

Leader's Update

5 April 2024

Issue: 73

Introduction and welcome

Welcome to my latest Update.

This issue includes:

- £5million funding boost for cultural projects across North Northamptonshire.
- New ways of working to help improve customer experience and service provision at North Northamptonshire Council.
- Over 10,000 trees planted in North Northamptonshire.
- North Northamptonshire Council works with local businesses on tree plantings.
- Project for a smarter and greener Corby gets underway.
- Safety improvements made to pedestrian crossings in Kettering.
- Rushden's Public Space Protection Order now in force in a bid to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Executive Director of Finance and Performance (S151 Officer) set to depart for new role.
- SEND Local Partnership accepts findings of joint OFSTED and CQC report and commits to making improvements for children, young people and their families.
- Council issues warning after Oakley Vale Lake contaminated.
- Splash Park in Wellingborough to undergo repairs.
- Upcoming Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections.
- Free Voi UK RideSafe Webinar.
- Merged Futures 6 event returns to the Learning Hub.

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!

£5million funding boost for cultural projects across North Northamptonshire

North Northamptonshire Council has been provisionally allocated £5million of Levelling Up capital funding from the government for investment in cultural projects in the area.

To secure the allocation, the council must complete an investment plan detailing the project(s) the funds would be used for and submit this to the government by Friday 10 May.

We are now seeking projects from organisations, and internally, to include in the investment plan.

Details need to cover:

- finance and budget,
- value for money,
- outputs and outcomes,
- how the project fits in with local priorities,
- stakeholder support,

- plans to deliver by March 2026.

We welcome this funding announcement which recognises the positive influence that cultural interventions can have on the prosperity of our communities - and shows that North Northamptonshire is a priority area for the government.

For further information, please visit the [Cultural fund](#) section of our website.

If your organisation would like to submit a project for consideration, please contact luf@northnorthants.gov.uk for an application form. Completed forms should be returned by 8am on Monday 22 April.

New ways of working to help improve customer experience and service provision at North Northamptonshire Council

A blueprint to shape future ways of office working at North Northamptonshire Council is being developed.

Changing how and where staff work will allow the council to work more efficiently in delivering services to the residents of North Northamptonshire.

The move follows local government reorganisation, which brought together five legacy councils at a time when the nation was moving out of the COVID-19 pandemic, and hybrid and remote working had become more common.

Known as Workspace Transformation, the strategy will bring service teams together across the North Northamptonshire area, while improving work efficiency.

It will also allow the council to review the number of office buildings that are currently used which will help us to meet carbon reduction targets and bring some efficiency savings.

Under the proposals, North Northamptonshire Council office staff will be based at the following locations:

- **Corby:** Corby Cube, Deene House and Grosvenor House.
- **Kettering:** Municipal Offices.
- **Thrapston:** Cedar Drive.

A council presence will also be maintained for customers in Wellingborough, at a location to be confirmed.

Alternative uses will be found for council buildings located at:

- **Corby:** West Glebe Day Centre.
- **Kettering:** Sheerness House, 94 Saunders Close, council occupied areas of Haylock House and the William Knibb Centre.
- **Wellingborough:** Tithe Barn Offices, Swanspool House.

Under the proposals, the workforce will be organised to bring services and directorates together, rather than operating at legacy locations.

Plans will be developed on which buildings will be used, and by which services. A full consultation with staff will be carried out in the coming weeks.

Reducing the number of offices where staff are located will mean that improvements can be made at the remaining sites both for residents accessing services directly and for staff.

The focus would also be on hybrid working with a mixture of home-working, where appropriate, with time spent at office locations.

Staff who are located at various depots across the council area will not be affected by the changes and are outside the scope of this project.

Rationalising and investing in our buildings will help us deliver better services. We need to be thinking more as 'One Council' and this strategy will help us to do just that.

Over 10,000 trees planted in North Northamptonshire

As the tree planting season comes to an end, North Northamptonshire Council has planted 10,392 trees in parks, gardens, woodlands and other public sites since October 2023.

Our Grounds Maintenance Team, volunteers from the Natural Ise Group, and children from Hayfield Cross school, undertook a planting of more than 750 native trees within its second Tiny Forest in the Ise Valley Parkland in Kettering. Officers were on hand to offer expert advice and demonstrate tree planting techniques.

A Tiny Forest is a dense, fast-growing native woodland, about the size of a tennis court. These forests are great homes for butterflies, birds, bees and other wildlife and a place for people to connect with and learn about nature.

The planting was made possible using funding awarded as part of the Coronation Living Heritage Fund with materials, resources and parts of the aftercare all funded to help the Tiny Forest establish and thrive for future generations.

Separately, 420 whips were planted at Croyland Park in Wellingborough by officers and Cllr Matt Binley in conjunction with the UP2U Youth Group and Wellingborough Eco Group.

Each tree planted at Croyland Park was specifically chosen and supplied by the Woodland Trust as part of their Free Trees for Schools and Communities programme.

North Northamptonshire Council works with local businesses on tree plantings

Teams from the council recently joined forces with 70 volunteers from local businesses and community group to plant more than 650 trees across Corby and Kettering.

Companies and groups (including Axil Integrated Services Ltd, BakeAway, Ricoh UK Ltd, RS Components and Natural-Ise) took part in plantings to help boost canopy cover and ensure future growth on existing shelterbelts (natural windbreaks) and parklands.

All trees planted by the volunteers were a mixture of 14 different native species including Rowan, Wild Cherry, English Oak, Hawthorn and Silver Birch. It hoped that the trees will succeed and eventually replace those which may be lost to diseases such as Ash Dieback.

The scheme, led by the council, offered residents the chance to be involved with tree planting in local communities and opportunities for outdoor learning, as well a lasting legacy.

So far this season, the council's Grounds Services and Parks and Woodlands Teams have planted a further 7,175 whips working with a number of partners including Friends of Groups, Tree Wardens, school groups and businesses across the five North Northamptonshire country parks and Corby woodlands. In addition to the whips, the team planted of the King's Tree to mark the King's Coronation in Hazel and Thoroughsale Woods in Corby.

All volunteers were supported by council officers who provided expert knowledge on tree planting techniques, aftercare and the use of urban green spaces.

Please [contact us](#) if you would like to be involved in future volunteering and supporting community initiatives.

Project for a smarter and greener Corby gets underway

A project is underway to establish Corby as a smart and green town through connected and clean technologies.

As part of the [Corby Towns Fund](#), North Northamptonshire Council will install 15 air quality sensors to detect and report on pollution levels and 25 traffic monitoring sensors across Corby.

The air quality sensors will collect data which will be stored on a publicly accessible digital dashboard. Residents will be able to see live air quality levels and it is hoped that the results will encourage more residents to use low carbon modes of transport to access the town.

The data collected from the traffic monitoring sensors will help the council to look at and design future infrastructure across the town. The sensors will identify popular routes, areas of congestion and opportunities to improve movement around Corby. This is particularly important as the town grows and diversifies. This is one of two highways projects delivered as part of the Corby Towns Fund and will be delivered prior to the Corby Station Link route, which is due to start construction later this year.

Works to install the sensors are planned during April and May. Plans have been put in place to minimise the disruption to residents whilst the works take place. Traffic management may be needed at certain times.

Any data collected is encrypted and deleted once journey times have been calculated and all data collected will not be used for any other purpose.

This project is funded by the UK government through the Towns Fund.

Safety improvements made to pedestrian crossings in Kettering

North Northamptonshire Council has reviewed the timings and operation of 36 pedestrian crossings in Kettering in an effort to improve road safety levels.

As part of the council's active travel plans, a review of signal timings and operation within the Kettering area has taken place to increase the use of crossings (i.e. pedestrians using the crossing and then waiting for the green man before crossing).

On average, the 36 crossings will now operate on average 20% quicker, which will reduce the time pedestrians have to wait before being able to cross. Drivers should see minimal difference to their journey times.

The council is trialling the changes in the Kettering area and will be reviewing the impact of changes before considering whether to look at pedestrian crossings across the wider area.

As a council, we are always looking at ways to encourage active travel. This project is part of a wider focus on cycling and walking infrastructure across North Northamptonshire, all designed to help people get out and about, living healthier lifestyles.

Rushden's Public Space Protection Order now in force in a bid to tackle anti-social behaviour

Rushden's Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) is now officially in force. Signage has gone up across the town and surrounding areas.

Under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, the order allows a council to impose restrictions in particular areas in a bid to tackle nuisance or problem behaviour. It gives the police and the council wider discretionary powers to deal with problems which harm the local community's quality of life.

Following a consultation in late 2023, 84% of those who completed the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed with a PSPO being introduced in Rushden. Problems in the town continue to include public alcohol consumption, rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour and begging.

The primary approach will be to engage and to educate individuals carrying out anti-social behaviour, but the new PSPO will give authorised officers the ability to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice of £100 paid to the council or to prosecute them.

Executive Director of Finance and Performance (S151 Officer) set to depart for new role

North Northamptonshire Council's Executive Director of Finance and Performance (Section 151 Officer), Janice Gotts, is set to depart this June for a leadership role at Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

Janice started in December 2020 with the North Northamptonshire Shadow Authority in preparation for the new unitary council which came into existence in April 2021.

Janice has been instrumental in putting in place solid financial and performance management arrangements at the council as well as leadership of the revenue and benefits service, corporate procurement and internal audit.

Her achievements include:

- Being a key part of a team that has ensured a safe operational transition from the previous two-tier local government arrangements to the new unitary authority.
- Worked with senior colleagues and members to ensure the council has a firm grip of its financial and service performance, working hard to drive service improvement and value for money in our operations.
- Under Janice's financial leadership, the council has set four balanced budgets. It has invested in vital services and delivered significant savings including the identification of £23.8m of efficiencies for the year ahead.
- Put in place rigorous internal audit, financial governance and risk management arrangements to ensure the effective stewardship of the council's financial and service operations.
- Provision of a strong revenue and benefits service that has not only collected income to support vital council services but has also supported payments to numerous residents and businesses in times of need, such as during the pandemic and to assist with cost-of-living pressures.
- Delivering wider transformation across the Council and supporting capital investment programmes.

Janice has done an excellent job of keeping the council laser-focused on the need to deliver a balanced budget. This has been no easy task given the service demand and financial pressures we have faced but Janice has done it superbly well.

Janice will leave us with strong financial foundations in place. There are significant challenges ahead, but we are in a strong position to tackle them.

I am very pleased for Janice and I wish her the best in her new role.

Janice Gotts, Executive Director of Finance and Performance, said:

"I am very grateful for my time with North Northamptonshire Council and the experience it has given me, including the opportunity to work alongside some wonderful people.

"I am incredibly proud of all that we have achieved together to lay the foundations of a new Council and transform our services for the future during challenging times. It has been such a privilege to work with so many people that are committed to making North Northamptonshire a great place to live and to thrive."

Adele Wylie, Chief Executive of North Northamptonshire Council, said:

"We recognise that it is a fantastic opportunity for Janice at Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and congratulate her on her appointment. Creating North Northamptonshire Council was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Janice should be immensely proud of the work that she has done across all the services under her leadership.

"We will soon embark on our search for our next Executive Director of Finance and Performance to join us in continuing to drive improvements in public services in North Northamptonshire."

SEND Local Partnership accepts findings of joint OFSTED and CQC report and commits to making improvements for children, young people and their families

Published on Monday 25 March, following the first inspection undertaken jointly by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted in January 2024, a report has found provision and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in North Northamptonshire needs to rapidly improve.

The planning and commissioning of SEND services across the area is the responsibility of the Local Area Partnership. This is made up of two statutory bodies, North Northamptonshire Council and NHS Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board. It is delivered across the area in conjunction with Northamptonshire Children's Trust together with schools, nurseries and North Northamptonshire Parent Carer Voice.

Leaders of the two organisations holding statutory responsibility have fully accepted the findings of the report and have issued the apology below to the children and young people with SEND, and their families.

A joint statement from Jason Smithers, North Northamptonshire Council's Leader, and Toby Sanders, Chief Executive of NHS Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board, said:

"We fully accept and acknowledge the findings of the Ofsted report and are sorry to all those children, young people and their families who have been let down. It is our absolute priority to ensure immediate action to drive the urgent improvements which have been highlighted."

They have also committed to producing a Priority Improvement Action Plan which will be closely informed by children, young people and families who use the service.

The Ofsted/CQC report highlighted that there are "widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which the local area partnership must address urgently."

The report did however highlight areas which the partnership was delivering effectively and noted the following:

- Children with visual and or hearing impairment are well supported.
- New SEND focused activities are due to start this year.
- The views of children and young people and their families are being used to shape the partnership send strategy.
- The partnership is starting to support children and families with SEND through earlier interventions.
- Nurseries and specialist schools are said to appreciate and value the advice of the SEND support service.
- The school nurses at specialist schools across area are well thought of by the children and professionals.
- Older neurodiverse young people have group support in the community.
- The partnership commissioned an analysis of speech, language and communication needs and has recommendations for future changes.

[View the full report](#) on the Ofsted website.

If you would like to contact the partnership's Improvement Team with comments and or feedback, please email: lapsendimprovement@northnorthants.gov.uk.

Council issues warning after Oakley Vale Lake contaminated

Last week, North Northamptonshire Council issued a warning to residents, including pet owners, after Oakley Vale Lake was found to be contaminated with oil.

Having conducted checks, it appeared that the oil had been deliberately dumped into the culvert which feeds into the lake.

The oil has now been removed from the lake, but remnants remain on the surrounding reeds and clear up work is ongoing.

Residents are asked to remain cautious and avoid the area.

The Environment Agency has been made aware of the measures we have taken to manage and mitigate any damage to the lake.

Splash Park in Wellingborough to undergo repairs

The popular Splash Park in Wellingborough is set to undergo a maintenance programme following an unprecedented wet Winter which has caused damage to the site.

Due to the exceptional levels of flooding at the Embankment last Winter, the facility has sustained substantial damage to the equipment surface and surrounding landscape. As the Splash Park area and adjacent car park were underwater for such a long time, and with the chance of further bad weather, the council has only recently been able to access the site to assess and arrange for remedial works to take place.

Traditionally, the facility would have opened for the Summer season on Good Friday. With Easter being so early this year, it has created further challenges, so this has not been possible due to concerns over safety and the remedial works that need to take place.

Remedial works will include a deep clean to all surfaces, replacement of damaged artificial grass in some areas, replacement of damaged sail shades and sanitisation of all equipment. This is to ensure that all equipment will reach the standards required when tested for Legionella and weekly tests of the water, which will be undertaken by our external compliance contractor.

The council currently plans to reopen in late April, dependent on the works being completed and the weather. Further updates will be published on our social media channels.

Upcoming Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections

On Thursday 2 May, voters across Northamptonshire will go to the polls to elect their Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

The [Police Fire and Crime Commissioner](#) (PFCC) is elected to oversee local policing and fire and rescue services, manage the police and fire and rescue budget, set council tax rates for policing, and ensure transparent communication about police activities in the community. They will also make key appointments of the Chief Constable and the Chief Fire Officer for the Northamptonshire area.

Anyone who is not yet registered to vote must do so by Tuesday 16 April in order to take part in this election. You can [register to vote](#) on the GOV.UK website.

You can [apply for a postal vote](#) until 5pm on Wednesday 17 April. The deadline for those wishing to [vote by proxy](#) (when someone votes on your behalf) is 5pm on Wednesday 24 April.

Voter ID

Following new legislation introduced in May 2023, all residents voting in person must remember to bring a form of photo ID with them.

Accepted forms of ID include:

- A UK passport.
- A passport issued by an EEA state or Commonwealth country.
- Photo driving licence (including a provisional one).
- Certain concessionary travel passes.
- An identity card bearing the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (PASS card).

Expired IDs are acceptable, as long as the photo still bears a true resemblance. Only original documents are accepted, photos of your ID, copies of digital versions or digital versions saved on phones and smart devices will not be accepted.

Details of all forms of approved photo ID are available on the [Voter ID](#) section of our website.

If you don't have any form of photo ID from the accepted list, or your ID no longer looks like you, you can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. Applicants must already be registered to vote. Residents without an acceptable form of ID have until 5pm on Wednesday 24 April to [apply for a Voter Authority Certificate](#) to be able to vote in the PFCC election.

If you do not have access to the internet and need to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, you can contact our Elections Team on 0300 126 3000 and a paper copy of the application form will be sent to you.

Free Voi UK RideSafe Webinar

E-scooter and e-bike operator, Voi, is encouraging riders to take its online safety training.

The hour-long webinars will cover key aspects of safely riding a Voi e-scooter or e-bike, from how to start a ride, traffic rules, road riding etiquette, and how to park without causing an obstruction for pedestrians.

Attendance will be rewarded with 30 minutes of free riding credits.

The next live webinar will take place on Wednesday 17 April from 5:30pm to 6:30pm.

Find out more and reserve your free space online via Eventbrite at: [Voi UK: RideSafe Webinar](#).

Merged Futures 6 event returns to the Learning Hub

The 6th annual innovation showcase event from Digital Northants, returns to the Learning Hub at the University of Northampton's Waterside Campus on Friday 14 June.

The event will take place from 10am to 4pm.

The keynote speakers will be talking about how technology is being used to support independent travel for children with special educational needs and to improve people's wellbeing in care homes.

The event also includes:

- Room 1: Digital Northants Stories.
- Room 2: Health.
- Room 3: Education.
- Room 4: Digital Marketing.

Find out more and book your free ticket online at: [Merged Futures 6](#).

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](#).

- [Local Air Quality Strategy - Have your say](#). All Local Authorities in England have been requested by the Department of Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to publish a Local Air Quality Strategy. The draft Local Air Quality Strategy contains a list of proposed measures that North

Northamptonshire Council are taking, and will take in the future, to maintain and improve good air quality in collaboration with other stakeholders. Closes 7 April 2024.

Forthcoming meetings

Executive

- Thursday 18 April from 10am.

Full Council

- Thursday 25 April from 6pm.

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):

- [Safety improvements made to pedestrian crossings in Kettering](#)
- [£5 million funding boost for cultural projects across North Northants](#)
- [Project to help Corby be smarter and greener gets underway](#)
- [Over 10,000 trees planted in North Northants](#)
- [Council issues warning after Oakley Vale Lake contaminated](#)
- [North Northamptonshire Council works with local businesses on tree plantings](#)
- [Rushden's Public Space Protection Order now in force in a bid to tackle anti-social behaviour](#)
- [Splash Park, Wellingborough to undergo repairs](#)
- [New ways of working to help improve customer experience and service provision at North Northamptonshire Council](#)
- [SEND Local Partnership accepts findings of today's joint OFSTED and CQC report and commits to making improvements for children, young people and their families](#)
- [Executive Director of Finance and Performance \(S151 Officer\) set to depart for new role](#)

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 (1 to 3 April)

- Over 10,000 trees planted in North Northants: <https://ow.ly/VqV850R6rlz>. (Reach 6,788, Link Clicks 11, Engagement 423).
- We're supporting Stress Awareness Month 2024 to highlight the transformative impact of consistent, small positive actions on over-all wellbeing. Focus on making manageable adjustments to your daily routine, as these small actions on their own have a cumulative effect of habits and can end up being profound! #littlebylittle. (Reach 4,847, Link Clicks 0, Engagement 206).
- You could be the final piece of the puzzle. The one we've been looking for. Consider a career in local Government <https://ow.ly/IQob50OWNP3>. (Reach 4,776, Link Clicks 114, Engagement 377).

Top Tweets so far this week (1 to 3 April)

- Over 10,000 trees planted in North Northants: <https://t.co/Ara5j8mAIL>. (Impressions 438, URL Clicks 6, Engagements 19).

- You could be the final piece of the puzzle. The one we've been looking for. Consider a career in local Government <https://t.co/RYX3nQmtVD>. (Impressions 426, URL Clicks 8, Engagements 8).
- Whilst we're #CelebratingSocialCare this April, maybe you're considering a career in care? Make a difference, change a life, find out more online <https://t.co/UKCHa42RXU>. (Impressions 422, URL Clicks 1, Engagements 28).

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