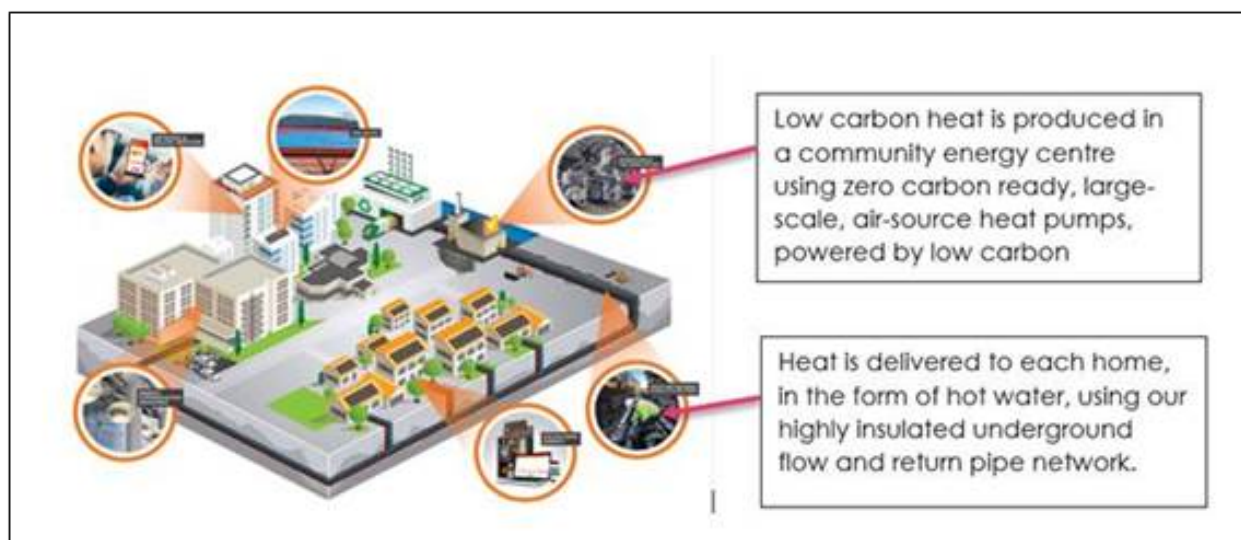
5.15 While the value of the options would be subject to a wider disposal process, PSP believed a sale to a PLC housebuilder would yield the highest capital receipt, albeit only marginally higher than a mixed tenure disposal which included self-build plots and provision of a site for elderly care / supported living. The PSP assessment did not include any assessment of the revenue savings that could be delivered through the provision of, for example, an elderly persons / supported living scheme or a children’s home on the site. In addition, it did not consider the operational and financial benefits of the Council securing affordable housing on site in lieu of capital receipt.

5.16 Cabinet will be aware that the Council, like many others, faces a shortage of social / affordable housing which it is currently actively seeking to address. Under the current local plan, developments in Northampton should provide for 35% of the properties to be affordable. For this site, this would equate to approximately 92 dwellings. However, the viability assessment process can result in lower numbers. As the Council has a need for social housing, it is likely to be of greater value for the Council to receive dwellings rather than a higher capital receipt.

### Heat network

5.17 The Council’s net zero goals call for a net zero West Northamptonshire by 2045. Energy performance of the district’s housing stock will be fundamental to achieving this. Whilst this can in theory be achieved in various ways, one of the most practical is likely to be the use of heat networks. Heat networks help reduce carbon emissions by removing the need for individual heat sources. They provide a locally managed solution for heating and hot water by replacing individual gas boilers with larger high efficiency heat sources such as centralised heat pumps located in an energy centre. A generic heat network is shown in Figure 4; of course, the buildings shown are not those proposed for this site.

**Figure 4: Generic heat network**



- 5.18 When properties are connected to a heat network all that is required within the property is a heat exchanger. This frees up space within the property for other uses. The heat is then used in whatever internal heating system the property has, such as radiators. Avoiding the need for local heat pumps to achieve low-carbon heating reduces maintenance burdens on householders and removes the noise heat pumps can make.
- 5.19 The Council is currently undertaking a feasibility study into a heat network or networks for Northampton and Rothersthorpe. This is largely funded by the Heat Networks Delivery Unit of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, with a view to securing capital grants towards scheme delivery if this proves viable.
- 5.20 Given this background, the opportunity to create a local heat network as part of development of the site has been assessed. In addition to the general benefits of heat networks, installing network as part of development of the site should offer efficiencies; the pipework can be laid along with other infrastructure.
- 5.21 While only indicative at this stage, to supply 100% of the projected heat demand from heat pumps, the scheme would require 800kw of heat pumps and approximately 150m<sup>3</sup> of thermal storage, the latter providing a means of storing and managing the supply to enable it to be distributed when needed (at peak times).
- 5.22 While a detailed assessment will need to be undertaken when a scheme has been further defined, the estimated cost of installing the heat network on site would be approximately £2.5m. This equates to circa £10k per dwelling, comparable to other low-carbon heating solutions. In practice the cost should be lower since the equipment and pipework would be installed alongside the general construction of the site rather than, for example, opening up an existing road, laying pipes, and then reinstating.
- 5.23 On completion, it is proposed that the facility would be owned and operated by the Council, creating a longer-term investment opportunity (through the sale of heat to the dwellings). Based on initial projections, this could deliver a positive return of approximately £800k over a 40-year period, while also supporting the Council's wider sustainability agenda.

### **Smart grid**

- 5.24 Managing the supply and demand for electricity via what is commonly known as a 'smart grid' helps maximise the use of renewable electricity and thus minimises carbon emissions. A local smart grid can be operated by an independent distribution network operator (IDNO). Such a system would take locally-generated green electricity, such as from roof-mounted solar (photovoltaic) panels, and balance it across the site, probably with a battery energy storage facility. This combination allows maximum use to be made of local green energy first, and then of power taken from the grid at off-peak prices. This should help households reduce their overall electricity costs without having to individually manage batteries and what can be quite complex management systems.

- 5.25 It is simplest to introduce a smart grid as part of a new development. Given this, it is proposed to pursue a smart grid for the new development. It would be managed from the energy centre alongside the heat network.

### **Assets for service delivery**

- 5.26 The Council has urgent needs for social housing, and for various specialist forms of housing for children, young people, adults with special needs, and older people. These are important both to meet social needs but also to reduce costs; in many cases the Council is currently paying very high costs to private sector providers when in-house provision could materially reduce the cost.
- 5.27 In the case of social housing, given the need for this, it is proposed that the Council requires that 35% of the dwellings constructed on the site are provided to it. These would be added to the Council's social housing stock. The exact mix of units would be determined in engagement with the Council's Housing & Communities team and Northamptonshire Partnership Homes, reflecting need and suitability for this location.
- 5.28 Work is still underway to define the exact mix of assets which would best be provided on the site, but these are likely to include a small number of dwellings to be used for children, young people, adults with special needs, or older people. It is proposed that these be finalised through business cases which demonstrate credible invest to save propositions.
- 5.29 The Council has duties to secure that planning permission is granted for sufficient self and custom build homes (see legal implications). It is therefore proposed that the developer be required to provide a minimum of ten plots for self or custom building. These would be serviced by the developer ready for sale to people desiring to build or specify their own home.

### **Local issues**

- 5.30 It has been identified that there are issues with parking for the nearby sports facilities. It is suggested that, as part of scheme design and the planning process, efforts be made to accommodate additional parking provision. It may be possible to share the area of the site used for storm water storage (flood risk mitigation) on the grounds that in times of heavy rain it is unlikely sports activities would be taking place.
- 5.31 There is also an identified local desire for additional allotments. It is therefore proposed that part of the open space required for the scheme takes the form of allotments if the planning considerations permit this.

### **Disposal route**

- 5.32 Given the way in which the Council is looking to bring this scheme forward, it is proposed that this will be completed using a PWCC. PWCCs are used by public authorities to deliver services or construct infrastructure by allowing the use of private capital with the return to the private sector coming from exploitation of a public asset (in this case, the right to build and sell houses) whilst taking market risk (fluctuation in sales demand and values).



5.33 The opportunity would be advertised on the correct procurement portal and also brought to the attention of likely interested parties, both large housebuilders and other companies capable of delivering the scale of development envisaged.

## 6. Issues and Choices

### Disposal structure

6.1 As part of the work undertaken by PSP, the Council requested that it undertake a comprehensive review of the viable options on site to assist the Council’s decision-making process.

6.2 Table 1 summarises those outcomes of those options, provides RAG Rating based on anticipated receipt levels: green being the highest and red the lowest. The actual values are not given in this report as they are commercially sensitive. It then considers the wider factors affecting the desirability of each option and then finally gives each an overall RAG rating. The second RAG rating is based on the principle that it cannot rise the RAG from the financial assessment but can lower it if other factors mean it is less favourable.

**Table 1: Option outcomes**

Option	Use Type / Developer	No. of Units	Value rating	Other factors	Overall rating
1	PLC housebuilder sale	265	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Known quantity.</li> <li>Likely relatively quick delivery compared to other options.</li> </ul>	Amber
2	SME-led with self-build	265	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops house-builder market capacity.</li> <li>Potentially quicker delivery.</li> <li>Potentially more stable delivery across economic cycle.</li> <li>More diverse character.</li> <li>Assistance with self-build statutory duty.</li> </ul>	Red
3	PLC-led with SME and self-build	265	Amber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Largely known quantity.</li> <li>Similar benefits to 2, at smaller scale.</li> </ul>	Amber
4	PLC / SME / self-build and PRS	265	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar to 3 with provision of some dedicated PRS units (other events scaled down).</li> </ul>	Amber
5	PLC / SME / self-build / PRS mix & private sector care home	245	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar to 4 with addition of care home (other elements scaled down).</li> </ul>	Green
5B	As Option 5 + 20% increase in density	288	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As 5 but with additional housing delivery.</li> </ul>	Green
6	PLC / SME / self-build / PRS mix &	265	Amber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As 4 but with lower carbon outcomes.</li> </ul>	Amber

Option	Use Type / Developer	No. of Units	Value rating	Other factors	Overall rating
	net zero carbon homes				
7	Self-build only	265	Amber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potentially more stable delivery across economic cycle.</li> <li>• More diverse character.</li> <li>• Assistance with self-build statutory duty</li> </ul>	Amber
8	PLC only including flats and extended through buffer zone	300	Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As 1 with increased numbers.</li> <li>• May be challenging to deliver due to lack of buffer zone.</li> </ul>	Amber

6.3 As Table 1 indicates, Option 5 (and 5B) combine the best financial returns with the best outcomes on other factors. It is not necessary to distinguish between them for the purposes of procurement since the site density will emerge out of developer proposals and detailed planning consideration. The Council can simply encourage best use of the land.

6.4 In relation to the options set out in Table 1, the Council could choose any of the Options or it could leave the land in its current state (and presumably place it on a new farm tenancy). Leaving it in its existing state would not deliver the objectives of the Local Plan, assist in meeting housing need, generate a meaningful financial receipt, or provide assets for the Council's use. It is therefore not recommended.

6.5 None of the options have a material differential impact on people with different protected characteristics except that in some cases they would make specific provision for people with disabilities or of different ages. Such discrimination is lawful if a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate end; in this case, those ends include meeting specific needs, and ensuring good use of public money.

6.6 Given this, option 5/5B is recommended for the structure of the disposal.

### Other issues

6.7 The Council has additional choices regarding (a) whether it requires provision of a heat network and smart grid, (b) whether it makes policy-compliant levels of affordable housing provision a requirement of the land agreement, and (c) whether and to what extent to require the provision of assets for service provision and to address local issues.

### Sustainability measures

6.8 As outlined above, providing a heat network and smart grid should enhance the sustainability of the development, reducing customer costs, whilst creating a small income stream for the Council. Based on the modelling they would have no material impact on the land value. Their inclusion would also help the selected developer increase its skills in this area and therefore make it more

likely they would be provided on other sites, helping towards the Council's 2045 goal for a net zero West Northamptonshire.

- 6.9 It is therefore proposed these elements be included in the requirements for the land agreement unless it becomes clear that they are impractical or would materially adversely affect land values.

### **Social housing**

- 6.10 Providing policy-compliant affordable housing as part of the land agreement would be likely to reduce land values, in two ways.
- 6.11 Firstly, land value for a scheme including affordable housing will intrinsically be lower because developers normally receive some value when selling the affordable housing they build to a registered provider of social housing. This would not occur in this case. However (see 7.1.2), the value concerned would be, in effect, 'paid' by the Council's housing revenue account to its general fund; thus, there should be no real loss.
- 6.12 Secondly, building the requirement to provide affordable housing into the land agreement would ensure it was not 'squeezed out' through viability assessments of a planning application. The point of those viability assessments is to increase land value to a point acceptable to the landowner. Thus there is likely to be a true financial loss arising under this heading.
- 6.13 However, the Council also benefits from the provision of social housing, most obviously in the reduced need for temporary accommodation for people who are homeless. Social housing also delivers a range of social, and thus financial, benefits from people having a stable home, greater ability to access employment, and so on. Delivering social housing is also key to several of the Council's objectives.
- 6.14 It is therefore proposed that the requirement for a policy-compliant level of social housing is a requirement of the land agreement.

### **Provision of assets for service provision and local issues**

- 6.15 As noted above, the Council has needs for assets for various forms of service delivery, including for children, young people, and adults with various needs. Providing the right assets it likely to allow significant revenue savings as well as helping to meet people's needs in more appropriate ways. The Council has limited sites on which it can provide these facilities, so it makes sense to seek to provide some of them on this site. The proposed PWCC would provide a structure to allow their provision in an efficient way. It is likely to be desirable to distribute them across the development.
- 6.16 Given the service benefits and potential financial savings it is proposed the delivery of suitable assets is included in the land agreement. As the business cases for these are still being defined,

it is proposed that the final number and mix is subject to approval by the Director of Finance based on invest to save principles.

- 6.17 Addressing the local issues identified in 5.30 and 5.31 should also assist in a smooth planning process and, if managed efficiently, should not result in a loss of land value. It is therefore proposed they be facilitated through the procurement process and subsequently management of the land agreement.

## **Summary**

6.18 In summary, it is proposed that the procurement and land agreement:

6.18.1 Is procured as a PWCC based around Option 5/5B.

6.18.2 Requires the provision of:

- g) All site infrastructure, including that required to serve the sites and assets to be provided to the Council.
- h) A heat network and smart grid, unless it becomes clear that they are impractical or would materially adversely affect land values.
- i) A policy-compliant proportion and mix of social housing, to become part of the Council's social housing stock.
- j) Assets for service delivery, as per approved business case(s) under 6.16.
- k) Ten plots for self-build/custom-build housing.
- l) A plot suitable for a private sector care home.

6.18.3 Facilitates the provision of overspill parking for the neighbouring sporting facilities and additional allotments.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

7.1.1 To avoid compromising the Council's commercial position the expected returns are not given in this report.

7.1.2 In the case of social housing, the assets would have been paid for by the Council's general fund (GF) but would fall within the housing revenue account (HRA). Accordingly, an adjustment to the capital financing requirement would need to be made to reflect the fact that the assets benefited the HRA.

7.1.3 In the case of other assets, these would fall within the GF but would be intended to produce a net benefit to the GF. This is because whilst the capital receipt would be reduced, savings would be made from the services provided using those assets.

7.1.4 Perhaps the largest risk to land value flows from the potential for additional works to be done to Watering Lane or its junction with the A45. Whether any such works are required can only be

determined through the planning process. Risks around the cost of utility supplies should be mitigated by the proposed sustainability measures.

## 7.2 Legal

7.2.1 Given the objectives the project is intended to address, it is proposed to pursue it as disposal combined with a public works concession contract.

7.2.2 The general power of disposal in Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, which gives the Council the power to dispose of land by it in any manner it wishes provided that the local authority achieves the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained. In this case – which is where the concession contract element comes in – part or perhaps all of the consideration would come in the form of assets constructed by the developer and passed to the Council. Section 123 does contain provisions dealing with under-value disposals, but it is not proposed to rely on those for these purposes.

7.2.3 The current framework for public works concession contracts is given the Concession Contracts Regulations 2016, which although based on European Union law have been retained in force under UK legislation. The provisions of the Regulations will be replaced by the relevant parts of the Procurement Act 2023 when these come into force. These makes similar provisions.

7.2.4 This arrangement would be a PWCC because the developer would be empowered to exploit a public asset (through the ability to deliver houses), but also takes on real market risks (demand and prices of new homes).

## 7.3 Risk

7.3.1 The scheme carries a number of risks, of which the significant ones are as follows.

7.3.2 R1: Variability of the housing market, which may affect the willingness of developers to tender and the prices they are willing to pay. There is relatively little the Council can do to mitigate this risk. However, allowing staged payments may be acceptable and would potentially reduce the perceived risk to developers, thus enhancing the prices they are willing to offer.

7.3.3 R2: The proposed disposal route, and the requirement for provision of assets as part of the scheme, may not be familiar to all developers, and therefore might inhibit some from coming forward or the prices they are willing to offer. However, the site is highly attractive, and nothing is required not within the skill set of most developers. It seems unlikely that this risk will prove significant. The Council would also seek to clearly explain the process and reassure developers it is not onerous.

7.3.4 R3: Planning risks, including issues around highways, noise, air quality, and flooding are inevitable risks for any development project. Whilst not eliminated, the combination of the site being an allocation in the local plan and the feasibility work carried out should have minimised these. As noted in 7.1.4, the largest is likely to be around highways, as these types of issue are often only identified as traffic impacts are considered in detail by local and National Highway teams after a planning application is submitted.

7.3.5 There are few risks with leaving the site undeveloped, except that it may become less practical to develop over time.

#### **7.4 Consultation and Communications**

7.4.1 The Council has engaged with Collingtree Parish Council, which identified the issues around sports parking and allotments. These are addressed in the proposals above.

7.4.2 Consultation will take place on a planning application following a land agreement, and is also expected prior to a planning application being submitted.

#### **7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 None.

#### **7.6 Climate Impact**

7.6.1 The disposal strategy proposed is specifically designed to reduce carbon emissions, and also to help develop capacity in the development industry to deliver low-carbon development. As such the proposal should make a material contribution to both the Council's 2030 goal for net zero in its own operations and the 2045 goal for net zero for West Northamptonshire as a whole.

#### **7.7 Community Impact**

7.7.1 By proceeding with the disposal of the former Collingtree Smallholding, the Council would be facilitating the development of additional housing to support the five-year housing supply. In addition, through the Control of the land, the Council is also looking to deliver an environmentally sustainable development, but also delivering a mixed-use scheme that seeks to meet some of the challenges faced by the Council such as Adult Social Care, and the delivery of self-build plots.

### **8. Background Papers**

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8.1 None



# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

## CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE: COUNCILLOR MALCOLM LONGLEY

**Report Title** Office Optimisation Phase 2 proposals

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### List of Approvers

<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	Cath Whitehead	02/01/2024
<b>Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	03/01/2024
<b>Other Director</b>	Stuart Timmiss	02/01/2024
<b>Communications Lead/Head of Communications</b>	Becky Hutson	20/12/2023

### List of Appendices

None.

#### 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To seek approval for the proposals and budget for Phase 2 of the Council's Office Optimisation programme.

#### 2. Executive Summary

2.1 The Council has undertaken a detailed "West Ways of Working" review. This has looked at where we work and how we work to ensure that our buildings, IT, and workforce offer is optimal in achieving our corporate outcomes. The review included detailed requirements gathering from our services, professionally supported feasibility work and market and partners engagement.

- 2.2 The review was instigated as it was clear that the Council has too much office space as a result of us moving both from four councils to one and as our post pandemic and hybrid working arrangements mean we need less office space and the space we do have needs to work better for us. The overall effects of these things are that we have ended up with a significant surplus of space which is on average only 50-60% utilised. We are clear that our West Ways of Working enables us to work more flexibly and allows us to deliver better outcomes for our residents with greater locality working and an ability to attract more staff into difficult to recruit to roles.
- 2.3 Our budget is also challenging with ongoing demand and inflationary financial pressures on local government. Rationalising our offices could result in significant savings and help us deliver on our [Corporate Priority](#) of robust resource management. Reducing our office space also allows us to lower our carbon footprint in line with our corporate priority to be net zero by 2030 as having less space will in turn reduce our energy usage – a significant proportion of our energy consumption comes from buildings and therefore from under-utilised buildings.
- 2.4 The final point in terms of our priorities is that by consolidating our office space it also allowing us to bring more teams and services together, maximising opportunities for collaboration and allowing us to improve and enhance services for our customers.
- 2.5 As part of our Ways of Working transformation programme, we will be reshaping our front-facing locality hub offer and bringing together our front-line services and professionals and maximising opportunities to work with partners. This will mean we will be able to offer more wrap around support, advice, and interventions to complex families and vulnerable people in crisis and reduce the ‘hand offs’ customers experience. For example, currently while a family can access debt advice and housing in the Guildhall one stop shop, if they need access to adults and children’s they must come to OAS. The facilities currently at OAS are not designed to cater for face-to-face meetings, distressed residents or larger groups in the way needed.
- 2.6 Phase one of the West Ways of Working project to close Lodge Road and relocate to the Abbey Centre have been successfully completed with staff relocated, a new locality hub opened and the move of all Revenues and Benefits staff into OAS. In phase two we have completed a full review of the Forum in Towcester and looked at the services that should be relocated there, the local offer and the space and IT services needed to do that. Our aim has been to make this the first of our family hubs.
- 2.7 In phase two we have also conducted a detailed review of the Guildhall and OAS to see how we could best utilise the two sites, taking into account their running costs, suitability for modern ways of working, refurbishment costs and the costs for IT fit outs. We have also worked with consultants to establish the potential based use of the space in terms of income, serving the public and costs. We have also spent a year actively seeking potential partners who might take some or all of the OAS space for their use and so mitigate the Council’s rent cost through income.
- 2.8 The conclusion of this work has made clear that the cost of works to make the 1992 Guildhall extension fit for purpose and support modern ways of working was significant and coupled with an inability to secure a tenant to take all or most of OAS, this has led us to conclude that OAS should become the main headquarters for the Council. The rationale for this is set out in detail



in the report alongside the conclusion of the plans now proposed for the future use of the forum at Towcester, County Hall, and the future of the 1992 Guildhall extension.

### **3. Recommendations**

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3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:

3.1.1 Approves the proposals for delivering Phases 2A (Towcester) and 2B (Northampton) of the Office Optimisation programme.

3.1.2 Notes the £5 million (m) budget for the building works and £0.616m budget for IT equipment and works for Phase 2 of the Office Optimisation programme proposed in the draft budget.

3.1.3 Authorises the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children, Families & Education to consider the outcomes of consultation on relocation of Towcester Children's Centre and if justified to approve the relocation of the Children's Centre to the Forum.

3.1.4 Authorises the Assistant Director Assets & Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance to:

- a) Grant a lease of part of the Forum, Towcester to Towcester Town Council in its capacity as trustee of the Towcester Community Centre Trust (charity number 304254) as set out in 5.18. This lease would be at no rent but would be in exchange for the surrender of the lease held by the Trust over the current Towcester Community Centre.
- b) Grant a lease of the 1992 Guildhall extension (except the parts of it retained with the historic Guildhall) and allied rights and agreements to a developer or occupier following a competitive disposal process.
- c) Grant a lease of space at County Hall and an allied license to use the Council Chamber and other relevant spaces to Northampton Town Council.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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4.1 To deliver efficient, effective, and economical services for the people and businesses of West Northamptonshire.

4.2 To enable the Council to reduce revenue expenditure and maximise opportunities to generate revenue and/or capital income without adversely affecting services.

4.3 To make best use of the assets the Council would retain direct use of.

### **5. Report Background**

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#### *Context*

5.1 Since its creation the Council has been engaged in a process of rationalising structures, systems, and assets. This is essential to enable the Council to operate efficiently, effectively, and economically in the interests of the people of West Northamptonshire as both tax payers and customers of our front line services. As part of this process it has been working through a

programme of office optimisation under the banner of our West Ways of Working programme. This has specifically been driven by (a) a need to bring the parts of the new organisation together in a way which support the effective delivery of services, and (b) to resolve the value for money issues created from having an excess of office space following local government reorganisation and the adoption of flexible working.

- 5.2 The first phase of office optimisation, the development of a new Daventry locality office and the closure of the former Daventry District Council offices in Lodge Road, Daventry is now complete with the last action being the disposal or development plans for the old Lodge Road site.
- 5.3 Work has since been underway to consider how we make the best use of the Council's offices in Northampton and Towcester, having regard to our emerging organisational model including working in localities through local area partnerships, children's centres, and family hubs and working more flexibly. The Council has also sought to engage partners and prospective tenants during the review period and where this would make sense in terms of service delivery or income generation.

#### *Northampton*

- 5.4 The Council has two main office buildings in Northampton, the 1992 Guildhall extension and One Angel Square ('OAS'). It also has County Hall, which is used for group members, some service meetings and other occasional use. Detailed analysis undertaken during 2023 considered multiple options and possible configurations including the introduction of partners and/or commercial tenants into both OAS and the Guildhall Extension, the ability to segregate parts of the buildings for sublets, the costs to modernise and reconfigure outdated spaces so that they provided a good working environment, more comprehensive customer service points and their locations, the IT requirements to bring the sites onto new systems and consolidated networks, potential alternative uses that could attract developers at the sites and the legal status of leases and freeholds and any limitations these presented.
- 5.5 Based on current levels of usage (which are at about two-thirds of theoretical occupancy levels at peak, but down to 50% on some days) it was concluded that it might be possible to withdraw entirely from OAS (renting it out to another body) and for the Council to solely use the 1992 Guildhall and space at County Hall. However, this option carried serious disadvantages:
  - a) It would have required capital expenditure in the order of £17.5m across the two sites to refit the spaces to be used to a suitable standard to support modern working, collaboration and fit the IT to modernise them and connect them into corporate infrastructure. The Guildhall costs alone were in excess of £9m.
  - b) The Council would have remained liable for the rent etc. at OAS unless a new occupier or occupiers was found (net cost a little under £4m pa).
  - c) OAS is not designed for multiple occupants segregated and secure from each other; works to make it useable in this way would be complex and leave, in most cases, less than ideal arrangements. As a unit, it is also very large to let in terms of the Northampton office market and would require a significant organisation, body, or company to fill the space.
  - d) While many potential partners/tenants were explored to take on the space at OAS, including one international company, none came to fruition as in the current economic climate there

was either too much cost to move, or the space was too large when they had moved to more mobile working.

- e) There would be no substantial opportunity to improve the offer for people using the One Stop Shop (OSS) facilities as the space did not support the required expansion, co-location and partners being on the site or the ability to have more family rooms, conferencing rooms and back office support space.
- f) It would limit the Council's ability to integrate its services and co-locate more widely both in terms of bringing teams together and with partners if the opportunity for this arose.
- g) The 1992 Guildhall Extension is the least energy efficient of the Council's offices and so would require significant work to improve that. By keeping it and letting out OAS energy costs would not be optimised and the Council's progress towards net zero would be adversely affected.

5.6 Thus, it was concluded that whilst in theory leaving OAS would offer the greatest financial benefit if a tenant could be found, the costs and risks of doing so were too high.

5.7 This therefore resulted in a strategy of making maximum use of space at OAS, and also parts of County Hall (which are unlikely to secure alternative uses) but need to be retained and kept in use to preserve their heritage value and looking at a potential disposal for the Guildhall Extension. The main elements of this strategy were:

- a) Creation of a new comprehensive one stop shop in the lower ground floor of OAS. This takes advantage of the design of the building to create a new public entrance where to most visitors it appears the building should be entered, with a large, welcoming, and secure reception and self service area plus the ability to provide a comprehensive range of services to our most vulnerable customers.
- b) The reconfiguration of office space to accommodate service needs, team consolidation and modern ways of working.
- c) Creation of a new post room and Environmental Health laboratory (and, if so decided, a new Trading Standards metrological laboratory) in spaces behind the OSS or in the service yard.
- d) Creation of additional meeting rooms in the space currently known as the Engine Room (which was never fully fitted out when Angel was built).
- e) Movement of the Learning & Development Service to County Hall, using spaces which are currently lightly used.

5.8 This arrangement also involves changes in use of the Guildhall and County Hall, as follows:

- a) The Coroner's service, which needs to remain at the Guildhall for operational reasons, would move to the ground floor of the historic Guildhall.
- b) The remaining 'office' rooms towards the rear of the ground floor of the historic Guildhall would be allocated to political groups.
- c) The Mayor's parlour would become the office of WNC's Chairman.
- d) The Learning & Development Service would be assigned spaces below and near to the Council Chamber, including use of the Council Chamber.
- e) Northampton Town Council (NTC) would be offered space to lease and license in County Hall, including use of the Council Chamber for formal meetings.
- f) The 1992 Guildhall (less some areas more naturally attached to the historic Guildhall) would be disposed of by lease, probably a long lease. The market testing completed suggests

space left in the Guildhall extension would most likely be successfully developed and used for hotel purposes, but ultimately it would depend on what the strongest market interest was once it is offered for development.

- 5.9 Other arrangements for the future of County Hall will be reported on separately. Due to fire safety issues, the Council Chamber has a maximum capacity of 60, but this should be sufficient for the purposes proposed for it.
- 5.10 All spaces retained at OAS and County Hall for WNC use would receive a light refurbishment under the proposal, making good accumulated damage including the after-effects of Covid-19 measures. But the costs of this would be minimal compared to the significant costs that would have been incurred for a Guildhall Extension and County Hall refit and modernisation which would, as noted above, have been in excess of £17m. While there will need to be a new network, improved wi-fi and phase out of Citrix in OAS, this was already part of the DTI strategy and therefore only means that the plans are brought forward with benefits to all staff and ways of working.
- 5.11 These moves will require a series of staff consultations and stakeholder engagements as changes progress, with distinct works phases and refurbishment steps over a period of just under two years. The new One Stop Shop should open in Angel in early 2025. Other services would move gradually, as service needs required and the refurbishment schedule permitted. Northampton Town Council's (NTC's) license to occupy at the historic Guildhall is to be extended by agreement to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, by which time NTC would move either to accommodation offered by WNC or accommodation it secures otherwise. At that point the final moves, such as the Coroner service, would take place.
- 5.12 During this period the 1992 Guildhall Extension would be marketed and hopefully a new occupier or developer secured.
- 5.13 New occupations by non-WNC entities would be on commercial terms. However, it must be recognised that given the degree of work which may be required, and the character of the buildings concerned, this does not necessarily suggest a high level of rent or capital premium would be received.
- 5.14 The Council's current metrological laboratory is located in a poor quality building at Wootton Hall Park. It was originally adjacent to the Trading Standards offices but is now isolated. The lab is shared with North Northamptonshire Council (NNC). The land on which it stands is a desirable housing site. It is therefore intended to dispose of the land for development (this will be the subject of a future report). However, this then requires consideration of how the Council would provide this service in the future. Locating a new laboratory at Angel makes sense, as it would be secure and readily accessible to WNC staff. However, there are other options including not providing a laboratory at all and using service provided by third parties.

*Towcester*

- 5.15 At the Forum, the Council's aspiration is to create a new integrated locality hub, meeting the needs of the town and surrounding communities. The Forum would also remain the home of WNC's Planning service.
- 5.16 As such, designs have been worked up and agreed with services. These include:
- a) An improved OSS.
  - b) Subject to the results of consultation, relocating Towcester Children's Centre from the existing Towcester Community Centre to the ground floor of the Forum, with the space remodelled to support this.
  - c) Providing space for the other elements of a Family Hub (reflecting Government guidance).
  - d) The Library and Registration services remaining, as core parts of the locality hub model.
  - e) Offering Towcester Town Council (TTC, in its capacity as trustee of the Towcester Community Centre Trust, TCCT) a lease of much of the first floor to create a new Towcester Community Centre.
- 5.17 The proposal to relocate the Towcester Community Centre arises from the following considerations: (i) it would be useful to the community to have these facilities co-located, (ii) given the Council's plans, there would be space in the Forum to accommodate this, (iii) the existing community centre is very dated and in poor condition, (iv) the lease of the existing community centre (from WNC) only runs to 2067, reducing the incentive for TTC/TCCT to invest in major enhancement, and (v) if the lease of the existing community centre was released, WNC would be free to use the land for other purposes.
- 5.18 It is therefore proposed to negotiate, if possible, an agreement with TTC (as trustee of TCCT) under which a new lease of much of the first floor of the Forum is granted in exchange for the surrender of the existing lease. This would appear to benefit both parties and the people of the area. As a charity, TCCT can only agree to surrender its existing lease on terms which reflect its value. As such, it is expected that WNC would need to offer a new lease a no rent, and with practical provisions relating to occupation costs, probably for a longer period than the existing lease has to run.

#### *Information technology*

- 5.19 A separate report is being presented on developments in the Council's information technology which is required to enable (among other things) the accommodation changes described in this report. The costs of this are included in the totals given in section 7, but it should be understood that whilst these costs are generally required for the office optimisation to be delivered, they are also important in their own right and would largely need to be incurred whether or not the accommodation changes took place.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1 There are a very large number of possible options and sub-options, meaning it would not be productive to list them all here. Given the work undertaken to date it is suggested that the key choice is whether to proceed with the schemes at all, and if so whether to proceed in

Northampton on the basis that Angel is the main office base, with use made of space at County Hall and the historic Guildhall as described above.

- 6.2 In both cases it is suggested the logical approach would be to proceed on the basis set out above, for the reasons described there.
- 6.3 There are also a number of smaller options, such as the degree of refurbishment to be applied to spaces WNC will occupy, and whether to provide a new metrological laboratory at Angel or at all.
- 6.4 It is proposed only to engage in 'light touch' refurbishment of existing spaces, making good decorative damage and wear and tear, including that resulting from Covid-19 measures. It is considered this represents a sensible balance in providing good quality workplaces and efficient use of resources.
- 6.5 The issue of replacement of the metrological laboratory requires consideration of the business plan for that service and further engagement with NNC. For those reasons it is assumed for these purposes that the new laboratory will be provided in Angel, but the final decision on this will be taken in the future.

## 7. Implications (including financial implications)

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### 7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 The anticipated costs of the proposed works are set out in Table 1. These costs do not include the reprovision of the metrological lab (on which a separate decision will be taken), works to restore County Hall generally (as these are required in any event; a separate budget is proposed for them), or renewal of the Guildhall heating system (for which a separate budget exists).

**Table 1: Office optimisation capital costs**

Area of works	£k		
	Building works	IT	Total
One Angel Square	2,868	510	3,900
County Hall	345		
Guildhall	177		
The Forum	1,399	106	1,505
FFE allowance	211	0	211
Total	5,000	616	5,616

- 7.1.2 These costs can reasonably be assumed to have an economic life of 20 years, resulting (on an annuity basis at a 5% interest rate) in an annual revenue financing cost of £451k pa. The expected savings once the works are complete and the 1992 Guildhall is disposed of are £805k pa. Over time the cash value of these savings would increase, whereas the capital financing cost would remain fixed in cash terms.

### 7.2 Legal

- 7.2.1 The Council can provide offices for its own use under, among other powers, Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972. It can also cease providing or change the provision of offices under this power.
- 7.2.2 Relocation of the Towcester Children's Centre is considered to require consultation in accordance with the Section 5D of the Childcare Act 2006 and statutory guidance made under it. Section 5D requires consultation before making any 'significant change' to services provided through a children's centre. A change in location is required to be treated as being a change (although not necessarily a significant change) in the services provided.
- 7.2.3 It noted that there is an intention to grant leases to Towcester Town Council and Northampton Town Council (respectively) as part of the office optimisation phase 2 proposals. In connection with same the Council has a duty to comply with the provisions of s.123 of the LGA 1972 which requires that in granting leases to Towcester Town Council and Northampton Town Council the Council must be able to demonstrate compliance with best value consideration duty and if it determines that such disposals are to be at a nominal value than the Council can with appropriate justification rely on general consent for disposal with a value less than 2 million
- 7.2.4 With respect to the grant of a lease of 1992 Guildhall extension, the Council is subject to the same duty with respect to its best consideration duty. However, it is noted that this proposed disposal is of much greater complexity, which will need to need to be supported with robust legal structure comprised of multi-discipline legal team to advise on property, commercial, procurement, planning and contractual, elements of the disposal to support delivery and the interlinked legal documentation, combined with the requirement as and when needed to seek external specialist advice as and when required.

### 7.3 Risk

- 7.3.1 Significant risks associated with the proposals are as follows.
- 7.3.2 R1: Changes in building costs. This is an inevitable risk, arising from the stage of design and state of knowledge at this point. As far as possible this is minimised through early use of cost consultants and risk allowances. Once contracts are let the risk will be reduced.
- 7.3.3 R2: Changes in IT costs. This is similarly an inevitable risk until systems are fully specified and scoped.
- 7.3.4 R3: Changes in service or user requirements. This affects both building and IT issues. It becomes more serious the later a change is identified. As far as possible service and user requirements will be identified, and a design freeze implemented prior to procurement of the works. However, it remains possible that, for example due to external circumstances, a change in user requirements arises during the works such that it would not make sense to complete them according to the original design, specification, or scope. If such a situation arises it will be reported and if required additional budget sought.
- 7.3.5 R4: Delays in delivery, affecting the ability to secure savings in the timescale desired and/or causing impacts on services. This affects both building and IT issues. In respect of building given

only minor works are proposed in the historic buildings, and even in Angel and the Forum the works are not structural, the opportunity for delay due to unexpected building issues is relatively modest. A greater source of risk may be the availability of suitable resources among contractors to deliver the work to the speed and quality desired. In relation to IT, the issues are similar but complicated by the range of historic equipment being addressed.

- 7.3.6 R5: Issues arising from a separate project of remedial works to County Hall. Separately from the office optimisation programme, works to restore County Hall will be underway, making good roofs, windows, heating, and so on. It is possible these may impact on the availability of spaces in County Hall for office optimisation purposes. However, as these projects are both being managed within the same team, they will be co-ordinated. The main source of risk is if the remediation works project discovers further issues with the buildings as they are opened up. With historic buildings this is always to be expected. This may then feed into R1 and R4.
- 7.3.7 R6: Consultation on the relocation of Towcester Children's Centre might identify good reasons the Centre should not relocate. This is considered a low risk, given the new Centre would be in a better building with improved facilities, and only a short distance from the existing Centre. However, if it did arise the works at the Forum would, in part, be unproductive.
- 7.3.8 The major risks of not undertaking the works are that the failure to deal positively with the Council's accommodation attracts adverse attention, including from Government or auditors.

#### **7.4 Consultation and Communications**

- 7.4.1 The Council has been engaging Towcester and Northampton Town Councils and Northamptonshire Children's Trust about the proposals.
- 7.4.2 Communication and engagement with staff, unions and other affected stakeholders has taken, and will continue to take, place about the proposed moves to keep them informed and updated on the proposals. Additional consultation will also be taking place with members of staff who whose office base will move to a different town.
- 7.4.3 A communications and engagement plan has been prepared setting out how staff residents, businesses and partners will be kept informed and engaged as the proposals move forward.

#### **7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

- 7.5.1 None.

#### **7.6 Climate Impact**

- 7.6.1 The proposals would enable the Council to focus most of its presence on its two newest and most energy efficient buildings, in lines with its Estate Climate Strategy. Whilst occupation of the historic Guildhall and parts of County Hall would remain, this would support the continued heritage benefit of those buildings, and opportunities to improve carbon performance whilst respecting their historic character would be explored. Works to be carried out will also seek, in line with the Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy, to minimise additional embodied



carbon. The overall strategy seeks to maximise positive use of existing buildings, thereby making use of the embodied carbon already in place.

## **7.7 Community Impact**

7.7.1 The proposals for Towcester should deliver an improved service offering from the Council and its partners, especially for those benefiting from the provision of services from the proposed combined children's centre/family hub (subject in the outcome of the consultation on relocating the children's centre).

7.7.2 The changes in Northampton should provide a better experience and greater access to services for residents and other visitors using the new One Stop Shop.

## **8. Background Papers**

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8.1 None.

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# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2023

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT – COUNCILLOR PHIL LARRATT**

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Procurement of bus shelter advertising franchise contract</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Alan Craggs, CCTV &amp; Transport Facilities Manager <a href="mailto:Alan.Craggs@westnorthants.gov.uk">Alan.Craggs@westnorthants.gov.uk</a></b>

### List of Approvers

<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	Catherine Whitehead	02/01/2024
<b>Chief Finance Officer (S.151)</b>	Martin Henry	02/01/2024
<b>Other Director</b>	Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director Place, Economy & Environment	02/01/2024
	Simon Bowers, Assistant Director Assets & Environment	02/01/2024
<b>Communications Lead/Head of Communications</b>	Becky Hutson	20/12/2023

### List of Appendices

#### Appendix A: Advertising policy

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for the procurement of a new franchise contact for the provision and maintenance of bus shelters using advertising.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 The Council owns or has under contract a little over 200 bus shelters. The majority of these are provided under a contract originally entered into between AdShel and Northampton Borough Council (NBC), which has reached the end of its term. The remainder were formerly owned by Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) or Daventry District Council, with a few owned directly by NBC. Those under the AdShel contract are maintained by AdShel, with the remainder maintained by the Council.
- 2.2 Given the expiry of the AdShel contract it is necessary to come to new arrangements for maintenance of the shelters provided under it. It would also be sensible to include all shelters the Council controls under one contract, ideally fully funded by advertising.
- 2.3 A new contact also offers the Council the opportunity to improve outcomes, including by putting shelters in the places where they are most useful, increasing use of solar electricity, and supporting biodiversity.

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
  - 3.1.1 Authorises procurement of a new bus shelter advertising contract.
  - 3.1.2 Endorses the proposal that WNC funds the provision of new shelters, subject to the Director of Finance approving the use of capital once the actual costs are known.

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 To provide one consistent approach to providing and maintaining bus shelters.
- 4.2 To maximise the potential for advertising revenue whilst respecting the Council's advertising policy, which seeks to balance commercial and policy (particularly public health) objectives.
- 4.3 To comply with public procurement law.
- 4.4 To enable the Council to add or remove bus shelters when it considers it needs to do so.

## **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 The Council has around 221 bus shelters it owns or are provided under a contract with it. These are all in Northampton except for three at Daventry Bus Station. Other bus shelters in West Northamptonshire are provided by parish councils.
- 5.2 The majority of the Council's shelters were provided by the former Northampton Borough Council (NBC) under a contract with AdShel, which maintains them using advertising revenue. These are owned by AdShel. That contract is now at an end but continues to operate until replacement arrangements are made. Others, previously owned by the former Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), are maintained by the Council's Highways & Transport

service, and those at Daventry Bus Station by the Assets & Environment service; in both cases there is limited resource for this.

- 5.3 The AdShel contract requires AdShel to remove all of its shelters and reinstate sites at its end. However, AdShel may consider that it does not want to incur this expense. Therefore, dialogue is underway to agree what should happen. This may result in all AdShel shelters remaining (and becoming WNC property), all AdShel shelters being removed, or some point between these two extremes. Until this is resolved, the uncertainty needs to be allowed for in the procurement and resulting contract.
- 5.4 In order to bring order to the situation and have all shelters under a common contract, it is proposed to procure a new advertising-based franchise contract. Pre-procurement engagement with potential operators has taken place to seek to understand operators' perspectives and how to maximise the attraction of the opportunity to them. The proposed aims of the contract, which would be used to score tenders, are to:
  - 5.4.1 Provide good quality bus shelters in the locations where they are most needed.
  - 5.4.2 Optimise income from advertising opportunities.
  - 5.4.3 Support design quality in the urban environment, including preserving and restoring any existing shelters (such as former tram shelters) of quality or local importance.
  - 5.4.4 Incorporate design approaches which support the character and distinctiveness of West Northamptonshire.
  - 5.4.5 Support biodiversity, including the provision of 'buzz stop' green roofs.
  - 5.4.6 Support net zero carbon in manufacture, construction, installation, maintenance, use, and removal/repurposing of structures.
  - 5.4.7 Receive a cash income.
- 5.5 Parish councils in West Northamptonshire were contacted to see if any of these would like to be included within the contract. At this point, only one, Daventry Town Council (DTC), has asked to be included. DTC owns 23 shelters.
- 5.6 The Council needs to be able to require changes to shelters, including addition or removal of shelters, to reflect its policy goals and service needs. For example, to support new or enhanced bus routes, or where a street is subject to major works. It would, however, be unreasonable to expect the chosen operator to take the risk of such changes, as they are totally out of their control. Therefore, it is proposed to seek as part of tenders:
  - 5.6.1 Costings for providing and maintaining different types of shelter.
  - 5.6.2 Income per-shelter, based on the location of shelters (as this is what drives advertising income, rather than type of shelter).
- 5.7 With this information provided in tenders, adjustments to revenue received from, or paid to, the operator would be adjusted when the Council requires changes to shelters. Provision would also be made for the operator to propose new shelters on its own initiative, where it considers advertising income would justify this. If the Council approved such proposals, the revenue impact for the Council would only vary if in a beneficial direction.

- 5.8 Having the information referred to in 5.6 would then allow the Council to choose to provide capital funding for all new shelters. This would reduce costs an operator had to bear, and therefore should make the net income payable to the Council higher (or net cost payable by the Council lower). Additionally, to this benefit, it would allow effective management of the uncertainty over whether the AdShel shelters are retained. Clearly, the risk on this would need to be carried by the Council, as operators would have to price a very high risk premium if they were to be asked to carry it, to the extent they may well refuse to tender at all.
- 5.9 The contract would include requirements for an initial programme of work, which would address outstanding issues with shelters and the Council's bus strategy. This would include provision of new shelters where justified under the bus strategy, provision of 'buzz stop' roofs, photovoltaic roofs, restoration of the historic tram shelters, and removal of shelters no longer required.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1 There are a wide range of choices open to the Council, but the main ones can be summarised as follows.
- 6.2 Option 1: Take no action. This would involve leaving shelters under their current arrangements, including the expired AdShel contract (or alternatively definitively ending that contract and leaving any remaining shelters for WNC to maintain).
- 6.3 Option 2: WNC providing shelters itself, and separately selling advertising space. To be attractive, this would require WNC to be as efficient in delivering and maintaining shelters as the operators are, and as effective at selling advertising as the operators. This appears unlikely.
- 6.4 Option 3: Procuring an advertising concession contract as set out above. This appears capable of delivering the service with the greatest efficiency. There are two sub-options which need consideration:
- 6.5 Option 3A: WNC does not fund shelter provision except where it instructs new shelters not proposed by the operator. This would require operators to fund all capital costs, reducing revenue benefits. It would also leave unresolved the issue of managing the risk of the need for mass replacement of AdShel shelters.
- 6.6 Option 3B: WNC funds all new shelter provision (including the mass replacement of AdShel shelters if required). This should maximise revenue benefits, and also provides a simple mechanism to address the risk of needing to replace the AdShel shelters.
- 6.7 Option 4: Procuring several contracts. There is no obvious benefit of operating more than one contract. Such an approach would be likely to reduce operator interest and lose economies of scale.
- 6.8 It is therefore proposed that Option 3B is taken forward.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 Currently maintenance of the former NNC shelter is funded by AdShel from advertising revenue. The former NCC shelters have no defined maintenance budget and accordingly receive only limited attention, but what work is done is a cost to WNC, carried in the Highways & Transport Service. Maintenance of the other shelters (e.g. at Daventry Bus Station) is carried out by the Assets & Environment service from maintenance budgets it holds.
- 7.1.2 It is hoped that the result of the procurement will be a contract which removes the cost of maintenance from the Council, thereby delivering a small saving, as well as ensuring the assets are maintained in a good position. Ideally, there will be a net income, reflecting operator's views on the available advertising income as against the costs of maintenance.
- 7.1.3 To maximise the revenue benefits, as outlined in the body of the report, it is proposed that the Council funds the initial provision of new shelters. This would be a capital investment. By doing this, the Council would avoid the need for the operator to meet these costs from its future revenue. This should minimise the risk of the Council needing to make a revenue contribution and maximise the chance of it receiving a revenue income.
- 7.1.4 Once tenders are received and evaluated, a decision would be taken on authorising the use of WNC capital. A budget proposal has been included in the budget to cover off a reasonable worst case situation, but it is expected the actual requirement would be lower.

### **7.2 Legal**

- 7.2.1 The Council can provide bus shelters on highways it is the highway authority for, and on land it owns, such as in bus stations. Parish councils can also provide bus shelters with the consent of the highway authority on whose highway they propose to locate them. If it is proposed to locate a shelter on land the council is not highway authority for, consent of that highway authority is required (for WNC, this only relates to a few roads such as the A5 for which National Highways is the highway authority).
- 7.2.2 Under the proposed contact, the operator would be acting as WNC's agent, with the legal authority coming from WNC.
- 7.2.3 Procurement of the operator would currently fall under the Concession Contracts Regulations 2016 but when the relevant provisions of the Procurement Act 2023 come into force these would replace the 2016 Regulations (but this would only affect this procurement if it had not started by that time). The substance of the provisions is similar, requiring notification of opportunities over a threshold value and a fair process of selecting operators and, if applicable, negotiating the terms of the concession. As it is difficult to estimate the value of the contact, and because there is no real disadvantage in doing so, it is proposed to use the highest value procurement route.

### 7.3 Risk

- 7.3.1 The main risks associated with undertaking the procurement and then implementing a contract are as follows.
- 7.3.2 R1: The number, location, and condition of existing bus stops is not well documented. This risk has largely been overcome. It is possible a small number of additional shelters may be identified, but the proposed form of contract would allow for these to be brought in with a clear framework for price/value adjustment.
- 7.3.3 R2: The advertising market is undergoing change, which may make it hard for operators to judge their likely income. Pre-procurement engagement suggests operators are reasonably confident in their understanding of the market.
- 7.3.4 R3: The requirement for bus shelters is likely to vary as the Council's plans for bus services, and those of commercial operators, develop over time. For these and other reasons, the Council may need to change the location of assets during the life of the concession contract, or to remove advertising from them. This risk is proposed to be managed by provisions in the contract which allow the Council to require these changes with a clear framework for price/value adjustment.
- 7.3.5 R4: Advertisements on the Council's assets may carry messages the Council does not wish to be associated with; conversely, having control over advertising messages may place the Council in difficult situations, where it is perceived as acting as a censor. These risks are proposed to be managed by setting out the Council's guidelines which the operator must comply with, but the Council playing no role in judging the desirability of advertisements which comply with the guidelines.
- 7.3.6 R5: Insufficient market interest. In the worst case this would leave WNC with no advertising income and the cost of maintaining the shelters. Given the degree of interest to date, this seems an unlikely outcome, even given the move of much advertising online.
- 7.3.7 R6: The costs of maintaining the shelters not previously covered by the AdShel contract is too large to be covered, in operators' estimation, by advertising income. This would result in the Council needing to make a net payment for maintenance. This risk would be minimised by setting realistic requirements, adopting clear and fair risk apportionment, and the proposed use of Council capital for the provision of new shelters.
- 7.3.8 The risks of not undertaking the procurement are principally of a challenge to the continued extension of the AdShel contract without any form of competitive process to justify this.

### 7.4 Consultation and Communications

- 7.4.1 Pre-procurement engagement has taken place with companies which may wish to provide the service. This has helped shape the form of procurement proposed.



7.4.2 Parish councils were approached to see if they would like their bus shelters included within the contract. To date only one, Daventry Town Council, as indicated it would like to do this. However, the proposed terms of the contact would allow other parish councils' shelters to be added in the future if they wanted to do this.

7.4.3 Once an operator is selected, public communications would explain what was going to happen and the benefits of it.

## 7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 None.

## 7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 Provision and maintenance of good quality bus shelters should support people's decisions to use buses, thereby indirectly supporting lower-carbon forms of transport.

7.6.2 Carbon emissions from the shelters themselves would form part of the procurement objectives and scoring.

7.6.3 Wherever it made sense, shelters would be required to include solar (photovoltaic) panels and a proportion to have 'buzz stop' roofs designed to support insect life.

## 7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 The contract should enable the provision and maintenance of good quality bus shelters throughout the relevant parts of West Northamptonshire. This should assist in reducing the risk of anti-social behaviour.

7.7.2 The contract is also proposed to include provision for refurbishing and then maintaining the two historic tram shelters, thus helping to secure the heritage of those parts of West Northamptonshire.

## 8. **Background Papers**

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8.1 None.

## **Appendix A: Advertising guidance**

### **1. Introduction**

Like most other local authorities, West Northamptonshire Council has a challenging financial outlook with diminishing governmental support and increasing costs.

As part of its work to minimise the impact on taxpayers, the council is seeking to find new funding streams to support its vital services. Consequently, it would like to attract revenue from advertising and sponsorship, wherever possible, subject to the terms defined below.

This guidance is intended to provide guidance on any form of advertising or sponsorship channelled through West Northamptonshire Council publications, promotional materials, events, council property or the website.

### **2. Prohibited products, services, and advertisers**

Our basic approach is to maximise the number of advertisements and advertisers and minimise the number that are prevented from doing so by any controls or restrictions. To this end, most products and services will be permissible, though there are some types of organisation and categories of product or service which are felt inappropriate for promotion on at council-hosted advertising sites, defined in the list below.

- Political publicity and any political or quasi-political organisations, including pressure groups (following guidance outlined in our Media Protocol, provided separately on request). *[The Media Protocol is not relevant here.]*
- Legal or quasi-legal organisations which limit their services to a specific area of law (for example claims relating to personal injury).
- Credit providers offering short-term, high interest loans. Credit advertisements must comply with all legal and regulatory requirements in force at the time of publication, including the Consumer Credit (Advertisements) Regulations 2010 where applicable.
- Gambling or organisations associated with gambling. The only exceptions to this are:
  - The National Lottery which finances the National Heritage Lottery Fund to support key projects across the area.
  - Any local lotteries which might be set up by charities or the council to support initiatives in the area.
- Organisations simply offering entry into a competition following completion of a form containing any personal information or similar are not considered appropriate.
- Promotion of prejudice, and any organisation that promotes prejudice, including but not limited to racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, and religious discrimination.
- Tobacco, vaping and other non-medically licensed nicotine containing products, and manufacturers of such products. Promotion of access to stop smoking services as part of ours or the Government's smoking cessation campaigns is permissible. Where smoking cessation campaigns explicitly focus on vaping this will not be carried out within 400 metres of schools and, where possible, will avoid digital advertising at times when children are travelling to and from school (7-9am and 3-5pm).
- Weapons or direct manufacturers of weaponry end products.

- Advertising for alcohol must adhere to the strict guidance set out by the Advertising Standards Authority and must also highlight the Drinkaware campaign. Operators must also avoid placing advertising for alcohol, or manufacturers of alcohol, within 400 metres of schools and, where possible, avoid digital advertising at times when children are travelling to and from school (7-9am and 3-5pm).
- Pornography or nudity, or organisations associated with or promoting adult industries.
- Organisations in legal or financial conflict with the council. *[The Council will provide the details of any organisations falling into this category as they arise.]*
- Operators must avoid placing advertising for food and drink that is high in sugar, salt and fat (as outlined in the Department of Health guidance), or brands producing such food and drink, within 400 metres of schools. They must also, where possible, avoid digital advertising for this type of food and drink, and these companies, at times when children are travelling to and from school (7-9am and 3-5pm).
- Organisations providing residential, nursing or domiciliary care and support services must offer proof of CQC registration.
- Advertising for educational establishments is limited to those within the West Northamptonshire area or those providing further education which can reasonably demonstrate that they serve residents within that catchment.

### 3. Style and content of advertising

We expect all advertising placed to fall within the guidelines of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), specifically the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing – otherwise known as the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) Code. It is the advertiser’s or operator’s responsibility to be aware of the code as well as Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations and any changes/updates to them.

All advertising must also adhere to the latest Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

Advertising content must be legal, decent, honest and truthful, and be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and to society as a whole.

We are open to a variety of styles in advertising, but will not consider content that:

- Violates the topics outlined in section 2 above.
- Uses the council’s logo without consent in writing from the communications team.
- Does not clearly state who the advertiser is.
- Is not clearly identifiable as an advertisement.
- Infers a connection with an organisation that does not exist.
- Is not suitable for family viewing.
- Presents unsubstantiated statements as fact.

We retain the right to require removal of advertising at any site which breaches this guidance or advertising operation agreement. We will agree with those operating our advertising sites, in advance, the nature and content of the publicity and will retain the right to approve advertising material should the need arise. *[The prior approval referred to here is that provided by the contract and does not mean*

*the Council wishes to judge the desirability of specific advertisements – see [relevant contractual provision]. It may, if requested, confirm if an advertisement does comply with the Requirements – see [relevant contractual provision].]*

Advertising does not represent endorsement of any organisation, product or offer by the council, or imply that the council is responsible for the advertiser's quality and reliability.

All advertising operators will be required to sign an advertising agreement which reflects the terms stated in this guidance before any advertising commences. *[This is covered by the contract, nothing further is required.]*

We accept no liability for any loss or damage arising out of or in connection to any external advertisement placed. As part of the booking agreement, all advertising operators must indemnify the council against any claims, damages, losses etc arising out of any advertising placed. *[This is covered by the contract, nothing further is required.]*

(Note: the guidance also contains a section on sponsorship of Council activities, which is not relevant here.)



# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## CABINET

16<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

### CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES – COUNCILLOR MIKE HALLAM

Report Title	New public mortuary
Report Author	David Baker, Construction Project Manager <a href="mailto:David.Baker@westnorthants.gov.uk">David.Baker@westnorthants.gov.uk</a>

#### List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer /Director Legal & Democratic	Catherine Whitehead	08/01/2024
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	08/01/2024
Other Director	Simon Bowers, Assistant Director Assets & Environment	05/01/2024
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	20/12/2023

#### List of Appendices

##### Appendix A – Business Plan

##### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval to deliver a new public mortuary for Northamptonshire and make allied arrangements.

## 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report summarises the Business Plan for the proposed public mortuary at Booth Meadow, Northampton and makes recommendations to facilitate its implementation.
- 2.2 The Council has duties both as the 'responsible authority' for the Northamptonshire Coroner Area and as a 'category 1' responder for civil contingencies to make provision for properly storing bodies of the deceased and enabling post mortems to take place. The current arrangements for this are fragile and increasingly expensive.
- 2.3 It is therefore proposed to construct a new public mortuary. Whilst principally designed to enable the Council's own duties to be met, in the interests of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness it would be sized optimally and therefore have capacity to service the needs of other public bodies.
- 2.4 The overall scheme is to cost £9.4m capital with a further £0.1m of revenue service transition cost. It should be available for use by early 2025.
- 2.5 For the purposes of the business plan, only ad hoc third party use is assumed. However, there is a good prospect of reaching agreement for the new mortuary to also provide core capacity for Kettering and Northampton General Hospitals. If this was achieved it would deliver good value for money across the local public sector whilst further reducing the risk taken by the Council. Proposals are therefore made to facilitate this.
- 2.6 The Council has the option of not proceeding (which would leave it exposed to the existing service risks and not offer savings), proceeding with a Council-led project (incurring the natural project risks, but removing the service risks and creating potential for savings), or seeking a private sector partner (which is likely to be complex, cause delay, decrease flexibility, and increase end costs). It is recommended to proceed with a Council-led project.
- 2.7 Once fully operational the mortuary should deliver annual savings of £0.489m pa. These should increase over time as the capital financing costs remain fixed in cash terms whereas other costs and income undergoing inflationary increases.
- 2.8 The key risks identified are cost and quality of construction, and demand for the 'spare' capacity in the mortuary once it is operating. Given the planning which has taken place to date, none of these are considered to be likely to prevent the project objectives being met.
- 2.9 The new mortuary would contribute to the Council's net zero goals in design, construction, and operation.
- 2.10 Overall, the new mortuary offers the most viable means of delivering on the Council's objectives and meeting its legal duties in these areas. It is therefore proposed it proceeds.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - 3.1.1 Notes the proposed budget of £9.4 million (m) for construction of a new public mortuary.
  - 3.1.2 Authorises procurement of works for the new public mortuary.
  - 3.1.3 Approves the Business Plan at Appendix A.
  - 3.1.4 Approves a one-off revenue budget of £0.125m to cover service transition costs.
  - 3.1.5 Authorises the Director Legal & Democratic in consultation with the Assistant Director Assets & Environment and the Executive Director Finance to enter into long-term contracts with public bodies for the Council to provide mortuary services and to certify them under Section 2 of the Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997.
  - 3.1.6 Authorises the Assistant Director Assets & Environment in consultation with the Director Legal & Democratic and Executive Director Finance to enter into leases or licenses to occupy property and any related agreements in connection with agreements under 3.1.5.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 The Council, as the responsible authority for the Northamptonshire Coroner's Area, needs to ensure there is sufficient, secure and suitable provision for the storage of bodies and the conduct of post mortems.
- 4.2 To improve the experience for those who are bereaved and who currently have limited access to or poor facilities for viewing their loved ones.
- 4.3 Investment in a new public mortuary would remove the need for investment in The Leys temporary mortuary.
- 4.4 To achieve net savings for the Council and support wider good use of public resources.
- 4.5 To enable, if agreement is reached, efficient entry into contracts for the provision of mortuary services with local NHS providers and/or other public bodies requiring these services, thereby maximising value for money and minimising risk.

### **5. Report Background**

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#### *Services*

- 5.1 Coroners are judges with responsibility for investigating the causes of violent or unnatural deaths, where the cause of death is unknown, or if the deceased was in state detention at the time of death. England and Wales is divided into coroner areas, as determined by the Lord Chancellor. The Council is the 'responsible authority' for the Northamptonshire Coroner's Area. As such, it is required to provide everything that is necessary for the Coroner's service to conduct its responsibilities.

- 5.2 The Council is also a category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This requires it to prepare for, and respond in the case of, a civil contingency such as a major accident.
- 5.3 In fulfilment of these duties the Council needs access to facilities to store the bodies of the deceased whose death are the subject of coronial investigation, and for post mortems to be carried out. It also needs to have the ability to store large numbers of bodies in the event of a civil contingency which causes larger numbers of deaths than normal arrangements will provide for (often known as 'mass fatality events').
- 5.4 Currently the Council fulfils these duties by (a) having arrangements to use mortuary and post mortem space at Northampton and Kettering General Hospitals (NGH and KGH), and where necessary further afield, such as at Leicester Royal Infirmary; and (b) through a temporary body storage facility at The Leys, near Wollaston in North Northamptonshire. However, these arrangements are fragile, and rely on sustaining old and temporary facilities, the co-operation of the hospitals, and (in the case of The Leys) the goodwill of staff whose main roles are elsewhere. The arrangements are increasingly vulnerable and expensive.
- 5.5 The existing arrangements also offer poor access and facilities for the bereaved and for pathologists.
- 5.6 Whilst the numbers of deaths referred for coronial investigation has remains broadly static in recent years, the number determined to require a post mortem has increased.

#### *Proposed facility*

- 5.7 Plans have therefore been prepared for a new public mortuary, owned by the Council. This would include facilities for:
- General forensic post-mortems,
  - 'Dry' post mortems by means of a computerised tomography (CT) scanner.
  - High risk and isolation post mortems.
  - Family viewing and formal identification of the deceased.
  - Disaster victim identification process in the event of a mass fatality incident.
  - Temporary expansion of body storage in the event of a mass fatality incident (replacing The Leys).
- 5.8 To elaborate on the second point, traditionally post mortems have been carried out surgically ('wet'). This, obviously, requires the pathologist to be in the same location as the body and have appropriate facilities for these activities. However, it is increasingly possible to use advanced medical technology, in the form of CT scanners, to determine the cause of death. This enables a quicker, cheaper, and less intrusive process (a 'dry' post mortem). Providing a CT scanner facility is likely to be an important part of the facility, both for efficient investigation into deaths in Northamptonshire, and also as a service which others can pay to use.
- 5.9 It is proposed that the mortuary would be located on Council owned land at Booth Meadow, on the Riverside Business Park, Northampton.



- 5.10 Extensive engagement has taken place with stakeholders, including the local hospitals, pathologists, Northamptonshire Police, and neighbouring coroner areas. This indicates there is support for the Council to develop this facility, and a high likelihood that it would attract use from neighbouring areas as well as the core demand from within Northamptonshire.
- 5.11 The new mortuary should be open for use in early 2025.

*Long term agreements*

- 5.12 Additionally (as is reflected in Opportunity 2 in the Business Plan) discussions with NGH and KGH are underway with a view to an agreement for WNC to provide the mortuary facilities for the hospitals at the new public mortuary. This would enable them to use their sites more efficiently and avoid duplication of facilities across the local public sector. It would also avoid the need for expensive works at the hospital sites. It is not yet certain that an agreement will be reached, which is why this is only reflected as an opportunity rather than a core part of the business plan. However, it seems likely agreement will be reached and therefore recommendation 3.1.5 is included to enable efficient delivery of legal contacts to that effect. This is desirable not only for the overall public sector efficiency it would deliver, but specifically from a WNC perspective as a means of further reducing risk.
- 5.13 It is also possible that similar arrangements may be secured with other public bodies, most likely from outside of Northamptonshire. This would also be beneficial to WNC and therefore the recommendation has been drafted to include any such contracts.
- 5.14 As part of agreements with the hospitals or other public bodies, it is possible WNC may need to have facilities under its control on their sites. For example, a chilled temporary storage facility. Recommendation 3.1.6 allows for this.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1 The key choice for the Council at this point is whether to proceed with providing a new public mortuary or not, and if it does so, whether to do so using its own resources. As set out in the Business Plan, the options are as follows.
- 6.2 Option A: No further action. This would leave the current situation to continue, with services at risk and no opportunity for savings.
- 6.3 Option B: WNC proceeds to deliver the new mortuary. This would involve the typical risks in a construction project and also those risks around demand for use of the spare capacity, but would resolve the existing service delivery risks and create opportunities for savings.
- 6.4 Option C: WNC promoted a mortuary in arrangement with the private sector. There are a range of forms of this, from something akin to a PFI contract to a 'block booking' by WNC anchoring a new private sector facility. All versions would involve significant additional complexity and restrict future flexibility, as well as being likely to result in higher costs.
- 6.5 It is therefore concluded that Option B is preferable.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 The financial situation in the 'no scheme' and 'with scheme' worlds is detailed in the Business Plan. In summary, the 'with scheme' scenario delivers annual savings of £0.489m pa, after the service transition is completed. The service transition is expected to cost £0.100m.
- 7.1.2 Over time, the financial position should become more favourable, as the capital financing costs are fixed in cash terms, whereas the other costs and income are subject to inflationary rises.
- 7.1.3 Financial risks are addressed under 7.3.
- 7.1.4 The land at Booth Meadow could in theory be used for other services. However, no specific requirements suitable for that site (which could not be provided as well as the mortuary) have been identified. Disposal of the area of land concerned separately from Booth Meadow as a whole may be possible but would be complex. The opportunity costs of using the site are therefore minimal.

### **7.2 Legal**

- 7.2.1 Section 24 (1) of CJA 2009 provides that it is the responsibility of the relevant authority (WNC in this case) to provide the Coroner with her service. The relevant authority for a coroner area must—
  - (a) Secure the provision of whatever officers and other staff are needed by the coroners for that area to carry out their functions.
  - (b) Provide, or secure the provision of, accommodation that is appropriate to the needs of those coroners in carrying out their functions.
  - (c) Maintain, or secure the maintenance of the accommodation provided.
- 7.2.2 Whilst these duties do not create a legal duty to provide a mortuary, in the circumstances of Northamptonshire, providing a mortuary is a means of economically, efficiently, and effectively delivering the required outcomes. This is in line with the Council's best value duties under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. The service delivery reasons are addressed below.
- 7.2.3 In providing a mortuary the Council would need to abide by a series of requirements including those specifically relating to mortuary licensing (Human Tissue Authority). It would also be sensible to have regard to the guidelines set out in the NHS publication Health Building Note 16-01 (2023).
- 7.2.4 The Council is entitled with other public bodies in relation to the delivery of public services under the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970 and for the purposes of that Act Section 74 of the National Health Service Act 2006 provides that the NHS is a public body.

7.2.5 If a Council 'certifies' a contract under Section 2 of the Local Government (Finance) Act 1997 the contract is protected against legal challenge to the effect it is outside of the Council's legal powers. Given it seems clear the Council's proposed actions would be within its powers, certification may well not be required. However, if the hospitals or other long-term contractual partners want the reassurance that the contact is protected in this way, there would be no reason not to provide it.

### 7.3 Risk

7.3.1 The main risks associated with the project are as follows.

7.3.2 R1: Change in demand. This largely flows from potential changes in number of deaths requiring coronial investigation but would also be affected by the attractiveness of the facility and its operation to third party users. The main concern is that demand might be lower than planned for, but there are also some risks around demand being higher, such that the mortuary is not sufficient to meet the need. The lower demand risk is mitigated by the design, including facilities not widely available and thus likely to be called for across a large area of England, and the intended agreements with third parties. High demand would be managed depending on its nature – short term or longer term – with short term peaks falling under the protocols for excess deaths. Long term higher demand may justify extending the mortuary. There is sufficient space to make this possible.

7.3.3 R2: Failure to obtain planning permission. This is considered to be a low risk due to the location and nature of the site, and further mitigated by pre-application engagement and careful preparation of planning application materials.

7.3.4 R3: Legal challenge. In theory this could be to either the Council's investment decision or to any planning permission granted. Neither is considered a high risk. In the case of planning permission, the risk is low for the same reasons there is confidence planning permission would be granted. In relation both aspects of this risk, the Council would take decisions properly, based on appropriate assessment. This will greatly reduce the risk of successful challenge. The absence of a party with interests materially harmed by the proposal makes even an unsuccessful challenge unlikely.

7.3.5 R4: Failure to control project costs. This risk may flow from a number of factors, notably changes in scope, increases in supply or construction costs, and the weather. This risk has been reduced through evolution of the design to its current stage, working with key supply chain partners, and use of professional cost consultants. It will be managed through optimised risk allocation in construction, with appropriate risk allowances. A design freeze will be critical.

7.3.6 R5: Failure to achieve adequate quality. This risk principally flows from a failure to understand or apply end user requirements in the design, or the design not being faithfully implemented during construction. These sources of risk have been mitigated by close engagement with the service manager, learning from providers of similar services, and engagement with the supply chain. They will be mitigated by selection of a suitable contractor and continued management of quality built into project management processes.

7.3.7 Taken together, the risks are not considered to pose a material likelihood of the project being unable to deliver the Council's objectives.

#### 7.4 **Consultation and Communications**

7.4.1 As outlined in the Business Plan, there has been extensive engagement with stakeholders in the preparation of the proposals. This would continue as the detailed design, procurement, and preparation for service commencement took place.

7.4.2 Whilst handling the subject with due sensitivity, public communications would explain the reasoning for the Council's proposals and how they would improve service delivery and offer value for money.

#### 7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 None.

#### 7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 The new mortuary would be constructed in line with the Council's Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy and Estate Climate Strategy, seeking to minimise net carbon emissions in construction and use. It would provide high levels of insulation and energy efficiency, and if practical will incorporate solar (photovoltaic) electricity generation.

7.6.2 Despite its location in the southeast of Northampton, the site is relatively accessible, being served by the 5 bus route between Northampton Town Centre and Southfields via Weston Favell and with a specific cycle route running close by. Inevitably body transport will use motorised vehicles, but this would be true wherever the mortuary was. Opportunities to reduce the impact of this will be explored in line with the Council's emerging Fleet Climate Strategy.

#### 7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 The location of, and access to, the site means there is little prospect of either negative or positive local community impact.

### 8. **Background Papers**

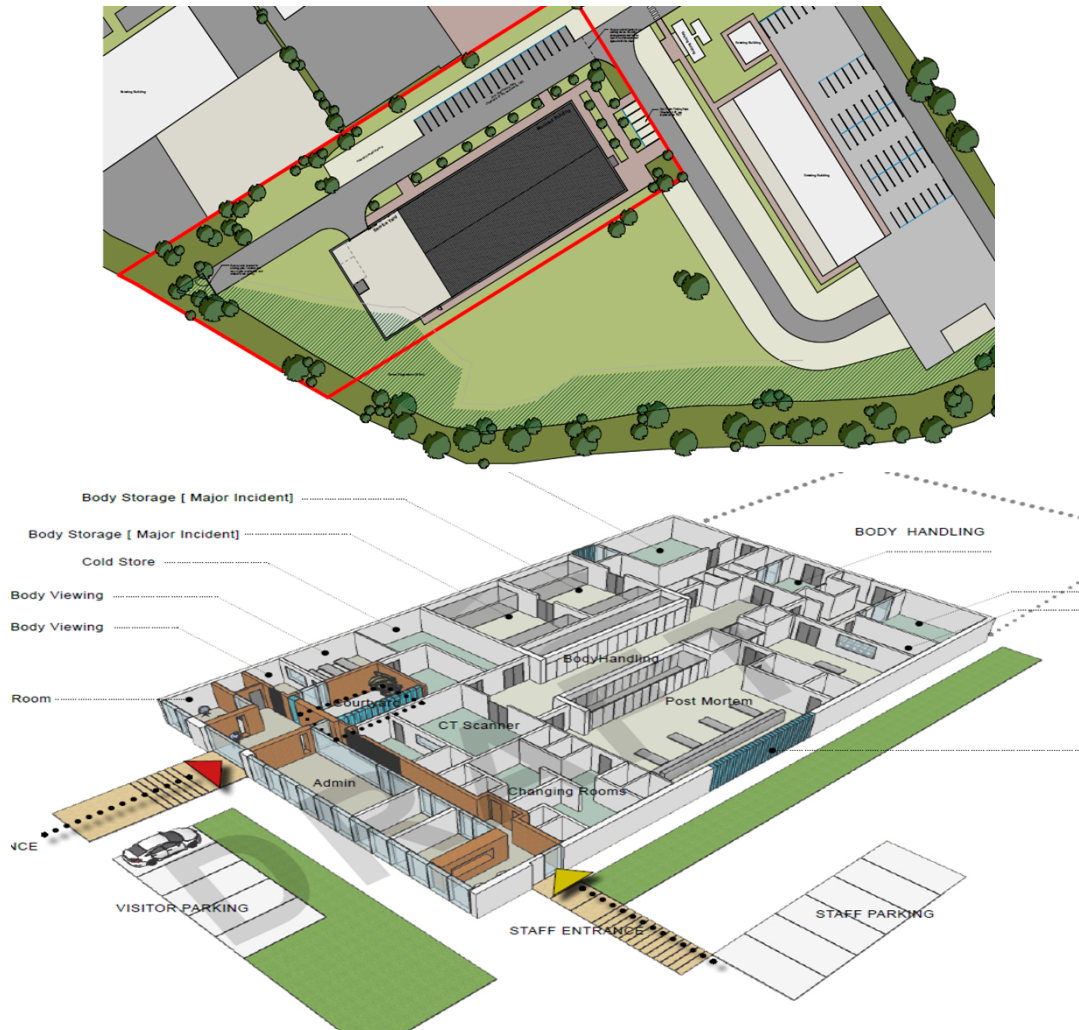
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8.1 None.

## Business Plan

for

# WNC Public Mortuary (Bereavement Services Phase 1)



**COMMERCIALLY CONFIDENTIAL**  
Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972

Version 0.4

Revised January 2024

## 1. Outline of Proposed Project

It is proposed to construct and operate a public mortuary on WNC owned land at Booth Meadow, Riverside Business Park, Northampton. The mortuary would provide services firstly for the Northamptonshire Coroner's Area but will also offer services to other authorities. It would include facilities for:

- General forensic post-mortems,
- 'Dry' post mortems by means of a computerised tomography (CT) scanner.
- High risk and isolation post mortems.
- Family viewing and formal identification of the deceased.
- Disaster victim identification process in the event of a mass fatality incident.
- Temporary expansion of body storage in the event of a mass fatality incident (replacing The Leys temporary facility).

The mortuary would be built to modern standards, including sufficient parking and facilities for body transport.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Coroner duties in relation to deaths

Under Section 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (CJA 2009) requires that a senior coroner "who is made aware that a body of a deceased person is within that Coroners area must as soon as practicable conduct an investigation into the persons deaths" if any of the following apply to a deceased person:

- (a) They had died a violent and unnatural death.
- (b) The cause of death is unknown.
- (c) They died while in custody or otherwise in state detention.

### 2.2 Northamptonshire Coroners Service

Northamptonshire Coroner's Service is a countywide service provided by WNC, as the 'relevant authority'. North Northamptonshire Council provides 48% of the costs of WNC providing the service, reflecting the demands from the two areas.

WNC as the 'relevant authority' has the responsibility to provide support to the Senior Coroner for her to fulfil her judicial function (see Legal Requirements, section 4.2). This can be broken down into these main areas:

- A. Staffing. To provide investigative and administrative staff to support referrals into the Coroner's office and any investigations that result in inquest hearings.
- B. Body transport (from place of death to storage facility).
- C. Body storage.
- D. Establishing a cause of death (post-mortems, histology, toxicology).

The Service currently handles these arrangements by way of contracts or service level agreements.

### 2.3 Disaster response and excess deaths

WNC is a Category 1 responder and has a duty under Section 1 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA 2004) to maintain and publish plans to reduce, control or mitigate the effects of an emergency,

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including those such as a Mass Fatality or Pandemics which can cause large scale loss of human life e.g., air crash, train crash, or pandemic.

WNC's Mass Fatality plan (currently out to consultation) will serve the whole county in the event of a disaster. The plan and any appropriate response would involve multiple partnerships working with, typically, Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Rescue Service, and NHS bodies, co-ordinated through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). The current plan details "The Leys" body store for the incident response location and the requirements for additional equipment required to support a response within Northamptonshire.

## **2.4 The Leys**

The Leys is a temporary body store, which is located at Wollaston in North Northamptonshire. The Leys has 184 mixed refrigerated and chilled spaces and a 'Nutwell' packaged unit with frozen capability for 12 deceased.

The creation of The Leys was in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The facility's operational management is the responsibility of the Coroner's Service. As a county there is not enough hospital mortuary storage space. The County has in place through the LRF the ability to trigger the use of the facility at the Leys. This has happened every year since Covid and is most likely to occur around the Christmas break when the higher winter death rate co-incides with the bank holidays and therefore there is a delay in collection from the mortuaries. Relatives do not like to hold funerals between Christmas and New Year, which results in funeral directors retaining deceased for a longer period, therefore funeral directors do not collect from the hospitals until they have adequate capacity at their premises. However, the need to trigger the activation of the Leys can occur at any time when there is pressure for space within the existing facilities.

In September 2022 the Mortuary at NGH was closed for works. Additional temporary facilities were put in place at that time to manage hospital deaths to avoid the need to open the Leys however the activation was discussed and was avoided by the use of Nutwells. The Coroner's service was obliged to divert community deaths elsewhere and had to incur additional costs of transfer to alternative mortuaries. This resulted in an overspend on the Coroner's budget. Both NGH and KGH mortuaries require significant updating and there are likely to be further closures for this to happen and costs when one or other mortuary is closed for refurbishment over the coming years. During this time there is also an increased risk of an activation of the Leys.

Historically due to winter pressures hospitals have denied admission to the mortuaries for community deaths. The last time this occurred was winter 2019 when Kettering General Hospital (KGH) closed its mortuary to community deaths on 24<sup>th</sup> December, and Northampton General Hospital (NGH) on 29<sup>th</sup> December. Due to the sudden closure, the Coroners Service borrowed Nutwells from the East Midlands Mass Fatality working group and changed the process of community deaths. A divert was put in place to Co-op in Corby for a Coronial decision to be made, and then forward transfer to a hospital for a post mortem. In early January 2020 NGH went back to the business as usual approach, but KGH was unable to accept direct community deaths until mid- February 2020.

The Leys Facility is activated via an Excess Deaths Activation plan if the hospitals are nearing the upper limit of their available body storage space. This plan diverts both investigative and administrative staff from the Coroners Service for operational activity and partnership engagements necessary to run The Leys once the facility is activated. The Service leads discussion with NHS mortuaries, burial grounds, and crematoria on demand versus available capacity within the death management system. Operation of The Leys it is currently maintained through goodwill of a few staff that have the emotional resilience and physical fitness to be able to undertake the role. Operating such a facility is a new requirement which emerged first during the Covid-19 pandemic Contracts with new staff provide for the requirement to operate The Leys or the replacement facility.

The Leys facility is accommodated in ex-school modular buildings (which have been refurbished and repurposed). At the point of creation in 2020 the modular buildings were around 12 years old. They are likely to have a maximum useful life to around 2028 (ie 20 years from first use). At that point there will be a need to re-provide either through replacement of the ex-school modular buildings (subject to availability) or through provision of the mortuary. There will be a cost implication in either option. Cost avoidance has not been included within the business case although the replacement cost for the current portacabins would be in the region of £150k.

The Leys has been activated on four occasions since inception. Each activation has been of approximately eight weeks duration. On the initial activation the service cared for 317 deceased. The second activation it was used to care for 417 deceased, which included supporting Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Local Resilience Forum. The last activation was winter 2022/23 and it was used to care for 120 deceased over a 6 week period.

The Leys facility has a number of drawbacks due to the nature of the facilities.

- i) It is not approved for the removal of samples so in the event of a mass fatality there is currently no excess deaths facility within the County which would support the identification of human tissue. An application for an emergency HTA licence could be made but this is subject to approval and a fee of £6,000. It would also require an additional portacabin for clinical use at extra cost.
- ii) The uses aged equipment which results in a range of ongoing maintenance issues. The site is currently managed by the North Northamptonshire Council FM services at a cost to the Coroner's service. These costs are rising due to the aging nature of the portacabins. E.g., The roof has had to be repaired twice in the last two years due to rainwater ingress. Maintenance costs are c£10k per year on top of the standard budget.
- iii) Activation of a site on an emergency basis requires a range of assessments and actions to ensure that the facility can be used which on an ad hoc basis creates a significant additional amount of work.
- iv) There are no viewing facilities at The Leys and it is not a suitable facility to receive the bereaved. Viewings are therefore not available as they would usually be at the mortuary (subject to activation of the additional space for excess deaths).
- v) Whilst activated the Leys facility has to be staffed, and this has a direct impact on the Coroner's service at peak time which leads to backlogs in the delivery of the wider service and a delay in inquests which has a negative impact on the bereaved.

Residents in the area have been notified whenever there is an activation because of the temporary nature of the facility and the lack of formal planning approval for the facility. There have never been objections and therefore the site has continued to operate on the basis of an emergency facility.

## **2.5 Dealing with Mass Fatalities**

Under the current arrangements with the Leys. Additional equipment would need to be put in place including a mobile CT scanner, and additional portacabin for clinical use and additional welfare facilities for staff to run the operation. All of this would be subject to applying for an emergency HTA licence. This will cause delay in the event of an emergency before the area could be in a position to identify and manage the deceased following a major incident with the consequent reputational damage. There would be no viewing facilities for the bereaved. There will then be significant additional costs as highlighted for the CT Scanner (£4k per day), the portacabin and other facilities. There is currently no facility if any postmortem is required beyond the CT scan then the deceased would need to be transferred to the LRI but that would be subject to their agreement and ability to take on incident.

A purpose build facility such as the one proposed which is owned by the Council and would therefore be made available to the Coroner's service would be able to carry out examinations as soon as the deceased arrive at the facility. The facility has been designed with four tables in one place with a



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CT scanner to comply with the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) process and it could operate on a 24 hour basis. In the event that a post mortem is required there would be no need for transfer to any other facility. In the event that viewing of the deceased was appropriate this could take place on site to meet the needs of the bereaved.

## **2.6 Pre-pandemic mortuary capacity**

The normal County mortuary capacity (without supplemental equipment) prior to the Covid-19 outbreak was 138 bodies at any one time: 89 at NGH) and 49 at KGH. Each hospital has purchased “pop-up” temporary additional facilities to help with their business continuity. This increased their potential capacity in times of high demand. however, this uses the space allocated for the chapel of rest at both locations. This adversely affects the undertaking of official identifications and families’ ability to visit and view the deceased. The Human Tissue Authority, does not approve regular use of temporary equipment i.e. Nutwells.

## **2.7 Current body storage arrangements**

The current arrangements for the service are that any deceased that die suddenly and unexpectedly within the county are conveyed to NGH or KGH. If the death is due to road traffic collision or a suspicious death, the deceased is conveyed straight to Leicester Royal Infirmary (LRI). The Coroner will then direct if a post-mortem is required and, if so, what type of examination and if any further tests are required i.e. toxicology. Body transport is provided by undertakers under a contract with the Coroner’s service at a cost to North and West Northamptonshire Councils.

### *Dealing with Child Deaths*

The death of a child is generally regarded as the most distressing for the bereaved. However currently when a child dies, and a post-mortem is required this will result in the child being transferred to the Leicester Royal Infirmary as detailed above. This is due to the lack of availability of suitably qualified pathologists. If the single pathologist at LRI is not able to take on the case, the deceased child will currently be transferred to Great Ormond Street. There are no facilities within the County for dealing with a post-mortem of a child. As stated above this will mean the bereaved would also need to travel to Leicester or London to view the child which can add further distress to families.

The Coroner’s service has been notified that from March post-mortems of children will no longer take place at LRI due to the retirement of the current pathologist. This will mean that relatives would need to travel to London in every case to view. This will also increase the costs for the Coroner’s service who will need to meet the cost of transport and pay for body storage at the relevant facility. Although the provision of a mortuary does not guarantee the availability of a pathologist, it has been confirmed there is willingness subject to appropriate facilities being available.

### *Faith Deaths*

The family in certain faiths will pay for a CT post mortem at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford to avoid the intrusion of a standard post mortem. The family appointed funeral director currently needs to arrange the transport arrangements to and from Oxford. All the cost are met in these cases by the families.

By providing CT post mortem locally through the purpose built facility, those from all faiths can have non invasive post mortems locally and can view the deceased at the local facility.

### *Other Deaths*

There is currently minimal provision locally for bariatric deaths requiring an LRF plan and transport outside the area where there is no local provision. The transport costs in these cases are met by the Coroner’s service.

## 2.8 Pathologists

In 2018 KGH withdrew its pathologists service for undertaking Coronial post-mortems. In 2020, NGH ended a contract supplying pathologists for Coronial post-mortems. The Service has therefore established a team of out-of-county pathologists who travel to each hospital to undertake post-mortems as and when necessary.

As a result, the Service is wholly dependent on the availability of the out-of-county pathologist and the relevant hospital facilities. This can sometimes create delay in post-mortems being undertaken, impacting on the needs and wishes of the bereaved families.

There is a general acknowledgment that there is a national shortage of pathologists. This is notified to the Chief Coroner each year at the national local authority Coroner services meeting as an ongoing challenge to the provision of services. Unhelpfully in this context, the Royal College of Pathologists does not include post-mortem within their initial training of new histopathologists.

With the known lack of pathologists both now and looking forward it is widely considered that the future of establishing a medical cause of death will be by non-invasive ('dry') post-mortems via use of CT scanning. Current research indicates that a situation is conceivable whereby cause of death could be established for 75% to 90% of all cases via dry autopsy alone. The option of using dry autopsy would be a judicial decision for HM Senior Coroner in each case, but it is considered likely that they would generally be willing to approve this approach in suitable cases.

## 2.9 Forensic post-mortems and CT scanning

Forensic post-mortems and CT scanning is currently provided to the county by LRI.

The deceased are taken directly from the scene to LRI. This affects a number of related services such as the Police, who are then required to travel to witness the forensic post-mortems. Importantly it also typically increases the travel required for the families of the deceased for formal identifications or viewings. There are also transport costs for the Coroner's service which increase as a result of the need to transfer to the LRI and body storage costs at the facility which must also be met by the Coroner's service.

## 2.10 Volumes of deaths referred to the Coroners Service

As shown in Table 1, the deaths reported to the Service have slightly decreased over the past three years, whilst the number of post-mortems carried out has increased.

**Table 1: Referred deaths and post-mortem rates, 2019 to 2022**

Year	Total death referrals	No of post-mortems	Percentage of death referrals resulting in post-mortem
2019	2,542	907	36%
2020	2,555	978	38%
2021	2,326	1,088	47%
2022	2,502	1,178	47%

The increase in post-mortems increases the risk that the deceased will need to be transferred out of the area for the reasons outlined above. The decision to carry out postmortems sits with the Coroner but is on the advice of the Medical Examiner. There has been a national increase in the percentage of post mortems.

## 2.11 Potential mortuary demand

Consultation with stakeholders has been undertaken as part of the preparation of this proposal. The outcomes of this strongly suggest that there is a need for a new public mortuary to serve

Northamptonshire. They also suggest that if the level and scale of facilities were to be provided to deliver a broad range of services then the issues highlighted above could in many cases be resolved. This would reduce costs for the Coroner's service significantly but more importantly would improve the experience of the bereaved. If the new mortuary had a broad offer then it is also highly likely (and we have received several statements to that effect) that adjacent authorities, experiencing a similar shortage of local facilities, would also be likely to want to make use of our new facility. Northampton with its very good road and transport connections as well as its central location is exceptionally well placed to be able to provide a new facility of national significance for key mortuary services which are not widely available elsewhere.

It should be noted that this proposal includes the replication of the storage currently provided at The Leys as a permanent facility which would then allow The Leys to be decommissioned once the new public mortuary was operational. It would also avoid the costs of updating and improving the Leys facility. There is also potential for the new Mortuary to provide a service to the NHS as detailed in opportunities below. This would further improve the experience of many residents whose loved ones die of natural causes and for whom a postmortem is not required.

#### 2.12 Current Cost Pressures

The proposed Council budget includes a growth item for increased costs arising from new contracts for Body Storage, Body Transport, Toxicology and Pathology.

Pathology: Current budget of £250k, current spend prediction 2023/24k is £338k.

As stated above there is a shortage of pathologists, and the cost increases arise from the increased charges. There is a national issue in relation to the availability of pathologists. Whilst it is likely that these cost rises will not be avoided by the Mortuary, but attraction of better facilities is more likely to enable us to manage these costs than not.

Body Storage: Current budget of £300k but predicted spend 2023/4 of £412k

Increases in body storage costs being charged by the NHS will almost entirely be avoided by the provision of our own facilities. Future cost rises and therefore financial risk would also be managed by the provision of our own facility.

Body Transport: Current budget of £150k but predicted 2023/24 of £120k but will rise within budget due to new contract.

Transport costs are subject to cost rises. There are only a small number of providers who are able to deliver the contract. As detailed in opportunities there is the potential for delivery of the transport ourselves. The proposed discussions with the NHS would include body transport as part of that discussion. This would enable us to better control rises in transport costs through the use of electric vehicles and management of journeys.

Toxicology: Current budget is £140k but predicted spend 2023/4 is £153k

The toxicology contract will be unchanged by the new facility.

### 3. Approval History

- Principle of project recommended by budget star chamber – October 2021
- Project brief approved by ELT – November 2021
- Death Management report endorsed by ELT – August 2022
- Death Management report approved by Cabinet –
- Capital budget for death management services approved by Council –
- Mortuary Delivery Project Initiation Document approved – September 2023.

## **4. Reasons for Proposed Project**

### **4.1 Corporate Objectives**

The provision of a new public mortuary would meet a clearly established and growing local need. As such it would support the following Corporate Strategy objectives:

- Priority 1 Key Aim 4 (Increased electric charging & energy efficiency) – the facility would make use of photovoltaic (solar) panels and waste energy recovery from process plant to improve energy efficiency.
- Priority 4 Key Aim 5 (to co-design public services to increase inclusiveness and community cohesion) – The facility will enable the bereaved to view loved ones locally and provide facilities suitable for different faiths and cultures.
- Priority 5 Key Aim 3 (Increased inward investment) – The site and facilities would achieve the highest practicable design standards, with the environmental impact being minimised and maximising sustainability opportunities and provide a nationally significant facility within Northampton.
- Priority 6 Key Aim 2 (Stable Finances) – the project should generate worthwhile financial returns (in terms of cost avoidance and income generation) over the medium to long term.
- Priority 5 Key Aim 2 (Use of assets to maximise service delivery) – This development will ensure an area of currently unused WNC land is put into constructive use to benefit our residents and allow the delivery of a valuable facility that provides services which are currently only available from third parties.

The reasoning can be summarised as the provision of facilities needed by the Council in a financially and environmentally sustainable manner to better meet the needs of local residents

### **4.2 Service delivery**

A key aim for this proposed project is to have a facility for Northamptonshire which is located conveniently in the county and which can provide the range of facilities to meet current obligations and also likely future capacity demands. Consultation has been carried out with the potential users of the proposed facility including the Police service and Pathologists who are supportive of its creation.

The options for meeting the Service needs are considered further in Section 7.

### **4.3 Value for Money**

The Council would be making a significant financial investment in a facility to better meet the needs of the Northamptonshire Coroner's Area. It is important that this investment represents good value for money for West Northamptonshire Council who carry the risk of the provision. The Mortuary will recharge the Coroner's service as one of the users of the new Mortuary and in that sense will sit outside the Coroner's service.

The costs of the new mortuary include the staffing costs for the new team, and management costs from existing managers of the service (currently met by other service areas), direct service costs and borrowing costs. There is also a £200k pa contingency in relation to the revenue costs.

This is off set by the revenue savings which will be achieved by reducing transport costs by reducing the need to transport out of the area. The savings in relation to the body storage will effectively be shown as income generation which will be recharged to the Coroner's service and shared with the North Northants Council in the usual way.

The income generated will be through a combination of body storage costs per bay, calculated on the current cost paid by the service of £220 per bay for a 20 day period. The income of the bays is calculated at 80% of total capacity. In addition, a charge for CT PMs and standard PMs is charged on the basis of the estimated numbers which would be likely to take place as an overall percentage. The total figure shows that the project would achieve a positive revenue balance of £487,570.

The capital costs have been estimated without reference to the avoided capital costs of the replacement of The Leys facility required in 2028 due to the expiry of the useful life of the Portacabins. One off capital costs in the region of £150k would be required to replace the existing Portacabins in 2028.

In the event of a mass fatality there would be charges of £4k per day for the CT Scanner, plus additional HTA licence fee £6k and additional portacabin hire and maintenance. The total costs in the event of a mass fatality would be difficult to quantify without knowing the precise nature of the incident but would be very significant if there was an event requiring any sustained use of the CT scanner.

For these purposes, it is assumed there is small change in body transport costs due to the reduction of transfers to LRI and Great Ormond Street (but see Opportunity 3). If the Council takes over body transport particularly in relation to the provision of transport to the NHS that could help to off set existing costs.

These figures do not include for the proposed contract with the NHS (Opportunity 2) in relation to Body Storage which would provide a guarantee of around two thirds of the income outlined below under the heading of Body Storage (the NHS require 136 of the total 319 bay capacity of the mortuary) with around 80 required by the demand from the Coroner's service.

The provision of the specialist services outlined above in relation to Child Pathology, Bariatric, Faith and CBRN as outlined in Opportunity 1 and 11.3 below have the potential to generate higher rates of income than those outlined in the cost estimates below, but the rates have been calculated on the basis of a standard charge.

**Table 2: Expected costs and income**

<b>Costs</b>	<b>£k</b>	<b>Net Difference</b>
Staffing Costs	397,707	
Management Costs	34,823	
Maintenance CT	80,000	
Mortuary cost of borrowing	339,074	
CT Scan cost of borrowing	87,826	
Other maintenance	22,000	
Energy, Building and Site Cost	50,000	
Contingency	200,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,211,430</b>	<b>1,211,430</b>
Savings		
Body Storage (charged to Coroner)	412,000	
Body Transport	20,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>432,000</b>	<b>432,000</b>
Income		
Body Storage	757,152	
CT PM	427,148	
Standard PM	82,500	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,266,800</b>	<b>1,266,800</b>
<b>Net Saving</b>		<b>487,570</b>

In addition to the change in full operation costs, there will be a period of service transition. During this time there will be one-off revenue costs incurred, duplicated costs whilst the mortuary costs are incurred and third-party services are run off, and staffing changes are made. Table 3 identifies these service transition costs.

**Table 3: Service transition costs**

Item	Period affected (dates)	Total cost, £k
Mortuary Manager Costs	September 2024-March 2025	33
Staff costs	February 2025 – March 2025	66
Other site etc maintenance and energy costs.	February 2025 – March 2025	26
Net Cost:		125
Total		

## 5. Project Objectives and Aspirations

Considering the reasons for the project as set out above, the following are defined as the project objectives:

- PO1. Delivery by early 2025.
- PO2. Total project capital costs not to exceed £9.4 million.
- PO3. Provision of a mortuary which meets the current and expected future needs of Northamptonshire (including CT scanner for 'dry' post mortems) and which provides a quality environment for users.
- PO4. Compliance with WNC Estate Climate Strategy and Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy approaches and goals.
- PO5. From financial year 2026/27, the mortuary to return a net saving/income of not less than £0.489m pa compared to the 'no scheme' world in total to the Council (reflecting the investment and risk accepted in progressing the project), as defined in Section 4.3.
- PO6. The mortuary to be the named facility for mass fatality management and disaster response for the county.

The following project aspiration is also defined:

- PA1. The mortuary to be the named facility for mass fatality management and disaster response for neighbouring authorities.

## 6. Significant Risks and Opportunities

Note: risk mitigations are set out in Section 11.2.

- **Risk 1 – Change in demand**

The risk here is that demand may either (a) be lower than anticipated, resulting in a facility which is not utilised to the degree expected, meaning allowing for capital costs the saving is lower than planned or even a net cost; or (b) that the demand is higher than expected, resulting in a need to continue to use third party services (or at least to lose opportunities to generate income).

Neither aspect of the risk is considered likely to arise. The number of deaths requiring post mortems in the Northamptonshire Coroner's Area has been rising, as shown in Table [X], Whilst this shows upward movement, the number now appear to be stabilising. It seems unlikely that the number will materially reduce in the future. As the population rises a modest increase is likely, but not to the degree that it would overwhelm the capacity of the proposed mortuary.

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There is an associated risk of legislative change which might result in changed demand for post mortems. It is likely that the availability of 'dry' postmortems more widely is more likely to increase rather than decrease the percentage of post mortems in relation to the deaths.

This risk is therefore considered to be low.

- **Risk 2 – Failure to obtain planning permission**

A planning application is to be submitted in December 2023. Pre-planning consultation has taken place. The proposed site is at the end of an access road and is contained within landscaping and the River Nene on two boundaries and car dealerships to a third. It shares an overall site with Booth Meadow House, currently the location for the council's library service. The development appears to be suitable for the location and unlikely to give rise to any serious objections.

This risk is therefore considered to be low.

- **Risk 3 – Legal challenge**

There is a risk of legal challenge either to the Council's investment decision or to a planning permission granted for the scheme.

In the case of the Council's investment decision, it is considered there would be no legal basis to challenge a decision which provided important public service outcomes whilst offering the Council (and North Northamptonshire Council) value for money.

In relation to a challenge to grant of planning permission, provided the planning decision is taken properly taking into account all relevant considerations the risk of a successful challenge should be low.

- **Risk 4 – Failure to control project costs**

The key issues which may result in a rise in costs above the proposed budget are:

- a) Changes in scope. The project has already undergone significant evolution which has increased its capital costs. This is justified because of the increased benefits (including cost avoidance and income generation) to be generated by what is now proposed. Further changes in scope would be likely to drive further increases in cost, particularly if made during construction.
- b) General increases in construction costs, such as those driven by changes in the price of materials or energy, or labour costs.
- c) Specific changes in costs of major items, such as the CT scanner. These may be affected by supply of relevant component from across the world.
- d) Adverse weather during construction.

Source (a) of this risk is largely within the Council's control; see mitigations. Risk sources (b) and (c) are largely not within the Council's control. Events such as war in Ukraine, the Middle East, or Far East, or another pandemic could result in large and unpredictable movements in prices. Risk (d) is not within the Council's control, although design solutions can affect the impact it has.

- **Risk 5 – Failure to achieve adequate quality**

It is vital that the Mortuary is capable of enabling the delivery of the services it is intended to provide. Reasons why it might fail to do this include:

- a) A lack of understanding of end user requirements.
- b) Incorrect translation of end user requirements into design solutions.

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c) A failure to build what was designed.

Risk source (a) and to a degree risk source (b) have already been significantly reduced through close working between the design team and the service manager. However, there remain risk sources in this area due to the fact that WNC does not currently operate a mortuary and therefore does not have implicit knowledge of operating one. However, even this gap is reduced by the fact that the service uses mortuary services extensively and worked with those who provide them currently.

Risk source (c) and the remaining part of (b) remain to be addressed (see Sections 9.5 to 9.7).

- **Opportunity 1 – Capturing a greater share of wider demand**

The business plan assumes a certain level of usage by third parties. However, given the attractiveness of what is proposed to be provided, there is potential for additional business to be developed, further increasing the value for money of the scheme. Approaches to this are outlined in Section 11.3.

- **Opportunity 2 – Providing core mortuary facilities for the NHS**

Discussions are underway which may result in the new public mortuary offering core mortuary functions for the local NHS. If this result is achieved, it would mean a large part of the capacity of the mortuary was required either for WNC's own services – the Northamptonshire Coroner's service – or under long-term contracts with local NHS trusts. This would mean, in particular, that Risk 1, would be further reduced.

The County currently has two mortuaries based at KGH and NGH. As stated above both are in need of refurbishment. KGH has developed a proposal for a major refurbishment of the mortuary which is currently subject to a bid for public funding. NGH has no specific proposals for refurbishment but there is an acknowledgement that the current facilities do require improvement. The Council has been in detailed discussions with the NHS about potential use of the new mortuary. The proposal currently being discussed is for the facility to provide up to 136 mortuary spaces to the NHS over a minimum of a ten year period but with the expectation that the facility would become the permanent mortuary facility for the NHS. The proposal would involve a staff transfer and a transport solution which would enable transfer to the new facility from both hospitals. It could mean additional travel for some families but would provide easier car parking and a dedicated viewing area. The facility is well located to provide a relatively short travel distance for the area. However, there are details which are still being considered about the practical arrangements for transport and collection and no decision has been made.

The guaranteed income which could arise if this arrangement did proceed alongside the income from the Coroner's service would significantly reduce any risk of not meeting the necessary income targets to offset the borrowing costs. The project would also be a groundbreaking example of collaboration between Health and Local Authorities in relation to the provision of a mortuary facility.

- **Opportunity 3 – Body transport**

Currently the Council contracts body transport services from undertakers. However, the market is fragile with a limited number of undertakers interested in providing the services. The creation of a new public mortuary offers a useful focus for considering whether to provide this service in a different way; for example, by insourcing it. This option has the potential to offer improved resilience. If we



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are able to proceed with the arrangements with the NHS this will be likely to include the provision of a transport service due to the likely increase in the frequency of collections.

- **Opportunity 4 – Setting an Environmental Example**

Integral to the development of the Mortuary, WNC will set clear objectives in terms of meeting environmental considerations – in line with aspirations for carbon saving – and encouraging innovation from the design team and supply chain accordingly. This should help develop the competence of the design team in delivering low carbon solutions and thus contribute to WNC's goal of net zero carbon for West Northamptonshire as a whole by 2045 as well as the Council's goal of achieving net zero in its own operations by 2030.

## **7. Option Identification**

### **7.1 Option A – No further action**

Under this option the provision of mortuary and post-mortem facilities would continue to be a combination of reliance on the hospitals, transport of bodies outside the county, and continued reliance on The Leys (which was only established to provide a short-term response to the Covid Pandemic and offers little resilience should this need arise in future) at times when death rates exceed capacity.

This option would require some new capital expenditure before 2028 but this would be lower than that required for the proposed new facility it would also leave the current issues around service resilience and rising costs unaddressed.

### **7.2 Option B – WNC proceeds to deliver the new mortuary**

Under this option WNC would proceed to deliver the new mortuary using its own capital, under the direction of its in-house Construction team, whilst using external consultants and contractors.

For the purposes of this business plan, it is assumed WNC will operate the facility essentially in-house. This is the simplest approach to model. It also would allow maximum control over what would be an important and sensitive facility. However, the model also assumed that, as is common practice now, pathologists would operate on a self-employed basis and 'hire' the mortuary to carry out post mortems they are themselves contracted to perform. This assumption does not prevent consideration of outsourcing other aspects of provision if the service concluded this was beneficial. However, as such questions do not affect the capital investment decision they do not need to be considered further here.

### **7.3 Option C – WNC Promotes a mortuary in arrangement with the private sector**

It would in theory be possible for WNC to seek a private sector operator to deliver and operate the facility, on the basis of a long-term contract with WNC to buy capacity. This could be a pure private sector facility or a joint venture with WNC. Depending on the structure of the arrangement, it could be similar to a private financial initiative (PFI) contract or more like a long term 'block booking'.

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## 8. Option Evaluation

### 8.1 Option A – No further action

This option has little merit other than to avoid the immediate costs and the risks of the project. It would not ensure the provision of services to meet the needs of local people or enable the potential savings or income generation.

### 8.2 Option B – WNC proceeds to deliver the new mortuary

This option has the potential to use the resources of WNC to deliver a service from which the population would benefit. This plan seeks to identify the good balance of capital investment and revenue return that can be achieved within a relatively low risk framework, especially given the Northamptonshire Corner's service is the key customer. Extensive consultation with other potential users has provided a strong basis for predicting potential revenue. There is an element of risk associated with the revenue potential for the facility on the bases that the potential users who have expressed an interest are unlikely to commit to use of the facility until there is a very strong likelihood that it will be available for use by a specific target date, but this is considered acceptable.

### 8.3 Option C – WNC Promotes a new mortuary in Arrangement with the private sector

A joint venture with a private sector provider would require a collaborative approach to design and project management to ensure that the aspirations of the Council were achieved. This would enable a shared approach to risk and reward, but also the potential to deliver the objectives at a higher capital cost than a self-delivery option and with the likelihood that costs to users would be higher. It would also greatly limit the Council's ability to vary its use of the site.

Practically, securing a private sector partner would take a significant period and thus delay the security of provision and savings potential.

The Council has the skills needed to develop the project, drawing also from skills available from its established supply chain. Given the advantages of controlling the nature of the facility and service, retaining full local authority ownership is considered to be preferable.

### 8.4 Recommended Option

Option B is, for the reasons outlined above, best placed to deliver against the Project Objectives. This option also has the greatest opportunity to further expand the services that can be provided and providing further income generation for WNC. The recommended option is thus Option B.

## 9. Implementation Strategy

### 9.1 Legal Issues

Section 24 (1) of CJA 2009 provides that it is the responsibility of the relevant authority (WNC in this case) to provide the Coroner with her service.

The relevant authority for a coroner area—

- (a) must secure the provision of whatever officers and other staff are needed by the coroners for that area to carry out their functions.
- (b) must provide, or secure the provision of, accommodation that is appropriate to the needs of those coroners in carrying out their functions.
- (c) must maintain or secure the maintenance of the accommodation provided.

Whilst these duties do not create a legal duty to provide a mortuary, in the circumstances of Northamptonshire, providing a mortuary is a means of economically, efficiently, and effectively delivering the required outcomes. This is in line with the Council's best value duties under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. The service delivery reasons are addressed below.

In providing a mortuary the Council would need to abide by a series of requirements including those specifically relating to mortuary licensing (Human Tissue Authority). It would also be sensible to have regard to the guidelines set out in the NHS publication Health Building Note 16-01 (2023).

The Council is entitled with other public bodies in relation to the delivery of public services under the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970 and for the purposes of that Act s74 National Health Service Act 2006 provides that the NHS is a public body.

## 9.2 Project Management

The project implementation would be managed under WNC's applicable project management methodology. The project manager is a member of staff experienced in delivering projects of this scale and who is supported by WNC's Programme Manager and other staff with expertise in various aspects of capital project design and delivery. A key part of the project manager's role would be to maintain, monitor and manage a risk register with the aim to mitigate risk through implementation of practical measures.

## 9.3 Communication

Key stakeholders have been identified for the proposed project as set out in Table 3.

**Table 3: Communication groups**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Issues to be addressed</b>	<b>Approach</b>
a) Funeral Directors	Location and design of the facility. Road access and drive-times. Facilities on site. Business potential.	Individual meetings with relevant sector representatives. Stakeholder presentations.
b) Public in general	This facility is intended to be discrete, and the emphasis is more on the fact that it will exist rather than what it will look like or where it is located. The only contact reason that members of the public might visit the facility is to be witness in the event of the death of a family member under certain circumstances. The facility will be equipped to address such eventualities with the requisite sympathetic space and comforts.	Contact will be via the planning process bringing information into the public domain.
c) Public close to the site	The proposed site is adjacent to a business park and at the end of the road such that it will not be visible to the general public. As stated above, except in very limited circumstances, public access would not be required.	As (b) above.
d) Health and related services	Managers/operators of the mortuary facilities at the hospitals in the county – KGH and NGH. NHS trust managers. Clinical staff and council administrators in neighbouring authorities; the emergency services; funeral directors (in	Direct approach to individuals and subsequent meetings.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Issues to be addressed</b>	<b>Approach</b>
	respect of collection and delivery at the mortuary).	
e) Businesses local to the site	The adjacent businesses are predominantly car dealerships. It is not anticipated that this facility will impact on their operations in any way.	As (b) above.
f) Internal clients and colleagues	Highways & Transport; Planning; Bereavement Services; Property Strategy & Estates; Works; Procurement; Facilities Management.	Direct approach to individuals and subsequent meetings and also project presentations using models, display boards and computer graphics.

#### **9.4 Procurement**

As the design is unique in terms of the facilities the facility will provide, taking in the selection of specific materials and the overall blend of the building and landscape, it was concluded that a contractor led design and build process would not allow the integrity of these decisions to be retained. Therefore, it is proposed that a contractor will be engaged on the basis of a full design with sections to be developed under contractor design portions such as foundations, structural frames and building services.

A cost-benefit analysis has been carried out to identify the optimum method of construction including the potential for off-site construction (modular), taking in to account such key requirements as floor construction, drainage, minimising vibration (CT Scanner), location and height of the building relative to the flood risk.

#### **9.5 Design and Construction**

During the initial project development process, the design team visited facilities and spoke with designers, contractors, and operational staff, including mortuary technicians and managers as well as senior consultant pathologists. From a base concept layout, this has allowed the team to develop the space planning in terms of efficient adjacencies; access including the necessary security controls; out of hours access for funeral directors; ease of access for use of the CT scanner by other organisations, flexible body storage including that required for bariatric needs; and the ability to carry out isolation PMs. Overall, there is a key requirement to allow facilities to be flexible and energy efficient.

Subject to any issues arising in the planning application and detailed design process the intentions are as follows. The mortuary building will be of traditional construction with cladding finish. Colours will be coordinated to the surroundings to create an unobtrusive but aesthetically pleasing facility. The building will be of single storey with low gradient pitched roof within a parapet to allow for the effective accommodation of photovoltaic panels to mitigate the significant electrical load requirement, reduce operating costs, and support net zero goals. Plant will be enclosed and located at ground level and distribution of media such as pipework and ductwork via ceiling voids. A new electrical supply will be connected via a new dedicated sub-station. Water and drainage will be sourced from the existing infrastructure.

The body storage and post-mortem areas would be climate controlled as necessary to meet the requirements set out in the relevant sections of the Human Tissue Act 2004 and current NHS guidance (currently Health Building Note 16-01 (2023)). The design of the heating, ventilation and cooling systems will be such that efficiencies will be sought from use of process biproducts such as heat and cooling from process plant. The body storage capability will be a maximum on 300, catering for the various needs including a range of frozen, chilled, and mixed use facilities.

The CT scanner suite would comprise a control and viewing area. The selection of the proposed CT scanner is based on the advice of medical advisers and operators of similar facilities as well as the supply chain and is intended to allow the proposed facility to provide a leading-edge approach to establishing cause of death through non-invasive post-mortem. Remote access to data obtained via CT scanning will be a key requirement. There is a statutory requirement to store imaging for up to 15 years.

## **9.6 Commissioning and Handover**

The construction team will establish a 'soft landings' approach to the handover of the facility to the operational teams in the lead up to full operation. The design of the new facility has been developed in collaboration with the Bereavement Services team and consultations have been carried out as a joint exercise. This has been an entirely collaborative approach between the various participants within the Council as well as the project design team.

The soft landings process will include video recorded training sessions for operation of the building functions together with electronic operating and maintenance manuals, asset registers, and as-installed records. The construction delivery team will assist in the appointment of specialist companies to carry out maintenance works where appropriate.

## **10. Summary Programme**

- Appoint designers – February 2023–Initial design development complete – August 2023
- PID approved by Executive Director – September 2023
- Order electricity connection – September 2023
- Working design and coordination complete – November 2023
- Planning application submitted –
- Planning permission received – February 2024
- Appoint contractor – February 2024
- Start on site – March 2024
- Practical completion – January 2025
- Mortuary operational – Feb 2025

## **11. Benefits Realisation**

### **11.1 Meeting Project Objectives**

The proposed courses of action set out in Section 9 uses existing methodology and experienced staff to carry forward the delivery of the new facilities and includes plans for involvement and managed handover of the facilities to the operational staff.

### **11.2 Risks**

- **Risk 1 – Change in demand**

This risk is identified as low. It would be further mitigated, in the case of lower demand, by the approach to running the Mortuary outlined in Section 11.3. These take advantage of design features which should make the facility attractive to a wide range of external users.

In the case of higher demand, it is first to be note that the existence of the mortuary would be a highly valuable tool in mitigating the risks the Council would otherwise face. The response to higher demand than the naturally free capacity would vary according to the circumstances:

- If there was a short term peak associated with a disaster, the arrangements for handling large numbers of deaths would be brought into use. The design of the Mortuary allows for this. This issue does not, therefore, require further consideration here.
- If the increase in demand was sustained, WNC would respond by prioritising its own use, and that of partners with long-term contracts, over that of ad hoc users.
- If the increase in demand was very sustained, consideration would be given to expanding the facility.

- **Risk 2 – Failure to obtain planning permission**

This risk is identified as low, given the nature and location of the site, and its appropriateness for the proposed development. However, it is further mitigated through pre-application discussions and the provision of a proper set of application information.

- **Risk 3 – Legal challenge**

The risks here are identified as low. They would be further mitigated by ensuring the the Council's decisions around the investment were soundly based and reasonable.

In relation to the planning permission, the Council will ensure that a proper set of information is provided, and the consideration of the application will be carried out, as is normal for the Council, with integrity and thoroughness.

- **Risk 4 – Failure to control project costs**

The initial mitigation is provided through the Council's appointed project cost consultant. This has reviewed the projected costs and confirmed they represent the appropriate amounts for the building and associated facilities that the Council is seeking to provide.

It will be critical to achieve and then adhere to a design freeze, so that there is clarity about what is to be provided.

Residual risk continues to be mitigated as the design progresses and greater cost certainty is established through the ability to market test the construction method with the supply chain and to identify and cost the key process elements of the delivery such as the body storage, post-mortem equipment, and CT scanner.

The delivery team are adopting a strategy whereby cost certainty within reasonable parameters will be achieved prior to commencement of the implementation phase through further development of the processes as set out above, resulting in the award of a contract which optimises risk transfer to the contractor. This will include considering risk around ground conditions, the weather, and external price shocks. The Council's delivery team will retain a risk fund out-with the main contract and will continue to analyse and mitigate the risk elements that inevitably remain with the Council with a view to retaining a substantial proportion of the fund upon overall project completion.

- **Risk 5 – Failure to achieve adequate quality**

As noted above, the initial sources of this risk – a failure to understand or properly apply to design the service requirements – have already been substantially mitigated through close working between the design team and the service manager.

The project design team has been selected following a thorough review of practice capabilities, resources, and experience of similar projects. It is the intention to progress the design to the extent that building method and use of materials is fully defined, with the main contractor providing detailed design only for specific elements such as foundations, structural frame and building services. The development team are committed to delivery and assessment of the design in line with their

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individual quality management policies and processes. The Council has also established procedures for quality management across the team. Project management will be directly geared to achievement of the objectives for the project.

The contractor will be chosen (as described in 9.5) with a view to their competence and diligence in carrying out this type of project.

### **11.3 Operation of the mortuary**

Once complete, the mortuary will be operated by the Council's Bereavement Services function, which forms part of the Registration & Coroner Services.

The new public mortuary will look after the deceased of Northamptonshire post go-live for all sudden and unexpected deaths including forensic post mortems for suspicious deaths or murders.

It has been established that there is a strong potential to provide a range of services to neighbouring authorities which might include CT post mortems; out of county body storage; standard and special post mortems and the like. Whilst no specific firm commitments can be secured at this stage, extensive consultation has taken place with local authorities such as Bedfordshire, Milton Keynes, Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire (including Peterborough), all of whom have expressed a willingness to use the proposed facility should the range of services described be made available, and in particular the ability to obtain cause of death non-invasive post mortems via CT scanning.

For the purposes of providing a realistic and robust business plan in this regard it is considered that there is potential to generate substantial returns from this source alone. The team have reviewed the various business models for provision of CT scanning and have established that in order to be able to offer a competitive and comprehensive service the CT scanner and associated hardware/software should be a capital provision as part of the project and that APTs (Anatomical Pathological Technicians) would be trained in the operation of the system including the specific processes that are available such as establishing cause of death from heart disease via calcium counting and angiography. It is recognised that the CT scanner requires facilities such as a lead lined enclosure and all such measures have been factored in to the project scope accordingly. The type of scanner envisaged is capable of being used for non-invasive post mortems for all age ranges including pre-natal.

Locally, regionally, and nationally there is a shortage of specialist facilities that will undertake bariatric postmortems, super bariatric post mortems, paediatric and chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological (CBRN) post mortems. As detailed above it is intended that the new mortuary would look to provide these services. Specialist postmortems would incur an additional specialist fees structure this has not however been factored into the costs in the business case.

The facility has been designed to accommodate the facilities for specialist postmortems, and the location of the public mortuary on good arterial roads, and central England is well placed to become a provider in this niche market. The Service has started the conversation with the College of Policing regarding CBRN.

## **12. Conclusions**

Delivery of a new public mortuary for Northamptonshire is a significant undertaking. It is vital it is done with careful consideration of how to deliver a facility which supports effective service delivery and properly manages design, construction, and operational risk. The plan for implementation and the cost and revenue projections have been developed to a level whereby it is considered the project can proceed on the basis described.

Implementation will provide a valuable service to the residents of Northamptonshire and the financial risks involved are at least balanced by the potential returns in both policy and financial terms. As such, it represents a valuable opportunity to progress the objectives of West Northamptonshire Council.

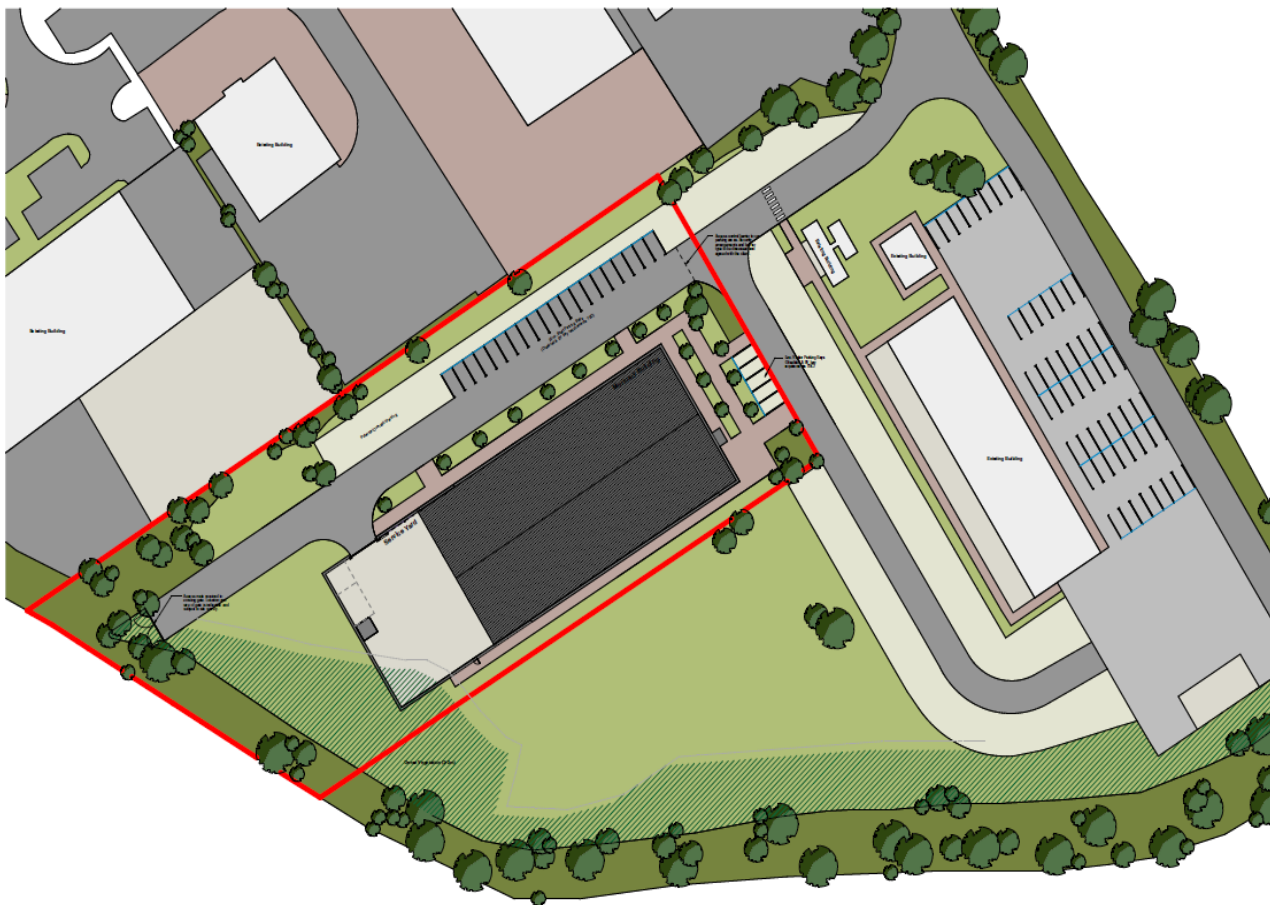






## Annex. Supporting Material

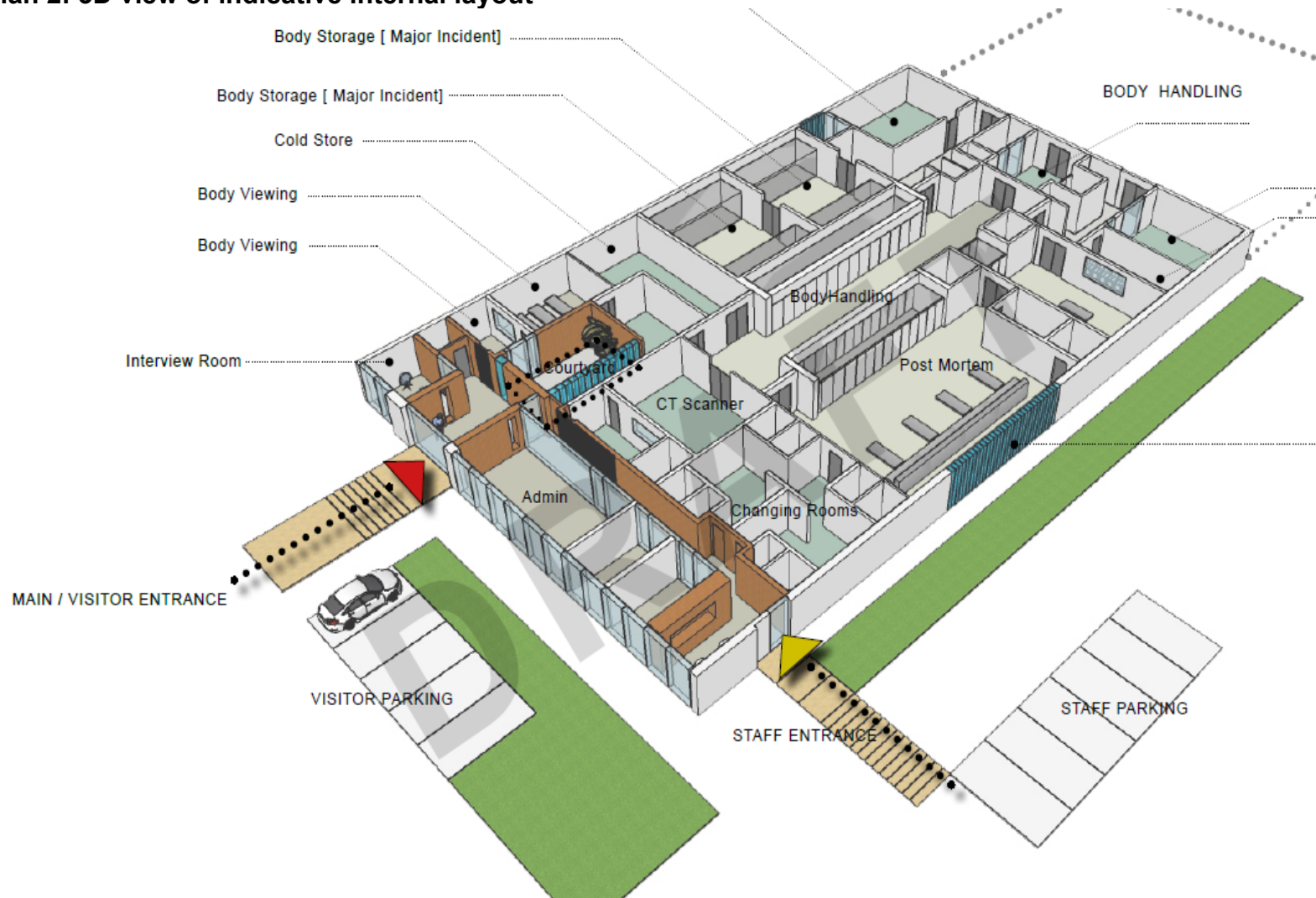
### Plan 1: Location of the of proposed facility at Booth Meadow



Site Plan  
1:250

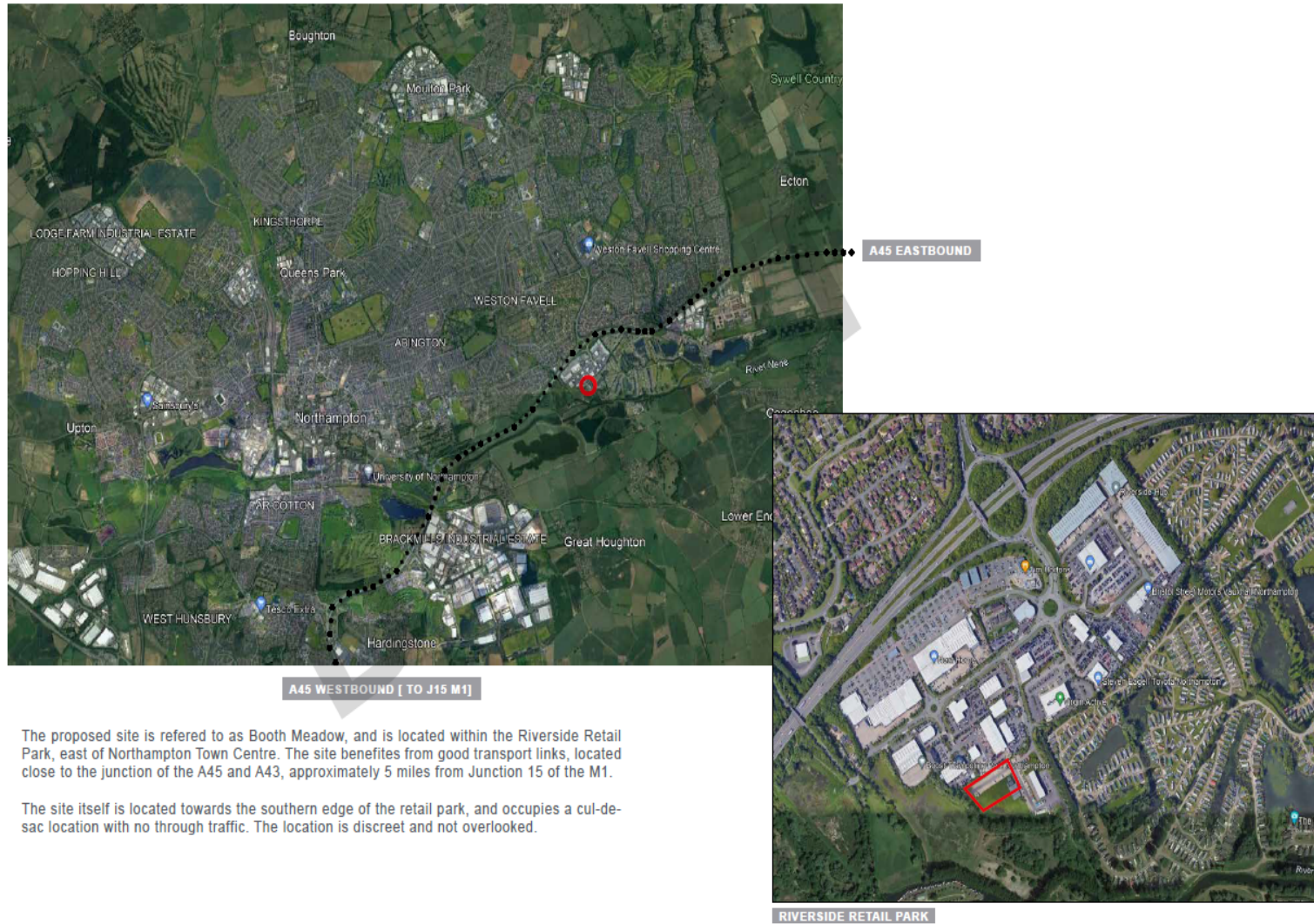


### Plan 2: 3D view of indicative internal layout





### Plan 3: Site location



The proposed site is referred to as Booth Meadow, and is located within the Riverside Retail Park, east of Northampton Town Centre. The site benefits from good transport links, located close to the junction of the A45 and A43, approximately 5 miles from Junction 15 of the M1.

The site itself is located towards the southern edge of the retail park, and occupies a cul-de-sac location with no through traffic. The location is discreet and not overlooked.

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