

CORPORATE SERVICES

1. Customer Services and Emergency Planning

The department are entering one of the busiest period of the year and are in the process of rolling out a number of improvements across all areas. Working closely with the Director of People, we are also aligning our work with the Access Strategy being developed by the DASS which shows our commitment to take the ambitions of the Customer Experience Strategy even further.

First Contact Resolution and Front Door

The Planning Service front door has now moved into Customer Services at the start of Oct, with a very successful first month during which 86% of the almost 500 calls handled were resolved without the need for escalation.

Whilst we are continuing to work with colleagues in Revenues and Benefits to expand the range of transactions which can be resolve in full by Customer Service Advisors without the need to pass onto colleagues in the back office, we are also scoping out a triage offer for Adults and Children's Services, which would allow us to offer information and advice and signpost whenever appropriate, to reduce inappropriate referrals to the MASH or Adults Social Care.

This work is starting out as a pilot on a small scale, to allow us to understand the nature of demand, and build sustainably towards a front door offer which improves the customer experience and allows our colleagues to focus on complex and high risk cases.

Locality Model

There are now 21 venues where we run outreach surgeries, with very good attendance and interest levels. We have collaborated with colleagues at Age UK to enhance the offer in certain areas (Northampton West, and also trialling Northampton Briar Hill) to include assistance with applications for Attendance Allowance.

A new process is being piloted with St Luke's Medical Centre to offer health professionals the option of referring a patient to Customer Services when they need support but there are no safeguarding concerns. This will make better use of resources, provide support to people whose

cases would otherwise be deemed inappropriate referrals, and build our relationships with partner agencies.

The West Northamptonshire app has seen further development which is making it now a great tool for reporting issues in the community and receiving notifications about local services. A communications campaign is underway to raise awareness of its functionality and encourage residents to download it and make use of it.

Contact Centre Infrastructure

All our hubs are now on the same Customer Records Management solution, which is allowing us to capture better information about customers, produce reports standardise our offer to residents.

The department are also currently in the process of restructuring management layers, with consultation currently underway to standardise ways of working at Manager and Team Leader levels and reduce the numbers of supervisors whilst re-investing into front line provision.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

We have invested additional resources into the review and improvement of the website content, so that more residents can find the information they need, understand the information shared and complete transactions online if that is their preference. A great example of this work is the development of the Adults and Public Health website pages with colleagues in the Communications team, making the content easier to navigate, user friendly and presented in ways which match people's life events and experiences.

The next area of focus is the development of Easy Read materials, for residents with learning difficulties or disability, where a more simplified presentation would improve engagement and independence.

24/7/365

Following a mystery shopping exercise which assessed the quality of provision at various times and days of the week against a number of services, it has become apparent that the way we support residents outside of office hours could be improved.

As a result, work has started to map the processes in place with out of hours teams, identify opportunities for improvement and standardisation, with a view that the first line at night carries out a triage function to similar depth to day-time services. This will mean that people find the support they need more easily, and stretched out of hours resources (Adults and Children's Social Workers, Homelessness Officers, Approved Mental Health Practitioners etc) are protected to focus on the most vulnerable and at risk residents.

Telephony Project

The project is now in implementation, with training and User Acceptance Testing well underway. The next couple of weeks will be critical to the success of the rollout, as more and more colleagues, including our Contact Centres, will start to benefit from the new technology. Communications are being issued to ensure that colleagues and Members are aware of the changes. The project will continue throughout the first half of next year to deploy full functionality such as web chat. We are hoping to have all benefits in place, not just the new ways of communicating via Teams, by summer. Communications will continue to be issued at critical points.

Emergency Planning and Business Continuity

The team have now produced a Manual of Tactical and Operational Responsibilities (MOTOR) clearly outlining our response as an organisation in case of emergency, what support would be available from each department, and how officers and Members could be notified. This is an excellent tool for internal and external colleagues, as it clearly lays out capabilities and response activities in case of incident.

2. Human Resources

Pay and Grading

Activity has continued on this project as we have been reviewing legal advice on how we can lawfully move TUPE protected colleagues over to the new WNC local pay structure, terms and conditions. There has been a considerable number of discussions with Trade Union colleagues who are pushing for teams within Provider Services, Adults, to be assimilated over. We now have an agreed approach and during November and December will be offering voluntary assimilation across Provider Services, to be implemented in January pay run.

A timetable for WNC's local pay bargaining activity for 2024-25 has been established, several options have been developed for discussion with ELT and the recognised Trade Unions have been invited to submit their pay claim by 5th January 2024.

Health, Safety & Wellbeing

There has been continuing support across the school's estate with advice to the Buckton Fields Primary school closure and the RAAC concrete in schools concerns. The team have also been reviewing the Service Level Agreements for Schools to provide greater clarity on service provision as well as working closely with PLACE colleagues on several key policies. Wellbeing have been raising awareness around Menopause in the Workplace, with training for managers and colleagues and Menopause Cafe events were hosted on World Menopause day.

Learning & Development

The team have been working on a solution for Adults to keep supervision records on iLearn (WNC's learning management system) following a request from DTI to help solve Adults problem of how to keep electronic records. We have also been trialling LinkedIN learning and onboarding new training suppliers and we have gone out to all managers in the last month to gather information on future training needs to help inform the 2024/25 delivery programme.

In late October we received approval to disaggregate the final phase of L&D from the NNC, and focus is now on disaggregating the apprenticeship service by 1st April 2024. At present we will receive just 2 FTE of resource back from NNC, which is not adequate to be able to deliver a quality service to WNC, therefore we are also focussing on creating job descriptions and will be going out to recruit to the team in early January.

We have also just concluded a restructuring the L&D team that transferred to us from NNC earlier this year. We have moved to a mixed model (part direct delivery, part external delivery) and as a result there have been two redundancies within the existing team (admin roles), and we are currently recruiting for L&D and Advisor and an Apprentice.

HR Advisory & Business Partnering

The activity in this team remains high, key activities include

- Supporting the closure of Boniface House for Adults and resulting redundancies and redeployment.
- Supporting Adults and Public Health with a Prevention and Early Intervention Project where WNC will have a tiered approach with prevention and early intervention services delivered by Public Health and Adult colleagues.
- Restructure of the Adults Community Teams to align them with the LAP's
- Delivering the planning service and enterprise applications restructures
- Supporting Communities and Opportunities to plan the Housing restructure, and deliver the Sport, Leisure and Culture and Economic Growth & Inward Investment restructures.
- Early activity regarding the transfer of SEMLEP.
- DTI voluntary redundancy programme
- Legal Services restructure and recruitment
- Pilot of DEI face to face training with Waste depot
- Revision of Line Manager Induction training
- Direct training for managers on ERP and absence by service within Place Directorate

Temporary structure changes

In order to release Sarah Reed to work with NCT on their Transformation & Efficiency programme, Alison Golding, AD HR will be taking on additional responsibilities by managing the Corporate & Finance Transformation Service for the next few months. HR & Transformation will report into the Executive Director, Finance.

Transformation

Over the last quarter, the Corporate & Finance Transformation team have been providing programme and project management expertise, business analysis and project support on various large scale initiatives to DTI, Customer Services, HR and corporately:

- Implementation of a single telephony solution to harmonise legacy provision and contracts.
- Office optimisation programme.
- Decommissioning of unsupported SharePoint sites (2007/2013).
- Customer experience management, four CXM platforms into one, to harmonise the way we capture customer interactions to be bring consistency in approach and reporting.

- Pay and grading project – Conclusion of phase two (to introduce a single set of pay, terms and conditions for employees on WNC interim terms and mitigate corporate equal pay risks).
- Hardware refresh, replacing all workforce hardware over a 4-year delivery window, leading procurement, hardware build, roll out model and transition to business as usual service delivery within DTI.
- Continued co-ordination and management of DTI Strategy Board, Transformation Board and Joint Office Board.

3. Legal and Democratic Services

Legal Services

It is a significant credit to the Deputy Director and the whole team that we now have an all singing and dancing in house legal service. The amount of legal work has, as expected, gone up as clients have greater confidence in the service and lower cost advice. Sound legal advice helps to avoid challenge and ensures we do what we are required to for the benefit of our residents. For example significant steps forward are being made in relation to our prosecution work, due to the expertise that we are able to offer to Regulatory and other Services carrying out prosecution work. The SEND team continue to benefit from the specific expertise the in-house legal team are offering. We now have permanent employees supporting our planning committees, to replace the locums and provide consistency of advice.

All three heads of legal services for Corporate, Place and People are in post and are working with our Practice Manager and Deputy Director to develop the culture and operational model for their new services. An official launch day for the new service was held in October at Vulcan Works and I attended along with other members of Cabinet and Senior Officers. We had the opportunity to meet the new team. Further events are planned to help introduce the team to all members and officers. The team is not yet complete as our legal assistants are only just joining us and we are still to carry out the final wave of recruitment for our Trainees and Apprentices. They will enable us to grow the lawyers of the future and provide support to the team. Across all posts a very successful response was received to the advertisements for the roles.

The Council has now withdrawn its shareholding in Pathfinder Legal Services and is working towards developing a service that other councils are already expressing an interest in instructing which will enable the service to generate additional income. We have been contacted by a neighbouring local authority about taking on their housing disrepair work and are exploring this further with them. We have also had initial discussions with Northampton Partnership Homes about increasing our support to them to help them to reduce costs. The team is also supporting the Children's Trust with procurement of external legal services.

A new project is underway for the Council's legal team at West Northants to deliver the service for the Children's Trust. This will enable the Council, and the Children's Trust (and as a result North Northants Council) to achieve savings too. All of which means resources can be redirected to prevent cuts to vital services to residents.

The new cloud-based case management system is now up and supports the financial charging model which will help to ensure that the £500k savings this year and the further proposed savings for next year are delivered.

Information Governance

The update to the teams case management system 'CycFreedom' took place over the weekend of 13-16 of October. The whole West team can now access the cloud based version of the system known as Cyc3 rather than just the staff using the Guildhall servers. This will increase efficiency as all request officers can now access their own cases in real time with inbuilt redaction tools removing the need for additional software. It will also enable a suite of management reports based on the current structure to be developed over the coming months.

Democratic and Electoral Services

At the last meeting of Council, the terms of reference for our Community Governance Review were approved. Since then, Democratic and Electoral Services have been working with colleagues from our Communications and Engagement Service to design a consultation which will launch later this month. The consultation will invite electors and other interested individuals and organisations to contribute views about parish arrangements in West Northamptonshire. Members whose wards are affected will also be asked to contribute their views. The Community Governance Review is due to conclude in September 2024.

The service has also been focussing on delivering the member development programme for 2023-24. Sessions on Overview and Scrutiny, Planning and Licensing are being delivered, alongside the usual briefings to ensure members are being kept informed. Overview and Scrutiny Committees continue to deliver against their work programmes, with the Adult Social Care and Health committee reporting the findings from its recent review of Integrated Care Across Northamptonshire (ICAN) to Cabinet on 14 November.

The Election team is now approaching the end of our canvass, which will conclude a busy but successful period. Our response rate has increased, with 1,334 more properties responding compared to last year. A very successful student registration drive also saw the number of students registered increase compared to last year. Work is now underway to prepare for the scheduled Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections in May next year.

Coroner's

Last year the service was heavily involved in the creation of the county Mass Fatalities plan, and we hosted a regional training day in collaboration with Northants Police. This year West Northants hosted the regional Mass Fatalities event, which was a success and very well received by regional colleagues. The aspiration is Northants has set the tone for annual CPD training, and next year Notts have offered to host the event.

The service is continuing to focus on clearing a backlog of over 12 months inquest cases and have had to employ interim staff to clear the backlog. This has resulted in an improved situation, however, there remains a continuing backlog.

We are working together with our partners in health, police and fire etc regarding preparation for winter months and if necessary, the activation of the Leys body storage facility in North Northants.

Both Registration and Coroners will be open between Christmas and New Year, due to deaths over the bank holiday periods to support the bereaved families.

Registration

For ceremonies we have now finished the busy summer period and are set to deliver a Ceremony Officer debrief session during November, to look back at what went well, and what learning we need to factor into our summer planning for next year. This is an in-person event for Ceremony Officer staff.

The service is leading on partnership engagement with NGH in relation to the statutory ME service which is due from April 2024. A spreadsheet to review deaths has been devised and a data sharing agreement is awaiting signoff, to ensure the process is correct for West Northants, to meet registrations key performance targets, and enable a smooth customer experience journey through the new statutory service. The ME has been within hospital trusts as a non-statutory service since the end of 2019, but from April 2024, will encapsulate all GP deaths.

4. Digital, Technology and Innovation

Fixed Telephone Line Project

We are entering the final stages of the full replacement of all fixed-line telephony within WNC: a project that will result in a single phone system spanning all of our sites and allow staff to be located anywhere whilst receiving calls or working in our call centres. This new tool enables our hybrid working policies, gives us flexibility with our property strategy and ensure more efficient and configurable routing of calls, giving our staff the tools, they need to do the job well. The project is expected to be completed next month.

Hardware refresh

A full refresh of all staff personal computing hardware (laptops, etc.) and in-office docking stations to allow staff to move and work seamlessly between our sites is underway and will continue through to 2025. Having kitted all former Daventry District Council staff to support their move to the Abbey Centre, rollouts of new equipment are now occurring every three weeks across the council, according to an order determined by the directors. This new arrangement reduces the lead time from weeks and months to five working days and gives staff the option to have it delivered to their home address as part of the setup.

Unified Digital Network

The service has been working with industry experts to devise a new digital network – the wires and digital routes between all of our main offices and satellite sites. This single network replaces all of the existing legacy networks inherited at Vesting day; ensures that we have the capacity and speed to meet the ever-growing needs for computer traffic between sites; and tailors the digital network to meet our new planned property setup.

A Cabinet paper is due in January to secure member approval and funding. If agreed, it will be implemented during 2024.

Laying the ground for future success

When we became West Northamptonshire, we inherited the separate systems of four predecessor councils, all in various states of maturity and age. One of the least visible programmes of work that nonetheless has the most impact on our productivity as a council is

merging and replacing these systems so that staff do not have to move between the four, saving time and money. This then often becomes an excellent opportunity, as we merge them, to identify more efficient ways of doing things.

Our teams are currently:

- Preparing to bring a case for replacement of all our meeting room AV equipment during calendar Q1 of 2024, to raise the standard of meetings and broadcast events.
- Looking at major replacements for the case management software of both our adults team and the Children's Trust, to work more efficiently and release valuable frontline worker time.
- Devising replacements for our main data storage and disaster recovery tools, to improve reliability and streamline our tools.
- A gradual programme of system mergers – taking four sets of tools in each of our service areas and merging them into a single set, allowing staff to work more efficiently and interchangeably.
- Developing a single "identity management" tool. This system will connect all of the various systems our staff use, allowing them to increasingly use a single login to access things over time, and also for our support teams to remove access to all systems instantaneously upon staff departure (thus improving our security).
- Preparing to replace our primary Housing system, as part of a drive to modernise our housing back office processes.
- Supporting the implementation of a single Revenues & Benefits system, to help deliver improved working and efficiencies in this area.
- Developing a single document management tool, to ensure that all council documents are accessible to the right people internally, backed up, shareable with people with appropriate permissions and protected from inappropriate access.
- Working on an extensive restructure of the service to save nearly £600,000 of staffing costs as part of our efforts to ensure the Council meets its budget and continues delivering vital frontline services.
- Evaluating all contracts to identify further savings to support our financial position.

Councillor Mike Hallam

Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services