



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Annual Report

2022/23

**Delivering services
that make a difference**



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Welcome to our Annual Report

2022/23

We are pleased to introduce you to our annual report, reflecting upon our second year as a new unitary council and the many services and activities we have delivered to communities across West Northamptonshire.

The past 12 months have not been without challenges for all of us, as we found ourselves dealing with significant cost of living rises in an uncertain international and economic climate. However we are so proud to see the great spirit, generosity and determined resilience shown by residents and businesses who have continued to pull together during tough times and so soon after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Supporting our communities through these cost of living difficulties has been our top priority during 2022/23 and we have worked hard with our partners to do everything we can to provide the vital support they need.

In addition to this our Council also found itself dealing with many other major issues, including helping to resettle families fleeing the war in Ukraine, leading our county's emergency response to the death of our beloved Queen and then taking steps to tackle emerging significant financial challenges in our future budgets which we could not have predicted this time last year.

Yet despite these challenges we have also continued to make good progress towards our ambitions and a lot has been achieved throughout 2022/23.

In our second year we've continued to progress our transformation plans and make improvements to the services we inherited from the legacy councils, developing and embedding new strategies with more sustainable places and better outcomes for local people. We know there is more work to be done and our priorities for the year ahead recognise our ongoing mission to provide even better services that will help residents to live their best lives.

This report is not only an opportunity to reflect on the past year but to set out how we will embark on the next stage of our journey of improvement during our third year as a new unitary authority.

Thank you to all residents, businesses, partners and colleagues for their support over the past year and the fundamental role you continue to play as we continue on our journey towards making West Northants a great place to live, visit, work and thrive.



Anna Earnshaw

Chief Executive of
West Northamptonshire
Council

Cllr Jonathan Nunn

Leader of West
Northamptonshire
Council

Designs on a better future

1. We will empower our communities to be more resilient, working collaboratively with them to find solutions in their locality.

This means:

- ⇒ We will work with stakeholders to decide how we deliver services.
- ⇒ We will use local data about local areas to see where we can improve local outcomes.
- ⇒ Where appropriate we let communities deliver their own services supported by the resources to do that.
- ⇒ We will make our information clear and easy to understand for everyone with an emphasis on local information.

2. We will put in place digital solutions and systems for the majority of customers to self serve and monitor progress of their requests.

This means:

- ⇒ Transactions should be available digitally using a smaller number of systems.
- ⇒ Where customers use a lot of the same transactions we will use technology to make it simpler and faster and use Artificial Intelligence if that makes sense and is safe.
- ⇒ We will always try to let customers know how long something will take and tell them if it's going to take longer than that.

3. We will adopt a deep front door across our services to be proactive and resolve customers' needs at first point of contact.

This means:

- ⇒ We will make sure we offer a consistent standard of service, responding quickly to simple requests and processing things in a timely way.
- ⇒ We will try to answer more questions at the first point of contact and only refer people to experts behind the scenes where more technical knowledge is required.
- ⇒ We will join up our information so we understand our customers better and try to use this information to help people get the help they need.

4. Our Local Area Partnerships will be our primary way of organising our locality working and delivering our community services.

This means:

- ⇒ Our Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) will provide face to face services that reflect local need.
- ⇒ Our services will increasingly be aligned to local area need where that makes sense.
- ⇒ Our back office staff and service delivery teams will work out of four main offices but customers will be able to make contact closer to home.

Our drive to thrive

Everything we want to achieve for West Northants depends on having the right people in place and doing the right things. We need to retain, recruit, and develop talented and committed staff to provide the best services for our residents and businesses.

By making the most of people's skills and experience, and with everyone performing at their best, we can take full advantage of the opportunities created by our new council.

To support this, West Northamptonshire Council has developed a set of values in consultation with our staff, members, and stakeholders. These values underpin how we work and what partners and customers can expect from us. We want to do our very best for our residents, service users and businesses and for our staff – we want everyone to THRIVE.

Similarly, where services are provided through partners or external organisations, we will work with them to make sure these values are carried through in delivering services on our behalf.

Our organisational culture will continue to develop as we carry on improving our services and ways of working as the new West Northamptonshire Council.

THRIVE

Our Core Values

TRUST

We are honest, fair, transparent and accountable. We can be trusted to do what we say we will.



HIGH PERFORMANCE

We get the basics right and what we do, we do well. We manage our business efficiently.



RESPECT

We respect each other and our customers in a diverse, professional and supportive environment.



INNOVATE

We encourage curiosity, we are creative and seize opportunities to grow individually as an organisation and as an area.



VALUE

We continually strive for best practice and ways of improving existing procedures, practices and systems and thereby promoting efficiency and cost effectiveness.



EMPOWER

We believe in people, will listen, learn and trust them to make decisions. We help people to realise their ambitions.



Our priorities for West Northamptonshire

We want our Council to reflect the times we live in. We believe our future is bright and are taking this opportunity to create a fresh start for us, our area, our residents and our businesses.

We are focused on harnessing the strengths of our diverse West Northants people, businesses and places, to create an inclusive and productive area where everyone and every place can thrive.

We will use partnerships and collaboration within our communities and with both public and private partners.

We aim to use all infrastructure funding that connects people and places across our region, and

we will bring to life the plans we have for the regeneration of our towns and for building more affordable housing.

We aim to make a real difference to the lives of real people and will consider our whole area and whole population in our strategy and work to address climate change, education, health and well-being, work, economic development, and our rural and urban gems, simultaneously.

By doing this, everyone across West Northamptonshire can have the opportunity to reach their potential, whether they're growing up, getting on or growing old.

Green and Clean Environment & Wellbeing **1**

- Net Zero by 2030
- Climate summit in first few months
- Increased wildlife species & more trees
- Increased electric charging & energy efficiency
- Vibrant towns & villages
- High quality parks
- Accessible green space for all

Improved Life Chances Health, Social Care & Families **2**

- Healthy, safe and protected children
- Increased aspirations in young people
- Investment in new schools & provision
- Adults supported to live independently
- Care provided for those that need it
- Reduced hospital stays and delays
- Joined up and local services with health
- Safe and secure accommodation for all

Connected Communities Transport & Connectivity **3**

- Improved road, rail and bus networks
- Completion of major roads projects
- Improved road quality
- Increased use of electric vehicles & charging points
- Enhanced broadband and mobile connectivity

Thriving Villages & Towns Place Shaping & Homes **4**

- Regeneration of our core town centres
- Safer communities with less anti social behaviour
- Flourishing and supported small business
- Sustainable planning for growth
- Increased affordable housing & Council homes
- Raised standards of privately rented homes

Economic Development Growth & Prosperity **5**

- Published west strategic infrastructure plan
- Framework for long term economic growth
- Increased inward investment
- Building on our rich heritage
- Increased visitors to our attractions
- Infrastructure benefits and investment through our role in regional forums and plans

Robust Resource Management Transparency & Financial Probity **6**

- Stable finances and rainy day reserves
- Robust scrutiny of spending
- Open and transparent decision making
- Financial prudence underpinning long term decisions and plans
- Optimised debt management

Progress against our priorities

It is important that the Council is clear and transparent on its performance and there are clear action plans where our performance falls below target or that of other benchmark authorities.

The Council monitors performance across all services areas and against hundreds of national and contract metrics (ie what we measure) to ensure that services are performing well and identified priorities are monitored and delivered against. These are monitored within services and reported in line with national

cycles or as required to Overview and Scrutiny, and other committees.

We have included a summary of our corporate scorecard which sets out our end of year progress on the delivery of our priorities against the targets we set for 2022/23 as part of delivering our West Northamptonshire Council Corporate Plan.

These metrics are set out by the Directorates that primarily contribute to the delivery of each priority.

Green and Clean

| What we measured | Lead Directorate | 2022/23 Target | 2022/23 Outturn |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Amount of residual waste treated | Place & Economy | 75.0% | tbc |
| Number of flytips cleared | Place & Economy | Trend | 17,301 |
| Fixed Penalty Notices for Environmental Crime | Place & Economy | Trend | 3,092 |
| Queen's Green Canopy - Trees planted or pledged in West Northamptonshire | Place & Economy | Trend | 5,661 |
| Trees planted by WNC this year | Place & Economy | - | 115 |
| Number of visitors to our leisure centres | Communities & Opportunities | 1,900,000 | 2,158,761 |
| Number of charging points - WN area West Northants | Place & Economy | Trend | 177 |
| Number of charging points on council land | Place & Economy | - | 31 |
| Charging Points per 100,000 population in our area | Place & Economy | Trend | 41.5 |

Progress against our priorities

Improved Life Chances

| What we measured | Lead Directorate | 2022/23 Target | 2022/23 Outturn |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Percentage of all referrals with a decision within 2 working days | People | 85% | 68% |
| Percentage of referrals with a previous referral within 12 months | People | 29.0% | 29.5% |
| Percentage of Single Assessments authorised within 45 days | People | 85.0% | 93.9% |
| Percentage of children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time | People | 20.0% | 29.7% |
| Percentage of Children in care who were placed for adoption within 12 months of an agency decision that they should be adopted | People | 72.0% | 86.7% |
| Proportion of young people (age 16-18) not in employment, education or training (NEET) or Not Known | People | 5.5% | 2.0% |
| Proportion of people using social care who receive self-directed support | People | 91.9% | 100.0% |
| Percentage of people that return to their normal place of residence after discharge from hospital | People | 94.7% | 94.7% |
| Proportion of older people (65+) who were still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement/rehabilitation services. | People | 79.2% | 65.0% |
| New requests for services where route of access was discharge from hospital that had a reablement service | People | 29.8% | 25.1% |
| Number of homeless preventions | Communities & Opportunities | 400 | 436 |
| Number of cases where homelessness was successfully relieved | Communities & Opportunities | 400 | 484 |
| How much money spent on Disabled Facilities Grants | Communities & Opportunities | 2,558,938 | 4,750,175 |
| Percentage smoking quit rate at 4 weeks | People | 60.0% | tbc |
| Breastfeeding rate at 6-8 weeks | People | 55.0% | 59.8% |
| Number of school age children who receive weight management advice and support | People | 5,000 | 5,765 |
| Percentage of mothers known to be smokers at the time of delivery | People | 11.0% | 11.1% |
| Infants due a new birth visit who received a new birth visit within 14 days of birth | People | 90.0% | 96.4% |
| Infants who received a 6-8 week review by the time they were 8 weeks | People | 90.0% | 93.3% |
| Covid Spring Booster - % of Eligible Population Vaccinated (age 75+) | People | Trend | 90.8% |
| Covid Autumn Booster - % of Eligible Population Vaccinated (age 50+) | People | Trend | 73.5% |

Progress against our priorities

Connected Communities

| What we measured | Lead Directorate | 2022/23 Target | 2022/23 Outturn |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Percentage of highway defects responded to within the timeframes specified (Priority 1 & 2) | Place & Economy | 97.5% | 98.8% |
| Percentage of highway defects responded to within the timeframes specified (Priority 3 & 4) | Place & Economy | 90.0% | 98 |
| Percentage of customers who are quite satisfied and extremely satisfied with the service received from the Customer Service Centre | Corporate Services | 90.0% | 90.7% |
| Percentage of contacts received within Customer Services for the first time (unavoidable contacts) | Corporate Services | Trend | 84.8% |
| Proportion of complaints escalated | Corporate Services | - | 5.7% |
| Number of visitors to our leisure centres | Communities & Opportunities | 1,900,000 | 2,158,761 |
| Number of charging points - WN area West Northants | Place & Economy | Trend | 177 |
| Number of charging points on council land | Place & Economy | - | 31 |
| Charging Points per 100,000 population in our area | Place & Economy | Trend | 41.5 |

Thriving Villages and Towns

| What we measured | Lead Directorate | 2022/23 Target | 2022/23 Outturn |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Number of new council homes built | Communities & Opportunities | 126 | 77 |
| Number of affordable homes completed | Communities & Opportunities | 404 | 441 |
| Planning applications approved by Committee as recommended | Place & Economy | Trend | 90.00% |
| Number of visitors to libraries | Communities & Opportunities | 500,000 | 854,390 |
| Number of people resettled | Communities & Opportunities | 300 | 746 |
| Number of people currently supported through wrap around care | Communities & Opportunities | 300 | 723 |

Progress against our priorities

Economic Development


| What we measured | Lead Directorate | 2022/23 Target | 2022/23 Outturn |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Visitors to Museums | Communities & Opportunities | 137,000 | 138,114 |
| Total number of people on Council Tax Reduction Scheme | Finance | Trend | 18,470 |
| Pensioners on Council Tax Reduction Scheme | Finance | Trend | 7,712 |
| Working age people on Council Tax Reduction Scheme | Finance | Trend | 10,758 |
| Number of apprentices employed in substantive roles | Corporate Services | Higher | 87 |
| Number of apprenticeships starts in West Northants | Corporate Services | Trend | 3,100 |

Robust Resource Management

| What we measured | Lead Directorate | 2022/23 Target | 2022/23 Outturn |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Number of Employee's - Full Time Equivalent (FTE) | Corporate Services | Trend | 2,400.72 |
| Number of Employee's - Headcount | Corporate Services | Trend | 2,667 |
| Average number of days lost due to sickness | Corporate Services | 10.70 | 11.88 |
| Projected sickness | Corporate Services | 10.70 | 11.88 |
| Rolling Annual Staff Turnover | Corporate Services | 1360.0% | 15.1% |
| Net Revenue budget delivery - Projected surplus/ deficit (£m) | Finance | 0.0 | tbc |
| Council Tax collection rate | Finance | 98.00% | 96.97% |
| Business Rates collection rate | Finance | 98.00% | 98.02% |
| Amount of debt owed to the council that is overdue by at least 90 days (£m) | Finance | Trend | 25.0 |
| Percentage of invoices that are paid within 30 days of receipt | Finance | 95.0% | 96.7% |
| Housing Benefit - time to determine new applications | Finance | 20.00 | 36.45 |
| Housing Benefit - time to determine change in circumstances | Finance | 8.00 | 7.68 |

Our year in review

£1.25m funding secured to make over **100** council homes more energy efficient



£1.55 weekly average council tax rise for a band D property to crucially generate an extra £12m to protect essential services

£34m additional taxpayer savings to be made by transforming and improving services inherited from the old legacy councils



436 homelessness cases prevented



441 affordable homes delivered, with **77** new council homes built



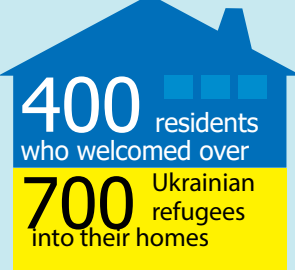
17,711 repairs to potholes, roads and footpaths



23,500 free school meal vouchers distributed



400 residents who welcomed over **700** Ukrainian refugees into their homes



40 extra school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities – with progress towards a purpose-built school to provide a further 230



97 Welcoming warm spaces set up across West Northants

2,158,761 visitors to our leisure centres



£5.4m secured from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to improve people's life chances, increase skills, and support local businesses over the next three years



17,301 fly tips cleared across West Northants

11,337 new trees across West Northants as part of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative



3,092 FIXED PENALTY NOTICES issued for environmental crimes



21m bins and caddies emptied over the year



21m bins and caddies emptied over the year



Green and Clean

Environment & Wellbeing

Over the past 12 months we have prioritised the environment and considered the carbon cost of our decision-making, working hard towards our sustainability goals – from improving energy efficiency, reducing waste and achieving net zero emissions by 2030, to making our streets, parks and open spaces cleaner and greener. Here are some of the many highlights:

- Establishing a new dedicated sustainability service was key to steering and developing our response to climate change and as a result more communities, partners and businesses have been engaged over the past year.
- We published a robust set of baseline CO2 emissions data for our Council's first year, giving us a baseline against which to progress a detailed action plan to monitor and reduce these.
- Government funding of £1.25m was secured to make over 100 council-owned homes more energy efficient and a further £7m towards decarbonising our leisure centres.
- Working with partners, we have pledged to plant over 11,300 new trees across West Northants as part of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.



- We retained international Green Flag Award status for the high quality of Daventry Country Park, Abington Park, Bradlaugh Fields and Delapre Park, with plans to work towards achieving similar accolades for Towcester's Water Meadows and Hunsbury Country Park.
- We expanded the success of the Northampton e-scooters scheme with the rollout of new e-bikes for hire across the town centre.



- We received nearly £300,000 government funding to roll-out new initiatives aimed at researching and improving air quality in Northampton.
- Our Cleaner Communities campaign was launched with partners to crackdown on flytipping and littering and change public behaviour.
- Our new garden waste service was successfully rolled out to include South Northants residents and with increased take up for 2023-24 and we introduced kerbside recycling for small electrical items and batteries in the Daventry area.
- We introduced a Public Spaces Protection Order across the Daventry and South Northants areas to promote responsible pet ownership and ban smoking in more public spaces, with consultation now taking place on similar proposals for Northampton.



Improved Life Chances

Health, Social Care & Families

2

Helping our residents through the ongoing cost of living crisis has been our top priority over the past 12 months and we've worked with a range of partners to provide a broad range of practical and financial packages.

- We developed and approved a new Anti-Poverty Strategy, setting out how we will support people struggling financially or with food security, what we will do to help people avoid falling into poverty and how we will work to influence the Government and other national organisations to get the best deal for the people of West Northants. This crucial strategy has brought support to many families, as a collaboration between the Council and all the relevant voluntary organisations.



- Over the past 12 months we have distributed approximately £5million of the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) to support thousands of vulnerable households in West Northants, including 23,500 free school meal vouchers, Over 7,000 pension credits to the elderly and nearly 10,500 food vouchers via a network of around 20 local voluntary and community groups.
- We worked with our partners and local communities to set up a network of 97 welcoming warm spaces across West Northants and set up a dedicated Cost of Living hub online and by phone to offer residents a range of tailored advice and information.



- Our Reablement West service, which provides vital care and support to people upon discharge from hospital to enable them to continue to live confidently and independently in their own homes – received a Good rating in the latest inspection from the Care Quality Commission (CQC).



- We prioritised work to create more school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including progressing plans for a new 230-place special school in Tiffield near Towcester, with the budget approved and detailed design work under way.
- This year a further 20 places were also created at Hardingstone and Castle Academies and new 'SEND Ranges' have also been introduced which provide a set standard for each child or young person in an education setting to better outline what support is needed based on children's individual needs or behaviours.

Improved Life Chances

Health, Social Care & Families

2



- A new integrated care system for the whole of Northamptonshire was established in July 2022 which sees the Council working more closely in partnership with all local health and care partners to deliver better joined-up services under a new 10-year strategy to help residents to 'Live Your Best Life'. This has

subsequently led to the establishment of Local Area Partnerships across West Northants, a pioneering approach that has for the first time brought together council, health, police, the voluntary and community sector and other services to identify and meet the specific needs of local communities.

- Our Shared Lives Service, where carers share their lives and homes to support others was rated 'outstanding' by CQC which found that "people received exceptional care and support from dedicated carers.
- We made encouraging progress in our work towards protecting vulnerable children across West Northants, with Ofsted lifting its rating of Northamptonshire's children's services from 'inadequate' to 'improvement to be good'.
- We received almost £575,000 to help improve adult numeracy in the area - the first tranche of funding approved from a £1.9m bid submitted to the Government's Multiply Fund. Money will be allocated



over a three-year period and could benefit more than 3,000 people in the area during that time.

- More than 300 primary school students from across West Northants took part in this year's Young Citizen's Scheme organised by WNC, Northamptonshire Police and Northamptonshire Children's Trust, where they learned about online safety, fire and water safety, and anti-social



behaviour.

- Our School Attendance Support Service arranged virtual sessions for parents and carers who home school children aimed at helping young people to stay safe online.
- Services helping domestic abuse victims find safer accommodation across West Northamptonshire received extra funding of over £273,000 under plans to boost the funding provided to the Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service (NDAS) and eve, Domestic Violence & Abuse support services.
- We also staged our annual campaign to bring comfort and joy to those staying in West Northamptonshire refuges, with donations of Christmas hampers.
- Less than a year after achieving bronze status in the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme we were awarded Silver status for our work in supporting our armed forces community, also setting up community hubs and resigning the Armed Forces Covenant for the year ahead.





- The launch of our new highways service in autumn saw our appointed contractors Kier set out their commitment to working with WNC on sustainability goals to achieve net zero emissions by 2030, as well as increasing social value to benefit the wider West Northants community and economy, such as supporting local disadvantaged groups and working with local sub-contractors.

Within weeks Kier embarked on a Community Enhancement Plan, this work has reached over 161 parishes, clearing nearly 4km of vegetation and cleaning more than 1,500 road signs. Alongside this,



Kier has also rectified over 1,688 road and footpath defects, and 6,771 carriageway repairs. This took the total number of repairs to potholes, roads and footpaths in 22/23 to 17,711. We then set out further plans in our budget for the year ahead to invest an extra £1m towards

repairing local roads and potholes, particularly following harsh winter conditions.

- Car parking charges have also been reviewed to introduce two hours' free parking on Saturdays and Sundays in Northampton's town centre off street car

parks plus a set weekend all-day charge of £2.20.

- Introducing free parking up to 10.30am on Saturdays at Daventry and Brixworth country parks and reducing the proposed maximum daily charge at the two sites by a third to £8.
- Investing £215,000 in the year ahead towards bus services while the Council shapes a new bus strategy and considers the most viable options for supporting and delivering the services in the future.
- Progressing proposals for the Abington Park Area Active Travel scheme which would introduce segregated cycleways and footways to provide better alternatives to driving, reduce traffic and



increase safety for walkers and cyclists

- Starting preparatory work on the new Northampton North-West Relief Road which will link the A428 Harlestone Road to the A5199 Welford Road. Over the past 12 months, WNC has worked with partners to acquire the land for the £54m development, working with experts to scope and begin the relevant archaeological field work – while protecting our environment and manage the careful construction of the rail and river bridges
- Continuing to work with partners to future-proof the digital connectivity of West Northants through the Superfast Broadband scheme and with partners. CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full fibre platform, has now laid a staggering 840km of full fibre internet cables through Northampton as part of its £40m initiative for the area.

Thriving Villages & Towns

Place Shaping & Homes

- We embarked on a comprehensive review of how the Council deals with Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to thoroughly investigate concerns raised by residents. The review will include a robust analysis of current policies concerning HMOs in Northampton, alongside looking at ways we can use best practice from elsewhere in the country.
- A fresh three-year strategy was developed and approved for improving housing for residents across West Northamptonshire whilst tackling issues including homelessness and the cost-of-living crisis.
- We organised a packed summer weekend of bank holiday events and activities for thousands of residents to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Commemorative beacons were lit across our area, including a virtual beacon at the Northampton Lift Tower, followed by a spectacular countywide pageant through Northampton centre involving military and emergency services personnel, youth and community groups and businesses and a Big Lunch community event for residents at Delapre Abbey.



- Our Council also supported The Birmingham 2022 Queen's Baton Relay which visited Northampton in July in the run-up to the Commonwealth Games, providing an opportunity for local communities to experience the excitement in the run-up to the big event.
- We supported over 400 West Northants residents who welcomed over 700 people fleeing conflict as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, arranging support, welfare and safety checks on their arrival and staging workshops for parish councils. We also continued to provide resettlement support for Afghan refugees and liaised with Home Office officials over future proposals around bridging accommodation to ensure our local communities were represented and their needs met.
- We worked with partners to construct and open the award-winning Northampton Bike Park to provide new



sustainable leisure facilities in the town, linking to existing cycle networks and improving the wellbeing of residents.

- Northampton Museum and Arts Gallery received full accreditation from the Arts Council England after nearly a decade, recognising its ongoing commitment to providing an outstanding facility that helps visitors to engage with collections and protect them for the future.
- We worked with our partners to stage over 30 community events and activities to bring our communities together, celebrate diversity, foster good relationships including Srebrenica, International Youth Day, International Women's Day, Northampton Pride, Diwali, Holocaust Memorial Day, Refugee Week, the Male Role model awards.
- West Northamptonshire joined the rest of the country and people around the world in mourning the loss of Queen Elizabeth II, with memorial services taking place across West Northants. Our Council supported the Lord Lieutenant of Northamptonshire in leading Operation London Bridge, the countywide response to death of the late Queen and proclamation of King Charles III, co-ordinating arrangements for official events, ceremonies and services.
- We continued our work in bringing together and improve planning services across West Northants, welcoming an independent review of the service and shaping an action plan for development.



Growth & Prosperity

Attracting inward investment, breathing new life into our urban areas, and supporting businesses across West Northamptonshire have underpinned our work to drive economic development during our second year as a Council, with a broad range of activities moving forward



- Vulcan works – a brand new £14 million hub of revitalised office space supporting start-up businesses in creative industries opened in the heart of Northampton's Cultural Quarter.
- We supported the launch of the new Social Enterprise Development Fund aimed at growing and developing social enterprises in Northampton that are making a positive impact on the community and the environment, while also generating income and creating jobs.
- The final stages of developing Daventry's Mulberry Place leisure complex were completed with the opening of two new restaurants alongside The Arc multiplex cinema.
- We were successfully granted more than £5.4m from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to boost our local economy over the next three years. This is the largest allocation in the Southeast Midlands and will be used to improve people's life chances, increase skills, create stronger communities, and support local businesses.
- Our partners at NN Contemporary Art unveiled plans for a major new cultural centre at 24 Guildhall Road – a £4.7 million project supported by the Government's Towns Fund and part of the Town Centre Masterplan.
- We encouraged residents across West Northants to

shop local and support our independent traders as part of activities for Small Business Saturday.

- Work started to demolish the old derelict Co-op supermarket in Towcester's Sponne Arcade to make way for additional parking spaces in the heart of the town centre.



- Our Council received a prestigious Federation of Small Business Local Government Award for supporting the local small business community, beating off competition from around 250 other councils to achieve the 'All round Small Business Friendly' regional category.
- We exchanged contracts on the former BHS and M&S stores in Abington Street to progress plans for modern new residential, retail and leisure units in the town centre.
- We worked with partners to progress plans to restore the Old Black Lion public house in Marefair, Northampton, with conservation repair work starting recently to bring the derelict premises back into use for our local community.
- Work started on the multi-million-pound redevelopment of Northampton's historic Market Square, which will include a flexible event space, bespoke fixed stalls, more trees, tiered seating and an interactive water feature.



Robust Resource Management

6

Transparency & Financial Probity

- Our work on transforming and improving public services inherited from the old legacy councils continued at pace throughout our second year, with the new unitary council's efficiencies on course to save taxpayers a further £34million than originally anticipated by the end of 2025/26.



- This year we worked hard to set a balanced budget for 2023/24, despite facing severe financial pressures like other councils due in the current economic climate, with high inflation rates driving up running costs and an increase in demand for services, particularly around supporting children in care and vulnerable adults.
- We made tough choices to set a Council Tax increase of 4.99% for 23/24, which remains well below current inflation levels but crucially generating an extra £12m to protect essential frontline services – with 2% of the increase going towards adult social care. This represents an average increase on a Band D property of £80.50 a year, the equivalent of £1.55 a week.
- We gave our feedback and recommendations to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England as part of its review of our Council's electoral boundaries which are due to be introduced at our next elections in May 2025.

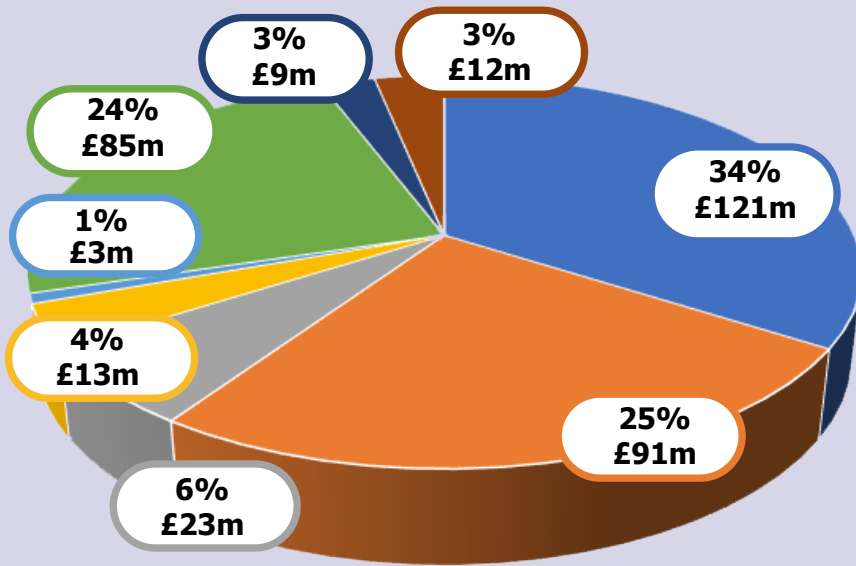


- We restructured a range of service areas to improve efficiency, including bringing our community-focussed services together with a place-making collaborative focus, including libraries, economic regeneration, ports and cultural services.
- The previous countywide approach to public health services changed as we established our own service focused on the wellbeing and needs of West Northamptonshire residents
- Our Revenues and Benefits colleagues worked around the clock to distribute a range of benefits and payments to residents struggling during the cost-of-living difficulties, including the government's £150 Council Tax energy rebates to households.



- We reviewed our buildings as part of ongoing work to bring our services together more economically and efficiently for residents and pursued plans to relocate from our current Daventry offices at Lodge Road to a new locality hub at the nearby Abbey Centre.
- We continued to develop the way we inform, engage and interact with residents, including key improvements to our website, the launch of our residents e-newsletter, regular briefings for town and parish councils, and increased audiences on our social media channels.
- Our efforts to improve outcomes for residents this year have resulted in widespread recognition, with key projects and activities being shortlisted for six national awards. WNC is among only a small number of finalists out of hundreds of entries from councils across the country for two leading local government sector awards ceremonies, the LGC (Local Government Chronicle) Awards and MJ (Municipal Journal) Awards.

How we spent our money in 2022/23

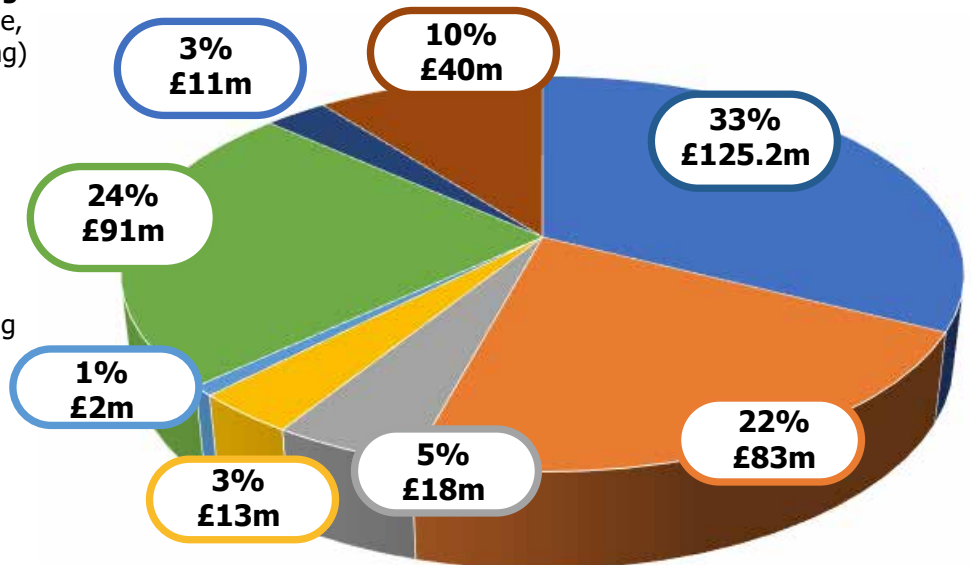


Further detail is provided in the 2022-23 Provisional Outturn Report

- ▶ **Adults, Communities & Wellbeing 34%**
(Looking after the elderly and vulnerable, supporting people's health and wellbeing)
- ▶ **Children's Services 25%**
(Caring for our young people)
- ▶ **Corporate Services 6%**
(Organisational support such as HR, technology and governance)
- ▶ **Chief Executive Services 1%**
(Setting strategy and priorities, informing and engaging on what we do)
- ▶ **Place and Economy 24%**
(From bin collections and highways to planning and assets)
- ▶ **Finance Services 3%**
(Managing your money and resources, administering benefits to those in need)
- ▶ **Communities and Opportunities 4%**
(From housing, libraries and community services to economic development and regeneration)
- ▶ **Central Resources & Financing 3%**
(Other budgets such as external audit fees, costs of servicing inherited borrowing,

Our spending plans for 2023/24

- ▶ **Adults, Communities & Wellbeing 33%**
(Looking after the elderly and vulnerable, supporting people's health and wellbeing)
- ▶ **Children's Services 22%**
(Caring for our young people)
- ▶ **Corporate Services 5%**
(Organisational support such as HR, technology and governance)
- ▶ **Chief Executive Services 1%**
(Setting strategy and priorities, informing and engaging on what we do)
- ▶ **Place and Economy 24%**
(From bin collections and highways to planning and assets)
- ▶ **Finance Services 3%**
(Managing your money and resources, administering benefits to those in need)
- ▶ **Communities and Opportunities 3%**
(From housing, libraries and community services to economic development and regeneration)
- ▶ **Central Resources & Financing 10%**
(Other budgets such as external audit fees, costs of servicing inherited borrowing, pension fund deficits and contingencies)



In 2023/24 West Northamptonshire Council will receive £383.5m to deliver the day-to-day running of our services. The money from your Council Tax makes up around two-thirds of this total income, with the remainder coming from sources including government grants and part of the national business rates.

Place Services

Portfolio Holder Forewords

Investing in our frontline services

All of our residents will come in to contact with our waste services at least once a week, as a vital part of our Council we are delighted to continue to be making strides in this area, collecting on 400,000 bins each week and reuse, recycling and composting nearly 50% of all waste collected. We are embarking on an exciting new chapter as we launch our new waste strategy this year to ensure our services meets the needs of our residents.

Furthermore, we are investing into our road network to ensure that we're doing all we can to improve the overall conditions for road users. We're investing an additional £2.86 million for 2023/24 into our roads and since the launch of our new Highways contract in September 2022, we've made improvements in 161 parishes, clearing nearly 4km of vegetation, cleaning more than 1,500 road signs to date and carried out 6,771 carriageway repairs. We will continue to enhance our facilities and services for local residents, as we look to purchase new equipment to provide a more efficient and improved service.

Cllr Phil Larratt, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste



Planning ahead for improving services

The last 12 months have been a significant period of improvement and change for our planning services as we continued our work in bringing together and improve planning services across West Northants, welcoming an independent review of the service and shaping an action plan for development.

Colleagues across the service have been working hard to process an exceptional number of planning applications, by taking part in planning focus weeks to concentrate on determining these as quickly as possible. As part of our planned improvements we're delighted to continue to invest in planning services to roll out a new planning portal for Daventry and South Northants areas, with Northampton area due to follow this summer. We are focusing on processing section 106 agreements and delivering payments to local organisations in a timelier fashion.

Cllr Rebecca Breese, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs



Planning ahead for improving services

There have been a number of developments across our regulatory services over the last year, we're delighted to have brought in-house our building control services in Daventry. After a lot of hard work, we're pleased to be offering local services for residents in the Daventry area and now host all building control services for West Northamptonshire. Environmental crime is something we will all be impacted by at some point. We have taken a proactive approach to work with our residents, businesses and partners to improve our communities by reducing fly-tipping and take action on those who blight our spaces

Cllr David Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Engagement and Regulatory Services



What we do in Place, Economy and Environment

The Place, Economy and Environment directorate consists of a diverse range of service areas that deliver frontline and internal services across the Council:

Our Services



**Assets &
Environment**



**Highways and
Transport**



Planning



**Regulatory
Services**



**Waste
Services**

Our Vision

Place, Economy and Environment is enabling residents and visitors of West Northants to live their best lives:

We are working together with our partners in developing a Place Vision that aligns to and articulates the Place role in delivering the Corporate Plan and alignment to the Local Area Partnerships and the Live your Best Life Strategy and, of course, the Council's Sustainability Strategy. This Vision will be the starting point and thread that runs through all future Place Strategies ensuring consistency and read across. Our vision for West Northamptonshire focuses on five key themes:

- Thriving Towns and Villages
- Empowering People
- Enterprising West Northants
- Sporting, Heritage and Culture
- Connected West Northants

Thriving Towns and Villages

With the attractive environment of its town and villages, including their heritage assets, combined with opportunities for regeneration, it presents an attractive prospect for growth and investment. This enables West Northamptonshire to develop clean, safe, strong and more resilient communities that are well looked after and where people are proud to live.

By adopting policies that protect and enhance its thriving towns and villages, it can effectively absorb this future growth, whilst both protecting and promoting the unique character of its settlements.

Empowering People

Empowering People is about providing opportunities, support and ability to thrive. By having the necessary

support infrastructure in place, residents will be able to make choices and live a life of their choosing.

Enterprising West Northamptonshire

West Northamptonshire has a vibrant and resilient economy.

Enterprising West Northamptonshire is about investing and enhancing the economic potential of this area, capitalising on its unique strengths and building on the potential within this area.

Sport, Heritage, Tourism and Culture

Everyone in West Northamptonshire is extremely proud of this area's strengths in sporting excellence, historic heritage and culture. Both as a place to visit its many attractions, beautiful countryside and villages is often overlooked.

It's about enhancing West Northamptonshire's position as a centre of excellence, increasing participation in sport, ensuring that we celebrate our culture and develop our arts as a way of supporting our residents, creating a positive perception of west Northants as a place to live work or visit.

Connected West Northamptonshire

West Northamptonshire is one of the most connected areas in the country.

Connected West Northamptonshire is about ensuring that all areas within West Northants have the necessary infrastructure and connections for our residents to succeed and thrive, whilst ensuring that our communities can still retain their unique identity.



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Assets & Environment

- Continued to provide high quality parks, including retaining six green flags, and providing many activities and amenities to keep visitors of all ages active and engaged with their natural surroundings.
- Developed and implemented policies:
 - Adoption of Assets
 - Voluntary & Community Sector use of property
 - Water hygiene including Legionella
- Delivered ongoing programme of works to ensure schools are warm, safe, and dry.
- Delivered new SEND units at three schools.
- Implementing Office Optimisation Stage 1 (new Daventry hub).
- Putting the foundations in place for major transformational projects:
 - Large scale solar generation (PV).
 - New Towcester Care Home.
 - New SEND school, St John's Tiffield.
- Delivered £1.153m budget savings, including in year mitigations.
- Proposed budget savings for 23-24 medium term financial plan to help WNC achieve balanced budget.
- Managed extreme pressure on energy costs, including delivering £1.8m of cost avoidance through smart procurement.
- Made significant inroads into inherited backlog estate management issues such as rent reviews.
- Procured a new valuation service and established a five-year valuation programme.
- Centralised property data and procured new integrated property records and computer aided facilities management system, critical for assurance on property condition and compliance.
- Implemented new parking payment system for multi-storey car parks, improving ease of use and efficiency of operation.
- Work underway on Climate Strategies for Estate, Construction & Maintenance, and Fleet.
- Secured funding:
 - £7m for decarbonising heating at four leisure centres.
 - £172k for feasibility for a sustainable heat network for Northampton and Rothersthorpe.
 - Delivering electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure.
 - Delapre Park active travel scheme.
- Secured approval for the business case for the Resilience and Innovation in Northamptonshire (RAIN) project, unlocking £7m of Environment Agency funding to help manage flood risk in Wootton Brook (WNC) and Harper's Brook (NNC) catchments, with wider benefits.
- Secured lead authority status for preparing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Northamptonshire.
- Delivered integrated postal service for WNC including the roll-out of hybrid mail.
- Began integration of Property Response services, integrating the former NCC, DDC, and SNC services.
- New websites:
 - Estates.
 - County Archives.
- Procured new integrated service contracts including:
 - Building works.
 - Electrical works.
 - Cleaning.
- Put new long-term management structure in place.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Waste Services

- Delivered efficient Waste Services and street cleansing to all residents, resolving any issues that arise. This involves collecting more than 400,000 bins each week, which is more than 21 million bin lifts per year!
- Delivered £1.8m budget savings, including in-year mitigations.
- Proposed budget savings for 2023-24 to help WNC achieve balanced budget.
- In association with IT and Customer Services, developed a new on-line Direct Debit system for garden waste subscription payments.
- Commenced development of the West Northants Waste and Resources Strategy, including holding 4 member workshops.
- Secured funding from Public Health to fund a food waste campaign.
- Secured funding from Keep Britain Tidy for chewing gum removal equipment and programme of works.
- Development new systems for managing the disposal of upholstered furniture containing POPs to minimise any increased costs.
- Recruited new Health and Safety Officer within waste team to help manage and mitigate risks of operational service.
- Review of website information for Waste Services & migrated to WNC site.
- Extended use of the Waste App across whole of West Northants.
- Awarded new contacts for Supply of Fuel, Maintenance of Vehicles at South.

Regulatory Services

- Delivered efficient and effective regulatory services to all residents, businesses, and visitors to West Northants.
- Completed over 95% of the food safety interventions required in accordance with the Food Standards Agency Recovery Roadmap.
- Completed planned programme of test purchasing in respect of illicit tobacco products and dealt with an unprecedented increase in complaints about the sale of illegal vapes, seizing over 1500 units with a total value of over £12k.
- Worked with Highways colleagues to progress the DEFRA (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) Air Quality Grant Funded project to install air quality monitoring equipment which will be linked to the traffic management system at key junctions in Northampton.
- Secured a DEFRA Grant of £292k for work to develop a comprehensive evidence base around the potential for implementation of smoke control measures in West Northants.
- Updated the Council's Statement of Policy in respect of the Gambling Act 2005.
- Completed the consultation and implementation of a Public Spaces Protection Order to deal with dog control matters and smoking in certain public places within the former South and Daventry areas.
- Held a successful Health Safety and Wellbeing Forum focused on the warehousing and logistics industry.
- Completed the preparation to bring the Building Control Service for the Daventry area in house from 1 April 2023.
- Worked with partners in the Event Safety Partnership to finalise and implement a process for sharing information about events, provide support to event organisers and streamline the operation of Safety Advisory Groups.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Regulatory Services

- Worked with colleagues in the Communications team to develop the Cleaner Communities Campaign and used this to share details of the work being carried out to address environmental crime which included submission of 71 Prosecutions and the service of over 3090 fixed penalty notices along with significant engagement with business communities 130 section 34 notices issued. The Campaign has published successful court outcomes and appealed to local residents to support our work and provide us with evidence of environmental crimes.
- Developed a draft taxi licensing policy and commenced the consultation process on this policy.
- Put plans in place with Emergency Planning to deal with any outbreaks of Avian Influenza within the area and supported colleagues in NNC in dealing with two outbreaks; this was a good learning exercise for WNC officers. Worked with partners to provide a coordinated emergency response to a major farm animal welfare case which involved over 24 days of officer time over a ten day period.
- Began the process of restructuring teams to progress the aggregation of services.
- Progressed the installation of replacement back office systems in Building Control and Trading Standards and began the process of identifying suitable IT solutions for the remainder of the service.

Highways and Transport

- Mobilised new Contracts for Highways and Specialised Home to School Transport whilst maintaining business as usual including TUPE of staff from one provider to another.
- Disaggregated service and implemented new structure
- Recruited to 2 of the 3 new vacant senior leadership roles.
- Carried out consultation regarding Moving Traffic Enforcement and applied to DfT for the powers to implement.

- Continued to deliver Northampton North West Relief Road Phase 2 on programme and within the budget envelope.
- Transported approx 9500 children to school on behalf of WNC and NNC.
- Secured £825k funding for Active Travel for capability and schemes.

Planning Service

- Recruitment of new Assistant Director following review of the service.
- New restructure developed with implementation set for end of June.
- The amalgamation of the rural area teams into one location at Towcester.
- Development of one IT system with rural area adoption already complete.
- Development of single enforcement team bringing capacity across West Northants.
- Improvement in stats across all areas now consistently above Government targets.
- Validation in Northampton now less than 2 days.
- Re-introduction of Pre application advice for major enquiries.
- Decision to change local plan from a 2 stage to 1 stage process speeding up the overall timescale for the plan production.
- Reduction in number of planning application following peer review.
- Establishment of single Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 team which will ensure more transparency and rigour in ensuring funding for communities is released quickly enabling investment in infrastructure.
- Setting up a developers forum to assist in the future process improvements moving forward.

Our Challenges

The Place Directorate faced many financial pressures and risk to service; the issues in the Ukraine caused huge pressures on building energy and fleet fuel costs as well as provider costs within home to school transport, leisure, and other services. Increases in material costs, and lack of material availability, also impacted construction, development, and maintenance works.

Some changes in legislation related to the use of red diesel and new requirements for the collection and disposal of upholstered furniture also placed additional financial pressures on the waste service.

Vacancies and difficulties in recruitment were also faced, putting pressure on staffing costs to deliver our frontline services, which had an impact on service delivery at times. Achieving recruitment was challenging during the year due to the stability of the Council during restructuring and in regard to the uncertainty around pay and conditions. As a result, the directorate has had to utilise a higher level of contractors and agency workers than would have normally expected but even securing these in the desired quantity and quality has been difficult.

Throughout the year, the management team has focussed on identifying and delivering savings across the service areas to mitigate the pressures; this resulted in a significant reduction in overall overspend. Reducing the overall pressure of over £10m to just over £1m. Work has continued to finalise remaining disaggregation projects as well as restructures to improve efficiencies and service provision.

Assets & Environment

- Recruitment to vacant posts, notably estates, flood & water, and construction, and retaining staff in the face of competition from other employers.
- Construction cost inflation.
- Managing the Northampton markets whilst they are away from Market Square.

Regulatory services

- Martyn's Law - changes resulting from the experiences of the Manchester bombing.
- Air Quality Strategy requirements with increased focus on particulate matter.
- Implications of the Gambling White Paper, changes in Licensing Act Guidance and more stringent requirements around taxi licensing.

- Building Safety Act implications
- Impact of EU (European Union) exit for legislation across Reg Services [Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill]
- New Foods Standards delivery model.
- The Serious Violence Duty policy has come into effect, placing a new legal requirement on a range of public sector organisations to share information locally to reduce incidents of violence, like knife and gun crime, and prevent loss of life.
- Experienced ongoing problems with recruitment of appropriately qualified staff especially in Trading Standards and Building Control which resulted in significant pressure on existing team members.

Highways and Transport

- Managing the expectation of services delivery within available budget envelope
- HS2 delivery impact on network.

Waste Services

- Expecting long awaited statutory guidance from DEFRA regarding 'consistency of waste collections'. The guidance is likely to require local authorities to adjust their waste collection services, for example the frequency of collection, the materials that are collected, or any charges that are applied.
- Number of complex waste contracts require re-procurement, but the adoption of the waste strategy must come first. Therefore, timescales will be challenging.

Planning

- Future review of Planning and significant change to the Local Plan process has been mooted.

Our priorities for 2023/24

Assets & Environment

- Continuing to provide high quality parks, including retaining six green flags, and providing many activities and amenities to keep visitors of all ages active and engaged with their natural surroundings.
- Develop WNC's Tree Policy and Strategy, and commence implementation.
- Publication and consultation on the Parks Development Strategy.
- Proceeding with the next stages of the RAIN project.
- Development of first draft of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Northamptonshire.
- Selected sites and moved towards implementation of large-scale solar generation (PV).
- Substantial development of asset strategy / asset management plan (AMP).
- Develop and implement policies for:
 - Asbestos management.
 - Driving at work.
 - Use of use spaces.
- Delivering ongoing programme of works to ensure schools are warm, safe, and dry.
- Implementing Office Optimisation Stage 2.
- Achieving business plan and budget approval for the New Towcester Care Home.
- Start of construction for the New SEND school, St John's Tiffield.
- Delivery of budgeted savings/income generation targets.
- Ready for full implementation of the new integrated property records and computer aided facilities management (CAFM) system on 1st April 2024.
- New parking payment system for Brixworth and Daventry Country Parks, improving ease of use and efficiency of operation.
- Publication of Climate Strategies for Estate, and Construction & Maintenance, and substantial progress on Fleet.
- Completion of decarbonising heating at four leisure centres.
- Completion of feasibility for a sustainable heat network for Northampton and Rothersthorpe and if appropriate seeking funding for the next stage of work.
- Procuring a commercial partner for delivering EV charging infrastructure and securing the capital grant for this work.
- Implementing the Delapre Park active travel scheme.
- Complete integration of Property Response services, integrating the former NBC services.
- Awarding new integrated service contracts including:
 - Security.
 - Fleet.
- Completing recruitment to long-term structure, especially in Property Strategy & Estates.

Our priorities for 2023/24

Waste Services

- Deliver efficient Waste Services and street cleansing to all West Northants residents, resolving any issues that arise.
- Deliver budget savings as per proposals in the medium term financial plan.
- Progress comprehensive review of waste health and safety processes and implement improvements.
- Deliver communications and education programme including:
 - Food Waste Project
 - Contamination Campaign
 - Don't bin batteries Campaign.
- Collaborative working with other teams to achieve corporate outcomes, including:
 - With Regulatory Services to help delivery cleaner communities
 - With Planning to help secure money from developers for waste services
 - With Regeneration to ensure waste is considered in the town centre improvement projects
 - With Sustainability to plan reduction in carbon emissions from waste service.
- Complete Procurement of waste contracts required by end of March 2024 including:
 - New Dry Mixed Recyclables Contract for Daventry & South
 - Garden Waste Permit provider
 - Bin Provider
 - New Food Waste Collection vehicle
 - Vehicle Grounds Maintenance Contractor for Closed Landfills
 - Closed Landfill Technical Support
- Agree and adopt waste resources strategy for West Northamptonshire.
- Prepare for and commence procurement of:
 - Residual waste treatment contract(s)
 - Household Waste Recycling Centre Contract.
- Implement new Direct Debit system for garden waste, including ensuring a smooth renewals process in March 2024.
- Review bulky waste collections (including cross-area collection, rebrand / name, reuse)
- Review Highways Cleansing Plan (including 'pooling' resource, consistent approach & coordination with WNC Highways and National Highways)
- Review of South area collection rounds & route planning.

Our priorities for 2023/24

Regulatory Services

- Completion and implementation of service restructure to deliver benefits of aggregation.
- Development of Business Support and Charged-for service including Primary Authority Partnerships, Training and Business Advice and scoping the potential for development of further services across the full range of Regulatory Services.
- Consultation and implementation of a varied Public Spaces Protection Order to cover the Northampton area. This will address dog control and smoking in key public locations.
- Progress the adoption of a single taxi licensing policy for West Northants.
- Implementation of a new Street Trading Policy for West Northants.
- Working with funding from Public Health to deliver a targeted programme of work on illicit tobacco sales.
- Progressing the DEFRA Air Quality Grant funded projects. These focus on the monitoring of traffic pollution in the Northampton area, integration with traffic management systems and provision of public information on air pollution levels and on the development of a full evidence base to assess the economic, social, and environmental costs and benefits of implementing further smoke control measures across West Northants.
- Ongoing focus on environmental crime to include work with University of Northampton on projects to probe root causes of fly tipping and ongoing deployment of CCTV cameras.
- Progress the declaration of a revised Air Quality Management Area for the Northampton area and work with partners to develop an action plan to improve air quality in the area.
- Complete procurement of contracts to deliver:
 - Littering and other environmental crime enforcement
 - Stray dog collection and kennelling
 - Local Authority funerals (working in partnership with the Coroner's Office)
- Progress the procurement of a suitable back office system for Environmental Health and Licensing, ensuring appropriate linkage with the Trading Standards system.
- Finalise and progress the adoption of a Contaminated Land Strategy.
- Collaborative work with other teams to develop corporate outcomes:
 - Working to secure the delivery of Cleaner Communities (working with colleagues in Waste, Highways, Community Safety and Engagement)
 - Working with colleagues in Housing, Planning and Public Health to address the needs of the Travelling Community.
- Working with Regeneration to ensure that Licensing, waste, and Health Protection factors are considered in the planning of town centre improvement projects.
- Working with system wide partners to assist in the delivery of public health outcomes across the LAPs.
- Progressing effective communications campaigns dealing with:
 - Cleaner Communities
 - Food Safety and Health and Safety
 - Consumer Protection
 - Building Regulation

Our priorities for 2023/24

Highways and Transport

- Stabilisation following disaggregation.
- Embed new Highways contract changes.
- Recruit to vacant roles across the service to enable full delivery.
- Complete work on Bus Service Review and implement outputs.
- Complete review of Community Transport and implement outputs.
- Complete roll out of new Home to School Transport CRM and Route Planning System.
- Complete Under 16 Home to School policy consultation and publish new policy in time for choices relating to 24/25 intake.
- Complete Post 16 Home to School policy consultation and publish new policy in time for choices relating to 24/25 intake.
- Deliver further efficiencies within Home to School transport operations.
- Deliver efficiencies within Highways maintenance operations using innovative technology and techniques to deliver better outcomes within the budget envelope.
- Assuming that permission is granted by DfT, implement first phase of Moving Traffic Enforcement roll out.
- Begin work on new WNC Local Transport Plan.
- Begin review of Highways Asset Management Strategy.
- Commence work on a new Strategic Transport Model.
- Delivery of ATF4 Delapre Park scheme and Active Travel Capability Funded activity.
- A43 Phase 3 business case and funding progression.

Planning Service

- Completion and implementation of service restructure to deliver benefits of aggregation, including ensuring we recruit good quality people to our remaining vacant position. This will also add to our commitment to improving our customer journey and experience with efficient communications to all users of the service.
- The bringing together of all staff in one location at Towcester as our main base whilst adopting a hub and spoke model of ensuring that we have touch down and meeting facilities in all of our main towns.
- That we embed new ways of working and drive efficient and effective outcomes meeting all targets on a consistent basis.
- Further consultation on the Local Plan which will bring it one step closer to adoption in 2024.
- Develop and clarify changes in legislation such as the requirement in the Environment Act for Planning to introduce conditions within planning approvals to implement Biodiversity net gain (BNG) This is a way to contribute to the recovery of nature while developing land and will apply from November 2023.
- Develop and implement a programme of training for Committee members, Members of Council more generally and to include our town and parish councils.
- To make available pre-application planning advice to all types of applications before the end of 2023.
- To improve collaborative working across all statutory consultees and internal representatives of the Council.
- Working with legal to improve the quality and consistency of legal agreements.
- To improve the opportunities for members involvement in the planning process including the development of S106 discussions required to mitigate the impact of development within their wards.

Our Transformation Priorities

- **System aggregation** to improve the effectiveness of the service, creating greater efficiencies and team working:
 - Assets and Environment
 - Regulatory Services
 - Planning
- **Policy change** and review of service provision within Home to School transport including a review of potential walking routes and independent travel training
- **Service improvements** within Planning to ensure a robust performance framework, aligned processes and a Local Plan to support WNC growth
- **Service restructures:**
 - Planning
 - Regulatory Services
- **Post Room centralisation** – decommissioning of the following major sites:
 - Lodge Road
 - The Forum
 - One Angel Square
- **Strategy co-ordination** – creation of the programme plan to co-ordinate and monitor the development of the strategies to be developed this year and next.
- **Management development days** – focusing on culture and behaviours, enabling services to work collaboratively to maximise benefits for our residents, and supporting managers to remove barriers to achieve better outcomes.

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead we will focus on 6 key elements:

- Changing the perception of West Northants as a place to live, work, invest and do business.
- We will continue investing in services and work with our communities and partners in ensuring that residents are proud of where they live and that they feel part of and have ownership in their place.
- That we continue develop the key strategies and action plans that ensure we deliver against our priorities and that we provide all of our residents the opportunity to live their best life.
- That we continue to develop strong partnerships with our businesses and investors in ensuring we create a strong, resilient economy and are seen as a place where things get done.
- That we continue to improve on the basics but also identify the innovation and best practice that maximise efficiency and delivery.
- Improved communications and customer service, ensuring that our services are easy to contact and that we resolve issues quickly and keep people informed.

Portfolio Holder Forewords

Our ambitions to help you live your best life

The health and care system in Northamptonshire has recently undergone huge transformational change into a unitary model at Local Government level and with the development of Integrated Care Northamptonshire (ICN) within health.

These changes have enabled and created more focus on how services are delivered through the system to help residents 'Live Your Best Life' with improved quality and life chances. Helping residents to live their best life is a priority for us and 10 joint ambitions have been developed to make this happen. These are:

- The best start in life
- Access to the best available education and learning
- Opportunity to be fit, well and independent
- Employment that keeps them and their families out of poverty
- Good housing in places which are clean and green
- Safety in their homes and when out and about

- Feel connected to their families and friends
- The chance for a fresh start when things go wrong
- Access to health and social care when they need it
- To be accepted and valued simply for who they are.

These ambitions set a clear direction of travel for us and together with the development of the place agenda and Local Area Partnerships we can shape more joined-up delivery of services to prevent duplication, as well as support residents to fulfil a happy, healthier life with access to the services they need. Within our Local Area Partnerships we are increasingly focused on delivering these joined up services designed to meet local needs and reduce health and wellbeing inequalities.

Cllr Matt Golby, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health



Working towards a better start for our young people

The last year has seen an increase in demand on our services and one that looks likely to continue in an upward trajectory in areas such as special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) places, where we expect to see growth of 25% by 2025 as an example. This sets a context for positive change that we are driving. We know that we are not yet meeting all the ambitions, but we are clear what needs to be done and we are well underway with our improvement journey across our service areas. Our plans will make a difference for our children and young people now, as well as in the future.

We have already created an additional 40 new special school places in the last year and have launched our new SEND Ranges which provide a detailed guide for all education staff working with children with SEND to help identify the right support and improve outcomes.

The demand on Children's Social Care has also continued to rise as we see the latent effects of Covid, the cost of living challenge and as we progress our improvement journey. Combined with the national challenge around

placement demand and supply and reliance on agency staff this has caused significant pressure on budgets and led to significant overspend in meeting our duties. But we have seen service and practice improvements noted by Ofsted and we are working closely with the Children's Trust to develop ways of reducing cost, increasing early intervention and transforming in line with best practice.

We know we cannot offer the best possible education, care and support for our children and young people without listening to our families, carers and partners to hear their voices, learn from their experiences and agree our priorities for the future. We are committed to continuing the positive progress made so far and building on the engagement work and consultations we have started about future service design.

Cllr Fiona Baker, Cabinet Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills



What we do in People Directorate

The People Directorate is made up of the following services:-



Our Vision

The People Directorate encompasses a huge range of services, many of which deliver statutory services and are designed to be a safety net for our most vulnerable residents or those facing a crisis. We know however that prevention and maintaining independence is key to managing demand and cost and we are working to help people to live well, stay well and age well. Our vision is to work with partners and colleagues, using a strengths-based approach, to ensure customers are able to access good quality services, appropriate to their needs, which promote and enable independence wherever possible. With the Live your Best Life ambitions at the heart of what we do, it is our aim to use these ambitions as a focal point when designing or shaping the services we deliver.

We are in the midst of developing Local Area Partnerships in West Northants, which, once

established, will give our services the ability to understand the specific needs of the demographic that an area serves and will enable us to work with our partners to address those needs and tailor service provision accordingly. In addition, LAPs will enable us to strive to reduce the health inequalities that are experienced by some cohorts and communities and help us to make links with other agencies that will ultimately give us the opportunity to improve the lives and experiences of the residents of West Northamptonshire.

In 3-5 years, the ambition is that we will have made essential strides for the wider system to work in synergy, through a newly revised Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Ultimately, we aim for people living in West Northamptonshire to live independently, with a better quality of life and where possible, we will help more people to help themselves to do this.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Adults

Adults Services

- A review of the Target Operating Model was completed which has resulted in an action plan based on the findings from data analysis and staff feedback.
- A restructure took place to increase the Community teams by combining them with the Inclusion teams – this has improved pathways for the people we support and improved efficiencies.
- Work continues to review and make improvements to the case management system that is used.
- Have continued to use the '3 Conversations' approach to work with people
- In 2022/23 the teams received over 10,000 requests for support, resulting in 2,367 new people receiving long term support.
- In total in 2022/23 4716 people accessed long term support over the year.
- Implemented new internal governance frameworks with clear communication channels.
- Adult Services Learning and Development disaggregated and has moved back to the service.
- Worked closely with the MHLDA to reduce the number of LDA inpatients.
- Implemented a project and working group to improve data quality.
- Implemented new performance dashboards for all teams.

Discharge to Assess

- Completed a full redesign of home-based reablement service to increase number of starts to the service.
- Completed a full redesign of bed-based reablement service and opened a new dual registered unit with our community health partner to run a new "Recovering Independence Bed Unit" at our Turn Furlong Specialist Care Centre reducing lengths of stay and allowing us to step down people from hospital and receive rehabilitation and therapy that supports their return to independence.
- We have also optimised our North Specialist Care Centres in the North with Spinneyfield costs reduced and Thackley Green being transferred to North Northants to run.
- Through service re-design programme of home-based reablement service increased front line staffing model by 30%.
- Through service re-design programme of bed-based reablement service created an integrated health and social care operating model with dual registration.
- Completed a review of the roles and operating model of the Transfer of Care Hub.
- Home-based reablement service underwent CQC inspection and obtained a Good rating.
- Completed a procurement and implementation programme to replace provider applications.
- Designed and implemented a complex discharge dashboard across all partners.
- Worked with the voluntary sector, GPs and community health partners to reduce admissions to hospital by 300 a month.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Adults

Safeguarding and Wellbeing

- The Assistive Technology team has continued to explore and deliver new and innovative ways of supporting people to remain independent in their own home, this year they have been shortlisted for numerous awards in relation to their use of remote monitoring to which is reducing the need and frequency of hospital admissions for people living in care homes.
- In readiness for the introduction of the CQC Local Assurance Framework, a self-assessment of governance, strategies and service delivery has been completed and this has enabled identification of areas to develop over the coming months and years which will strengthen the overall approach to quality assurance.
- Following the disaggregation of the Deprivation of Liberty (DOLs) service work to effectively reduce the number of people awaiting assessment has been underway.
- The Single Handed Care programme has worked to support both people receiving services and care providers to reduce the number of people it requires to care for people requiring manual handling. This has reduced the pressure on care resource across the local health and care system.

Commissioning

- The recommissioning of care home services is out to tender.
- The recommissioning of home care services is out to tender.
- An ICS integrated reablement service has been put in place.
- A quality improvement project has been concluded.
- We have over performed in Direct Payments savings by circa £1.5m.
- Completed Fair Cost of Care (FCOC) exercise in line with DHSC requirements.
- Published WNC Market Sustainability Plan.

Public Health

- Successful disaggregation of the team.
- Successful restructure and realignment of portfolios with almost all roles now recruited to.
- Continuing development and progression of the Local Area Partnerships and successful pilot of two LAP areas.
- Progression of successful plan to align reserve spending to key priority areas.
- Focus around the anti-poverty agenda has led to some key projects progressing in this area such as Money and Debt Advice and Warm, Welcoming Spaces – the DPH Annual Report which is currently being signed off is also focused on the cost of living crisis.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Children's Services

Northamptonshire Children's Trust

- Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) delivers children's social care statutory services and completes its own Annual Report each year which is part of the contract.
- Children's Services following Ofsted Inspection in October 2022 moved from Inadequate judgement to one which Requires Improvement to be Good.

Children Education Services

- Children's Services have established an Improvement Board and Improvement plan in Q4 of 2022/23 to support service improvement across education to support improvement during 2023/24 and beyond.
- Positive recruitment has led to a permanent senior management structure, Director of Children's Services (DCS), Deputy DCS, Assistant Director (AD) for Education and AD for Commissioning and Partnerships all in post and all permanent. This will bring stability and enable further improvement across services.

School Improvement Service

- 2022/23 has seen some positive Ofsted inspections of schools, particularly where intensive support has been given by the Council.
- A series of successful primary heads network meetings were held.
- There have been changes made to the School Attendance Support Service to create stronger links with schools, which includes trialling targeted support meetings.
- There has been a closer working partnership with primary alternate provisions to look at earlier intervention for primary aged pupil at risk of Permanent Exclusion.
- Early years provider network meetings have been established and held termly with growing numbers of attendees.
- Safeguarding in Education Services will disaggregate from NNC enabling a stronger focus on schools, but WNC will still working closely with colleagues in NNC.

SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities)

- We prioritised work to create more SEND school places for children, including progressing plans for a new 230-place special school in Tiffield near Towcester.
- A further 20 places were also created at Hardingstone and Castle Academies and new 'SEND Ranges' have also been introduced which provide a set standard for each child or young person in an education setting to better outline what support is needed based on children's individual needs or behaviours.
- SEND Improvement focus – co-production events have secured wide engagement to develop new SEND strategy.

Early Help/Best Start in Life – Youth Work Based Approaches

- A partnership board has been created to develop a youth offer for West Northants.
- A recent LGA Peer Review praised our approach and mapped the next steps.
- A voluntary sector led collaboration approach is being developed and will provide support to ensure the development of youth work services, including the qualified workforce in conjunction with our Youth Offer Board.
- WNC have supported successful bids to the Youth Investment Fund, bringing capital into the development of youth centres; and submitted a Youth Endowment Fund bid to assist the rapid development of our youth offer.



Our Challenges

Commissioning

- Attracting staff to work in the in-house provider services has been a pressure throughout the year and continues to be a challenge moving into next year, this has created an increased reliance on agency staffing to enable care provision to be delivered safely.
- There has been an increased level of demand in safeguarding which has created a pressure on all teams in maintaining response times.
- Staff turnover in finance operations, which manages financial assessments and payments, remains high.
- Difficult to improve services due to the need to replace the core systems with integrated platforms
- Adults self-funder care income has reduced.

Actions taken to manage spend and improve services

- A significant amount of time has been invested into recruitment activity to attract staff to hard to fill posts and create a stable and efficient workforce.
- Recruitment of additional staff to support and drive the quality of work that front facing teams are delivering through the review and implementation of more robust processes and procedures.
- A new approach has been piloted to deal with the increased demand on safeguarding activity through more effective triaging at the front door of the service.
- There has been intelligent use of grant funding allocation.
- An online financial assessment portal has been implemented.
- Integration of the Welfare Benefits Resource into the centralised WNC Team.
- Development of performance reports to highlight key areas of performance.

Public Health

- The disaggregation of Public Health Northamptonshire and subsequent team restructure for Public Health West Northants.
- Complex budget arrangements surrounding the disaggregation led to difficulty in budget monitoring.
- Complexity around contract arrangements post disaggregation has been a challenge.
- Ongoing Covid-19 response and recovery has contributed to delays in focusing on other areas.

Actions taken to manage spend and improve services

- In service Star Chamber budget meetings have taken place to assess and challenge spend in all areas of the Public Health budget.
- A Public Health Framework has been developed to clearly set out budgetary decision making processes and expectations on grant spending.
- A full business case and governance process has been put into place to manage requests for reserve spend and ensure approval processes are robust.
- Reserve spend is being reviewed and aligned to priority areas to ensure appropriate allocation is given.
- All spend must be in line with grant conditions so any additional budgetary spend is linked to these via the business case.



Our Priorities for 2023/24

Adults Services

- Improved outcomes for people – reduced waiting lists to access social care, improved scheduled review activity, improved national performance and improved quality of all services and support provided.
- Review of front door and duty processes.
- Implement lead worker model for people supported by Learning Disability Service.
- Deliver Supported Living review project.
- Develop/Implement clear Moving into Adulthood pathways.
- Aligning Community teams with the Local Area Partnerships.
- Continue to embed connecting conversations model and improve community and partnership links.
- Scoping of the Social Work System
- Replacement of the Sigmund access group.
- Embedding of Discharge to Assess policy/team.
- Review/Redesign Flow Capacity Team.
- Design Integrated pathway for bed based delivery.
- Pilot performance framework.
- Embed and grow the Reablement West team.
- Review the quality and delivery of Turn Furlong and work towards achieving outstanding rating.
- Ensuring we are responsive to safeguarding concerns and that enquiries deliver the outcomes people desire.
- Embracing digital and technological advances to promote and enable independence.
- Ensure council owned care homes are of good quality and meet the needs of older people.
- Developing longer term strategic plans for the future provision of directly delivered care services which meet the changing needs and expectations of service users.
- CQC Assurance Framework – supporting the delivery of a meaningful action plan to address the recommendations from the CQC self assessment exercise.
- To develop the Supported Living Strategy – review contractual arrangements – to minimise isolation and maximise independence.
- Home Care redesign – make efficiencies by redesigning how these are managed – reduce amount of individual providers and grow successful ones.
- Property – Review of properties where inhouse service delivery is present – scoping/demand analysis.
- Make provision and adaptation to the service to accommodate the Social Care Reform which is being implemented by October 2025.

Our Priorities for 2023/24

Public Health

- Development of Local Area Partnerships (LAPs), embedding them and making them sustainable, driving efficiencies and innovation within the system.
- Continue to align spend with the anti-poverty, prevention and health inequalities agenda to ensure Public Health (PH) reserve spend is maximised within the local agenda.
- Work to redesign the 3 Conversations offer with Adult Social Care/Supporting Independence Programme.
- Complete realignment of service, growing and embedding the team, including an enhanced Health Protection function and nurture the recently re-established training status for West Northants PH.
- Build and embed wider relationships, with public health at the forefront of strategic thinking and enable a 'Public Health Council'.
- Bring forward the Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

Children's Services

- Safeguarding in Education Service to be built in WNC following disaggregation.
- Disaggregation of the Intelligence Client Function (ICF).
- Development of Family Hubs linked closely with the LAPs work to develop a Universal EH Offer.
- Programme of recommissioning of Education contracts and Public Health contracts post disaggregation.
- Development and Implementation of Family Hubs and youth offer aligned with the 0-19 agenda.
- Joint commissioning of health, social care and education and through the ICS.
- Ensuring commissioning is based on engagement with children and young people and their families so services arranged have the best fit to need.
- Develop the Best Start in Life Strategy in partnership with the Local Area Partnership to have a family hub offer.
- Redevelop and relaunch the Local Offer for children with additional needs.
- Recruit additional resources to manage the current demand and seek solutions around the lack of EP provision to address the waiting list for EHCP and move to a position where statutory timescales are being met.
- Develop a solid youth offer which starts to ensure children living in WNC has the best start to life and the right support at the right time when its needed.
- Continue to make change across children's services and providing a service which is judged good or better.
- SEND service is anticipating a SEND inspection, and inspection readiness is key for this next year.



Communities and Opportunities

Portfolio Holder Forewords

Working collectively for our residents

The UK housing sector faces significant challenges, with cost-of-living pressures further increasing demand on our frontline services. We are responding by fundamentally changing the way we provide housing support services, improving our teams' ability to respond to national challenges at a local level, and strengthening the joint commitments with our partners to work collectively for the benefit of our residents. In addition, our enforcement specialists are tirelessly pursuing rogue landlords to the full extent of the law. We have a clear message that contempt for safety and our community will not be tolerated. Elsewhere, we continue to support the leisure sector's recovery while improving the quality of facilities available to communities. Work is underway to develop a stunning programme of cultural and musical events that will help to make West Northamptonshire a destination of choice.

Cllr Adam Brown, Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure



Investing in a vibrant future

This is an exciting chapter for West Northamptonshire as we continue to pursue an ambitious growth agenda. Our teams have secured tens of millions of pounds of funding to invest in revitalising our town centres and high streets. We have commenced regeneration programmes that will breathe new life into assets that will help us attract investment in the local economy and provide public places that are truly valued by our communities. Coupled with efforts to define a fresh approach to promoting all that the area has to offer, I'm confident West Northamptonshire reputation as a destination of choice will continue to grow through the delivery of our ambitious place shaping and tourism strategies.

I am also proud that our teams have been recognised for the support provided to local businesses, as they spearhead efforts to maintain a vibrant local economy and a prosperous West Northants.

Cllr Daniel Lister, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth



Welcoming people for who they are

Our services form a cornerstone of partnership efforts to reduce anti-social behaviour and criminal activity to keep our communities safe and welcoming. The action days and targeted interventions coordinated by our teams tackle issues head-on, making a direct and positive impact on areas of concern, as well as raising the profile of initiatives among wider communities. Our ambition to be an area that welcomes people for who they are and create environments for people to thrive is reflected in our dedication to supporting over 500 people through refugee resettlement programmes, and the creation of almost 100 warm and welcoming spaces at the heart of communities to help people facing cost-of-living challenges.

Cllr David Smith, Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Engagement and Regulatory Services



What we do in Communities and Opportunities

Communities & Opportunities services are at the forefront of shaping local communities for future generations.

Our services are the connective tissue between 'place' related asset-focussed services and 'people' related response-led services.

By leveraging the relationships we have with strategic partners across the public, private and voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors; we are in a unique position to work holistically with our residents to provide best value for the finite resources of the council and deploy our services to areas where the greatest impact can be achieved.

Our services work against a turbulent backdrop of evolving legislative requirements, increasing demand on frontline services and a real-terms reduction in funding resulting from external factors, such as rising inflation and the cost of living, that are beyond our control. The complexity of services, along with the high number of system stakeholders and partners we have, means that working in a wholly transparent and collaborative way is essential to successful delivery. Meeting our statutory duties and coping with the increased demand will more than ever require a join up with other services (like children's, adults and public health) and a greater focus on prevention and early intervention when a crisis happens.

Housing and Communities

Place Shaping



Our Vision

We will create strong and resilient communities that provide opportunities for growth that both empower and enable residents to live safe, healthy and enriched lives.

- Our services will be resilient and sustainable, with the ability to adapt quickly to the pressures of a complex local government landscape.
- Our leadership team will be dynamic and empowering; creating environments for our employees to thrive and creative innovate people-centric solutions.
- Our partnerships will be built on strong foundations, fostering a collective responsibility to work collaboratively to achieve the best outcome possible for residents, businesses and visitors.

Our service plans will be designed to deliver against both the Corporate Plan priorities and the Live Your Best Life ambitions.

Through our contribution to the establishment of local area partnerships, we will continue to refine our approach to early intervention and prevention in tandem with our transformation programme so that our services are primed to respond to changes in need and make sound, intelligence-led decisions.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Housing and Communities

Community Safety, Engagement & Resettlement

- Established 96 warm welcoming spaces that supported nearly 35,000 residents throughout January and February and facilitated over 2,000 referrals for wrap-around support as part of delivering the Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- Facilitated more than 60 community engagement events to enhance community relationships and celebrate diversity, including: Srebrenica, International Youth Day, International Women's Day, Northampton Pride and Diwali.
- Achieved 100% victim satisfaction in over 100 anti-social behaviour interventions during the process of investigating cases, including: community protection warnings, injunctions and closure orders.
- Successfully bid for more than £1.7m of Safer Streets funding to enable a range of measures, including physical improvements, to make our streets safer.
- Continued to develop a partnership-focussed approach including:
 - establishing the Community Safety Strategy as a 'live strategy' detailing our commitment to tackle crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour.
 - organising display of the Knife Angel sculpture, community safety education and awareness package for schools, and campaigns such as Hate Crime Week and 16 Days of Activism.
 - creation of the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Board and completion of a needs assessment to identify gaps in support, and Domestic Abuse Strategy developed to meet our statutory duties.
 - participation in a multi-agency approach to respond to 39 cases of cuckooing, supporting victims and tackling offenders.
 - coordinating several night-time economy interventions in Northampton town centre: launching 'it only takes one' campaign; two Public Place Protection Orders; safer routes home initiative.

Housing Solutions

- Improved our response to 16/17-year olds who find themselves threatened with or experiencing homelessness through co-development of a joint protocol with Northamptonshire Children's Trust, supported by a full training package.
- Led a partnership approach to secure almost £320,000 to fund circa 40 tenancies to support homeless prison-leavers to access the private rented sector, reducing chances of re-offending.
- Developed a care leavers' protocol and implemented a multi-agency care leavers' transition panel to support 16/17-year-olds in danger of crisis and post-18-year-olds at risk of exploitation.
- Achieved circa 440 successful outcomes to prevent homelessness.
- Achieved circa 450 successful outcomes to relieve homelessness (where an applicant is homeless and eligible for support).



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Housing and Communities

Housing Strategy & Partnerships

- Adopted the Housing Strategy 2022-25 to achieve 14 strategic priorities under the themes of: deliver homes people need and can afford; improve the quality, standard and safety of homes and housing services; support residents to live healthy, safe, independent and active lives; support thriving and sustainable communities.
- Secured £2.3m in government funding through Rough Sleeper Initiative 5 to support people (at risk of) sleeping rough over the period 2022-25.
- Delivered a total of 518 new affordable homes, of which 77 are council homes with the others delivered through registered providers.
- Secured over £3m to fund energy improvement works to over 100 properties as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, working with Northamptonshire Partnership Homes.
- Successfully delivered nine out of 10 properties to support single homeless people as part of the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme, with the final property expected to be complete imminently.

Private Sector Housing

- The Home Adaptations team continued to support residents to live safely in their homes through the Disabled Facilities Grant programme and discretionary grant programme, spending £3.2m supporting 253 residents living in a variety of owner-occupied, private rented and social rented properties.
- The Housing Enforcement team ensured effective licensing and regulation of the local private rented sector (circa 33,000 households according to the 2021 census), including:
 - regulation of over 1400 shared houses in multiple occupation.
 - issuing financial penalties totalling £54,150 to 15 landlords operating 13 private rented properties for non-compliance with the Housing Act 2004.
 - taking enforcement action through the magistrate's court against 10 landlords operating 18 unlicensed houses in multiple occupation resulting in fines and a contribution to court costs in excess of £400,000.
 - undertaking 422 property inspections to support resettlement of refugees.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Place Shaping

Economic Growth & Inward Investment

- Submitted a partnership-developed investment plan to the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing & Communities to draw down £5.4m of capital revenue funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which aligns with the government's mission to develop 'pride in place' focussing on the priorities of: communities and place, supporting local businesses, and people and skills.
- With partners, developed an addendum to the investment plan with partners to draw down a further £1.3m of government funding through the Rural England Prosperity Fund to address rural transport challenges and grant funding for businesses.
- Developed the Explore West Northants app to showcase local businesses, attractions, events, walking paths and more, which will be a long-term tool to promote everything that area has to offer for residents and visitors alike.
- Scooped the prestigious 'best in the region' award for support provided to the local small business community at the inaugural Federation of Small Business (FSB) Local Government Awards and was successful in winning the 'All round Small Business Friendly' regional category.

Libraries, Museums & Community Hubs

Museum Service

- Regained Arts Council England accreditation.
- Gained Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations status.
- Won Best Exhibition Award in the 2022 Northamptonshire Heritage Forum Awards for 'We Are Northampton'.
- Museum design won a Council for the Protection of Rural England architectural award that recognises excellence in melding new build with historic buildings.

Library Service

- Successfully transferred St James Library to be the eighth community managed library in West Northants in July.
- Delivered welcome and support sessions in libraries as part of the Ukrainian Resettlement programme.
- Delivered warm spaces initiative from all libraries over the winter.
- The Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire delivered kickstart grants to 10 local small and medium sized enterprises via Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport funding.
- Welcomed 854,390 visitors to libraries in West Northamptonshire.

Adult Education

- Secured £1.9m Multiply funding for three years to deliver numeracy interventions.
- Procured three providers to work alongside Adult Learning to deliver against the 10 Multiply interventions.
- 3,231 unique learners enrolled with numbers returning to pre-Covid rates by year end.



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Place Shaping

Regeneration & Major Projects

- A contract has been awarded and work has begun on the flagship Market Square transformation project to positively transform the heart of Northampton town centre.
- The Vulcan Works community and creative hub has been completed and been operational since early 2023, attracting some of the more innovative and creative businesses operating in West Northamptonshire.
- Towns Fund Businesses cases: The Regeneration team have worked collaboratively with the Northampton Forward Board to draft, refine and obtain approvals for all projects within its £24.9m Towns Fund and £8.4m Future High Street Fund regeneration programmes.
- Delivered the £750,000 Northampton Bike Park, featuring facilities for all abilities of rider, from a skills area for children on balance bikes, to the most demanding trails for experts in mountain and BMX biking; all free to use.
- First phase of works on 24 Guildhall Road completed to create a gallery and artist space for NN Contemporary.
- Prepared and submitted a bid to the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 for a £50m project to create a new Leisure & Community Hub.

Sports, Leisure & Culture

- Allocated £250,000 of Section 106 funding towards supporting sports and community facilities to improve access to provision and encourage healthier communities.
- Kick-started the organisation's drive to attract major events by successfully claiming Host City and Host Venue statuses for Women's Rugby World Cup 2025 through thorough curation of the bidding process.
- Improved leisure centre facilities by refreshing swimming pool changing rooms and extending the gym at Daventry Leisure Centre and refurbishing the gym at Towcester Centre for Leisure.
- Received recognition through awards:
 - Towcester Centre for Leisure won the UK Active regional and national award for Leisure Centre of the Year
 - Trilogy Active won the UK Active award for Generation Active Award for their young people's membership and programmes.
- Supported the establishment of We Make Northampton, a cultural compact engaging with the cultural and creative organisations, businesses and higher and further education partners. Secured Arts Council England funding to progress compact and develop and launch a range of creative and cultural initiatives to support the regeneration of the town.



Directorate Challenges

Cost of living crisis and pandemic recovery

Frontline demand-led services (homelessness, debt and money advice) have experienced an increase in approaches which drives increased workloads and a pressure on supply. Partners across the voluntary and community sector have experienced similar circumstances, impacting their ability to effectively fulfil their commitments.

Pressure on social housing supply

A shortage of social housing has caused increased reliance on the private rented sector. Landlords are experiencing increasing mortgage payments alongside changes to requirements around Energy Performance Certificate ratings and tax which is driving them to exit the market, reducing the supply of private rented accommodation.

Surging demand for temporary accommodation for homeless households combined with an increase in costs of provision has caused increased financial pressures.

The upcoming closure of Afghan bridging accommodation places an increased burden on homeless services, as well as local information and advice services.

Construction cost inflation impacting capital delivery projects

Challenging market conditions in the construction industry are negatively impacting on levels of interest, and prices returned, which in several cases have exceeded pre-tender estimates, putting pressure on approved capital budgets. The construction industry has become increasingly risk averse which has impacted on prices and the level of interest from contractors in bidding for regeneration projects and new affordable housing schemes.

Increased operating costs

Increased operating costs puts some leisure centres at risk. A slow post-pandemic recovery followed by rising inflation has placed considerable strain on operator's business models, but we are working alongside leisure operators to reduce energy consumption, deliver the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, and access Sport England funding (£63m announced in March 2023 budget) to support the leisure sector.

Major event cancellations

Major events provide significant economic benefits and are a key feature of cultural development plans for the area, but organisers can cancel at various stages. We work closely with organisers to identify the risks and incorporate mitigations for the council within event agreements to minimise loss and impact, but wider economic benefits associated with the visitor economy are at risk.

Our Priorities for 2023/24 - Housing and Communities

Community Safety, Engagement and Resettlement



- Continued support for approximately 500 Ukrainians as part of the Homes for Ukraine Programme; and the move-on of Afghan guests through the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, delivering a commitment of at least 10 properties in West Northants and provision of wrap-around support.
- Develop the Community Grant Funding Framework to fairly fund local partners to support delivery of key services.
- Develop a strategic approach to working with voluntary and community sector including procurement of a Local Infrastructure Contract to increase capacity in the sector; procure a contract to provide community transport; procure a contract to provide information and welfare advice.
- Develop community hubs in local and trusted settings across our urban and rural geography to enable additional support wrapped around a primary need (provision of food, primary care, or a key form of advice).
- Deliver against a range of strategic priorities and associated action plans for: Anti-Poverty Strategy; Community Safety Strategy; Domestic Abuse Strategy; Serious Violence Duty.

Housing solutions



- Design, develop and implement an aggregated structure for the delivery of the homelessness and housing solutions team services.
- Reduce the cost of service provision by enhancing the preventative measures and tools to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation.
- Implement the outcomes of the Single Allocations Scheme review.
- Re-procure private sector accommodation through a newly reviewed dynamic purchasing system.
- Implement the finding of the Housing Solution service health check.
- Enhance and embed a positive working culture and behavioural framework.

Housing Strategy and Partnerships



- Deliver a new and consistent allocation scheme before March 2024.
- Develop and implement a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.
- Remodel and commission a new single homelessness accommodation pathway.
- Produce a development plan to increase delivery of affordable housing.
- Facilitate property acquisitions to provide a cost-effective alternative to expensive nightly-paid temporary accommodation.
- Deliver properties for families from Ukraine and Afghanistan through the Local Authority Housing Fund programme.
- Develop a new Supported Housing Strategy.
- Work in partnership with Northampton Partnership Homes to implement a new assurance framework to evidence compliance and service quality in response to the changing regulatory environment.

Private Sector Housing



- Continue the intelligence-led enforcement approach to regulating the private rented sector, seeing the conclusion of a number of significant prosecutions and provide assurances that the sector offers safe and secure accommodation.
- Undertake a housing stock condition survey to provide intelligence regarding the current state of housing, enabling the allocation of resources to ensure accommodation remains safe, secure and sustainable.
- Continue to deliver home adaptation services with confirmation that the council will continue to receive a Better Care Fund grant of c£2.7m for 2023/24.
- Deliver capital investment to see environmental improvements to the Ecton Lane travellers' site.

Our Priorities for 2023/24 - Place Shaping Services

Regeneration & Major Projects



- Market Square transformation, completion anticipated Summer 2024
- Old Black Lion, completion anticipated Spring 2024
- Northampton Social Enterprise Development Fund expected to conclude in Spring 2025
- 78 Derngate, practical completion expected April 2023
- 24 Guildhall Road, completion anticipated Spring 2024
- 35–45 Abington Street, Northampton, completion of pre-enabling works, including significant asbestos removal in by Spring 2024
- Four Waterside and Marefair development, technical survey work expected by Summer 2023 with developer procured for Spring 2024
- Marefair Heritage Park, completion of public consultation in April 2023
- Market Walk, Northampton, approval of grant funding agreement and exchange of property in April 2023.
- The development of a new holistic Regeneration Strategy, providing identification of regeneration opportunities across both rural and urban districts (completion in Autumn 2023).
- Creation of a new Daventry town centre investment plan and public realm strategy, helping to identify development opportunities across key sites (completion 2023/24).
- A new Place Vision Strategy to outline strategic ambitions and success criteria (completion Summer 2023).

Economic Growth & Inward Investment



- Develop an Employment & Skills Strategy.
- Develop a Visitor Economy/Tourism Strategy.
- Manage the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund programmes.
- Develop an Economic Growth & Investment Strategy, and inward investment action plan.
- Promote Northampton and West Northamptonshire through brand and place making activities, communications and use of social media.

Libraries, Museums & Community Hubs



- Deliver the three-year Multiply Funding to delivery numeracy opportunities.
- Review museums and library service provision, including schools' library service, to realise efficiencies.
- Deliver a new Library Strategy to make best use of our libraries as part of a wider cultural offer.
- Provide support and grants to small and medium sized enterprises via the Business & Intellectual Property Centre using UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Sports, Leisure & Culture



- Develop a Major Events Strategy.
- Develop a cultural and music events programme.
- Leisure contracts procurement (ready for tender ahead of March 2026).
- Rugby World Cup 2025 planning and delivery.
- Active Quarter (Northampton) engagement.
- Development of Cultural Compact (We Make Northampton).
- Management of Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions for sport and leisure.
- Develop a Sport, Leisure & Culture Strategy, including associated documents: Playing Pitch Strategy, Sports Facilities Strategy, and Local Football Facilities Plan.

Transforming and improving services

- Our Housing Solutions Programme will bring together staff and processes, with a strong focus on prevention, meeting housing needs and reducing the use of temporary accommodation.
- The Debt and Money Advice project will simplify the pathway for residents seeking advice and support on debt and money issues, working closely with our voluntary sector partners and internal staff to support as many residents as possible, at the earliest opportunity.
- We will be streamlining the community transport model, aligning funding, and exploring the feasibility of reaching more residents to access transport.
- We will explore how we use our buildings that house our libraries and museums to make sure we are using them in the best way possible, both practically and financially, through the building feasibility project.
- Work will restart to separate our Libraries Support Services from a lead-authority model with North Northamptonshire Council, following a pause instigated by the cost to both authorities.
- Supporting the directorate leadership team to undertake aggregation and restructures following the completion of a leadership team restructure, furthering our 'one council' approach and aligning processes and services to respond to local demand.



Looking ahead

Staff structures

We have recently implemented a management restructure in both housing and economic development to confirm permanent heads of service who can spearhead organisational design of services to meet demand and work in the most efficient way possible. In housing they will undertake wider service restructures to bring together former area-based teams. Some services will see an alignment of roles to common policy and processes, while others will undergo a full transformation to fundamentally change how they operate to meet evolving need and make services fit for the future based on best practice.

Policies, procedures and processes

Through our restructures and transformation programmes, we will be aligning the differences in operating procedures across services to create a consistent customer experience and improve efficiency in our services.

Strategic planning

We have developed a structured forward plan of directorate activity to give our leadership team high level oversight of upcoming work so that we can identify dependencies quicker and better coordinate our requests on enabling services.

Strategic partnerships

We continue to leverage our relationships with key partners, whether through formal forums such as the newly created Housing Partnership Board, or through personal relationships that our teams have developed and strengthened. We are fundamentally changing the way we work with the voluntary and community sector, to make better use of their expertise, resources and professional standing; and refine the way in which we can co-develop innovative solutions to challenges facing the council over the coming years.



Chief Executive's Directorate

Portfolio Holder Foreword

Enabling others to make a real difference

The Chief Executive's Directorate is at the heart of West Northamptonshire Council and plays a key role in enabling colleagues and councillors to deliver for our communities.

In our first two years as a new Council we have delivered at pace, fully restructuring the directorate to introduce a bold and progressive structure, creating new apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers, enabling career progression for our talented colleagues from our legacy councils and recruiting external colleagues who have brought fresh perspectives to the team.

We have delivered robust financial management across our directorate realising over £800k in savings whilst delivering additional in year savings to support the corporate position.

From implementing our ambitious new sustainability strategy to leading on exciting events for our communities such as the jubilee and coronation celebrations, our work is already making a real difference and we are extremely proud of the hard-working and passionate team we have built.

**Councillor Jonathan Nunn, Leader of the Council
and Cabinet Member for Strategy**



What we do



Our Vision

Chief Executive's Directorate leads the charge to make West Northants a great place to live, work, visit and thrive, enabled through:

- Developing our communications and engagement service to deliver a shared voice between residents, partners and the Council, focusing on prioritised campaigns with impact
- Driving our sustainability commitments to achieve net zero by 2030 for WNC and by 2045 for West Northants
- Enabling high performance and improving outcomes through data and insight.
- Delivering an efficient and effective Leader's Office and Chief Executive's Office enabling productivity and innovation
- Providing a high-quality Executive Support service to our senior leadership team
- Leading our Chairman and Lord Lieutenancy support to deliver on our civic commitments
- Championing the Armed Forces Covenant to ensure we meet our commitment to the armed forces community.



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

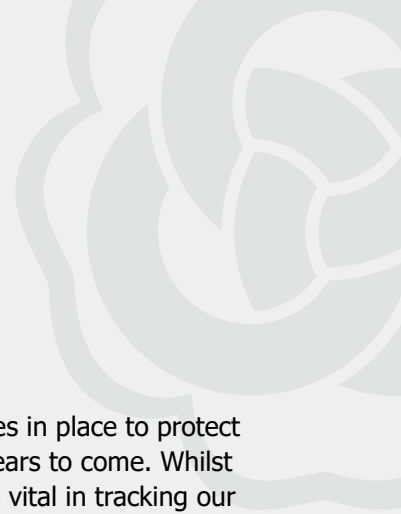
Communications and Engagement

- Our communications and engagement team continues to work successfully to raise the profile and reputation of our new council. During 2022/23 we have restructured and appointed a highly-motivated and talented team.
- We have been shortlisted for both LGC and MJ awards in the Health & Social Care integration, Climate Response, Large team of the year and Rising Star categories. This is an excellent reflection of all the hard work that colleagues and councillors have put in to make a difference in West Northants.
- We delivered an outstanding response to a series of important royal occasions over the last year including the Jubilee and Operation London Bridge. These events have brought residents together from across our communities.
- We have delivered high quality internal communications including all colleague briefings, Chief Executive's blog and vlog, coffee and chats with directors, keeping our colleagues informed and supporting the development of our new organisational culture.
- We have developed and launched a new fortnightly news bulletin for residents, achieving over 8,000 subscribers within its first few months.
- Our weekly Members briefing continues to develop with feedback from our councillors ensuring they receive proactive communications and are supported to keep residents informed.
- Our town and parish council briefings have received positive feedback and are helping to keep our local councils up to date with information and to support effective engagement with communities.
- We have delivered high quality and proactive campaigns in line with our corporate plan priorities including:
 - ▶ Cost of living, debt and money advice
 - ▶ Sustainable West Northants
 - ▶ Discover Northamptonshire: promoting the visitor economy
 - ▶ Equalities: International Women's Day, Pride, Black History Month
 - ▶ Health and Wellbeing: Weight management service, No smoking day, Well Northants
 - ▶ Regeneration: Market Square, talk of the town, Vulcan Works, Abington and Fish St Public Realm works, Marefair consultation, Active Quarter
 - ▶ Special Educational Needs and Disability strategy engagement
 - ▶ Rough sleeping and Homeless Strategy engagement
 - ▶ Community and Home to school transport
 - ▶ Homes for Ukraine and Afghan Resettlement
 - ▶ Garden waste renewals and Direct Debit comms.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Sustainability

- Our cross-party member working group continues to meet on a monthly basis to drive our sustainability programme activity and we are grateful to all members involved for their time and commitment.
- The Council's commitment to sustainability was rewarded by achieving bronze accreditation to the Investors in the Environment scheme, work will continue with the target of achieving silver accreditation in 2024.
- At the Cabinet meeting on Monday, 13 February, we presented our baseline emissions report for 2021-22; taking a step forward in meeting our sustainability goal to be net zero by 2030.
- This report provides a robust set of baseline CO₂e emissions data for the Council's first year, April 2021 – 31 March 2022 and outlines WNC's intentions to eliminate or reduce these. Establishing the baseline for WNC emissions will enable the Council to develop a detailed emissions reduction plan and monitor progress towards our targets.
- Publishing our emissions report was a pivotal step to ensuring we not only meet our target of being net zero by 2030 but go above and beyond this. By understanding our current CO₂e emissions, we can ensure that we take the right steps to reduce these and put measures in place to protect our environment for years to come. Whilst the emissions report is vital in tracking our environmental sustainability, a great deal of work is also being done to ensure future social and economic sustainability, for both present and future generations.
- We are embarking on a bold new approach to make West Northamptonshire a more sustainable place to live and work. Steps that the Council is taking are many and varied, from our £8million scheme to decarbonise our rural leisure centres to increased solar energy to reduce our emissions.
- We are encouraging residents, businesses and other organisations to visit our website and review the emissions report, and also make a pledge to live a more sustainable lifestyle, inspiring others to come on this journey with us.
- Our sustainability team continues to engage with residents, partners, parish councils, businesses and schools to raise awareness of sustainability and encourage uptake of relevant grants. Recent events have included a business start up event and school engagement.



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Business Intelligence

- We have reorganised our Business Intelligence Service this year to introduce a progressive structure from apprentice to Head of Service, enabling us to provide business intelligence, performance reporting and equalities advice and guidance to support the operational and strategic objectives of West Northamptonshire Council.
- We have continued to embed our new Performance Framework and Corporate Dashboard, providing transparency and openness in how we are performing against our corporate plan and developing our baseline performance data for our new organisation.
- We have successfully completed our statutory returns to Government for all services.
- We have actively promoted equalities through celebrating key events in the year including Pride, International Women's Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, Black History Month, Disability Awareness Events. Launching our staff networks for women, LGBTQ+, carers, disabilities, armed forces community, early careers, ethnic diversity, mental health and wellbeing.

Executive Support, Lieutenancy Office, and Armed Forces Covenant:

- Our Executive Support team continues to provide efficient and high-quality support to our senior leadership team and Cabinet members, as well as to the Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire and the Chairman of the Council.
- This year we have supported the wider organisation on a number of different projects, including arrangements for the staff THRIVE Awards, staff network events, and the Coronation Big Lunch.

- Over the past year, we have helped to raise the profile of the Council's Chairman, delivering a number of events and fundraising activities in a cost-effective manner.
- We have also supported the Civic Working Group to finalise the Council's Coat of Arms, which is a major milestone in our Civic workstream.
- Within Executive Support, the Lieutenancy office has played a key role in arrangements for the Platinum Jubilee, the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and most recently the Coronation of King Charles III. We are proud that we have been able to secure a number of royal visits to Northamptonshire, helping to raise the profile of some of the excellent local businesses and organisations within West Northamptonshire.
- Under our Armed Forces workstream, less than a year after achieving bronze status in the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS), West Northamptonshire Council was awarded silver status in August 2022. The ERS silver award is the second step in a constant improvement programme which makes it easier for reservists to find flexible employers and improves employment pathways between the forces and the private and public sectors.
- After the initial bronze award in December 2021 which recognised our openness to employing reservists, veterans and anyone connected to the forces, we have since put in place policies which allow reservists to carry out their military commitments. We offer a range of support for serving personnel, veterans and their families including support with finance, housing and employment and education.

Our priorities for 2023/24

During 2023/24 we will continue to support and enable improvement across our organisation, key priorities include:

- Together with our councillor working group, taking forward our Sustainable West Northants work to raise awareness across our communities and make progress against the delivery of our pledges to deliver Net Zero for West Northamptonshire Council by 2030 and for West Northamptonshire residents and businesses by 2045.
- Launching our resident newsletters and continuing to grow and promote our communications channels to reach out to a wider audience.
- Delivering on our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and continuing to support the development of staff networks.
- Launching our new Business Intelligence and Population Insights service to support effective decision making and improved outcomes.
- Achieving Gold status in the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) ensuring we are providing the best support to our armed forces community.
- Providing an efficient and effective executive support service to enable enhanced productivity.
- Delivering our King's Coronation Celebrations including our Community Big Lunch at Delapre Abbey for up to 10,000 people.
- Developing our talented colleagues through our apprenticeship opportunities and through participating in the National Graduate Development Programme.
- Continuing to provide effective leadership for the development of our new organisational culture, ensuring all colleagues are able to thrive, taking pride in their work and feeling a part of our new council.

Our Challenges

- Work is underway to develop our Emissions Reduction Plan to deliver on our Net Zero commitments. Our targets align us with the most ambitious councils as part of UK 100 and will require collaboration and engagement across the organisation and with partners, residents and businesses.
- Mobilising our new Business Intelligence and Populations Insight Service will require learning and development support to ensure colleagues are supported to thrive in their new roles.
- The scale of change we are delivering as a new Council necessitates a challenging and fast paced communications and engagement programme and effective prioritisation of resource to ensure we continue to develop our new council brand and profile.

Looking ahead

- Embedding our approach to sustainability ensuring that it becomes an integral part of life across West Northamptonshire, and we can demonstrate progress against our pledges and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Developing our Business Intelligence and Populations Insights service to maximise our use of data and intelligence to provide a single version of the truth supporting evidence based decision making.
- Raising the profile of West Northants nationally and internationally, promoting our many thriving places and communities through our communications and engagement service.
- Continuing to champion equalities to ensure West Northants is a great place for everyone to live, work, visit and thrive.

Portfolio Holder Foreword

Dealing with our challenges proactively

The financial year 2022/23 has been challenging as a result of the changing global economy and the ensuing cost of living issue that has had a significant impact on the community we serve as a whole and on the services provided to residents and businesses.

Early in the year it became clear that there would be significant financial pressure for 2022/23 as a result of rising inflation and the implications that had on the provision of services alongside a general uplift in demand for key services.

Initial estimates highlighted that if the pressures were left unmanaged the year end position was likely to be almost £27m overspent representing approximately 8% of the net budget.

As an organisation we set about proactively dealing with the situation and as a result of the approach adopted we have brought the spend broadly back in line with the original budget that was set.

We also saw the same challenges have a significant impact on setting the budget for 23/24 but again the organisation rose to the challenge and whilst some difficult decisions had to be made a balanced budget

was able to be prepared for consideration and agreement at full council in February for the financial year 2023/24.

I am proud of what we as a directorate and as an organisation have achieved and if we continue in this manner with really excellent people working hard to stabilise, improve and make services more efficient we will continually improve the service offering to all residents, businesses, organisations and other stakeholders.



Cllr Malcolm Longley, Cabinet member for Finance

What we do in Finance

Our Finance Team lies at the heart of the Council providing resource management services both across the organisation and to residents, businesses and partners.



Accountancy – Dealing with closing the accounts of the Council and the predecessor Councils. Providing technical financial advice. Investing our money and managing our borrowings. Advising on taxes such as VAT and Stamp Duty. Paying suppliers and raising invoices for services provided. Being responsible for administering insurance claims.

Strategic Finance – Providing financial support and advice to the Council. Setting revenue and capital budgets, monitoring those budgets, providing advice and support to services, managing the medium term financial plan and providing strategic advice to services and Councillors.

Revenues and Benefits including Debt and Money Advice Services – Responsible for all billing activity associated with Council Tax and Business Rates bills. Provides support, advice and help to people who are eligible for Housing Benefits or Local Council Tax support. Provides debt and money advice to residents who need it the most. Administers the distribution of Government grants to those residents and businesses that need the support the most.

Audit and Risk Management – Provides internal audit and risk management services to the Council. Seeking to ensure that the internal control environment is robust and that the key risks affecting the Council are effectively managed. Responsible for detecting any fraud the Council is exposed to and dealing with it accordingly.

Pensions – Responsible for administering and managing the Local Government Pension Scheme for Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire Pension Funds taking responsibility for overall resources in excess of £5bn and dealing with payments and individual pensions schemes for active, deferred and retired members of the scheme.

Procurement – Ensuring that the purchasing of services is managed in a legislatively compliant way. Seeking to reduce the costs of services through procurement processes and advising on letting and managing contracts once the procurement process has finished and the contracts are let.

Our Vision

In three to five years we intend to see the robust work to build strong foundations, that has taken place in the first two years, cemented and become embedded. We have an ethos of seeking to continually improve and will not settle for mediocrity.

We will always seek to bring on, support and develop our own staff and nurture the many talented individuals we have within the service. However, we will also tackle any poor performance to ensure we are providing the best service we possibly can.

Over the next three to five years, we intend to ensure we continue to streamline systems and wherever we can. This reduces costs, allows us to flex resources across our demand and ensures we follow common best practices policies and procedures. In the next financial year, we will implement a single income management system and a single revenues and benefits system. Both projects will provide further efficiencies for the Council and importantly improve the service provided to residents and businesses.

We hope that the global economy will settle down and with that the impact on our finances. 2022-23 was a

difficult year and whilst we intend that the financial position will be broadly within budget, it will demand a significant effort across the organisation to get to that position.

We want the finances to sit quietly in the background rather than be front and centre of everything we do because of external factors which are outside of our control. But should the challenging conditions continue and there be a requirement to create financial controls again, we have now built in the early warning systems to identify this early and we have tried and tested ways of managing our finances (successful in 22-23) to ensure we can cope with pressure points and put in place mitigations to manage any deficits down. Many councils are predicting issues and its important we have the processes, governance and assurances processes to do this in line with best practice.

Our financial planning process will evolve again to include a 'worst case scenario' planning.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Whilst the financial impact on the council of the external factors highlighted earlier dominated matters in the directorate and across the organisation, we should not forget the excellent work that has continued in other services across the directorate:

- Business Rates collection rates improved compared to 2021-22
- Council Tax collection rates improved compared to 2021-22
- Benefit claims performance (new claims and Change of Circumstances) improved compared to 2021-22
- Statements of Accounts continue to be signed off for the predecessor authorities (just one final set left for audit sign off)
- Our Head of Procurement won the Individual of the Year award at the national GO procurement awards
- Successfully bringing the internal audit team in-house delivering cost savings and improving the service
- Continuing to be the guardian of the pension fund totalling £3bn for Northamptonshire and smoothly closing the pension accounts for 2021-22
- Successfully completing the 2022 valuation of the Northamptonshire Pension Fund
- Providing key financial and advice and support to services and major projects that progressed throughout the year
- Paid 96.6% of suppliers within 30 days
- Allocated 97.8% of all income received within 7 days
- Issued 98.6% of all pension awards within five working days
- Administration of a significant number of grants that have been distributed to help those residents most in need through the cost of living crisis. This has included the administration of the Winter Fuel Payments and the Homes for Ukraine host payments.
- Our Procurement Team leasing the challenge of implementing and embedding Social Value into the organisation
- Tightened controls and monitoring on our financial systems to identify and control future spend needs via a pipeline and produced significant cost avoidance. This is in addition to the many procurements led for services and awarded successfully new and improved contracts with particular note to the Highways contract which we led for both West and North Northants.



Directorate Challenges

Significant external factors impact

Service failure because of over reliance on key individuals in the team leads to excessive pressure being put on individuals.

Management within the service are aware of the staff who have most reliance placed on them and will actively consider that when allocating tasks.

Number of vacant posts across the directorate have an impact on the level of service provided

The only service area that continues to have a significant number of vacancies is Revenues and Benefits and a recruitment campaign was launched recently to seek to bring new recruits in and move reliance away from agency staff. The issue is being actively managed and performance is currently holding up.

Major issues come out of the closure of accounts at any of the predecessor authorities

This would impact on the total amount of reserves held and inherited by West Northamptonshire as well as impacting on the ongoing base budget.

Very good, technically skilled business support from finance. High level of commitment to balanced budgets by managers. Only one set of predecessor accounts remain but with minimal issues outstanding.

Actions taken to manage spend and improve services

- Service transformation has taken place in almost all areas of the Finance Directorate ranging from implementation of interim structures to wholesale change in two areas.
- All service transformation has taken place to stabilise and improve services with financial savings also being delivered.
- Major transformation has taken place within the Revenues and Benefits Service and the Internal Audit Service as we have moved away from lead authority and Teckal company arrangements to deliver a single target operating model.
- Revenues and Benefits has seen improvements in performance across the board compared to the arrangements in place prior to bringing the service in house. The Internal Audit Service is now dedicated to West Northants and is a stepped improvement on the previous arrangements that were in place.
- Two further major projects were both started in 2022-23. The move to a single income management system rather than the four systems that are currently in place and the move to a single revenues and benefits system to replace the three systems currently in place. Both projects will continue to be implemented in 23-24 and will lead to further efficiencies and improvement in service delivery.

Our priorities for 2023/24

- Further work to stabilise the budget in 23-24 and beyond.
- Continue to embed support and development of budget holders and services so that we continually improve the financial management of the authority.
- Get the final set of predecessor accounts signed off by our external auditors.
- Seek to address any anomalies coming out of the pay and grading exercise and the remaining TUPE staff within the directorate.
- Continue to progress the implementation of a new income management system to replace the existing systems. This is a major project.
- Further develop the new approach to risk management and internal audit across the directorate.
- Continue to progress the implementation of a single revenues and benefits system which will drive further efficiencies in the service and provide a better service to residents and businesses.
- Continue to address cultural differences and deal with poor performance where required.
- Automating processes wherever possible – there are basic manual processes being delivered that should be automated.
- Streamlining of contracts wherever possible.
- Improvement in performance levels across the directorate.
- Consideration of an improved asset management system.
- Developing Housing Revenue and Housing Capital reporting.

- Implementation of the revised asset allocation within the pension fund including the transition to sustainable, lower carbon solutions.
- Successfully deliver the continued suite of grants being received to distribute to those most in need including Homes for Ukraine payments, energy rebate payments and Household Support Fund 4.

Looking ahead

Within the next three years we would like to see:

- Greater stability and certainty in the budgets set across the authority given the challenges we have need to address in managing the budget for 2022-23 and setting the budget for 2023-24.
- Greater funding certainty from the Government in respect of issues such as the fair funding review and business rates re-baselining
- Continual improved performance in all services
- Systems and processes fully harmonised and operating with greater efficiency which also delivers a better service to the residents and businesses in the area.
- Timely production of West Northants Councils accounts and unqualified opinions on them.
- Development, nurturing and growing of our internal talent to aid with succession planning. A desire to keep our 'rising stars'.
- Continue to establish West Northants as a place where people want to work because of the culture we are promoting and because of the reputation we are building. Being an employer of choice.

Corporate Services

Portfolio Holder Foreword

Delivering the best, the west way

We are committed to ensuring that West Northants fulfils its vision, making West Northants a great place to live, work, visit and thrive and our residents can live their best life. We are totally committed to providing excellent services to our residents and being totally customer focused and Corporate Services has a key role to play, managing many of the enabler services that make all areas of the Council function well across their front door, workforce and systems.

People are our greatest asset and one of our core priorities is supporting positive culture change, living our core THRIVE values. Over the next three years, we will continue to innovate and transform what we do and how we work, bringing together our collective expertise, seeking out excellence, and learning from others.

As a new public sector organisation, we are fully committed to good governance and ensuring that our statutory functions are discharged in the most efficient and effective ways and that we have open and transparent decision making and robust scrutiny.

We want all our employees, many of whom are residents of West Northants, to bring their very best selves to work, and we also want to be known as an employer

of choice. We are also committed to ensuring that when supporting residents and other stakeholders, we provide the very best customer experience.

Finally we want to ensure that we make it as easy as possible for people to engage and interact with the Council, as well to enable all our employees and elected members to work effectively.

We will continue to ensure that digital solutions and agile ways of working are enabled to ensure the council provides the greatest reach and joined up systems and processes that make a difference to residents.

Cllr Mike Hallam, Cabinet Member for HR and Corporate Services



What we do in Corporate Services

Corporate Services enables and supports all other areas of the Council as they strive to deliver the highest standards of service, by providing them with the right governance arrangements, IT infrastructure, human resources and people development, open access routes for customers and members, within a culture of continuous improvement supported by robust transformation skills and tools.

The main strategies that set out our key services outcomes:

- Customer Experience Strategy 2021- 2024
- People Strategy 2021 – 2025
- Digital Technology and Innovation Strategy 2022-2025
- The emerging Corporate Governance Strategy
- Our Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Plans



Our Vision

We will act as the 'disruptive innovators' of the organisation, encouraging and supporting an evidence-based approach, advocating for those we serve, championing resident outcomes, and deploying the most appropriate solutions to current and emerging demand, be they technological innovation or people and culture.

We want Corporate Services to be:

- The productivity and improvement engine for the organisation:
- Responsive and accessible to support directorates to THRIVE.
- Proactively driving the organisation to deliver for our people.

For the Council this means:

- Making it easier to do business with the council and taking an approach that is co-produced by residents and local stakeholders
- Actively improving equality of access through targeted work with communities and those with protected characteristics, to help people to thrive.

For West Northants this means:

- Better meeting resident needs in localities and making it easier for residents to engage with a range of service providers in more seamless ways
- Taking an intelligence-based approach to actively target those who need more support to live their best lives.



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Customer Services

Improving the customer experience through our website:

- Continuous development of the website with colleague representation from all hubs, leading to positive change and an enhanced customer journey
- Improved Contact Us page promoting top used pages for each service, and reducing the need for customers to call us.

Disseminating learning throughout the organisation:

- Delivered training to front line staff on Dealing with Difficult Conversations and bespoke, mandatory Customer Services Skills online training, promoting a consistent approach across the organisation
- Rolled out the 'Safer Customer Interactions' scheme, and encouraging colleagues to report potentially dangerous customers through the use of the Accident and Incident Reporting and Investigation procedures, ensuring a consistent approach protecting ourselves and our colleagues
- Rolled out and administering the Staff Alert Register to promote information sharing organisation-wide
- Cross-trained the Executive Support Team on managing Members and MP enquiries, helping reduce avoidable contact and improve response times.

Consolidating resources:

- Improved ability to allocate customer enquiries across the various teams and hubs, to better manage demand (such as Garden Waste subscriptions, Elections and Household Support Fund)
- Three hubs transitioned onto the same Customer Experience Management system (CXM), allowing for more services to be delivered across our full complement of staff and aligning processes for customers

- The Lodge Road hub has embraced access to the revenues system having been trained on direct debits, reprofiling and adding account notes. This has ensured residents have a better standard of service and many were able to take advantage of this during the energy rebate rollout
- Members and MP Enquiries processes consolidated onto CXM system, enabling trends analysis and ability to report centrally - 36% received are responded to by Customer Services, reducing impact on the service areas
- Training of our internal mailbot to identify the service and location and respond to, or prepare a draft response for approval prior to allocating to an advisor: Of 7,741 emails, 1,429 (18.5%) needed no amendments to be made, reducing email handling time by 50%.

Meeting customers where they are:

- The Towcester Hub has completed over 3,000 proactive callouts to residents in council tax arrears and supported revenues with the implementation and rollout of the energy rebate payment
- Drop-in outreach sessions rolled out across multiple locations, building closer working relationships with our partners and library and parish council counterparts in the process (we now have 12 active, regular outreach surgeries which are well-attended, and more to be rolled-out over the coming months)
- Bringing the One Angel Square Reception into Customer Services, implementing processes to include all visits recorded not just planned appointments and the health and safety and wellbeing of staff and visitors.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Emergency Planning

- Coordinated a successful programme of commemorative events for the funeral of the Queen
- Developed accessible and comprehensive guidance for officers and Elected Members to access in case of emergency, specific to different types of incident
- Developed and implemented a robust programme of training for various officer roles (Gold and Silver Command, loggist, Reception Centre Managers and Scene Incident Liaison Officer)
- In collaboration with partners, produced and socialised the Preventing Radicalisation and Extremism Strategy and its accompanying implementation plans
- Designed and rolled-out a consistent approach to business continuity management, supporting colleagues to assess the impact of incidents on their service areas and the mitigating actions to be put in place

HR Services

Resourcing

- Shortlisted for two national in house recruitment awards, design and launch of the new WNC Employer Branding and logo 'Where careers thrive' and procurement, build and launch of our new applicant tracking system - Recruitment Hub (www.jobs.westnorthants.co.uk) enabling:
- A better user experience for candidates
- Enhanced recruitment reach with 8 free jobs board plus LinkedIn, Facebook and Diversity jobs boards, and the Municipal Journal and Local Gov Jobs
- Reduced administration for managers due to the capability of the new Recruitment Hub.

Learning & Development

- Design and launch of 'Our West Welcome' corporate induction event and a separate new managers induction and design of first line manager/team leader training programme and our coaching and mentoring programme
- Phases one and two of the disaggregation of the Learning & Development Service from North Northants Council (NNC) meaning it can now be redesigned to be fit for purpose for WNC and better aligned to our

organisational culture and delivery of our Council priorities

- Re-procurement of the learning management system and system re-build following the disaggregation from NNC associated re-build to enhance user experience with easier to navigate pages and content, including new reporting tool for managers

Pay and Reward:

- Design of our new Job Family Architecture and associated new WNC Local Pay scale, job matching of c550 individual posts
- Completion of negotiation on day one terms and conditions of employment
- Negotiation and implementation of the 2022/23 local pay award

Policy:

- Launch of the Cycle2Work scheme, and the long service and Valuing Individual Performance (V.I.P) process developed, launched and embedded alongside the WNC Behaviour Framework (clarification and communication of our WNC expected behaviours, aligned to our THRIVE values)
- Establishing the diversity baseline through conducting an equality monitoring campaign, encouraging the workforce to disclose their equalities information to inform the future development of the equality, diversity and inclusion strategy
- Design and consultation of worker types carried out, all staff placed into worker types and reportable in ERP. Creation of associated policy/guidance to define the West Way of Working at WNC and associated manager training



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

HR Services

Health, Safety & Wellbeing:

- Development and publication of the WNC wellbeing strategy, informed by workforce feedback and coordination of a wellbeing roadshow and launching our '5 pillars of wellbeing', with supporting material for employees
- On-going training for Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs) and the introduction of a £250 annual payment, reflecting the organisational commitment to mental wellbeing
- Re-procurement of key contracts to support employee health and wellbeing, occupational health and employee assist

Payroll Services

- Over 51,000 people paid over all payrolls per month
- 99.9% accuracy rate reported across all main clients (WNC, NNC, CCC, MKC)
- Delivery of payroll services to NCT, Pathfinder and Fire & Rescue with similar accuracy rates

Digital Technology and Innovation

Digital

- New paperless direct debits for garden waste in Feb 23, allowing residents to sign up for auto-renewal and payment: has taken over 3.5m in payments and cut calls to our teams
- New online registrations enabling people to book their weddings and ceremonies, removing a two-year event backlog created during the COVID pandemic
- A new User Experience (UX) function, which measures how staff and customers use our systems and uses data to simplify and streamline them, making them simpler and quicker.
- In-housed popular grassroots Merged Futures, giving backing to this showcase of the best of digital talent within the county.

- Received first place award in the country for accessibility of our council website
- Begun work in unifying our four customer relationship management (CRM) tools, moving us towards a single view of our customers and optimising team working
- We have begun disaggregation of our Digital service with North Northamptonshire Council, which will ultimately allow both councils to focus more clearly on their own sovereign priorities

IT operations:

- Disaggregated from a shared arrangement between former South Northants Council and Cherwell District Council, repatriating services back to our organisation.
- We have migrated all services from one of our data centres in Farnborough, reducing our technology estate footprint and gaining greater operational efficiency.
- Planned and supported migration of all staff and systems from Lodge Road in Daventry to allow us to close the premises: coordinating the moves of hundreds of staff and interdependent systems based at Lodge Road that power our core business.
- Begun work on a new WNC-wide telephony and contact centre system, standardising our contact methods, improving our reporting and analytics, providing for better management of inbound queries and increasing flexibility in location for our staff.
- Started a complete refresh of staff hardware, rolling out new computer devices tailored to the needs of each person's job profile, with the ability for true remote management to allow us to support these out in the field – a must in the era of hybrid working.

Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Digital, Technology and Innovation

Applications

- A new e-recruitment system in September 2022, reducing the time and effort for managers to get job vacancies to market, and improving the process of onboarding new staff.
- A new internal helpdesk tool in January 2023, allowing WNC staff to raise requests for help from internal services (e.g. Payroll, HR, IT) from anywhere and get access to a system that shows them the progress of their issues.
- Began work on a new income management system, which will streamline and enhance our banking reconciliation and payment receipting processes.
- Began work on access to our main ERP system from outside of our corporate network, allowing remote workers to manage their leave, payslips and timesheets from anywhere.
- Began work on replacement of the main case management system for the Children's Trust (and in the near future, for our internal Adult Social Care teams) to modernise and improve methods of managing cases.
- Started work on replacement of our main housing and our main revenue and benefits systems.
- Established our internal Technical Design Authority. This body scrutinises all proposals for new systems and technology, applying key principles to tighten, improve and futureproof them and ensure they represent good value for money to the taxpayer.
- A new Innovation function, which prototypes new technologies partners with the community to make Northamptonshire an attractive place for digital business. Currently running pilots using (VR) to support SEN children, a digital adult care package brokerage and using data to drive insights on preventing fly-tipping.
- A cyber security function, which develops strong technical defences and human training to systematically combat some of the threats to business continuity that we face from increasingly sophisticated actors (including state-sponsored attacks).
- The division contributed heavily to a variety of proposals to help reduce expenditure and balance the Council's budget during the cost-of-living crisis, including £1 million of DTI budget reductions and absorbing a further £1m of increased prices through good contract management and a collective effort to find efficiencies.

Governance

- Launched our very first Digital, Technology & Innovation Strategy. Passed by Cabinet in July 2022, it contains twelve key initiatives and sixty-five objectives which, enacted over three years, meet the council's objectives and empowers the council and its residents.
- A new Architecture function, which develops sound technical blueprints for systems, ensures good solution choices that have longevity and represent good value-for-money, and ensures consolidation and cost optimisation of our systems.



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Transformation

- Supported the design and delivery of the Corporate Services Target Operating Model Project, a £1m project to realign corporate services to the emerging priorities of the organisation as well as ensuring we operate as a modern and effective support service.
- Initiated the delivery of a Legal Services Review, insourcing our legal provision from an external supplier as well as revising the operating model for our inhouse team. The delivery of a new structure, a new cloud-based IT solution and an internal charging model has allowed the directorate to realise £500k in financial efficiencies.
- Supported the design and delivery of a new Social Value framework with procurement colleagues underlining the organisations commitment to it.
- Project managed the Budget Task Force to work across the organisation on balancing the budget in 2022/23.
- We set up in a short window the Spending Review Panel and associated processes and also the back-office infrastructure to ensure its effectiveness.
- Re-orientated the Transformation Board to focus on priority projects and what matters to the organisation coupled with a revised project management framework.
- Took over from North Northamptonshire the running of the joint governance arrangements around disaggregation and intern authority agreements.
- Managed all DTI projects in delivery from Q2 this year, establishing robust plans and benefits for each project and then onboarding them to provide a more total view of change and bring discipline across all projects.

Democratic Services and Elections

- Building on foundations recognised by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny during their recent review, we have put into practice our learning and the recommendations in order to design a forward-looking overview and scrutiny process focussed on outcomes. Democratic Services now support four overview and scrutiny committees, which seek to align reviews to the Council's priorities, as well as producing outcomes that deliver benefits for communities
- Pursuant to the new requirements of the Elections Act 2022, we undertook a review of polling stations to ensure they are compliant with accessibility, voter identification etc. Work is also underway to ensure voter ID requirements are effectively communicated to the electorate. Team members also worked elections in neighbouring Councils to watch Voter ID in practice and share learning.
- Working with Planning Service and Facilities Management colleagues, we have put in place new governance arrangements for planning committees, building on the recommendations of the Planning Advisory Service peer review and will see planning committees being webcast for the first time from Towcester and Northampton.
- Supported the Council's first review of electoral boundaries, a complex task involving the analysis of a great deal of qualitative data about community identity and links within West Northamptonshire.
- Working with elected members, the team continue to refine and update the Council's Constitution and governance framework through the Democracy and Standards Committee and full Council.



Our performance and achievements 2022/23

Law and Governance

- Creation of the new legal service got off to a strong start with over 60 applicants in the first recruitment drive and only 5 posts within the 35 strong new team left unfilled – a second drive is now under way. Plans are being created to enable the new team to be up and running as soon as possible and work is underway to explore potential income generation opportunities over the next 18 months. The new arrangements are on course to deliver the £0.5m saving as well as providing a comprehensive and responsive service to clients.
- A Governance Group has been established to support effective governance arrangements across the council. Engaging with officers council-wide, it aims to demystify governance and provide access to information to help effectively support good governance as everyone's responsibility.
- The legal team successfully supported regulatory services to prosecute multiple unlawful HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation).
- Ongoing support and guidance is being provided in respect of the Council's Regeneration projects including the Bike Park, Market Square and Four Waterside.
- In relation to Information Governance the number of data breach reports has risen by 20% from 156 in 2021/22 to 191 in 2022/23. However, this is because the team has been effective in raising awareness and therefore the increase is largely due to improvements in reporting/escalating to the Data Protection team rather than an increase in data breaches.
- In addition the team is putting in place a new tool to help reduce data breaches which is likely to be ready to launch late summer to early autumn.
- The records management team have now been recruited to the Council and are beginning to work with our storage provider to identify and destroy out of date files relating to predecessor Councils.
- 2022/23 saw a total of 1670 requests (1252 FOIs 418 EIRs). Of these just 41 responses were challenged and just 8 escalated to the Information Commissioners Office. This means that 97.5% of all requests were responded to positively and satisfactorily.

Registration

- Wedding and other Ceremonies service delivered 1770 new ceremonies and implemented a new online booking process for ceremonies, available to the customer 24/7. This has resulted in no backlog and a more flexible service.
- The Registration Service website has been enhanced with updated content ensuring it meets all accessibility requirements
- The service has re-introduced the customer choice of private citizenship ceremonies and is also introducing a lower cost (simple ceremonies) at Towcester office to support those wishing to marry during the cost-of-living crisis from June 1st 2023.
- The service increased statutory marriage registrations from 4 per week to 6 per week, to meet rising demand and respond to customer need.
- Both Registration and Coroners continue to work closely with the County Medical Examiners for the implementation of the new Statutory Medical Examiner system. The go-live date has been pushed back nationally from April 2023 to April 2024.

Coroners

- Successfully recruited and trained Casual Coroners Officers, for Service resilience
- Worked collaboratively with Northants Police and Fire and Northampton General Hospital and Kettering General Hospital and activated The Leys due to the worst winter pressures ever experienced by the NHS
- Added to the Court provision and put in place the necessary digital support to be able to carry out Jury Inquests in The Great Hall, at the Guildhall.
- Worked with the Coroner to recruit three additional Assistant Coroners for the service to address the backlog of Jury Inquests.
- The service has ensured that it has implemented new legislative changes into its working processes across the service.

Our challenges

Data

There have been pressures associated with managing data and information effectively across the Council, reviewing systems and networks and a lot of work continues around cyber security and infrastructure support.

There is a need to ensure that the directorate and the council have high quality and robust processes and data collection and work continues to improve how we manage data and information, being a key priority for 2023/24.

Capacity

There is continued pressure to deliver a wide range of priorities and help to transform the council. This often is centred around bringing in new business systems and new capabilities.

In the past year work has been done to bring together all the key capabilities and governance around programmes and projects. This has led to a central PMO (Programme Management Office) and improved centralised governance of Transformation programmes with sub boards now in place (e.g. Assets Board and DTI Board)

HR

Within the current economic climate there have been pressures on recruiting a number of professions in high demand or where the external market conditions present different options for alternative recruitment for similar wages.

A lot of work has gone on in the past year to improve our recruitment processes with specialist HR recruitment support being in place. The work associated with the new WNC pay and grading work is also key to ensure fair wages and a more stabilised workforce.

Actions taken to manage spend and improve services

There is considerable grip on spend and budgetary pressures with regular review and improvement meetings taking place in the directorate and working with our Finance Business Partners. Work has also been done in advance of the new financial year to review how Corporate Services works as a whole. We have done a lot to better join up our services and make it easier to drive improvements.

Our priorities for 2023/24

- Delivery of our new Target Operating Model for Corporate Services:
 - Connected Customers Programme
 - Connected Enablers Programme
 - Rapid Improvement Analysis
- Delivery of new Target Operating Model for Legal Services
- Delivery of phase 1 of Pay and Grading for WNC
- Delivery of key enabling support activities for Directorates and joined up business support (reactive) (aligned to supporting corporate strategies)
- Delivering improvements in relation to management of scrutiny function following CPS review
- Delivery of Ways of Working and Office Optimisation
- Designing and delivering an improved offer following aggregation and disaggregation of corporate services (digital, learning and development, apprenticeships, ICT review) and managing the IAA process for 23/24
- Review, transform and improve the customer experience for interactions related to Revenues and Benefits, in order to unlock the potential benefits of proactive preventative work with residents
- Develop and embed a consistent and comprehensive front-door offer for Planning services, in order to improve the service's capacity to manage demand and increase resident satisfaction
- Deliver a One Stop Shop, multi-agency offer at The Abbey Centre in Daventry, bringing together Council and VCSE services to best support the residents of the town and surrounding areas
- Deliver a One Stop Shop, multi-agency offer at The Forum in Towcester, bringing together Council and VCSE services, with a specific focus on providing a Family Hub facility
- Simplify and enhance the offer on our website, to include translated information and guidance documents – top 5 spoken languages and Easy Read
- Develop website content which reflects the lived experience of residents, by providing 'packages' of information and advice, rather than addressing isolated queries (Bereavement, Having a baby, Moving into the area etc).
- Consolidate all customer records management onto one system, to allow us to work consistently across all geographical areas and start building the single view of customer approach
- Implement and fully adopt the new technological opportunities offered by the new telephony solution (omni-channel, flexible working, interactive phone lines etc).

Looking ahead

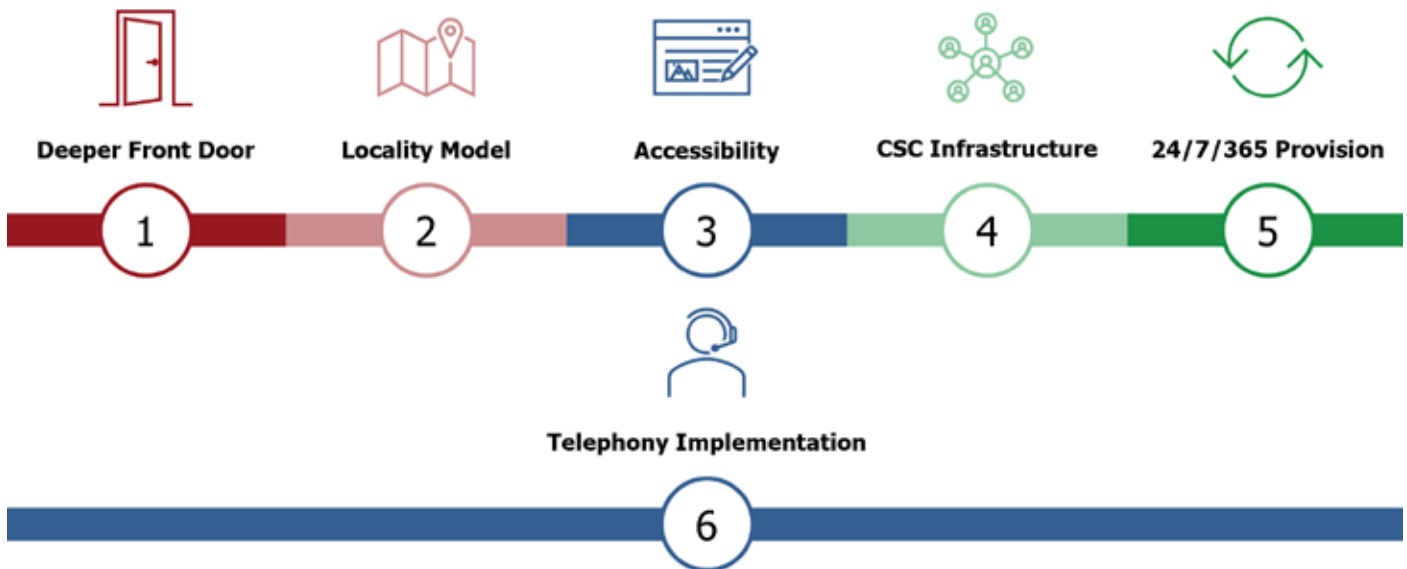
- 2022/23 has been a busy and productive year and the services have delivered immense improvements and have developed core foundations for the organisation and help to develop a truly connected council.
- Moving forwards there is a lot to do to work better with partners and develop a more connected West Northants and support will go into helping to develop the Local Area Partnerships
- The focus ultimately though is on improving outcomes for our residents, improving the customer experience and helping to reduce the inequality gaps that exist.
- Corporate Services will continue to join up our service offerings and help the council services to ensure we maximise technology and innovative practices, have better customer pathways and integrated systems and ensure we govern effectively and help facilitate improvements.

Our Priorities for 2023/24 - Corporate Services

Connected Customers Programme (2023 – 2025)

Aim: To develop a unified front door that enhances resident experience, integrates with partners' processes and systems and delivers value for money, through co-producing seamless services with our people, utilising local insight to fulfil our customers' current and future needs.

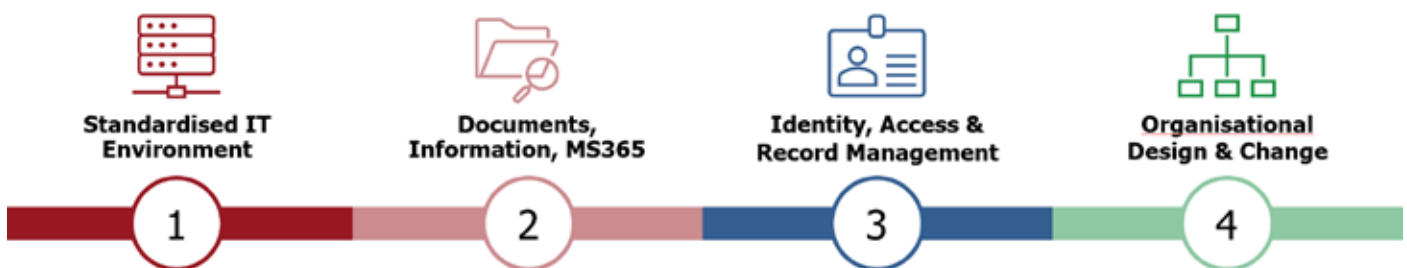
Defined projects for delivery



Connected Enablers Programme (2023 – 2025)

Aim: To cultivate conditions that enable productivity, collaboration and capability through connecting structures, practices, people and tools to achieve our organisations priorities.

Defined projects for delivery



Projects already in-flight



Find out more

Access our services online at www.westnorthants.gov.uk

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It's the quickest and easiest way to see information on a range of things, such as finding your local councillor, making a comment, reporting an issue, accessing planning services, and finding out more about waste and recycling collections.



Phone us

If you still need to speak to someone, call us on **0300 126 7000**.

Council meetings

Members of the public are welcome to attend any of the council's public meetings, including Council, Cabinet, Planning Committees and Scrutiny Committees.

Council meetings, Cabinet meetings and our Planning Committees are also streamed live via our YouTube channel at youtube.com/westnorthamptonshirecouncil

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