

# Leader's Update

23 February 2024

Issue: 70

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## Introduction and welcome

Welcome to my latest Update.

This issue includes:

- Final budget proposals for 2024-2025 approved by North Northamptonshire Council.
- Major investment in highways network agreed by North Northamptonshire Council.
- Funding approval creates an additional 28 SEND school places.
- Grants on offer to make energy saving home improvements for hundreds of residents using off-gas heating.
- Our Retail Support Programme attracts over seventy small businesses.
- Bring a smile to Mum's face this Mother's Day - and support a local business too.
- Recruitment, Skills and Careers event at Tresham College in Corby.
- Vegetation causing damage to Kettering Library to be removed.
- LIVE Team shortlisted for LGC Awards 2024.
- Have your say on how to improve parks and green spaces in North Northamptonshire.

In addition, you will find below some useful information about forthcoming meetings, Your Voice Matters (our consultation and engagement hub), all the latest press releases and our top social media posts.

Whatever your plans are, I hope you have a great weekend!

## Final budget proposals for 2024-2025 approved by North Northamptonshire Council

Final budget proposals for North Northamptonshire Council for the next financial year were approved at a [meeting of the council](#) yesterday.

Draft proposals were initially agreed by the Executive on Thursday 21 December, and these were subject to a detailed consultation process and scrutiny before final proposals went before Executive earlier this month.

Overall, the net revenue budget for 2024-2025 is £375.3 million. This money provides a range of services to residents and businesses across the area including care to vulnerable adults and children, education, the disposal and collection of waste, highways maintenance, economic development, housing and support for those who are homeless.

The council also has a programme of capital investment totalling £113.1m over the four-year period 2024-28 across a number of schemes including investing:

- Over £49.1m into highways,
- £12.3m for schools,
- £10.7m to support disabled facilities,
- £9.1m in improving digital infrastructure,

- £2.7m from the Corby Towns Fund and
- £2.9m for electrical vehicle infrastructure.

This last year has been extremely tough financially. We have seen a significant increase in the need for, and the cost of, social care for both adults and children and this is placing an unprecedented financial pressure on the council.

A commitment to maintain vital service provision has seen the council invest an additional £62.6m into services to protect the most vulnerable in our communities and address a growing need for services.

### **Council Tax**

Government has permitted local authorities to increase the Council Tax rate by 4.99%, including 2% for the adult social care precept, in recognition of the difficult financial climate and increased inflationary pressures.

The authority will be increasing Council Tax to the amount allowed by government of 4.99%.

This increase will contribute around an additional £9.5m per year towards inflationary and demand lead pressures to enable services to be maintained and will represent a Band D level of Council Tax for North Northamptonshire Council of £1,740.22 for 2024-2025.

This is an annual increase of £82.71 (equivalent to £1.59 per week) from the Band D Council Tax level set in 2023-2024.

Around 57% of properties in North Northamptonshire are in Council Tax Bands A and B which will see an annual increase of £55.14 (equating to £1.06 per week) and £64.33 (£1.24 per week) respectively.

Increasing Council Tax has the advantage of providing stable funding for the future, helping to further protect services.

This Band D figure does not include the Council Tax for individual Town and Parish Councils or the Council Tax set for Fire and Police by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

There is no change to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme which will continue at 25%.

### **Housing Revenue Account**

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a separate ring-fenced account within the council for the income and expenditure associated with its housing stock.

The HRA does not directly impact on the council's wider general fund budget or on the level of Council Tax. Income to the HRA is primarily received through the rents and other charges paid by tenants and leaseholders.

This year's HRA will see a balanced budget for the two Neighbourhood Accounts.

There will also be a rent increase of 7.7% for the next financial year, which accords with the government's rent setting policy for 2024-2025. Any funding received by the HRA is retained within the HRA and will be used to support housing improvements and maintenance.

## **Major investment in highways network agreed by North Northamptonshire Council**

At two recent council meetings, North Northamptonshire Council has agreed to significant funding to improve highways across the area.

At today's [Full Council meeting](#), councillors agreed, as part of the Capital Programme for 2024-2028, to spend approximately £49.1m over the next four financial years on highways projects, the largest investment the council has made towards highways to date. This allocation includes £16m on pothole repairs.

This money includes £9.768m, allocated for highways infrastructure improvements, received from the Department of Transport (DfT) and agreed at last week's [Executive meeting](#).

The package of funding from DfT will support projects and help maintain the existing highways infrastructure assets, investing and improving highways infrastructure, improving access by cycle and foot (including safety improvements) and improving safety and traffic flows by upgrading traffic signals.

Now the funding has been approved, the council will look to allocate the budget to specific highways schemes in line with the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan.

These recent funds are part of the council's overall investment into North Northamptonshire's highways network and will combine with the [funding already received from the DfT](#) as part of their recently announced investment using funding from the cancellation of the northern sections of HS2.

I am delighted that this council is investing in our highways network, improving our infrastructure and connecting communities.

We recognise the importance of our highways network to residents and businesses across North Northamptonshire. By combining our investment alongside funds from the Department of Transport, this presents a huge opportunity to significantly improve our road network over the coming financial years.

## **Funding approval creates an additional 28 SEND school places**

North Northamptonshire Council's Executive has approved a capital project at Corby Business Academy.

The scheme is worth up to £543,900, and when completed this Autumn will help address the growing demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school places in the area.

The project has come about after Corby Business Academy, a secondary school, expressed an interest to the council in expanding their current SEND provision.

Parts of the original school were designed to accommodate a SEND provision which included complex needs, including a hydrotherapy pool. However, over the years the school's intake has been directed at more mobile students.

A refurbishment of the original hydrotherapy area, together with re-planning will increase the teaching space footprint enabling an increase in pupil numbers. The project will create two classrooms and accommodate an additional 28 SEND pupil places.

I am delighted that we have been able to use Higher Needs Funding to give this project the go ahead.

We have a statutory obligation as a council to provide appropriate enhancement of an existing school to meet the demand for SEND school places, an obligation we take seriously.

We are extremely fortunate that Corby Business Academy has the physical space that can be used to help us address the shortage of SEND spaces in North Northamptonshire.

## **Grants on offer to make energy saving home improvements for hundreds of residents using off-gas heating**

North Northamptonshire Council is pleased to announce the availability of the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2), a government-funded scheme aimed at providing energy-saving upgrades to residents with off-gas heating systems.

The HUG2 program offers free-of-charge energy-saving improvements that will not only keep homes warm but may also help residents manage their heating bills efficiently. Whether you own your home, privately rent, or are a private landlord with tenants, you may qualify to apply.

The grant is available to households meeting specific criteria, including not being heated by mains gas, having a combined annual income of less than £31,000 (this will increase to £36,000 after 2 April 2024), and having a home that an Energy Performance Certificate declares as 'hard to heat.'

Landlords are also encouraged to apply, under conditions detailed further below.

The scheme aims to phase out the use of fossil fuel heating, supporting the UK's 2050 Net Zero commitment and promoting household health and well-being through the reduction of cold homes.

### **Eligibility criteria:**

The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2) is open to homeowners and private tenants in:

- Homes not heated by mains gas which includes oil, coal, LPG or only electric heating.
- Households with a combined annual income of less than £31,000 (£36,000 after 2 April 2024) or receiving certain income-related means-tested benefits such as Universal Credit or you live in an Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) area. You can check your postcode on the [Home Upgrade Grant \(HUG 2\)](#) section of our website or call 0800 107 8883.
- Hard to heat homes – this is based on your home Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). You will be helped with this part of the assessment and receive a free EPC assessment if you do not have one already.

Landlords, who have four or fewer properties, will be able to apply and will be required to contribute at least one third of the cost of the upgrades in addition to the funding provided. This will be agreed before work begins.

### **How will it help?**

You may be offered energy saving improvements to help cut your energy bills and reduce your carbon emissions.

These could include:

- Insulation and ventilation upgrades (to keep you warm in winter and cool in summer).
- A low carbon heating system such as an air source heat pump (which will mean upgrading any existing heating system).
- Heating controls which make sure you only use heat when you need it.
- An energy efficient hot water solution to keep your water warm for longer.
- Solar panels (PV) to generate electricity.
- Energy efficient lighting which is cheaper to run.

A survey will identify what is suitable for your individual home and you'll get a free updated EPC assessment.

To apply for the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 and find out more, please visit the [Home Upgrade Grant \(HUG 2\)](#) section of our website or call 0800 107 8883. Applications are open until March 2025.

Agility Eco, a specialist company appointed by North Northamptonshire Council, will manage all energy-improvement works on behalf of residents. For direct enquiries or assistance, please contact Agility Eco at 0800 107 8883. You can apply via the [HUG](#) website or by calling Agility Eco on 0800 107 8883.

## **Our Retail Support Programme attracts over seventy small businesses**

More than 70 small businesses across North Northamptonshire have signed up to our new Retail Support Programme since its launch in January.

This expert-led programme provides free mentoring and support for independently run businesses in the area through a mix of workshops, webinars, tailored support, one-to-one sessions and more.

North Northamptonshire Council has partnered with [Smarter Society](#) to deliver the programme which is made possible thanks to funding secured from the government's [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) (UKSPF).

Next week sees the first in-person workshop taking place in Kettering on Tuesday 27 February from 10am to 12:30pm, where business owners will learn about building their social media presence, and to find out how to use it as an effective marketing tool. There will be presentations, a practical session and networking opportunities.

The NN Business Team has met many local businesses across the 12 towns that make up North Northamptonshire over the past few weeks. Through their one-to-one mentoring sessions, they have reported seeing a real appetite for the programme, along with a sense of pride, and wanting to do all they can to help their business thrive.

Businesses can register their interest in mentoring, support and upcoming workshops on the [NN Business](#) website. Please help to spread the word about this fantastic initiative.

## **Bring a smile to Mum's face this Mother's Day - and support a local business too**

Mother's Day is coming soon on Sunday 10 March. If you are fortunate enough to be able to celebrate this special day, you can make it even more meaningful by shopping local for thoughtful gifts and showing your support for the brilliant small businesses that are all around North Northamptonshire.

It's another busy occasion on the High Street and surrounding areas, and local businesses are working hard to help you find exactly what you're looking for. Whether you're treating mum to a special meal at a local restaurant, surprising her with a unique gift, or simply expressing your appreciation with a heartfelt card from a local stationery shop, every purchase you make with a local business makes a difference and invests in your community.

There are many reasons to support local this Mother's Day including:

- **Unique and thoughtful gifts:** Handcrafted jewellery, artisanal chocolates, custom-made bouquets, and more. These one-of-a-kind gifts add a personal touch to your Mother's Day celebrations.
- **Quality and freshness:** Local businesses take pride in the quality and freshness of their products. Whether you're purchasing farm-fresh flowers from a local florist or indulging in gourmet treats from a neighbourhood bakery, you can rest assured that you're getting top-notch goods.
- **Personalised service:** One of the most rewarding aspects of shopping at local businesses is the service you receive. Business owners will often take the time to get to know their customers and provide tailored recommendations and assistance.

As part of our [Hi Street](#) campaign, we've been talking to some brilliant small businesses. Look out for our features and a special giveaway for Mother's Day, coming soon on our Hi Street [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.

## **Recruitment, Skills and Careers event at Tresham College in Corby**

People looking for a new job, opportunities to enhance their skills, and the chance to develop a fresh or more rewarding career are being invited to join our Recruitment, Skills and Careers event on Wednesday 6 March at Tresham College in Corby.

North Northamptonshire Council is working in partnership with The Bedford College Group and Jobcentre Plus to deliver the popular event which will see experts from a wide range of companies across the area on hand to chat with visitors about employment, training, volunteering and other opportunities.

Courses available locally at Tresham College will also be promoted to help people discover pathways into employment including T-Levels and apprenticeships.

Job roles at the council will be available to view and discuss along with those from companies attending which include Aspire People, Avon, Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire, Home Instead, Home-Start, Northamptonshire Police, Oundle School, So Very Creative, SPIROL Industries Ltd., Supacolour, Take Me Taxi, Textbook Teachers and The Royal Navy.

The event is free to attend. Further events will be taking place throughout the year at other locations in North Northamptonshire. Please look out for news on these on our website and social media channels.

## **Vegetation causing damage to Kettering Library to be removed**

As part of the wider project to replace Kettering Library's Grade II listed roof, works will start in March to remove vegetation that has been identified as causing damage to the building.

Currently, ivy and Virginia creeper cover a large portion of the Library and Art Gallery with vegetation growing, at places, through the building's windows and roof causing damage and impacting the overall building.

As a council, we have to ensure that all the buildings we own, including Kettering Library, are maintained and will stand the test of time.

Although the plants may aesthetically add to the character of the building, they are damaging the wider building. We also must consider the long-term costs of maintain the vegetation. With all this in mind and having consulted with specialists, the decision has been taken to remove the vegetation.

North Northamptonshire Council will start works to fully remove all the vegetation and clean up the exterior of the building, which will prevent further damage and reduce maintenance costs in the long term, while allowing for the historical architecture of the building to be visible.

The works are taking place now to avoid the removal of plants later in the year when, typically, they would be flowering or denser.

The work will be undertaken as the library roof project replacement moves into the 'delivery' phase.

Tree canopies around the building have already been raised to prevent further damage to existing roof slates.

Further updates about the Kettering Library roof replacement project will be published in due course.

## **LIVE Team shortlisted for the LGC Awards 2024**

Our LIVE Team has been shortlisted for the [LGC Awards 2024](#) in the 'Community Involvement' category.

The LIVE Team has set up numerous projects and initiatives to empower adults with complex learning disabilities to support their independence, volunteering and employment success.

They are making a real difference in the community and this recognition is very well deserved.

The awards ceremony will take place on Wednesday 12 June at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London.

We are wishing the team the best of luck.

Follow their Facebook page [LIVE Team News](#) to find out more about their fantastic work.

The full [2024 shortlist](#) can be found on the LGC Awards website.

## **Have your say on how to improve parks and green spaces in North Northamptonshire**

North Northamptonshire Council has secured just over £1.5million of the government's [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) (UKSPF) to invest in the creation and improvement to the area's local green spaces, community gardens and watercourse spaces.

The six urban areas identified are Corby, Desborough, Kettering, Wellingborough, Rushden and Higham Ferrers.

The first part of the project includes undertaking an audit of urban green spaces within these settlements, before developing a strategy prioritising those spaces with plans for how the investment can improve the area and optimise its use for visitors.



It is also hoped to create a legacy strategy document that can be used to attract future funding bids, building on the investment already secured through the UKSPF.

The council has secured specialist open space consultants in The Environment Partnership (TEP) and CFP Landscape and Heritage to carry out engagement on the project brief and prepare a strategy with prioritised schemes for delivery.

The council is keen to hear from residents, local groups, organisations and businesses with their views and suggestions for improvements to urban parks and green spaces at any of the six towns identified.

Examples might include any of the following, or other ideas:

- Developing or creating a new park;
- Creation of a new community garden;
- Tree planting within urban environments;
- Change in management to enhance ecological and amenity value;
- Improvements to existing parks or green spaces;
- Improvements to accessibility.

Delivery of projects is scheduled to be complete by March 2025.

The questionnaire can be completed online at [North Northamptonshire Urban Green Space Strategy - residents survey](#).

This consultation closes at midnight on Monday 18 March.

## Your Voice Matters

Please find below details of our other current consultations and engagement activities. Please use the links below to provide your feedback and inform council decisions and share with family and friends who may be interested in shaping future plans.

Details of all open and closed consultation and engagement activities are available on the North Northamptonshire Consultation and Engagement Hub, [Your Voice Matters](#).

- [North Northamptonshire Council All Age Carers Strategy 2024-2029](#). We are developing our first All Age Carers Strategy and are asking carers, or those supporting a carer, to share feedback on the draft strategy. Closes 3 March 2024.
- [North Northamptonshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy consultation](#). The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 sets out how, over the next five years, North Northamptonshire Council will work collaboratively with our partners to build on our existing approach and respond to challenges to tackle and help prevent homelessness and support those who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We are seeking the views of residents and local partners to understand your views. Closes 31 March 2024.

## Forthcoming meetings

### Full Council

- Thursday 7 March from 6pm.

### Executive

- Thursday 14 March from 10am.

The agenda and papers will be published on the [Council meetings](#) section of our website in the week before the meeting.

These meetings will be live streamed on our [YouTube](#) channel.

## Press releases

To help you stay abreast of the key things the council has been doing, I have included some links to the latest press releases below (starting with the most recent):

- [Major investment in highways network agreed by Council](#)
- [Final budget proposals for 2024-2025 approved by North Northamptonshire Council](#)
- [Funding approval creates an additional 28 SEND school places](#)
- [Vegetation causing damage to Kettering Library to be removed](#)
- [Have your say on how to improve parks and green spaces in North Northamptonshire](#)

## Social media: Top stories

Follow our social media accounts and share our [Facebook](#) and/or [Twitter](#) posts when you can.

### Top Facebook posts so far this week (19 to 21 February)

- Have your say on how to improve parks and green spaces in North Northamptonshire  
<https://ow.ly/wi0950QF8Tz>  
(Reach 5,251, Link Clicks 111, Engagement 524)
- Please do not place clothing in your recycling bin. If they are in good condition, clothes can be taken to a charity shop, textiles bank or one of our Household Waste Recycling Centres (tips). Find your nearest HWRC <https://ow.ly/okzw50QcNLT>  
(Reach 2,927, Link Clicks 7, Engagement 221)
- Update: The Gym and Health Suite at Splash Leisure Pool have re-opened. The pool is currently still closed. Apologies for any inconvenience caused.  
(Reach 2,571, Link Clicks 15, Engagement 142)

### Top Tweets so far this week (19 to 21 February)

- Please do not place clothing in your recycling bin. If they are in good condition, clothes can be taken to a charity shop, textiles bank or one of our Household Waste Recycling Centres (tips). Find your nearest HWRC <https://t.co/7GqsLtVDmM>  
(Impressions 624, URL Clicks 0, Engagements 13)
- Have your say on how to improve parks and green spaces in North Northamptonshire  
<https://t.co/aAYTxJ95V8>  
(Impressions 432, URL Clicks 5, Engagements 8)
- Your Voice Matters - the North Northamptonshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029 consultation. You can share your views by reading the current draft of the strategy and completing the questionnaire: <https://t.co/0p0GsabJED> The consultation will close on 31 March.  
(Impressions 384, URL Clicks 0, Engagements 3)

## Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. If you have any ideas for items to include in future updates, please email me at [executive@northnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:executive@northnorthants.gov.uk).

With Best Wishes,  
Jason



