

## West Northants Council – the transformation journey so far

### 1. Introduction

This report provides an update on how West Northants Council has progressed and delivered against the following key areas:

- The finalisation of the West Northants Council (WNC) operating model
- Transformation progress across Council services to date and planned next year
- Progress, against the efficiencies and improvements promised from LGR,
- Efficiencies & improvements generated in 2022-23
- Efficiencies & improvements planned for 2023-24, and
- Progress on the disaggregation of services from North Northants Council.

The scale of change undertaken in the first two years of West Northants Council has been significant. It has involved bringing together multiple and varied processes, service functions and finances across 3,000 staff, 800 systems, four main office buildings and thousands of inherited contracts. Our priority has remained protecting service continuity and always ensuring we are meet our duties while making changes, rationalising and transforming alongside business as usual.

Importantly, all our key strategic changes have been supported by clear published strategies underpinning the overall direction of the Corporate Plan, which set out our direction of travel and priorities for change. Having this clarity is important as successful Councils have a clear link between their corporate plan, strategies, delivery and staff appraisals.

We have made good progress to in partnership working, with a strong start on our Integrated Health and Care Partnership, which has attracted national interest and the exciting work on our Local Area Partnerships. Work has also been progressing across our Sport Excellence Plans with exciting growth plans underway across motorsport, rugby, cricket and other sports.

It should also be borne in mind that the progress made against a challenging backdrop of

- **The ongoing effects of Covid** including sustained high demand, for example in temporary housing following family or household breakdowns and a loss of income, for example as parking income has not recovered to pre pandemic levels due to more home working
- **High demand for services for our vulnerable residents** (above all pre unitary and WNC 2021-22 budget predictions) and we have seen 760 more adults' customers, 42 more children in care and increasing number of single homeless people in 2022-23,
- **Demographic growth** at 13% growth based on the 2021 census, which is twice the national average and significantly a 57% growth in the over 75s compared to a national rate of 34%,
- **Maintaining the service performance** standards set in the corporate framework, and
- The emerging **cost of living and inflation crisis** and effects of the war in Ukraine.

All of the above have meant our plans and priorities have had to be adjusted and adapted as we have progressed through our first two years.

## 2. Our Vision, Operating Model and Transformation Progress

The Council's vision is to **make West Northants a great place to live, work, visit and thrive**. This was a vision agreed with a range of stakeholders including the public, members staff and partners and set out in our corporate plan of June 2021.

On 25th August 2020 the West Northamptonshire Shadow Council agreed a blueprint for future Council services – this set out how the Council would operate on day one when the predecessor Councils were dissolved, and staff and functions were brought together. The priority and focus of that initial blueprint and suggested operating model was ensure all services operated effectively on day 1. This included making sure that several critical or new IT systems were in place and that front line services could operate unaffected by the organisational changes.

It was recognised at the time, that because of the pandemic and challenges preceding vesting day, we were not able to exploit all the opportunities presented by having a single tier Council for day 1. Instead, the detailed blueprints published in September 2020, and agreed by the shadow council, set out a roadmap for future transformation opportunities and actions to be delivered by the new councils. We knew too that during that first year we would need to stabilise services, our workforce and complete significant work to split the fifty services shared on day 1 with North Northants in order to build our new complete council.

Stabilisation took a long time given the breadth, scale and complexity of the systems and processes WNC inherited. This dictated the pace and progress we could make towards our final future operating model for a transformed Council. There were many years of records (often paper), budgets and decisions that had to be collated and verified to both close of the predecessor Councils accounts and verify the base budgets for WNC. But strategic work also continued in parallel to stabilisation to ensure that WNC had clear plans in terms of our priorities, our people, our assets and our future delivery model. These plans and strategies include:

- **WNC Corporate Plan** - Setting out a clear vision and set of Council priorities which we would work towards and inform service delivery - this was done in our WNC Corporate Plan published 8th June 2021.
- **WNC Customer Experience Strategy** - Setting out the principles of how we would support and deliver services for our customers to meet their needs effectively and efficiently. We published our initial Customer Service Strategy in October 2020 and our Customer Experience Strategy in August 2022.
- **WNC Anti-Poverty Strategy** - Setting out our plans to address poverty in all its forms and having agreed an action plan and priorities with a cross party group we published our Anti-Poverty Strategy in April 2022.

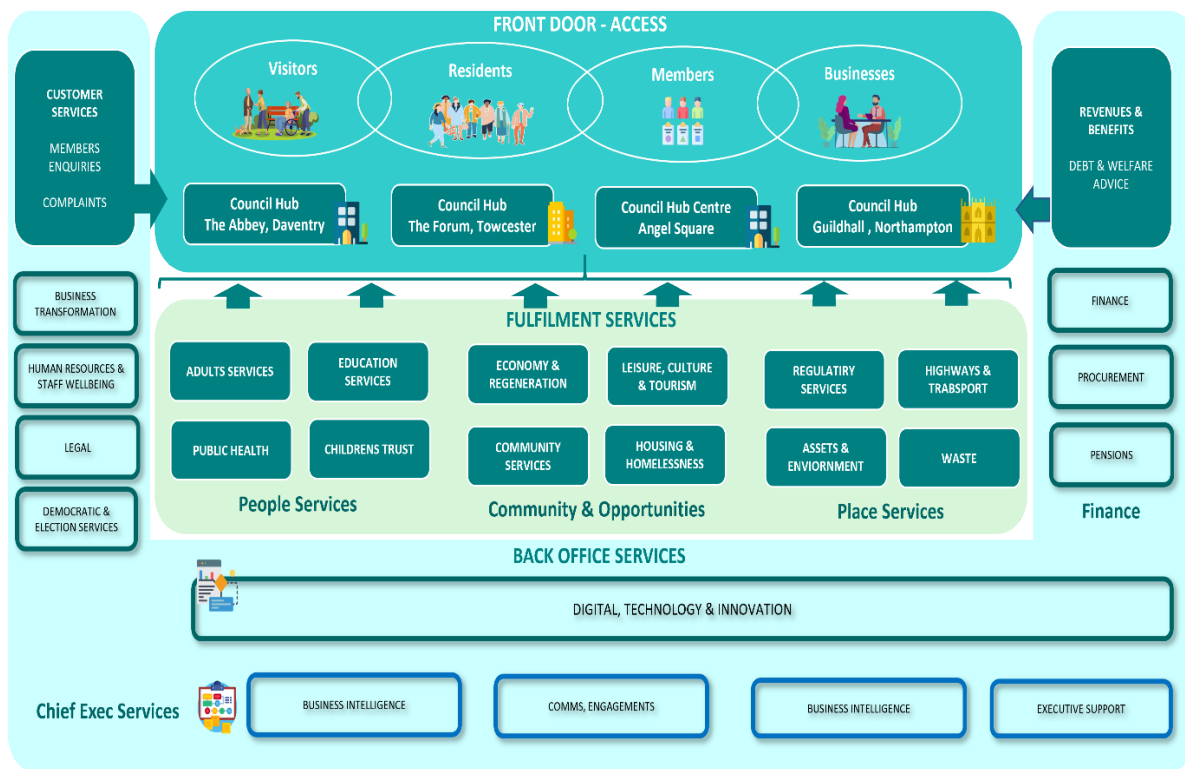
- **WNC People Strategy** - workforce and people strategy, this was particularly important post pandemic and after significant changes in the job market and recruitment across the UK – The WNC People Strategy was published in February 2022.
- **Digital, Technology and Innovation Strategy** – setting out how IT would enable change and transform how we operated, how we might automate and our plan to create an IT estate to support our new ways of working – Our Digital, Technology and Innovation (DTI) Strategy was published in July 2022.
- **Housing Strategy** - published in September 2022 setting out how we would address our corporate priorities to deliver homes people need and can afford, Improve the quality, standard and safety of homes, support residents to live healthy, safe, independent and active lives and Support thriving and sustainable communities.
- **West Northamptonshire Sustainability 2030** - in September 2021 our sustainability strategy agreed with cross party stakeholders was set out. This included a new collective purpose to enable and protect the environmental, economic, and social sustainability for all residents, businesses, communities and wider society.
- **Procurement Social Value Policy** – our policy is now in place with monitoring ensuring that our buying power is out to good effect in the supply chain and contributing to community value and sustainability aims, and
- **Public Health Outcomes Framework** – a Population Health and prevention plan for Public health in order to support the wider determinants of health and the new outcomes framework for the Integrated Care System (ICS) published in November 2022.

## Operating Model

The 2020 blueprint draft operating model, represented the way we hoped to operate in future across three core areas:

- **Customer services & our front door** – where and how we interact with our customers
- **Fulfilment and back-office services** – how we support internal and external transactions across people, places and our legal duties, and
- **Enabling & back office services** – the underpinning back-office support services and infrastructure to keep the Council running and performing its business.

Our original blueprint has been updated to reflect our planned future operating model and taking into account the principles and aspirations of the strategies above. The updated model is shown below:



The operating model remains largely unchanged in its core design and at its heart it retains the following key design principles:

- **We will provide a front door that supports multiple channels of access** but maintains a physical presence in community hubs that supports face to face multi services local access for residents and business where they need support, advice or assistance during a crisis or life event.
- **We will adopt a deep front door where appropriate** - The customer services front door will be as deep as possible absorbing the customer interface, complaints and enquiries of all service areas where the customer services team can offer appropriate advice, information or complete transactions through multi-skilled staff in a more efficient, resilient and allow back office technical experts to deal with processing the more expert and complex transactions.
- **We will operate a flexible working model** with staff supported to work in the most appropriate setting for their services and customers with the ability to work remotely, drop down in any office or use collaboration space.
- **We will operate a hub and spoke model for fulfilment services** with fixed (back office) services based in head offices where their systems or team working requires on site present, but with representatives working in community hubs or in the field where they interact with customers, residents, or businesses.
- **We will put in place the systems and digital solutions** that enable efficient processing, a single view of customers and make processing requests or finding information easier. This includes a refreshed and accessible website and all the legacy councils sites

being switched off by April 23 and a single internal portal for all employee queries, requests and transactions for HR/Payroll, IT and finance.

- **Our asset base will be sized to support our ways of working and sustainability principles** so that space and value for money is optimised and are carbon footprint is minimised, and
- **We will develop systems and shared intelligence** to help us make evidence-based decisions including the development of population health management data and Local Area Partnerships that help us identify where a local area has poor wider determinants of health which we can address through neighbourhood partnerships and devolved budgets.

The development of our front door has been a key focus of transformation and our demand has changed. We developed our thinking having engaged with a range of stakeholders on what they wanted and needed from our customer services, and this was set out in our Customer Experience Strategy published in August 2022

The strategy set out the aims of our future way of working and aims to be quick in reacting to needs, but even more, be able to prevent some of these needs from occurring. It recognised that to do this we needed to be flexible in how we work, and by focusing our limited resources where they are most needed.

We know that most people in West Northants will only need to get in touch very rarely – to make an appointment for a birth registration, to apply for a school place or to make a planning application for a house extension. These people will, often, have access to a smart phone and be comfortable completing these requests online, at a time and from a place that's convenient to them. We want to make information and services available in this format as often as possible, so that you have choice and the power to act in your own interest.

At the other end of the spectrum, some of our residents are very vulnerable, have high needs and complex situations. These are the people we want to support in a more hands-on way, by being where they are (at the end of the phone, in our One Stop Shops or present in community hubs in their immediate neighbourhood).

Our employees should have the knowledge and access to systems which will allow them to meet people half-way and wrap around the right support at the right time. It may be that an elderly person becomes frailer and needs help accessing some support to live at home. We will ensure that not only we refer to the relevant services within and outside of the Council, but also that we make them aware of the benefits that may be entitled to and help them apply for them, discuss their housing options if appropriate, and also put them in touch with local voluntary or community groups which may be of interest.

Whether staff work for customer service or any other service in the council we want to ensure that we recruit, train and help develop people in line with our values and a commitment to put people at the heart of everything we do. To that end we have continued to transform services and are putting in new systems now so that we will have

- **Phone and IT systems** which can be used anywhere – due to go live April 23

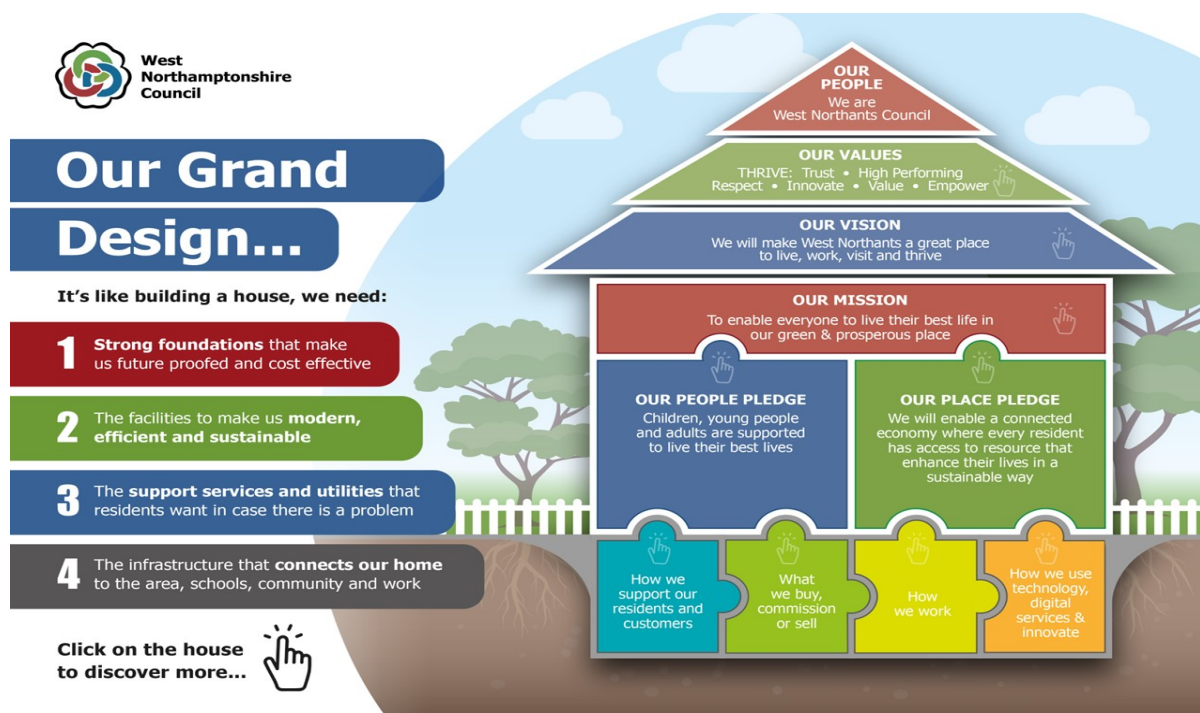
- **Access to information about the resident** and their open cases through a single Customer Experience System – due to go live November 23
- **Skills, knowledge and the power to resolve issues** they are equipped to resolve – all staff now receive corporate training and inductions, and
- **Support for all employees through self-service** and easy and fast access to their employment information – a new single employee help desk went live October 22.

## WNC Transformation progress

While there have been many challenges voiced about the pace, scale and progress of transformation across West Northants Council we have made significant progress in our plans. We have sought quick wins where possible, restructuring to reduce headcount and put in place new leadership, consolidating contracts, systems and functions and bringing services together to resolve shared “wicked issues” as a single tier council. But lasting and successful post LGR transformation change requires a best practice stepped approach of stabilising, setting vision and priorities, restructuring, consolidating, transforming and optimising. Without strong foundations like this service continuity, our workforce and performance would be at risk, especially in times of significant demand challenges.

Each step towards transformation has also required the enabling “infrastructure” to bring services together and support from Human Resources, IT systems, transformation, property services and in some cases procurement. We have progressed well with a complex set of services and the table in Appendix 2 provides an “at a glance” progress heat map that demonstrates the progress made in each service against the key steps towards transformation.

Our transformation deliverables were set out in our West Northants Grand Design published in January 2022.



It was clear that we needed to build a strong foundation for change with clear strategies and action plans. But it also detailed the outcomes and deliverables we committed to deliver to fulfil our corporate plan and transform. We have made substantial progress against those outcomes and deliverables and in our transformation journey and this is reflected in the updates set out in Appendix 3 to this document.

### **West Northants Property Plan**

Under the theme of redesign and reorganisation, the plan for our buildings and service delivery locations has been updated based on our operating model principles and particularly our agreed ways of working. We have taken time to ensure that all services understood their workforce profile (in terms of how people needed to work and the staff that each service had in each workstyle category: fixed, mobile, and field workers), the office or space needs and most importantly where they needed to operate to meet the current and future needs of their customers or collaborate with other services or agencies. This has included thinking about where we can co-locate with partners (and gain a rental income) to support a collaborative one public estate approach that helps residents to get the help they need in one place.

The Council also committed to review its property base to ensure it was right sized for a unitary Council and operated in the most efficient way into account all of the above. The rationalisation of office facilities was identified from the outset as a likely efficiency of LGR and savings were included in the Council's first budget on that basis. Under our plans we will save £500k a year initially, rising to £750k a year by the end of 2023.

We took several steps before finalising our property plan. This included:

- Reviewing buildings for best use and space
- Monitoring occupancy levels of our core buildings
- Working with services to understand future space and storage requirements
- Assessing the new IT requirements to support a new way of hybrid working
- Introducing worker types across the organisation: Flexible, Part flexible, Field/operational and Fixed

The key design elements of our property strategy and ways of working were:

- To ensure that our core buildings are used in the most efficient and effective way, creating team zones for services
- To reduce our carbon footprint to assist our goal of being net neutral by 2030
- To minimise the disruption to services but completing the moves for staff and teams from their existing locations to their future destination by the end of 2023
- To ensure staff are equipped to work in line with their worker profile and enabled to operate out of any office in our estate, and.
- Undertake consultation with unions and affected staff to agree how we accommodate any specific needs, effects on cost or travel.

The Council's main office locations will now be at the Guildhall and One Angel Square in Northampton.

### **One Angel Square**

- People directorate
- Corporate services except Legal and Democratic
- Revenues and Benefits
- Children's Trust
- Other partners

### **The Guildhall**

- The Executive Leadership Team
- Chief Executive's Office
- Legal and Democratic Services
- Place, including Communities and Opportunities, except Planning
- Finance teams, except Revenues and Benefits (after OAS partial move)

We will also have locality hubs at The Forum, Towcester, The Abbey Centre, Daventry and The Guildhall. A locality hub is a multipurpose centre, that provides a range of services to the local community to which we serve. West Northamptonshire's locality hubs will include a one-stop shop for customers to engage with these services. The hubs will include the following services

Members of staff from the following teams (with colleagues from the Children's Trust) will work in the locality hubs to support our communities:

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| ▪ Customer Services    | ▪ Regulatory Services  |
| ▪ Revenue and Benefits | ▪ Registrations        |
| ▪ Housing Options      | ▪ Adults Locality team |
|                        | ▪ Facilities and DTI   |

The plans specifically by site are set out below

**Lodge Road** – will close by the end of March 2023 and the Council is currently in discussions in relation to the potential disposal/sale or rent of the building.

**The Abbey will become our Daventry locality hub** after a short period of renovations to ensure the building can support its new occupants, services and their needs - It is expected that the three voluntary and community sector groups which have space in the Abbey will continue to do so, working alongside WNC staff, many of whom have allied roles.

**The Forum will become the locality hub for the Towcester and South Northants** area and also the main base for our Planning Team. The Planning move is one of our priorities. We are working to move this team swiftly, subject to staff consultation and all IT requirements being met.

**The Guildhall will continue to be the locality hub in Northampton** - It will also act as the main office base for many of our teams, alongside well established VCSE presence, as outlined earlier.

**One Angel Square will become the main base for the People Directorate and partnerships.** It is anticipated that the Children's Trust will also remain there. However, as outlined previously, both Adults and the Children's Trust will have locality teams in the hubs. We are working with related organisations to secure, if possible, their presence alongside the Adults and Children's teams. This will support joint working, especially in care-related activities and



will also reduce WNC’s costs for Angel Square. One Angel Square will also accommodate most of the Revenues and Benefits, and Customer Services teams, including the corporate call centre, DTI, and HR

The full detailed office and desk plans are almost completed and will be published once shared with unions and staff, to show the proposed plans for each of the four buildings.

**County Hall** – update will be provided in a separate cabinet paper to be published in Spring 2023. While a disposal plan had been developed based on splitting off parts of the building, the current climate around investment returns and build costs has led us to believe that marketing the site may attract more investors and better returns. This needs to be tested and a market engagement exercise is now planned ahead of finalising the proposals for the site and bringing it to Cabinet.

### 3. Efficiencies & Savings

The LGR prospectuses of 2019 and 2020 also set out the potential for significant savings of £84m to be delivered as a result of the LGR plan. Of the £84m savings it was assumed that £51m would be delivered prior to vesting day both within the legacy Councils and through LGR transformation. When the two new Councils went live in April 2021 the remaining savings to be delivered of £35m were split between the two Councils. This included assumed savings like:

- the reduction in senior staff costs as the councils were amalgamated
- the rationalisation of buildings
- Contract consolidation savings, and
- Benefits from automations and efficiencies from new IT systems.

West Northants Council therefore had £17.50m left to be delivered over the first few years of the Council. The table below shows how West Northants has delivered and exceeded these targets for efficiency:

West Northants Created 1 April 2021			
West Northants remaining savings delivery target		17,530	Assumed a 50% split of the remaining savings target for West Northants
Transformation savings delivered in 2021-22	-6,120		2021-22 transformation related budget proposals
Transformation saving delivered in 2022-23	-6,409		2022-23 transformation related budget proposals
Transformation savings anticipated in 2023-24	-13,905		2023-24 transformation related budget proposals
Transformation savings anticipated in 2024-25	-5,494		2024-25 transformation related budget proposals
Transformation savings anticipated in 2025-26	-2,075		2025-26 transformation related budget proposals
		-34,003	
Transformation savings in excess of WNC inherited target		<b>-16,473</b>	

Despite the challenges we have faced in terms of legacy financial pressures uncovered in our first year, the need to stabilise services, the mounting demand pressures and inflation that followed in 2022-23 and the challenges set to continue into 2023-24, we have continued to deliver efficiencies over and above those assumed in LGR.

We have adopted consistent themes approach to tracking out savings which help us ensure we consistent in our thinking and how we identify short, medium and long-term savings and that we are driving best practice. These themes are shown below

Theme	Narrative
<b>Redesign &amp; Reorganisation</b>	Service redesign or aggregation post LGR – opportunities to reduce staffing, delayer structures or change the model of who delivers what services, where and how; are the spans of control reasonable? Can we reduce headcount by sharing work or being co-located. Can we reduce our footprint and operating costs.
<b>Demand and Prevention</b>	We cannot change our demographics, but we can influence the likelihood of people coming to us, how quickly their needs escalate and how we react to them and how long they stay independent. Where can we invest one off or Public Health grant in prevention to reduce or slow demand or reduce costs?
<b>Buying &amp; Commissioning</b>	Could we buy things differently or combine legacy contracts to get better economies of scale? Can we seek help from the market to help us reduce need, reshape the offer and look at when it makes sense to provide services ourselves In house or outsource or partner?
<b>Charging and Income</b>	How do our fees compare and benchmark? Is there an opportunity to increase fees, generate new income streams, harmonise legacy charging or earn income from fees for services, asset use or commercial propositions? Are there external funding or grants we could access or should use?
<b>Technology and Innovation</b>	Where could we reduce operating costs through systems, digital innovation or automating. Are there examples from other councils making savings that we could duplicate? Can we consolidate systems or services and become more cost effective or provide services to others. Many of these initiatives will be delivered by DTI (Digital, Technology and Innovation services) but the benefits will be realised within the services they support

<b>Process and Policy</b>	Where could we do things differently to create operational efficiency e.g., can we centralise processes in customer services at a reduced cost because they can use more generic trained advisors? Are there policies that give us the discretion to deliver in different ways or more efficiently? are we experiencing demand failure anywhere that we can improve. are there national policies that allow us to capitalise costs or use grants?
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We have delivered significant transformation and wider efficiencies across these themes in our first years and the scale of these is set out below.

Theme	Narrative	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Savings
<b>Redesign &amp; Reorganisation</b>	Service redesign or aggregation post LGR – opportunities to reduce staffing, delayer structures or change the model of who delivers what services, where and how; are the spans of control reasonable? Can we reduce headcount by sharing work or being co-located. Can we reduce our footprint and operating costs.	£830,000	£2,716,000	£13,890,000	£17,436,000
<b>Demand and Prevention</b>	We cannot change our demographics but we can influence the likelihood of people coming to us, how quickly their needs escalate and how we react to them and how long they stay independent. Where can we invest one off or Public Health grant in prevention to reduce or slow demand or reduce costs?	£3,744,000	£1,150,000	£2,132,000	£7,026,000
<b>Buying &amp; Commissioning</b>	Could we buy things differently or combine legacy contracts to get better economies of scale? Can we seek help from the market to help us reduce need, reshape the offer and look at when it makes sense to provide services ourselves In house or outsource or partner?	£1,300,000	£1,803,000	£425,000	£3,528,000

<b>Charging and Income</b>	How do our fees compare and benchmark? Is there an opportunity to increase fees, generate new income streams, harmonise legacy charging or earn income from fees for services, asset use or commercial propositions? Are there external funding or grants we could access or should use?	£399,000	£7,975,000	£5,409,300	£13,783,300
<b>Technology and Innovation</b>	Where could we reduce operating costs through systems, digital innovation or automating. Are there examples from other councils making savings that we could duplicate? Can we consolidate systems or services and become more cost effective or provide services to others	£71,000	£189,000	£1,050,000	£1,310,000
<b>Process and Policy</b>	Where could we do things differently to create operational efficiency e.g., can we centralise processes in customer services at a reduced cost because they can use more generic trained advisors? Are there policies that give us the discretion to deliver in different ways or more efficiently? are we experiencing demand failure anywhere that we can improve. are there national policies that allow us to capitalise costs or use grants?	£263,000	£106,000	£1,881,930	£2,250,930
		£6,607,000	£13,939,000	*£24,778,230	£45,334,230

\* Note: Reconciliation to draft budget proposals:

Budget Report	-35,621
Less:	
Centrally controlled proposals	5,563
Technical adjustment proposals	5,270

**-24,788**

Members will be aware the 2022-23 has been a particularly challenging year for demand, with the cost-of-living crisis and as a result of pressures on inflation and due to the war in Ukraine. This pressure meant that some savings could not be delivered in full during 2022-23, where the volume of clients or service requests means that savings were outstripped by new costs.

As the Council must deliver a balanced in year budget, unlike many partner agencies, this has meant us taking urgent action to reduce unnecessary expenditure in year in 2022-23. The Management team and Cabinet undertook “Survive to Thrive” budget sessions with two key focus areas – immediate efficiencies and tackling so called “wicked issues”.

**Immediate actions** included introducing a Council-wide Spending Review Panel which has avoided around £1.7m in cost to date, to review all agency staff and there were expert panels set up in both Children’s and Adults to review care packages and increases. But services also agreed over 150 proposals or actions to reduce spend and produce savings (on top of the original budget savings proposals) across the five key of efficiency and transformation themes as follows:

Theme	Yr 2023-24
Buying & Commissioning	162
Charging and Income	4091
Demand and Prevention	4083
Process and Policy	814
Redesign & Reorganisation	1283
Technology and Innovation	359
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>10,792</b>

**Wicked Issues** – alongside immediate budget improvements and efficiencies we also undertook a series of workshops that look specifically at areas where the Council was facing significant demand and escalating costs and where a cross Council focus was the only way could create longer term solutions that were better for residents, the Council and/or our finances. The work from these informed the budget setting process for 2023-24 and further detail is set out in Appendix 1.

As we look to 2023-24, we will focus on the delivery of these initiatives and to complete the aggregation and transformation steps for services where this has not yet been completed and as shown in Appendix 2.

The wicked issues sessions are going to be a key transformation focus for the remainder of this year and next with a range of strategic projects, changing policies and optimisation looking to drive long term improvements and efficiencies. A short summary of the kind of projects being undertaken in each area is shown below:

**Wicked Issue 1 - Adults Demand and Optimisation**

**Key and shared challenges** included residual Covid pressure, the increased demand from hospitals and elderly cohort and escalating learning disability costs, the impacts of disaggregation in

disproportionate clients that now sit in west Northants Adults, the continued challenges of the use of the north based Specialist Care Centre's. From a commissioning perspective increasing provider costs and Social Care Reform.

Projects commence include:

**Supported living developments** – we are now working with assets and property services to actively develop new sites that support respite care and step-down care and reduce the reliance on costly contracts

**Service optimisation** – with in-house service buildings being unfit for today's use and our clients needs and requiring significant investment we are working on a full business case with specialist advisors for the development of new modern facility that can support more varied and complex client

**Dom care contract & Electronic call monitoring** – we will be retendering our Domiciliary care contract and implementing call monitoring that ensures care is provided, provides quality assurance and ensures we are paying accurately for services delivered. The new contract and commissioning approach will also lead to a reduction of spot purchase/ off contract.

**Transitions cases** – while we work well with childrens and have early joint planning for disabled children we still face challenges in looked after children and turning 18s not known to childrens but with complex needs when coming to adults. We are doing more to identify eligible clients early and to ensure a strengths-based approach to managing the pathway to adulthood

**Increased prevention – LAP/Health inequalities** – we are now working with public health, health, the VCS and parish and town councils to increase our community and preventative offers and reduce the escalation into formal care

**New Systems to automate** – we are progressing new systems for online eligibility assessments and self-assessments and a new case management system. This will include an system that will allow residents to check their eligibility for benefits and financial assistance an reduce their liability for care charges.

### **Wicked Issue 2 - Children's complex and high cost placements**

Key challenges for the trust include National challenges on demand and the availability for placements and as a result the increased cost of securing private placements. This is particularly acute with complex and emergency placements. There is also the only reliance on Fostering Agencies rather than in house foster families

Projects commenced include:

**Development of in-house placement and accommodation offers** – we are now working with assets and property, housing and the university services to actively develop new sites that support emergency care placements, complex placements and post 16 care leavers and reduce our reliance on expensive and often isolated private accommodation.

**Valuing Care** - Valuing Care is an approach that seeks to better understand the specific needs of children in care, to ensure provision and spend is better aligned to need and focused on how children's needs change over time. The programme has demonstrated in other areas that the current focus for placements for children in care is often 'deficit based' and reactive, leading to containment of needs, out of area placements and a reluctant requirement for unregistered provision. This can result in no clear correlation between needs and spend. By better understanding the needs of children, local authorities have been able to improve support and sufficiency resulting in significant reductions in spend and demonstrable improvements in need

over time. When combined with a dedicated managed social work team alongside therapeutic intervention and proactive commissioning our Valuing Care Plus programme has significant potential to deliver better outcomes for our children in care at a more sustainable cost.

**Foster friendly council** - we are working with the Trust to create and implement a number of policies designed to promote fostering opportunities across our anchor institutions and develop our fostering support services so that in house carers feel better supported, get better consideration and we offer a better network of carers to draw on. This will improve outcomes whilst reducing costs.

### **Wicked Issue 3 - Front Door – deepening the front door**

**Failure demand & Siloed services** - We have a number of services where failure demand is leading to technical experts and professionals having to spend time responding to standard enquiries or complaints and delaying case work.

**Disjointed pathways** – we have several entry points into the council and varied experiences for people accessing our services – we are looking to standardise, modernise and improve these and encourage self service where appropriate

**Increase in complexity of cases – we have seen more complex emerging issues across our customer base with increasing challenges across** employment, money, housing, mental health. We are looking to expand our offer with a single debt and advice offer and maintain our community hubs and customer service clinics to take advice and services to the people who need them.

**Deeper front door and optimisation** - We are working to establish what processes can be delivered from customer services with better and consistent outcomes and response times. This will be enabled by IT transformation underway including a single modernised telephony solution, a single CRM, process redesign and locality hubs all implemented in the first half of 2023. This will deliver financial efficiencies to WNC by moving customer contact from expensive back-office settings to the customer contact centre.

**Revs and Bens Transformation** – Building on the work which has already delivered £200k saving but further enabled by system rationalisation, process redesign and adoption of best practice

### **Wicked Issue 4 - Homelessness/ Single Vulnerable Adults**

Statistics show that we have a significant issue with single homeless adults with 475 households in temporary accommodation and of these 222 are singles and 253 are in families. We have a higher percentage of single homeless households compared to other Councils nationally and many are vulnerable adults for example victims of domestic violence, carer leavers or people with drug and alcohol issues.

We know that these issues and housing are linked to poor mental health we are also facing a loss of subsidy due to lack of qualifying supported accommodation that has the appropriate wrap around services.

**Temporary accommodation development** – we are looking at the opportunities to secure more sites, to convert Council sites and developing feasibility studies for Pods/ modular units on council land based on best practice successful models elsewhere. This includes securing suitable care leavers post 18 accommodation to avoid the additional costs and dependencies created by childrens having to provide enhanced support when there is no viable housing solution.

**Subsidy** - Work between Revs and Bens, housing, adults and childrens is looking at the wrap around support services required to maximise subsidy cover but working to increase the quality of private offers and develop more in house solutions.

**Housing Transformation** – we are progressing a new single system, a single way of working to enable a strong culture and developing a programme of both demand and supply improvements, enabled by system rationalisation and adoption of best practice.

#### **Wicked Issue 5 - School Transport**

**Policy** – The total spend on contracts for school transport is in excess of £25m across Northamptonshire. The councils policies inherited from the County have not been updated since 2010-12 and as a result we are providing service over and above statutory entitlement, policies do not reflect best practice, changing demand and school arrangements with more academies and less maintained schools..

There is significant pressure arising from increased costs of operating transport services and levels of demand. Procurement process have also been open to manipulation and collusion & last-minute placements drive cost and issues in securing SEND transport cost effectively with the current annual timetables to agree plans and then secure the transport.

**New System** – will be live in January 2023 which will ensure that all drivers check in and out on picks ups, we improve and regularise compliance checks, we deploy better route optimisation and payments are accurate against fulfilled trips. It will also support more effective route procurement and management of contractors.

**Policy** – we have developed a new West Northants School Transport policy and we will be entering consultation with stakeholders early in 2023 about changes for the school policy from September 2023 school term start.

**Independent travel training** we will be working to improve travel options for SEN children and young people with a view to supporting independence in life situations and confidence in the use of buses and other transport and reduce reliance on single child transport where appropriate.

**Personal Travel Budgets (PTBs)** – we are reviewing the best practice model of PTBs as home to school transport policy creates a duty on councils to assist not provide transport and PTBs may provide an alternative way to use more modes of transport or pay for family transport where a pupil is eligible for support.

#### **Wicked Issue 6 - Ways of working, utilities & operating costs**

**Too many buildings** – with modern flexible working we have too many buildings and only require a third of our current desk space.

**Prevailing cultures** – the geographic basis of teams and committee encourages the prevailing identities of the old district and borough councils/County Council and reduces our opportunity to combine teams, processes and practices and create better economies of scale and reduced complexity

**Utility costs** – the national and international situation has driven significant inflation on utility costs and our buildings are not all efficient. This increases costs and the carbon footprint

**Aggregation** - We now have a corporate plan for Accommodation Rationalisation – with Lodge Road being the first building to close and plans published for the reduction of buildings, consolidation



and co-location of services and opening of community hubs to help customers access more key services and partners. This will also facilitating culture change and improve efficiency and will be underpinned by plans already under way to roll out technology to enhance productivity, support new ways of working and get services onto single systems.

**Sustainability** – we are now implementing more modern Heating and cooling systems, looking at more renewable energy sources and will be implementing LED lighting in the top ten buildings - contributing to sustainability and net zero

**Solar** – we are progressing smaller solar farms for implementation on our own buildings and working with an expert partner to develop a feasibility study for a larger solar farm.

#### 4. Disaggregation of services form North Northants

Due to the impacts of Covid on the original LGR transformation plans a decision was made to focus on achieving a “safe and legal “transfer and the “must haves”. While this including completing transformation and splitting services into the two new unitary footprints where we could, we could not split all County Council services and 5,000 staff on day one. We therefore had to move to a shared service model across 50 Service areas or teams. While the budgets were split these shared services worked on one of three models:

- Host services – 34 services where one Council temporarily hosted the service on behalf of both councils until we could safely split based on securing the right staffing, systems or new contracts
- Lead services – 16 services where one council provided the delivery of services on a longer-term basis as there may be multiple organisations receiving services/sharing systems or contracts would not be economic to split until they come up for retender

#### Host services

The majority of host services have now been or are in the process of being split, with staff TUPEing to the relevant council and contracts, budgets and any assets split. As at the end of October 2022 12 services are still waiting to complete their disaggregation process as follows:

Directorate	Name	Status	Comments
People - Education	SEND (IASS)	Mar-23	
People - Adults	Assistive Technology Service	Mar-24	moved to align to new contract procurement
People - Adults	Visual Impairment Service		Deferred until safe & legal & more staff trained - 2 staff only
People - Adults	Shared Lives	Mar-23	
People - Adults	Adult Mental Health Practioner Service AMHPS		Deferred until safe & legal - team of 7 - National shortage of trained staff
People - Adults	Libraries support services		£90k additional cost to WNC to split - requested deferred
People - Adults	Personal Budgets (PBSS)	Mar-23	
Corporate Services - HR	Learning and Development Phase 2	Mar-23	
Corporate Services - IT	Programme Team	Mar-23	ICT discovery underway on wider service disaggregation
Corporate Services - IT	Strategy Team	Mar-23	ICT discovery underway on wider service disaggregation
Corporate Services - IT	Digital Team		£150k additional cost to WNC to split - requested deferred
Place	Household Waste Recycling Centres HWRC	Mar-23	

There have been challenges in delivering disaggregation across these services and because in some cases the split of services has led to the loss of economies of scale and the need to employ more staff at additional cost and spend more on contracts. This include the school's admission services, highways services (where savings had been assumed) and creation of separate Directors of Public Health. There have also been challenges in some areas in recruiting to the new roles created from the split and in turn maintaining performance as a result. Given these issues West Northants is currently reviewing some requested disaggregation's are halted where the benefits of any split do not justify the investment at a time of financial challenge, or any split would put a safe service at risk. These are shown above in red.

## Lead Services

The 16 Lead services and their status is set out in the table below:

Directorate	Name	Status	Comments
People - Adults	Adult Learning	No change	The EFSA contract is commissioned by DFE as a county wide one.
People - Adults	Public Health Intelligence and STP	No change	Team part of system plans for intelligence and population health unit
Place	Archives and Heritage incl PAS HER	No change	County wide team - 1 member of staff
Place	Northamptonshire Archaeological Resource Centre NARC	No change	County wide team - 1 member of staff
Place	Minerals and Waste Planning	No change	County wide team - 1 member of staff
Place	Digital Infrastructure (Place and Economy)	No change	County wide team - 1 member of staff
Place	County Traveller Unit	No change	County wide team - 1 member of staff
Place	Street Lighting	No change	PFI contract county wide - await contract expiry
People - Childrens	Childrens Trust Intelligent Client Function	Under review	Childrens Trust contract requires variation to be agreed to split
People - Education	Virtual School	No change	County wide small team working across schools base with NCT
Corporate - legal	Coroner Service	No change	County wide function legally
Corporate Services - HR	Payroll and HR Transactions	No change	Part of old LGSS shared service contract/system with Milton Keynes, Cambridge CC, North Northants, NCT and WNC
Finance & Resources	Pensions	No change	As above
Finance & Resources	Accounts Payable and Receivable AP/AR	No change	As above
Corporate Services - IT	ICT Operations and Infrastructure	Under review	ICT discovery underway on wider service disaggregation likely to have significant cost to split
Corporate Services - IT	ICT Service Delivery (former NCC systems)	Under review	As above

The majority of lead services are likely to remain as they are unless there is a change in legal or contract arrangements. One service area, DTI (Digital, Technology and Innovation) is part of ongoing discussions as North Northants are keen to progress the split of the service in order to progress sovereign digital strategies and technology priorities. However, this presents a number of key challenges for West Northants Council including:

- Business Systems Team - 19% of the DTI budget, this team supports and maintains the ERP system (covering HR, payroll and Finance Accounts receivable and accounts payable) across Milton Keynes Council, Cambridge CC, North Northants Council, Childrens Trust (NCT) and WNC – it is subject to separate contractual and governance arrangements. Splitting would require the agreement of all partners
- West Northants provides wider IT services to the Childrens Trust (NCT) under a support services contract and paid for through the children's service contract sum (contributed to by the two councils) – this relies on one council providing the service

and supporting projects for the trust and cannot be split without the risk of disruption and uncertainty for the trust. (North Northants lead on other areas of provision to the trust)

- The county council infrastructure and DTI teams were already very lean as a result of the period of austerity and intervention with some functions not having dedicated staff (for example the strategy team) but skills spread across a number of teams and roles.
- The IT infrastructure requires modernisation and while investment and transformation has started the split is likely to result in the need for significant additional investment to split infrastructure and systems and staff the new services, and
- The process of splitting the services is likely to take 18 months plus to complete and during this time there is a significant risk that the Councils transformation plans and priorities for things like new systems will be delayed while this is completed.

West and North Northants therefore agreed to jointly fund ICT discovery work and due diligence which would set out the potential plan, opportunities, risks and costs of such a split. This work is due to be completed in March 2023. Given the current financial pressures if there is a significant cost, West Northants Council will need to consider this investment against its other priorities and investment cases and in the context of any benefits or efficiencies that might offset that.