

## **Labour Group Amendment to the West Northamptonshire Council Budget 2024-2025**

This amendment proposes several schemes to aid the proposed budget in achieving the corporate priorities of West Northamptonshire Council and support it in making West Northamptonshire a connected, clean, and safe place to live and work.

The following proposals come in response to the increasing needs of our residents to have somewhere to live, to feel safe in their communities, to support our most vulnerable, to have clean air to breathe, and help our youngest flourish together.

They utilise only a small amount of the budget's contingency whilst mobilising available grant funding to invest in innovative schemes that both meet demand and reduce council expenditure in the long term.

We propose:

- **Investing in carbon-neutral modular housing** to deliver much-needed housing and temporary accommodation efficiently, inexpensively and without forfeiting our climate promises
- **Employing more Neighbourhood Wardens** to work alongside our residents and volunteers in keeping our communities safe and clean
- **Piloting innovative transport schemes** to help our residents, especially our most vulnerable and the people who look after them, get to where they need to go
- **Cleaning our air** by introducing no idling zones and investing in state-of-the-art traffic management systems
- **Tackling child isolation and unhappiness** by giving our neighbourhoods the power to help them play together

## **Amendment 1: Purchasing Social and Temporary Housing**

West Northamptonshire currently has an acute housing shortage which is affecting our ability to deliver our statutory and corporate duties.

Over 4,000 families are currently on the social housing waiting list. The Number of families in temporary accommodation has risen by over 150 in 12 months, 679 as of January 2024. WNC is forecast to spend net £2,883,000 on temporary accommodation (£4.1m gross) for 2023/24. It has budgeted £3.18m for temporary accommodation for 2024/25. The majority of this cost is carried by the use of “nightly paid self-contained” accommodation, which makes up 65% of temporary accommodation. Only 22% is the council’s own housing stock.

WNC needs to increase its own stock of social and temporary housing in order to bring these costs down and provide our residents with permanent homes. This needs to be done in a quick and efficient way, something standard brick-and-mortar construction cannot deliver.

### **Proposal**

Labour Proposal is to grow the council’s own housing stock further by investing in a pilot modular housing invest to save programme.

TopHat is a modular housing provider founded in 2016 with sustainability and social value at their core. Their factory in Derby produces 800-1,000 homes a year. Once their new factory in Corby is opened, they will be able to produce one complete home every hour and provide 700 jobs for the Northants area.

The modular homes are a timber-framed pre-fabricated product which is ultra-low embedded due to their 3D-printed brick aggregate material. The Essos heat pump allows for them to be net-zero energy and the option for solar panels allows some to have zero energy bills. All by-products from construction are fully recyclable and the homes themselves are accredited for 75 years (as opposed to 60 years for brick-and-mortar homes).

TopHat provide 29 different house and apartment types. All come fully furnished with white goods included and the internal specifications confirmed when making the order. The houses are deployed within 16 weeks of the order, with a second contractor then providing surrounding landscaping and groundwork for 2-3 weeks. 15 homes can be delivered a month with the occupants able to move in the next day.

A pilot scheme consisting of 30 prefabricated homes, 20 for social housing and 10 as temporary accommodation, could be built on land currently owned by the council. Social rent could then be charged on these.

**COST: A fully-furnished house with two bedrooms for three people would cost a maximum of £163,289. The same for five people with three bedrooms would cost a maximum of £191,383. This includes ground works, furnishing and white goods. Funding for this could be provided by a grant from Homes England.**

**Total Maximum Cost for pilot of 15 homes: £5,320,080 grant from Homes England**

**Corporate Priorities:** Clean and Green, Thriving villages and Towns, Improved life chances

## **Amendment 2: Cleaning and Securing Our Communities**

### **Context**

Neighbourhood wardens are a pivotal link between the council and our residents by acting as the public face of WNC's mission to make the district a clean and safe place to live.

There are currently 12 neighbourhood wardens working across the West Northants area. But these are often required to monitor areas outside their usual beat due to demand pressures. Between April and December 2023, 8,225 fly tips were cleared at a cost to WNC. In the same period, only 731 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued for environmental crime

New Public Spaces Protection Orders have increased the ability for the council to gain income from Fixed Penalty Notices for environmental crimes but need greater enforcement.

### **Proposal**

Labour Proposal is to increase the number of wardens to 18. Of the additional six, two will be allocated to the South Northants area, two to the Daventry area, and the remaining two would join the team in Northampton. This will alleviate the demand pressures on existing wardens and lead to further FPN income to the council.

More wardens will also allow for the building of local intelligence with communities and support schools, residents and business owners get buy in. Residents will see their council is committed to making their community a nicer place to live and coming down hard on fly tipping, illegal HMOs and rogue landlords.

The initial cost will come from existing contingency, before becoming self-financing within 2 years through penalties and fees and the income from WNC's new Environmental Enforcement Contract.

**TOTAL COST: £270,000 (initially from general contingency and then self-funding)**

**Corporate Priorities:** Clean and green, Thriving villages and towns, Improved life chances

## **Amendment 3: Transporting Our Communities**

West Northamptonshire is a rural and disparate area, with many small villages and isolated communities between our towns. Local transport and bus routes have been cut over the last decade, leaving residents in villages and suburban neighbourhoods with few or no opportunity to leave their areas and increasing the problem of social isolation.

More seriously for our budgets, this puts huge pressure on our Home to School and Adult Social Care transport budgets in procuring and maintaining multiple contracts to transport our children and vulnerable adults to where they need to be.

Poor public transport leads more to driving themselves, increasing congestion and pollution in our towns and reducing our chances of getting West Northants to Net Zero by 2045.

WNC needs radical innovation in our transport provision in order to bring our mounting costs down and connect our communities

### **Proposals**

The Labour Group proposes WNC employ a project manager to design and deliver three pilot schemes to provide greater connectivity to our most in-need residents. The officer would be in place for three years as the following pilots are rolled out:

#### **a) In-house transport for services**

An in-house transport service would mean the council would run certain services to improve connectivity for our rural areas in the areas of Home to School and Adult Social Care. WNC would lease buses on a typical three-year contract for the pilot.

The scheme would provide Home to School transport for multiple children at a time, removing the need for several taxi contracts at once. They would further provide adult social care transport between homes, care homes, and services in towns. This again would reduce the cost to the council/Public Health of contracting companies to provide it for us.

If successful, the pilot could be rolled out unitary-wide. The Public Health Grant would assist in funding this area of the expansion, alongside other

#### **b) Hospital Park and Ride**

Northampton General Hospital is recorded as having very poor air quality due to the traffic of visitors and staff coming in and out of its car parks, which themselves have very little space and regularly cause traffic jams at the entrances and exits.

The council has existing assets that would serve perfectly for a park and ride for hospital staff and visitors. Partnering with NGH could allow WNC to offer a subsidised parking fee and travel ticket that could pay towards the costs of the shuttle bus and parking maintenance.

#### **c) Northampton circular Hop-On bus service**

The connectivity between different areas of Northampton Town Centre is just as disparate as some rural areas. Those wishing to shop in the town centre, visit the hospital, and speak to the council must take several different buses or walk.

Several major cities have had success in providing a free circular bus service to connect different areas of their city centres. One in Northampton could connect the bus station, train station, One Angel Square, NGH, Wellingborough Road, Abington Street, and the Bus Station/Market Square. The bus/es could run during standard retail times, with an aim to make them electric in the medium/long term should the pilot prove successful.

**COST: The cost of employing a project manager to design and deliver these pilots would be £71,607 per annum (fte), supported by a programme manager at £43,592 per annum (0.5fte). Funding required to help deliver the pilots would be determined by said officers, though supportive funding for these could be available through partnering with NGH and applying to relevant grant schemes.**

**TOTAL COST (over three years): £345,597 (from general contingency)**

**Corporate Priorities:** Connected communities, Improved life chances, Thriving villages and towns, Clean and Green

## Amendment 4: Cleaning Our Air

Northampton has some of the worst pollution of any town in the UK, which leads to long-term medical conditions including asthma and COPD for our residents across West Northants.

In 2010, Northampton Borough Council declared seven Air Quality Management Areas in the town, which by law needed to have a Local Air Quality Action Plan within a certain number of years. But WNC has made little effort to properly address the air quality issue.

Cabinet is set to approve the declaration of a Northampton Air Quality Management Area, which would then lead to an Air Quality Action Plan. But this could likely take several months or years to implement when action is needed now.

### Proposals

1. Create no idling zones around schools and hospitals
2. Conduct a comprehensive awareness campaign on clean air run by WNC communications
3. Provide schools and hospitals with RAC Clean Air Zone banners to encourage drivers to turn off their engines. **Cost for 200 banners: £12,000 from general contingency.**
4. Installing smart junctions at five key areas of congestion-caused pollution in Northampton:
  - Victoria Promenade junction with Bridge St and Cattlemarket Rd;
  - St James Rd junction with Weedon Rd and Harlestone Rd;
  - A508 junction with Grafton St (Regent's Square);
  - Cock Hotel junction;
  - Cheyne Walk junction with Bedford Rd.

**COST: The cost of a pilot at one or two of these locations would be funded from the £10m automatic element from the council's bid for Traffic Signals Obsolescence Grant (TSOG) from the DfT. WNC would also apply for funding through the DfT's Intelligent Traffic Management Fund 2024 in April, which could fund remaining pilots and a £75,000 feasibility study, to find if a wider scheme could be implemented.**

**TOTAL COST: £12,000 from General Contingency with traffic pilot costs funded by DfT grant TBC**

**Corporate Priorities:** Clean and Green, Improved life chances

## **Amendment 5: Helping Our Children Play**

The physical and mental health of our youngest constituents has rightfully always been a priority for this council. But since the Coronavirus pandemic, cases of child isolation and subsequent mental health problems and difficulties in socialising later in life have led children in England to be widely considered amongst the unhappiest in the world.

Outdoor play is a key component in developing social skills and confidence in children, alongside keeping them physically active. But in the past decade it has been found that only 12% of children play out, as opposed to 82% in the 1980s, and that 75% of children in the UK spend more time inside than prison inmates.

The underfunding and closure of community hubs and children's centres over the same period have left children with few places to play together outside of their homes, with subsequent health problems putting pressure on our statutory services.

### **Proposal**

Labour proposes WNC work alongside Playing Out in launching a pilot Play Streets scheme. Play Streets encourages local communities to come together to create outdoor spaces for children to play out in safe traffic-free streets.

The scheme is completely resident-led. Beginning with interested residents consulting their neighbours on the proposal to close the street. Residents then apply to the local authority for permission to close the road (either the once or on a rolling agreement) to through traffic. Neighbours and volunteers then provide residents with stewarded access to and from their homes and parents and guardians are responsible for their children, with no expectation the council provide childcare etc.

The proven benefits for children and local communities includes: 82% of parents saying play street had improved their child's social confidence, 89% of people felt that they 'belonged more to their neighbourhood, and residents going on to become more involved in local issues and making their communities a better place to live.

The scheme is of very little cost to WNC, who would act as enablers rather than deliverers. Using the Town and Police Clauses Act 1847 to close a road for a Play Street event means the council does not need to spend the usual costs on publicising the closure as with other events. The only expenditure would be the admin time and cost of granting the road closure, providing support and advice when needed and using the communications department to market the scheme.

A one-off funding of £5,000 would also mean WNC could purchase 'Street Closed for Play Street' banners that could then be loaned by organisers and starter kits to communities wanting to take part, containing simple play equipment like chalk, hula-hoops, beanbags etc.

**COST: 15 playground equipment packs at £150 each (£2,250); 30 play street road closure banners at £50 each (£1,500) with £1,250 in contingency for council support costs and additional/replacement equipment**

**Total Cost: £5,000 (from General Contingency)**

**Corporate Priorities:** Connected communities, Improved life chances, Thriving villages and towns

Labour Group Amendment to the West Northamptonshire Budget 2024-2025

	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Grant Funding</b>	<b>Comments/Funding Stream</b>
<b>Amendment 1- Purchasing Social and Temporary Housing</b>		5,320,080	Funded through a grant from Homes England. 10% discount dependent on land and order
<b>Amendment 2- Recruiting more neighbourhood wardens</b>	270,000		Funded initially from general contingency and then self-funding
<b>Amendment 3- Connecting our Communities</b>			
Recruiting a project officer for three years	214,821		From general contingency
Supporting programme manager time	130,776		From general contingency
Funding for pilot schemes	TBC	TBC	Budgets to be determined by recruited project officer, with possible grant funding available
<b>Amendment 4- Cleaning Our Air</b>			
200 RAC Clean Air Zone banners	12,000		One-off funding from general contingency
Smart junction pilots		TBC	Funded through TSOG funding
Feasibility study for expansion		75,000	Funded through successful ITMF bid
<b>Amendment 5- Helping Our Children Play</b>	5,000		One-off funding from general contingency
<b>Total</b>	632,597	5,395,080	