

Annual Parish Meetings 2020

A Great Place to Live

South Northants District continues to be ranked as one of the better places to live in the country.

Unemployment is one of the lowest in the country although SNC runs a job club to help anyone get back into work and has placed 511 people into work over the last 10 years.

The waste and recycling record is one of which we remain proud and is the best in the County.

Local Government Reform (LGR). **Written before Covid-19 crisis. Updates in County Council report.**

The issue dominating Local Government in Northamptonshire as a County and South Northamptonshire as a District has been the dissolution of the top two tiers of government and the creation of two new Unitary Authorities in their place.

A quick recap:

Because of the financial strife at Northamptonshire County Council, the government appointed Max Caller to come and do an in depth 'Best Value' review of governance and finance at the council. His conclusion was that the problems at the County were so ingrained and intractable, that to restore public confidence, Northamptonshire County Council and the seven district and borough authorities would be abolished and two new Unitaries created (West and North) to take over their functions. This not only creates a fresh start but enables a sweeping transformation of the way services are delivered, to create better, more reactive services, and deliver value for money. A phrase which has been picked up and taken to heart is the concept that a council must learn to 'do the boring well'.

Following a series of public consultations, at a local level organised by the 8 affected authorities, and then at a nationwide level, through MHCLG The Secretary of State confirmed that he was to approve the dissolution of the authorities.

A Structural Change Order (SCO) was drafted and eventually laid before parliament. The SCO is the legislative foundation upon which the new Councils' are built, and determines issues such as the names of the new authorities, the existing eight councils will be wound up and abolished on 1 April 2021, size of wards, numbers of councillors, when elections are to be held and the electoral cycle, appointment of officers, initial organisational hierarchy and setting out the organisation of the "Shadow Council" which will run in parallel with the existing authorities for the first year as they prepare to hand over their functions in 2021. Until April 1st 2021 which we call 'Go Live' day, South Northamptonshire Council and Northants County Council will continue delivering the services to our residents as usual

while the Shadow Council will be setting council tax, preparing a budget, appointing permanent senior officers, writing and consulting on policies and preparing to take over services.

In the second week of February, after a protracted series of false starts and delays, the Structural Change Order was delivered.

Where we are now:

Over the last year, South Northamptonshire has been working with the other authorities to plot a way forward, guide officers in their thinking, and working collectively to design services that will deliver an aspirational new council called West Northamptonshire which will encompass the boundaries of the Borough of Northampton, Daventry District Council and South Northamptonshire. West Northamptonshire will take over the delivery of all the services except Children's Services (looked after children) which is being hived off into a new Children's Trust, which West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire will pay for but which will delegate the delivery of service to an organisation on an arm's length basis.

The basic tenets that have been applied to the design process are that all services except for Children's Services will be split into two across the two new Unitaries and in the West we will:

- Deliver high quality and consistent services at a local level where possible
- Engage with communities and co-produce future designs
- Align resources to our priorities and ensure sustainable budgeting
- Have a culture of open and honest communication within the organisation
- Work with our partners to secure the best possible outcome for our communities
- Invest in technology based on clearly defined business objectives
- Make decisions informed by robust and focused data, evidence and intelligence.

As services are designed and decisions are made, stakeholders across the community will all help shape the new services. Working with partners in health to design a new integrated system that will ensure that vulnerable and elderly adults are supported in such a way that they do not become more complex cases costing exponentially more, just for the lack of all stakeholders coordinating information and actions being one example. Local communities, the voluntary sector, business, education and other tiers of government (Parish Councils) will be involved in shaping the new services.

The first step in this ambitious programme has been assembling information and data on all the services, both statutory and discretionary, assets, liabilities, employees, contracts, buildings, leases etc..... that make up the existing authorities, and then working out how this is all to be disaggregated, allocated, redesigned and transformed to meet the aspirations of the residents of the new authorities. As this work progressed it became clear that the authorities between them provide in excess of 1000 separate services to residents, most statutory and some discretionary. Once all the data was collected and analysed the process of creating blueprint options for the new Shadow Authorities to consider began. The

intention is, as said, that all services provided by the County Council (except Children's Services) will be split into two and delivered by the two new authorities.

It is important that on 'Go Live' day services provided across the new authority are safe and legal. The policies behind some of these services must be harmonised across the authority, for example Council Tax Reduction, Taxi Licensing Policies, Housing Allocation Policies however other areas do not. The government has confirmed that the three-Part II Local Plans (and their 5-year land supply) across the existing authorities will remain extant for the next 5 years until a new policy encompassing the whole area can be agreed. This important concession will ensure that our district will continue to benefit from protection against inappropriate development in our market towns and lovely rural areas for at least the next five years.

Transformation of Services

It is anticipated that, in addition to providing safe and legal statutory services, transformation in the delivery of many services will be underway. Delivering savings through an integrated programme of transformation is at the heart of the design process of the blueprints to be presented to the Shadow Authority.

The approval of the Northamptonshire Business Rates Retention pilot brings the opportunity to invest in transformation across some critical areas with significant return in outcomes, total cost reduction by reducing demand and benefiting residents. Our successful bid stated the additional £18m funding would be used to:

- Promote future financial sustainability for public services in Northamptonshire through transformational service delivery including the pro-active management of demand led services. These services would be focused mainly on the following three areas:
 -
 - 1. Prevention demand management – supporting the most vulnerable service users
 - 2. Partnerships – greater collaboration across the public sector
 - 3. Transformation – delivering services more efficiently and effectively.

There are some interesting proposals being formulated that should deliver on these intentions. Officers are working with stakeholders to deliver blueprints for the consideration of the Shadow Councils in due course.

I have been asked questions by my parish councils about expectations of services that they may wish to take over and deliver to their residents or obligations that may be imposed upon them by West Northamptonshire. At this point, as service blueprints are prepared for consideration by the Shadow Council, there has not been any substantive discussion as to which services may be considered.

As officers and members work together on Local Government Reform, we need to make joint decisions on how best to oversee proposals and decision making prior to the election to the Shadow Councils in May this year. To achieve this a West Northamptonshire Joint Committee was set up last year. It comprises four councillors from each of the three District and Borough authorities in the West and four from NCC. In 2019 the Joint Committee met only a couple of times, but its activity has stepped up this year as it makes decisions on the Constitution of the Shadow Authority, appointment of Interim Statutory Officers, and the Code of Conduct and Members Allowance Scheme.

SNC Financial Highlights

Council Tax Collection

Whilst our collection rate for Council Tax slipped a bit last year due to billing issues and delays in valuations, SNC continue to be in the top quartile in the Country for collecting council tax with 98.5% of all tax collected. Again, we are considerably higher than the other Authorities in Northamptonshire.

Business rates collection has usually not been as good and we have raised our position from 135th to 68th, a significant improvement from 98.7% collected to 99.1%.

Council Tax					
	Rank 2017/18	% Collected	Rank 2018/19	% Collected	Change
Corby	206	97.1%	198	97.2%	8
Daventry	123	98.1%	134	98.0%	-11
East Northamptonshire	158	97.8%	156	97.7%	2
Kettering	152	97.8%	142	97.9%	10
Northampton	247	96.3%	254	96.3%	-7
South Northamptonshire	16	99.0%	56	98.5%	-40
Wellingborough	128	98.1%	94	97.8%	34

Business Rates

	Rank 2017/18	% Collected	Rank 2018/19	% Collected	Change
Corby	290	97.3%	181	98.3%	109
Daventry	15	99.6%	118	98.7%	-103
East Northamptonshire	260	97.7%	50	99.2%	210
Kettering	33	99.4%	34	99.4%	-1
Northampton	283	97.4%	210	98.2%	73
South Northamptonshire	135	98.7%	68	99.1%	67
Wellingborough	8	99.7%	8	99.7%	0

New Homes Bonus

SNC has used the New Homes Bonus it receives from new developments to invest in the local community. This year we changed our approach and pooled the Local organisations can bid for grants to help them achieve their objectives. This enables larger projects with greater impact to be funded.

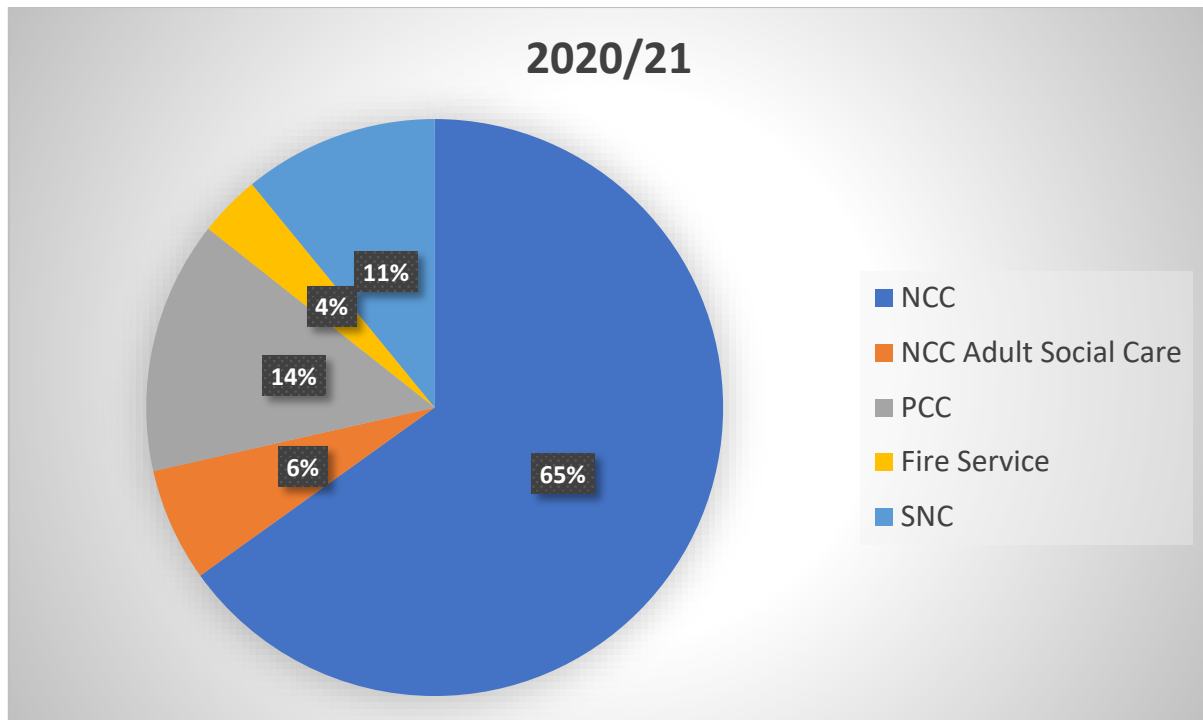
Earlier this year, we paused our grants scheme to change the processes for the allocation of grants in order to make it clearer on what was required and easier for applicants to apply. The new policies and processes will take effect from 1st April and will be available from our web site and communicated to Parishes and organisations over the coming months.

For the year 2020/21, some £700k is available in the grants budget.

Whilst not from the New Homes Bonus but as a result of S106 monies raised from developers the Council provided some £150k funding to Brackley Town Football Club.

Council Tax

The SNC part of the Council Tax bill was raised by 2.62% which is £5.00 a year for a Band D property, making total now £196.33 per year. The increase is in line with inflation. SNC only get to keep 11% of the total bill. Northants County take the biggest share at 71%, PCC 14% and the Fire Service 4%. The SNC proportion of the Council Tax will increase by under 10p per week.



The breakdown of the Council Tax bill for 2020/21 is shown below for a Band D Property:

Body	2018/19	Change	2019/20	Change	2020/21
NCC	£1,146.63	-£0.25	£1,146.38	£24.60	£1,170.98
NCC Adult Soc. Care	£89.72	£0.00	£89.72	£24.72	£114.44
PCC	£221.04	£24.00	£245.04	£10.00	£255.04
Fire Service		£60.76	£60.76	£1.21	£61.97
SNC	£185.78	£5.55	£191.33	£5.00	£196.33

Total	£1,643.17	£90.06	£1,733.23	£65.53	£1,798.76
--------------	------------------	---------------	------------------	---------------	------------------

Percentage Increase	5.48%	3.78%
----------------------------	--------------	--------------

Cost Increase	£90.06	£65.53
----------------------	---------------	---------------

In addition, individual Parish Precepts will be levied and charged for. The average parish precept across the District is £90.44. This is an increase of 5.8% on last year's average of £85.51.

Over the last few years the percentage increase in the various parts of the Council Tax is shown below:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
NCC % Increase	4.96%	6.00%	4.89%	3.90%
SNC % Increase	2.85%	3.00%	2.99%	2.61%
PCC % Increase	2.00%	5.73%	10.86%	4.08%
Av. Parish % Increase	4.07%	5.75%	7.21%	5.77%

(Note: The PCC took over the Fire and Rescue Service last year from NCC but the amount due to this service has been incorporated into NCC for the last two years to compare like with like.)

Investment

The Council continues to invest significant sums in the District. This year's budget has an increase of £1.9m which is funded from external funding, CIL, S106 agreements as well as our reserves. The capital budget is close on £2.3m.

Amongst the projects that are being funded are:

- Improvements to Towcester Centre for Leisure
- Towcester Water Meadows
- Vehicle replacements
- Improvements to sports and community facilities

Customer Services & IT

As we work towards the creation of the New West Northants Unitary Authority, work continues at a pace, on our Transformation work. The work to join up our services and integrate with Cherwell saving many Millions of pounds in revenue costs has had to be undone due to the new Unitary councils being created and Cherwell joining forces with Oxfordshire County Council once the Government decided on a new form of Local Government in Northamptonshire.

I would like to say how proud I am of all our staff at South Northants Council for the amazing professional approach they have undertaken in redelivering our local service given all the changes they have adapted to over recent years.

We will continue to run our IT services with Cherwell as this is the most cost-effective way of running our existing systems until we make the changes needed in establishing the new unitary authority.

In April we will split our joint customer services team.

This means all telephone calls to SNC will be answered by a dedicated team at the Forum in Towcester who are all in post and answering calls currently under our joint arrangements

with Cherwell. We look forward to improving the service to our residents and it is important that we make any contact with our Council as easy as possible.

To facilitate more use of the Website we introduced the Citizens Portal and many people have registered for this popular service which gives you access to your Council Tax, arranging E-billing, business rates and housing Benefit plus making changes to direct debits, all things you can do at a time to suite your lifestyle.

Delighted that our Council website is rated one of the best Local Authority sites in the Country more and more residents are accessing the site by either mobile, tablet or Desk top and we continue to have a high rate of approval, so much information is available and is a great way of finding out what is going on in the district.

We are continuing to distribute our quarterly SNC review which is well read and enjoyed by our communities and again is another way of keeping residents up to date with what is happening and going on in the district in this addition we have more information on the West Northants Unitary Elections which take place on May 7th

Planning

Local Plan Pt 2

Consultation on this plan started way back in 2014. The good news is that after numerous consultations and amendments the plan is expected to be adopted at the Council Meeting in July 2020. Similar plans are currently being developed by Daventry and the Borough and will be in force when Unitary comes into being. Each of the plans are valid for 5 years and until a possible joint plan is developed will be used to control development in the area.

Neighbourhood Plans

The Neighbourhood plan for Roade was adopted last July and became the third in the District. The plan for Hartwell currently going to examination prior to a local referendum with adoption expected in the Summer of 2020.

Council Land Supply

The Council currently has a land supply of at least 5.14 years which is in excess of the 5-year target and so restricts the development of land outside village boundaries. We are currently calculating the new figure which we estimate will be available in July. Even when Unitary comes into effect initially the individual Councils will retain their own land supply figure and not amalgamated with each other.

Towcester SUE

Progress on the new builds opposite the Racecourse in Towcester continues at pace and there are now over 310 properties already occupied. There are various trigger points in the

S106 agreement which benefits Towcester and the next major one is the provision of a new Primary school expected September 2021.

Joint Plan Part 1

This latest version of the plan which includes call for Industrial sites of which we currently have 5 was examined publicly by the Inspectorate back in Summer 2019 and initial responses given. These amendments have been reworked and recently submitted but because of Purdah the process is delayed with the next consultation expected Sept 2020. The overall completion date for this plan is 2022.

Local Development Order

The planning department deals with hundreds of planning applications for improvements or extensions to homes every year and we approve nearly all of them, using our adopted Design Guide to help us to make a fully informed and consistent decision.

A householder planning application takes about eight weeks to determine, and there is the possibility of taking even longer than that, if for instance the application needs to be determined by the Planning Committee. To simplify the process as well as saving money for the Council we are adopting a District wide L D O as an alternative to obtaining planning permission. There are restrictions but provided your property is not excluded and meets all the relevant criteria in the LDO, then you will be able to use it instead of a planning application when adopted in July.

Conservation Areas

At the end of March 2017, 61 areas of special architectural or historic interest had been designated as conservation areas with 53 of the 54 pre 2011 conservation areas having been reviewed and re-designated with an up to date boundary, appraisal and management plan. At the start of 2016-2017 the start of a second phase of work commenced an assessment of the qualities of the district's 38 settlements not benefiting from a conservation area. The final assessment of the remaining villages is expected to be completed by end of the year.

Health & Wellbeing in the District

New Community Funding Policy.

SNCs new Healthy Communities Team has worked hard reviewing our current funding framework and have produced a new policy to guide our investment in our communities during 2020/2021. The new policy simplifies the funding system providing a single pot of funding, which is available to a variety of community & voluntary organisations across the district for a range of projects. Over recent months the Wellbeing Directorate has completed research to understand our community's needs and developed various strategies to help us meet local needs. We now have an up to date Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, a Housing Strategy, a Sport & Leisure Strategy and the team are now working with a range of partners to develop the Council's first 'Building Stronger Communities Strategy'. The new Community Funding Policy allows us to focus our investment on proposals that

meet the Council's priorities as set out in these strategies. I am very pleased that Cabinet approved and adopted the new policy which enables the team to move towards its implementation which includes improvements to the application process, new information on our website, a new application form and a 'How to Apply' guide. We will be running workshops for potential applicants to help them understand the new Community Funding process and how to apply.

Health & Wellbeing Forum.

SNC lead on the Health & Wellbeing Forum for the district. We hold quarterly meetings with partners including NSport, Healthwatch Northamptonshire, Renew 169, Grand Union Housing, Social Prescribing Link workers, Children First Northamptonshire, Brackley & Towcester Medical Centres, Sponne School, NCC, Ncalc, Snvb and NHCP. The forum is held to network with partners across the district and county on a range of subjects and issues. The last forum included a presentation by Dr Tina Beardsworth on Primary Care Networks and a presentation on Social Prescribing. Discussion took place on bereavement and loneliness, mental health crisis, young carers, obesity and social wellbeing.

Parish & Town Clerks Forums.

We hold regular Parish & Town Clerks & Chairman Forums. These give our Chief Executive and Officers the opportunity to update Parish Councils on topics such as our latest Senior Management changes, our progress with Local Government Reorganisation, the Local Plan, improving the Health & Wellbeing of our Communities, Data Security and important issues facing our local communities.

ABILITY Community Transport

Is going from strength to strength. South Northants Council awarded a grant of £59,924 towards ABILITYs total set up project costs of £171,214 and residents of the district started to benefit from a new community bus service which was desperately needed in the rural areas as public transport availability is rapidly diminishing leaving people isolated and lonely. The bus service provides the essential link between the rural villages and the local towns, collecting users from various points along the route the bus drops off at a number of the major supermarkets and town centres and allows a couple of hours before it returns. To assist those passengers with mobility issues they offer a Door to Door service and collect people from home and return them home and even carry the shopping to the house. For Concessionary bus pass holders the service is provided free within the county of Northamptonshire. The community bus service is now being made available across the rural communities of South Northants and South Northampton to provide a weekly shopper bus service to the main shopping areas of Towcester, Brackley, Banbury and Northampton the service operates 5 days a week.

Place Based Hotspots.

We conducted Insight research in partnership with Northamptonshire Sport, which identified Blisworth, Kings Sutton, Roade and Danvers & Wardoun as areas within our district that required a boost to increase their activity levels, with a particular focus on those experiencing limiting long-term health conditions or disabilities. We held a go events to ascertain what activities each parish would like. This resulted in 16 new activities being delivered in a range of different activities highlighted as lacking provision and an area of need. Activities have focused around long-term health conditions with new provision in dementia friendly activities with training for 12 groups in Blisworth and Kings Sutton along with Let's Get Moving Falls Prevention mobility and strengthening programmes, inclusive Activity training, Nordic Walking, Walking football, Walking netball and Health walks.

Health Walks.

We currently run 25 different health walks at locations throughout the district. Each walk is graded on length and time and led by qualified voluntary health walk leaders, in partnership with Ramblers UK. The walks are advertised in our six weekly newsletter, Best Foot Forward, which is available on our website and via the walk leaders. During 2018 we had 590 registered walkers and over 10,000 registered attendances. This was an increase of approximately 20% from 2017, when we had 492 walkers and 8,400 attendances. In 2019 we established intergenerational walks for people registered with the health walks and children at Kings Sutton and Blisworth primary schools, to take place during the school day. These aim to encourage intergenerational relationships and an understanding of the benefits of physical activity. These initial locations were chosen as our targeted 'hot spot' areas for improving physical activity and well-being for people with long term limiting health conditions and disabilities. We will monitor the success of the walks in these areas and consider rolling them out elsewhere in the district.

Pocket Parks Grant.

Syresham Parish Council in collaboration with our Healthy Communities Team has been successful in bidding for £11,520 for the development of their Pocket Park. The funding came from Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. The money will be spent on improving the path, accessibility, interpretation boards, bat and bird boxes and additional seating. The scheme links with working with local voluntary groups and individuals to make the most of the area.

Sport & Leisure Strategy 2019 – 2024 'Active Lives for Everybody'.

Cabinet adopted SNCs new Sport & Leisure Strategy 2019-2024 for South Northamptonshire. It's not a statutory requirement for a Council to have a Sport & Leisure Strategy but we see it as good practice in setting out our priorities and plans for meeting the health and wellbeing needs of our residents and doing so based on robust evidence. Our role in sport and leisure provision across the district is to help more of our residents to be more active, more often, therefore improving their health, well-being and quality of life. We all know that sport and physical activity can play a huge role in supporting educational

attainment, health and well-being and social interaction. Through this Strategy we intend to support our least active residents to build activity into their everyday lives and to support local people of all ages and all abilities to fulfil their potential through sport, leisure and physical activity.

This strategy covers the period 2019-2024 and sets out SNCs plans for services for the next 17 months and should provide a valuable platform to shape services in the new unitary authority. There are 3 strategic priorities, to enable all residents to lead an active life, to provide high quality and sustainable sport and leisure facilities and to develop strong partnerships to improve health, wellbeing and quality of life to our residents. The Strategy has an annual Action Plan which will be used to deliver the strategic priorities and measure impact. The Action Plan will need to evolve to ensure it remains current and reflects changes at a national and local level.

It has been very important to consider the views of key stakeholders and local residents while we produced the strategy. We had an extensive public consultation programme that ran from 18th July to 18th September. Part of this consultation was an on-line survey. We received over 430 responses, over 99% agreed with the priorities set out in the draft Sport & Leisure strategy and over 94% agreed that the Sport & Leisure Action Plan will deliver the strategy. Key issues we have taken into account following the consultation are investment in facilities and increasing the number of facilities hosting physical activity, a wide range of activity providing a 'year-round' physical activity offer, limiting barriers to participation for all user groups, public/community transport and active travel and a balance between urban and rural provision.

Brackley Town Football Club.

Supported by SNC, Brackley Town Football Club have been able to provide new stands with seating at the Club. Located on the far side of the pitch, the stand makes for an even better atmosphere at the club. The stand provides much needed covered seating for football fans and their families.

New Astro pitch at the Towcestrians.

A much-needed hockey pitch at the Towcestrians. Cabinet also approved the Community Funding Panels decision to grant £240,000 to the Towcestrians Sports Club towards their new Astro Hockey Pitch project. The Towcestrians have already been awarded £250,000 from the London Marathon Charitable Trust towards this project and are awaiting confirmation from 2 other funders. Our new Sport & Leisure Strategy identified the need for the Astro pitch. It will be used widely across the district for ladies, men's and children's

Hockey, for walking sports, football training and for children and adults with disabilities including wheelchair sports.

Towcester Centre for Leisure.

The Leisure Centre offers a 70-station gym, a 25m swimming pool and a leisure pool, a fitness studio, indoor cycling studio, sports hall, café and creche. The centre also offers walking football and walking netball and numerous weekly fitness classes. We are incredibly pleased and proud that we can commit just over £1million towards making long overdue improvements to Towcester Centre for Leisure. The height restriction barriers have been installed at the entrance to the Centre and safety bollards have been installed at the front of the building.

Brackley Leisure Centre.

The Leisure Centre celebrated their first birthday in November since the installation of the 2 new swimming pools, changing facilities, the new gym and huge improvements throughout. The combining of the swimming pool and recreation centre at Brackley has proved to be a good decision with increased use of the facilities. The Centre has worked hard on increasing social media content, Facebook and online bookings.

We have worked closely with and supported members of the Brackley Dippers and have installed new window graphics screening to the windows pool side of the large pool, giving privacy not only to them but to everyone using the pool. The new window graphics look absolutely super, they give perfect privacy to everyone using the pool, they don't cut out any light, they are fresh and vibrant. We have also replaced the poolside hoist and fitted wider steps into the pool, enabling much easier access to the pool for everyone.

Youth Activator programme.

Last summer we expanded on the success of our previous 'FREE' Youth Activator Sessions and were able to reach more children than before by visiting six South Northants communities. The sessions are for children aged between 7 and 13 and feature a range of team sports led by our security checked activity leaders. These sessions will bring together children from across the community and as well as keeping them healthy and active, and I hope they will provide them with lasting memories and friendships. Sessions were held at Hartwell Community Centre playing field, the Towcester all-weather pitch, Roade Village Hall playfield, King's Sutton Memorial Hall playing field, Greens Norton playing field and Brackley Leisure Centre playing field.

Snbv.

For the year 2019-2020 SNC have funded the snvb, originally known as South Northants Volunteer Bureau an £80,000 grant to support their work across the whole district of South Northamptonshire. The snvb is a charity. Their mission is to support local people to provide

services and help the districts residents to lead healthy and enjoyable lives and to strengthen the voluntary and community sector to enable it to thrive and make a difference to those who live and work in South Northamptonshire. The charitable objectives are to provide a focus for voluntary organisations in the district and a forum for dialogue both within the sector and between voluntary and other sectors. To recruit, place and support volunteers in the area, and promote good practice among volunteer using agencies. To work in partnership with others to ensure the development of high quality services in the area. To manage services which respond to local needs, where appropriate. To support communities to respond to identified need. Their principal activities have been the provision of infrastructure support to local voluntary and community organisations in South Northamptonshire including outreach infrastructure support work to enable local communities to develop services which meet needs they have identified.

Seventh South Northants Art Trail.

October saw the South Northants Art Trail run for its seventh year and it was the most varied yet. Running in October, the Art Trail is the only organised visual arts festival in Northants, with 63 artists and craft makers exhibiting in 21 venues in the south of the county. The Art Trail offers art lovers the chance to meet artists working with oils, pastels, acrylics and watercolours, glass and wood, silver and polymer clay, mixed media and textiles, coiled and wheel-thrown ceramics, photography, calligraphy, wearable art and more. The emphasis is on art in action, with demonstrations, hands-on sessions and workshops, and most artists working on new pieces while open.

Annual Comfort & Joy Campaign.

The annual Comfort and Joy campaign, started in 2015, ran again in December. The campaign helps those who are staying in refuges as a result of experiencing domestic abuse. It is jointly organised by the Daventry District and South Northamptonshire Community Safety Partnership and the Daventry District Forum, its aim is to provide people with a few gifts and treats, as well as food, toiletries and other essential items. The project also raises awareness of domestic abuse, incidents of which tend to increase over the Christmas period. The generous spirit of people in Northamptonshire ensured parcels were able to be distributed to local people, to men, women and children as well as Christmas food parcels, in refuges in South Northamptonshire, Daventry District and the wider county area at Christmas, as well as to families recently rehomed as a result of domestic abuse. The parcels are greatly appreciated by the families receiving them, Christmas time is especially difficult for vulnerable adults and children.

Housing Strategy 2019-2022 'A Legacy for Lasting Communities'.

Cabinet approved the new Housing Strategy 2019-2022 'A Legacy for Lasting Communities' in July. It isn't a statutory requirement for a Council to have a Housing Strategy but we see it as good practice in setting out our Councils priorities and plans for meeting the housing need and it is based on robust evidence. Housing is about more than just bricks and mortar, it's about creating a home. A home should be a place of sanctuary, a place of safety and stability where people can live as part of a wider supportive community. It is important that

we make the best use of existing housing, that empty homes are brought back into use and the right types of new housing are built in the right locations. By doing this we can ensure that young people can afford to stay in the area if they wish, that companies can continue to compete by attracting and retaining their workforce, and that housing is available and adaptable to meet the requirements of our ageing population. We are going through a time of great change with the West Northamptonshire unitary council. This is at a very early stage and it is difficult at this point to outline exactly how this will develop and impact on services. However, we recognise that over the lifetime of this strategy the new working arrangements will present opportunities for sharing good practice, innovation and improving services to residents. We will work with the other West Northamptonshire local housing authorities to align the housing functions to deliver an effective and efficient service for the people who live and work in South Northamptonshire. We cannot deliver an effective housing strategy on our own. This is reflected in the approach we have taken in the shaping of the vision, strategy and development of the action plan. It is imperative that we continue to make the best use of limited resources and that we continue to work effectively with partners to ensure our objectives are met and to deliver more together than we could ever do alone. This strategy is a living document. The Strategy Action Plan sets out clear direction, key actions and timescales for the council and partners. Delivery of this strategy will be monitored regularly, and the action plan will be updated to ensure the timely delivery of actions. This will help us to keep the strategy relevant to meeting the needs of South Northamptonshire residents.

Homelessness and Rough Sleepers.

The team have been successful in obtaining government funding to provide intensive support for people who are sleeping rough across the district. Rough Sleeping numbers have been historically low in this district, however we have a small number of entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs. This project will help to deliver creative person-led routes off the streets and address the barriers to accessing permanent accommodation. In November Cabinet received an update on the progress of the implementation and delivery of SNCs Homelessness Action Plan and approved the updated Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2020. The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced the requirement on all local housing authorities to carry out a homelessness review for their district and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results at least every five years. Measures implemented in April 2018 by the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 placed a greater duty on local authorities by legally obliging them to assess and provide assistance to all those who are eligible and homeless or threatened with homelessness, irrespective of their priority need status. As part of the governance arrangements, it was set out in the Homelessness Strategy that the action plan would be reviewed annually to remain responsive to emerging need and the national and local context. The Homelessness Strategy 2018-2020 identifies three main priorities and the action plan sets out how to address them. The priorities are to prevent and relieve homelessness in the district, to improve access to services for people who need help and support and to ensure homeless households can access suitable temporary and permanent accommodation.

Disabled Facilities Grants.

The private sector housing team facilitate the provision of disabled facilities grants to persons who need adaptations to their home as a result of a disability or chronic illness. The team have recently approved a discretionary disabled facilities grant for a gentleman living with his family and receiving palliative care. A stairlift was provided to enable the gentleman to access upstairs bathroom facilities and his bedroom, enabling him to free up the dining room that he had been sleeping in and provide some normality to family life. Owing to SNC offering discretionary grants we were able to install the stairlift within 10 days of visiting the property, a normal mandatory disabled facility grant would have taken weeks to process owing to the need to undertake a financial assessment and consult with the County Council. His wife contacted us the day after to say *'We are so delighted and it is all working well and very well installed. Can't thank you enough for your help'*.

Understanding affordable housing.

SNCs strategic housing team have been holding briefing sessions with Councillors to unravel the complexities and differences in the types of affordable housing that could be developed. The definition of affordable housing has changed at the national level, and it is important to understand the opportunities that new affordable housing products can bring to housing delivery locally. The team are planning to deliver a session at a future parish forum too.

Housing outreach worker – hospitals.

Working collaboratively with local authorities across West Northamptonshire, Northampton General hospital and Berrywood Hospital, South Northamptonshire Council are hosting a housing outreach worker. The officer works predominantly in the hospitals, with specific responsibility to help reduce delays in hospital discharge where there is a potential housing issue preventing release. During the first three months of the role the officer dealt with nearly 50 referrals, with half of the referrals being closed due to successful interventions.

Northants Warm Homes Fund.

Through this fund we are able to offer a helping hand to households struggling to afford to stay warm and those who are vulnerable to the cold that do not currently have a central heating system. The scheme is expected to run until 2021 but is operating on a first-come, first-served basis and will close to new applications once all the funds have been allocated.

Home Safe Project.

The last year has seen the launch of the second year of the Home Safe Project to improve the wellbeing of low-income households by assisting with essential works to their homes. In 2018 the project helped 29 households by assisting with general repair works and improving security, lighting, warmth as well as adaptations to support access and mobility issues reducing the risk of falls. Run in conjunction with Care and Repair Northamptonshire Ltd all

clients received a Home Safety & Support check, including a gas safety, carbon monoxide detector and smoke alarms check, and a pack containing a wide range of information aimed at supporting independent living. The project aims to improve wellbeing by preventing avoidable accidents or injuries, reducing the risk and fear of crime and tackling poor living conditions affecting health in the home.

Enforcement in the Private Rented Sector.

SNC handles enquiries from tenants regarding conditions in the private rented sector, the last year has seen the encompassing of more houses in multiple occupation (HMO) into Mandatory HMO Licensing. The Private Sector Housing Team have been undertaking extensive work to identify those properties and inform landlords of the need to licence their properties with the Council.

Housing register.

SNC manages a housing register which means eligible households with identified needs can be added to the register and can apply for affordable rented housing. Properties can either be new build or existing properties that have become vacant. They are owned and managed by housing associations and we will always work with the household to make sure the property is affordable and suitable for their needs. In 2017/18, 256 properties were let through the housing register.

Environmental Services Report

Waste and recycling have seen some changes, with another company now handling our blue bin recycling. This offers a better service than the previous one and is much closer being in Leicester. We are also now using more small vehicles to collect food waste. This makes our operation more efficient and cost effective allowing the large collection vehicles to carry more and get round faster. This is important with so many new properties being built - particularly in Brackley and Towcester.

The **MOT testing station** we run at Tove Depot continues to attract good business in particular from owners of campers and larger vans which many garages are unable to test due to their height.

Environmental Health has continued to promote the Eat Out Eat Well Awards and have presented our first Platinum Awards. Currently we have 22 Award holders in the district (six Platinum, four Gold, six Silver and six Bronze). It has also continued to provide enhanced regulatory support to local businesses through our EH Sense services. Our Silverstone campsite scheme sees seven Platinum and two Gold awards presented this year.

As far as food safety is concerned, 480 food safety interventions have been completed as well as 98% of programmed inspections to high risk food businesses in 2018/19. As far as the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme is concerned, 97 % of food businesses in our district are rated 3 or above and 79% have a 5 rating. Enforcement has seen five Hygiene Improvement Notices served, two voluntary closures for pest infestations and three Abatement Notices served for noise nuisance plus two food hygiene prosecutions.

As Lead local authority on the Northamptonshire Growth Hub Primary Authority Pilot, we had a proposal approved by the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) resulting in the provision of £10,000 grant funding as well as additional regulatory support being provided to local businesses that were referred to us via the SEMLEP Growth Hub.

The air quality and emissions guidance we provide for developers has been adopted by the SNC Planning Department as a 'Supplementary Planning Document'. This Document ensures all developments both residential and commercial consider the installation of emission reduction measures at the design and build stage rather than relying on individuals and companies trying to retro fit measures.

Licensing

With regard to taxis, we continue to make sure that our licensed drivers meet the strictest standards with compulsory tests for English and geography. Safeguarding Training continues to be delivered to all drivers and is well received by the taxi trade. We also have a strict vehicle inspection scheme for road safety and our work with Milton Keynes Council has resulted in a number of successful prosecutions for taxis operating illegally. We are currently working to implement a Joint Taxi Policy to ensure high standards across the county. In the last year we have dealt with 875 taxi-related applications and have taken action against 382 taxi licence holders ranging from driver revocations to vehicle suspensions for failure to provide paperwork.

In other areas we processed 420 Temporary Event Notices and are the lead for the county Safety Advisory Group ensuring that all large scale events are run safely and in line with legislation. Our work will now continue to ensure we have a safe and legal licensing service operating to the highest standards for the new West Northamptonshire Authority.

Towcester Regeneration

The Towcester regeneration project based around Moat Lane is in its final stages and should be complete by around the end of the year. It has seen a derelict part of the town become a thriving community with shops, beautifully designed and built new homes, a landscaped historic monument and water meadows for all to enjoy plus more car parking. It has also provided a brand-new 21st-century fit-for-purpose Civic Centre and offices including a state-of-the-art library for the community.

The latest phase is seeing the new shops on Whittons Lane occupied or in the process of being occupied. The houses on Northampton Road are virtually finished with the new owners moving in. The former shoe repairer shop and flat above on the corner of Watling Street and Whittons Lane has been completely refurbished and is being let. The old garden machinery workshop behind the Forum has been converted to a house. The basket store, with accommodation above, on the corner of Watling Street and Northampton Road is well on its way to completion and, as the direct result of the relocation of SNC, the purchase of the car park on former Co-op site in the centre of the town is progressing well.

The Economy 2019 – 2020

South Northamptonshire is an area that continues to thrive and provide a quality of life that is unmatched within the region. Unemployment remains far below the national average and is the lowest in the County.

Businesses continue to invest and grow within the District and skill levels are extremely competitive. South Northamptonshire is the only District within Northamptonshire with an average skill level of NVQ4 and above, which is higher than the national average. Broadband coverage is currently at just over 96%, which is on target for Northamptonshire to have 99% coverage by the end of March 2021.

Economic successes

Last year, there were several economic successes.

- In September 2019, the SNC Job Club celebrated an impressive milestone of successfully supporting its 500th member into local employment and in February 2020 celebrated 10 years of the Council running the SNC Job Club. The Job Club has been actively supporting several new businesses moving into the District:
 - Marston's The Paisley Pear Pub and Restaurant in Brackley,
 - Towcester Screwfix,
 - New employers at Arrow Park, Brackley, and
 - Brook House care home in Towcester.

-
- The SNC Economic Growth Team won its bid for £164,000 grant funding to enhance public parkland at Towcester Watermeadows. This grant will improve both the offer and access, as well as attract a greater cross section of the public to enjoy this open space in the centre of Towcester.
- Mercedes-AMG Petronas Formula 1 team based in Brackley celebrated their 6th FIA Formula One Constructors Championship as well as Lewis Hamilton winning his 6th Formula 1 Drivers Championship.
- In July 2019, Silverstone Circuit and the British Racing Drivers' Club (BRDC) announced that the Formula 1 British Grand Prix will continue to be held at Silverstone until at least the end of 2024, after an agreement was reached between Formula 1, the BRDC and Silverstone Circuit.
- The Silverstone Experience opened in October 2019. Supported by South Northamptonshire Council, the brand-new family attraction based at the Home of the British Grand Prix takes visitors on a thrilling journey celebrating the past, present and future of Silverstone.
- Statistics show that earnings by place of work and residence are at a higher average than the rest of the East Midlands. Variomh Eurosensor in Towcester won Employer of the Year in the Northamptonshire Business Awards and claimed a prize of £10,000, and Fortitude Financial Planning claimed the title of South Northamptonshire Business of the year in awards sponsored by South Northamptonshire Council.

Regeneration Projects

There has been a range of regeneration projects within Towcester and Brackley, including:

- the recent purchase of the Co-Op Supermarket off Richmond Road in Towcester to protect over 60 public parking spaces for the town centre.
- Whitton's Lane, Towcester has been given a new lease of life with brand new employers moved into the units and clear signage promoting this extension of the high street.
- the extensive refurbishment of Brackley Town Hall, which enhances the aesthetics of the high street, and
- the build of Egerton Hall as part of the Radstone developments, which has helped grow the local community.

Local Plan Part 2

The Local Plan Part 2, which is expected to be adopted by Spring this year, sets out new employment sites at the following locations:

- Bell Plantation, Towcester (35ha including existing uses plus 6ha for the football club)
- Woolgrowers, Towcester (4.5ha)
- Tiffield Lane, Towcester (21ha)
- Shacks Barn, Whittlebury (10ha)
- Furtho Pit, Cosgrove / Old Stratford (16 ha)

Next year and beyond

The SNC Economic Growth Team will continue to attract new investment into the District by promoting South Northamptonshire as the perfect place for investment to a national and global audience, details as follows:

- Junction 16 of the M1, known as Panattoni Park, boasts 1.6 million square foot of employment land, which is perfectly located for logistics. 625,000 square foot of the land has already been pre-let to Eddie Stobart.
- Silverstone based SportPesa Racing Point F1 Team, which from 2021 onwards will be rebranded to Aston Martin Formula 1 team following a major investment deal, secured planning permission for a new 15,000 sqm HQ building with workshops, design space, over 600 parking spaces and a helicopter landing pad. It is also expected that MEPC – Silverstone Park, will soon be looking to expand into the South Northamptonshire side of their site, which is receiving major global interest and investment.
- The SNC Economic Growth Team have been innovative in their approach to supporting the local economy, including a robust place-marketing strategy to enhance the reputation of this District to a local, regional and national level. The Team has used Twitter to promote positive news to the masses and 2019 saw continual growth, with the total number of views of their tweets being an impressive 165,000. This is an average of 14,000 people seeing the Team's publicity per month.
- This year the Economic Growth Team are establishing a new Economic Growth Strategy, setting out a 5-year vision for the District to maximise opportunities and overcome challenges. Despite the new Unitary Authority commencing, which has now been confirmed by parliament for 1st April 2021, this strategy will detail a factual analysis of the area's needs so that there is a robust foundation for the new West Northamptonshire Unitary Authority to build on.

- The Economic Growth Team will also be delivering a range of worthwhile initiatives to benefit local employers and residents, such as sponsoring the Northamptonshire Business Awards, which as mentioned was hugely successful for local businesses last year. The team are focused on enhancing the SNC Job Club to be more efficient and effective, as well as working with stakeholders and partners to provide greater business support to new and existing employers. As a founding member of the Silverstone Technology Cluster and a long-term partner of the Motorsport Industry Association, there will be a spotlight on the high-tech innovation sector, along with the other growth sectors recognised for this region, which are the Visitor Economy, Motorsport, Food & Drink and Logistics.