

Leader's Update

15 November 2024

Issue: 87

Introduction and welcome

Welcome to my latest Update.

This issue includes:

- Significant progress made in improvements to planning services at North Northamptonshire Council.
- Council Tax support proposals in North Northamptonshire discussed at Executive meeting.
- New bus services connecting communities in North Northamptonshire.
- Proposed changes to burial policies and regulations.
- Launch of the North Northamptonshire Youth Advisory Council.
- Make a difference: Choose a career in local government.
- Watch our climate change conference on Thursday 21 November.
- Corby school awarded first Healthy Schools Silver Award in North Northamptonshire.
- Chester House Estate welcomes their first ever ice-skating rink this Christmas.
- South Midlands Authorities announce the launch of the new Business Board.
- Integrated Care Northamptonshire: East Midlands Assisted Fertility Review.

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!

Significant progress made in improvements to planning services at North Northamptonshire Council

Significant improvement has been made in bringing positive transformation to North Northamptonshire Council's planning department, according to a recent progress review of the service.

An update report after the visit by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) was presented to the council's Executive yesterday.

View the report: [Planning Advisory Service Peer Review Update](#).

The peer team particularly noted the move to two planning committees and the updated scheme of delegation, demonstrating a proactive approach to streamlining the decision-making process.

The review team also noted the significant progress to coordinate data for developer contributions and providing greater transparency and accountability by publishing an infrastructure funding statement.

The review team was impressed by the culture of collaboration and mutual support demonstrated within the planning department, and it was also lauded for establishing apprenticeship programmes to support the development of planning officers.

They also recognised the ongoing efforts to implement a new IT system intended to further enhance the efficiency of the planning service.

However, the update report also recognised that more work is still needed to be done and it was identified that the council continued to face challenges regarding resource and recruitment, which is common across planning services nationally.

The need for good communication and timely correspondence between the planning service and its stakeholders was regarded as essential and whilst some improvements were noted, it was acknowledged that further improvement was required in this area.

In September 2022, the initial peer review of the council's Planning Service was undertaken by a PAS Peer Review Team. This included an extensive set of interviews and focus groups with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders.

Following an invitation by the council, PAS made the second visit to conduct a progress review in May 2024, where they were also requested to undertake a desktop-based review of the council's use of Extensions of Time (EOT) on planning applications.

PAS is part of the Local Government Association and is funded by government. Among other activities, PAS undertake peer reviews for local planning authorities.

Peer reviews can be done for any service and operate through a 'sector-led' approach, where local authorities help each other to continuously improve.

Council Tax support proposals in North Northamptonshire discussed at Executive meeting

The assistance available to people paying their Council Tax in the North Northamptonshire Council area is set to remain unchanged from previous years.

A report presented to the council's Executive yesterday recommended that, under the [Local Council Tax Support Scheme](#), help for the 2025-2026 financial year would stay at the same proportion as for 2024-2025.

View the report: [Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26](#).

This would mean all eligible working age claimants would only have to pay a minimum of 25% towards their Council Tax liability.

The proposal will go before the authority's Full Council meeting on Thursday 5 December for final sign off.

In addition to the [Council Tax Support scheme](#), the council has a scheme in place where people who are finding themselves in difficulties can apply for a [Council Tax Discretionary Discount](#), which is used to mitigate any unforeseen or exceptional hardship circumstances that threaten taxpayers' ability to pay Council Tax.

The council's revenues and benefits social inclusion team is on hand to help customers apply for Council Tax Support, Council Tax Discretionary Discounts and other areas such as discretionary housing payment applications, personal independence payment applications, utilities and general money and debt advice.

Draft budget proposals for the financial year 2025-2026 are due to appear before the Executive next month.

Proposed changes to burial policies and regulations

In a meeting of the council's Executive yesterday, two reports on proposed changes to cemeteries across the area were considered.

Following on from a consultation this Summer ([Burial Reservation Policy - have your say](#)), the council's Executive were asked to approve plans to harmonise burial reservation policies into one unified policy across North Northamptonshire, bringing consistency to the reserving of graves across the area.

Under the new policy, North Northamptonshire residents would have the option to pay a fee and reserve one plot at a time, before burial. A grave could also be reserved at the time of burial for a partner or family member to be buried next to each other.

View the report: [Extension of the Burial Reservation Policy and Fee](#).

The Executive were also asked to approve a report on proposals to apply lawn cemetery regulations to the new extension at the council's Shire Lodge Cemetery in Corby. In 2020, planning permission was obtained to extend the cemetery to create an additional 2,978 graves.

A lawn cemetery is a cemetery where only headstone memorials are installed by families in a defined headstone border, with no additions outside the headstone border. This means the cemetery has a formal, orderly and peaceful appearance.

Currently a mix of memorial types are permitted across the existing cemetery and the proposals would also help the site be better managed in the future and help with ensuring that the site is available for the longest possible time.

The report also looks at other operational changes including simplifying the opening hours of the site to match the hours across other council owned cemeteries across North Northamptonshire.

View the report: [Application of Lawn Cemetery Regulations to the new extension at Shire Lodge Cemetery](#).

New bus services connecting communities in North Northamptonshire

More new and enhanced bus services are being introduced across the North Northamptonshire Council area.

The services have been subsidised by the council from its own budgets and through funding targeted from the previous government's Bus Service Improvement Programme, as well as from developer contributions.

The move supports the council's own [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) which was approved by the Executive this year, and is in addition to other service improvements announced in September

Well-connected communities help develop social cohesion and are a vital component in assisting economic growth and workforce mobility.

Buses play a major role in reducing congestion on our roads, reducing pollution and helping us meet our ambitious carbon reduction targets.

Further details can be found on the [Buses and transport](#) section of our website and in the recent press release: [New bus services to help connect communities in North Northamptonshire](#).

Launch of North Northamptonshire Youth Advisory Council

A [North Northamptonshire Council Youth Advisory Council](#) has been launched to coincide with National Youth Work Week.

The role of the Youth Advisory Council is to give young people a voice to create an environment where they can make decisions about what is important to them, and create opportunities for young people to participate, engage and be heard by politicians, service providers and others in their local community.

In July this year, North Northamptonshire Council secured Public Health funding to employ a qualified Youth Worker. This demonstrated the local authority's commitment in supporting the voluntary sector and ensures that there are increasing levels of meaningful engagement and participation to empower young people to have a voice on issues that matter to them.

Applications for the Youth Advisory Council member elections will be accepted from Monday 18 November to Saturday 30 November 2024. Applicants are required to complete a short expression of interest form.

There will be 14 places for young people to apply for a seat on the Youth Advisory Council. Those elected will represent the North Northamptonshire area. Two seats will be allocated to Youth Members of Parliament.

The Youth Advisory Council will be seeking member applications from young people who are active members of a current youth forum from school councils, voluntary youth organisations, youth councils and forums, college youth councils, or an individual nominated by a member of staff from a school, college or community group. The only stipulations are that applicants are aged 13 to 19 years (up to 25 with SEND) and live in North Northamptonshire.

Elected council members will be invited to get involved and work alongside North Northamptonshire Council's Engagement and Participation Team. Should there be a high number of applications, these will go to a public vote through the Family Hubs 'Digital Front Door'.

Once elected, the first meeting of the Youth Advisory Council will be on Tuesday 14 January 2025 in Kettering. Subsequent meetings will then take place on the second Tuesday of every month.

For more information, please contact Brian McLaughlin, Youth Work Co-ordinator, at engagementandparticipation@northnorthants.gov.uk.

Watch our climate change conference on Thursday 21 November

Our virtual climate change conference, NNClimate24 is taking place on Thursday 21 November and will look at the health effects of climate change, sustainable living and engaging communities.

If you would like to watch the live stream, please visit our [website](#) at 9:30am, where an NNClimate24 banner will appear with a clickable link to the live YouTube broadcast.

A recording of the event will be available afterwards on our [Democratic Services channel on YouTube](#).

Further information, including a list of keynote [speakers](#) and panellist as well as full [agenda](#) details, can be found on the [NNClimate24 conference](#) section of our website.

I hope you will be able to join us.

Make a difference: Choose a career in local government

North Northamptonshire Council is joining local government organisations in a recruitment initiative to highlight the fantastic career opportunities available at North Northamptonshire Council and across the country.

The Local Government Association is the national voice of local government, and the council is taking part in their national recruitment campaign this Autumn which is designed to boost the local government workforce. The strapline is 'Make a Difference'.

The campaign will highlight why a career in local government can really make a difference, especially to the people and place they know and love.

North Northamptonshire Council is proud to be a recognised Disability Confident Employer, committed to providing an inclusive recruitment process and will offer an interview to disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria for the role.

The council re-signed the Armed Forces Covenant in June 2024 which highlights the pledge to support the Armed Forces community. The council obtained the Silver status award for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) and is currently working towards achieving Gold status.

For more information, please visit our [Jobs and careers](#) web pages.

Corby school awarded first Healthy Schools Silver Award in North Northamptonshire

Cottingham Church of England (CofE) Primary School has become the first North Northamptonshire school to gain the Healthy Schools Silver Award.

After completing their Bronze Award in February, Cottingham CofE Primary School soon set its sights on going for Gold and swiftly achieved Silver.

To achieve the Healthy Schools Silver Award, the school completed a self-led mental health project focused on their Year 5 children, who moved to Year 6 at the start of the school year in September.

The focus was on the Five Ways to Wellbeing, Giving, Connecting, Being Active, Taking Notice and Learning, with sessions around the five themes, including a food bank donation (Giving), a family afternoon (Connecting) and a yoga session (Being Active).

As part of the process, pupils completed a weekly reflection log workbook, looking at how they had achieved the Five Ways to Wellbeing that week and why it was important. Currently, 51 schools are working towards their Bronze Healthy Schools Award, and 19 are on the path to their Silver.

Schools and colleges in North Northamptonshire can learn more by emailing the Healthy Schools Team at HealthySchools@northnorthants.gov.uk.

Chester House Estate welcomes their first ever ice-skating rink this Christmas

Chester House Estate is urging visitors to 'get their skates on' this festive period to enjoy their first ever ice-skating rink. This is part of the [Winter Wonderland](#) experience that will run from Saturday 23 November to Tuesday 24 December.

The ice rink will be located at the front of the 17th century historic farmhouse, with festive huts serving hot chocolate and roasted chestnuts lining the edges of the rink. Skate collection and penguin-shaped ice-skating aids for children and inexperienced skaters can be collected at the event marquee.

The popular Father Christmas experience is returning this year. Designed as a festive journey led by friendly elves, guests can visit Mrs Christmas' kitchen to create a Christmas card, make reindeer food and visit Father Christmas in his grotto and, of course, receive a gift.

Last year, the Father Christmas experience sold out within a few weeks, so this year's offering has been expanded to incorporate family favourites and new features, making it their largest Christmas event to date.

Christmas markets will be running every weekend from Saturday 23 November, with a host of local craft, food and drink and market stalls available to explore. A Festive Afternoon Tea, Winter Ploughman's and Festive Burgers are part of the new Winter menu.

The artisan shopping courtyard will be open from Tuesday to Sunday throughout November and December, which includes a florist, dog shop, dressmaker and pottery studio.

Winter Wonderland tickets are on sale now. Please pre-book to avoid missing out.

This project is part funded by the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

South Midlands Authorities announce the launch of the new Business Board

The newly established [South Midlands Authorities](#) group was set up to champion economic growth by supporting businesses, improving skills and enhancing career opportunities.

The group represents the entire region, covering Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes City, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire councils.

The [South Midlands Business Board](#) has been established to act as the voice for businesses across the region. It will play an important role in shaping future economic strategy and ensuring that regional priorities align with the needs and opportunities of businesses across the region.

After a comprehensive recruitment process, 15 leaders have been invited to form the first cohort of board members. They bring a wealth of experience and expertise from various sectors. Their diverse backgrounds will ensure that the Business Board is well-equipped to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities within the region.

We look forward to working with this first cohort of business leaders on the challenges and opportunities both here in North Northamptonshire and further afield.

Integrated Care Northamptonshire: East Midlands Assisted Fertility Review

The NHS in the East Midlands is currently reviewing how people can access fertility treatments. The aim is to create a fairer approach to fertility treatment across the region.

Currently, there are differences in the way people can access fertility treatments. The review addresses these differences in access, such as age, BMI, and the number of treatment cycles available across the East Midlands. It also considers access for same-sex female couples, individuals with children from previous relationships, and single people.

The engagement period will run for two months in November and December, and feedback will be used to influence the final policy.

Please visit the [Assisted fertility review](#) page on the Integrated Care Northamptonshire website for further information.

Your Voice Matters

Please find below details of our 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](#).

New

- [Harmonising payment options and the proposed removal of paying by cash at the Corby Cube](#). Closes 3 December 2024.
- [Adult Social Care Strategy 2024-2029](#). Closes 16 December 2024.
- [Term Dates for North Northamptonshire schools for the 2026-27 academic year](#). Closes 29 December 2024.
- [Consultation on school admission arrangements for September 2026 intakes](#). Closes 29 December 2024.

Current

- [Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy review](#). Closes 17 November 2024.
- [Local Nature Recovery Strategy for North Northamptonshire](#). Closes 9 December 2024.
- [Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy review](#). Closes 9 December 2024.

Forthcoming meetings

Full Council

- Thursday 5 December 2024 from 6pm.
- Thursday 20 February 2025 from 6pm.

Executive

- Thursday 19 December 2024 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):

- [Significant progress made in improvements to planning services at North Northamptonshire Council](#)
- [Oundle Library re-introduces its popular weekly events](#)
- [Corby school awarded first Healthy Schools Silver Award in North Northamptonshire](#)
- [Council Tax Support proposals in North Northamptonshire to be discussed at Executive](#)
- [Changes to burial policies and regulations on Executive agenda](#)
- [South Midlands Authorities announce launch of new Business Board](#)
- [Popular Irchester attraction welcomes first ever ice-skating rink this Christmas](#)
- [New bus services to help connect communities in North Northamptonshire](#)
- [North Northants communities come together to remember](#)
- [Would you like to represent and give a voice to young people in North Northamptonshire?](#)
- [Council encourages people to make a difference and choose a career in Local Government](#)

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 (11 to 13 November)

- Attention local job seekers! Don't miss the chance to meet with a variety of companies at Recruitment, Skills, and Careers event tomorrow (12 November). You can also get employment advice and support, as well as find out about training opportunities to boost your skills. It's taking place at Tresham College in Kettering from 4pm to 6pm. We hope to see you there! (Reach 3,043, Link Clicks 0, Engagements 64)
- Just over a week to go to this great event hosted by BIPC Northamptonshire. If you're thinking about starting a small business, it's a great opportunity to get advice and expertise. Start-Up Stars Panel at #BIPCStartUpDay 2024. Hear from three BIPC Northamptonshire Build Your Business grant winners as they share their journeys from idea to reality: David Sikharulidze of Mavis Technologies, Laura Howard of Laura's Seating Solutions and Vicky Skinner of Animal Focused. Moderated by Ruth Roan from the Growth Hub, this panel is packed with insights, advice, and real-life stories. Don't miss this opportunity to learn from local entrepreneurs, sign up today: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/.../start-up-day-2024...> #StartUpDay2024 #Entrepreneur #BusinessEvents #BIPC #BIPCNorthants West Northamptonshire Council North Northamptonshire Council Business & IP Centre (Reach 1,077, Link Clicks 1, Engagements 14)
- Our festive page, highlighting our services over Christmas and New Year is coming together, thanks to our wonderful website elves! We'll keep adding information over the coming weeks. <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/christmas> (Reach 1,060, Link Clicks 14, Engagements 32)

Top Tweets so far this week (11 to 13 November)

- Eligible homeowners now have until 24 Nov to begin their application for the Home Upgrade Grant, a government funded scheme to make homes warmer. Still not sure? Don't take our word for it, read this case study <https://ow.ly/IYeR50U4Ewc> Apply online <https://t.co/7FkEWDMY6Y> (Impressions 324)
- Attention local job seekers! Don't miss the chance to meet with a variety of companies at Recruitment, Skills, and Careers event tomorrow (12 November). It's taking place at Tresham College in Kettering from 4pm to 6pm. We hope to see you there! (Impressions 315)
- Significant progress made in improvements to planning services at North Northamptonshire Council <https://ow.ly/3OEY50U4RUH> (Impressions 247)

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.

With Best Wishes,
Jason