

**30<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

## **HOUSING**

Following the conclusion of a 10- week consultation with service users and stakeholders on the new Housing Allocations Scheme, the final scheme will be presented to Cabinet on the 14 November.

The consultation received a total of 732 responses analysed, consisting of 445 fully completed responses. 624 (85%) of respondents were from local residents of West Northamptonshire and 363 (57%) of respondents were already registered with a current housing allocation scheme within West Northants. There was positive support for the draft housing allocation scheme as 69% of respondents strongly agreed and/or agreed with the proposals within the consultation.

The scheme has been developed to provide an aligned and harmonised approach across West Northants which will help in meeting the housing needs of the most vulnerable residents. Work is ongoing to draft a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, with the first draft set to be presented to Cabinet on the 12 December to seek approval to consult.

The relationship with Northamptonshire Partnership Homes continues to improve as both organisations work together to develop the quality assurance framework and plan together for the introduction of the new regulatory regime next year.

Formation of the Housing Partnership Board progresses with discussions under way with key stakeholders about heading up the four Housing Strategy-aligned steering groups. One working group focussed on accelerating development undertook a successful roundtable exercise in early October to lay out an approach and identify barriers (and mitigations) and opportunities. Successful meeting of the Housing Partnership Board on 2 November covering progress updates on priority activities: development plan; allocations scheme; homelessness and rough sleeper strategy; early intervention, prevention and temporary accommodation, alignment of aims/outcomes between the board, the Health & Wellbeing Board and local area partnerships.

West Northamptonshire Council has funded a pilot initiative which will provide additional support for the homeless and rough sleepers in Northampton. The initiative, delivered by Midland Heart Housing Association, will provide intensive housing related and independent-living support for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping with the aim of increasing independence to move on to longer-term accommodation. The aims of the initiative include preventing people from sleeping rough for the first time, supporting people currently sleeping rough to move off the streets, reducing offending and re-offending, limiting social exclusion and isolation, promoting independence and the development of independent living skills.

## **CULTURE & LEISURE**

### **The Library Service**

The public consultation around the draft Library Service Strategy 2023-2027 ran from 4th September to October 29th and received 598 responses. The team are now working through these responses to pull together actions that can be taken from the feedback as well as any resulting changes to the draft before it is taken forward.

The Summer Reading challenge in our libraries was extremely successful this year with 5027 children in West Northants taking part in the challenge and 2967 completing the challenge and receiving a medal and certificate for their efforts. This was a 10% rise from those taking part in 2022.

179 sports and games themed events took place in libraries across the summer holidays to bring the challenge to life. 38 volunteers supported children, encouraging them to read and talk about the books they had been reading through a total of 469 volunteering hours.

### **Museum Service**

New exhibitions were launched in the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery in September. Punk: Rage and Revolution launched with a sold-out talk by punk icon John Robb of the Membranes, Gold Blade and Louder than War. The exhibit features many artifacts illustrating Northampton's rich punk history and includes the original "Spinadisc Records" sign from the legendary Northampton retailer. "Fifteen" was an exciting and eclectic exhibition of the work of fifteen prominent Northamptonshire artists as part of the ever-expanding Northants Open Studios programme of events and this was followed by "Found in the Fields", an exhibition of images by Carry Akroyd incorporating words from the poet John Clare.

The Museums team won the Best Event category of the Northamptonshire Heritage Forum Awards for the Transport Day event held in 2022 at Abington Park. Some 3000 people attended and enjoyed the event in 2022 and this rose to 5000 for this year's event which was held in Abington Park on June 24th. 35 different organisations took part in the event.

The first element of the National Portfolio Organisation "Histories of Northamptonshire" project with the installation of high specification display cases in four library sites, Daventry, Weston Favell, Brackley and Towcester. The display cases will host a changing programme of exhibitions developed in partnership with different organisations and groups. Library cases have been installed at the four sites. The first exhibition Unearthed – finds from the Portable Antiquities Scheme is currently in design and due to open in first week of January 2024.

A working group of library and museum staff is being established to plan future activities, manage logistics, and plan events and associated activities.

Library Museum Ambassadors have visited the museum, met with staff, and been shown the museum collections and briefed on current and future activities. These ambassadors will connect with library visitors to promote museum exhibitions and events and signpost them to the other library sites, where they can see a wider range of displays.

## **Arts & Culture**

The Arts & Culture newsletter continues to provide a useful source of local information. Steady growth continues and the newsletter has reached over 800 subscribers. The team are working alongside colleagues and sector experts to further improve the content and messaging.

Planning continues for Collide the brand name for Choirfest 2024, a celebration of musical genres sung by local choirs hosted at the Royal & Derngate. The lead up to the main event will be promoted through up to eight 'mini' events across West Northants showcasing local choirs and reaching a wide audience through a range of venues.

Main Stage '24, the live music event being planned at Delapre Abbey for summer 2024. Procurement of an event promoter has completed with award going to a nationally recognisable promoter. Finer details are being agreed as part of the formal onboarding process. Once this has been completed more event information will be shared publicly.

## **Sport & Leisure**

The team has submitted an application to the Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund Phase 2. This phase focusses on capital project improvements to improve energy efficiency and help our leisure centres reduce their carbon footprint. The application includes Danes Camp, Moulton, Daventry, and Lings leisure centres totalling £690k. The council has already invested in excess of £1m towards capital improvements at Lings Forum, Danes Camp and Mounts Baths as well as running an £8m project to reduce the carbon footprint of our rural leisure centres.

Leisure Centre procurement for Danes Camp, Lings Forum, Mounts Baths, Daventry, Moulton leisure centres and Daventry Sports Park has reached the soft market testing stage. A series of questions have been made available to leisure operators to test the market and help shape the scope within tender documents that will be shared in 2024. As part of the process, Members have been invited to a workshop at the end of February.

Rugby World Cup 2025 planning continues through the early introduction phases. Mapping and partner engagement has started, exploring the RFU Impact Programme, part of the RFU ambition to raise the profile of rugby and increase participation of the women and girls game. An introductory meeting with World Rugby and the Local Operating Company (LOC) is being held in November.

Councillor Adam Brown

**Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure**