

Report of Councillor Jonathan Nunn Leader of the Council

30th November 2023

Since our last full council meeting, I have worked with the Cabinet, Members, the Chief Executive and Officers across all areas of the Council. Many of these activities and issues are referred to in more detail in Cabinet colleagues' reports.

Transformation

The Transformation Portfolio continues to focus on priority projects linked to significant savings or complex delivery. Highlights of each directorate's key developments are described below.

Place

In Planning, the new structure has been confirmed and the majority of internal appointments have been made. A major external recruitment drive is currently underway, and all vacancies are expected to be filled by Christmas. The successful delivery of a single DEF Mastergov IT system has enabled the project to focus on creating consistent single processes across WNC to support the outputs of the section 106/CIL review, which have been incorporated into the Planning Improvement Plan, to maintain pace in the improvement journey. The integration with the Corporate Customer Contact Centre has so far proven to be successful, resolving many enquiries quickly and efficiently, and the services are looking to expand this approach further.

Communities and Opportunities

Given Housing Solutions staff continue to be under pressure with winter approaching, a project seeking to reduce spend on Temporary Accommodation is currently being scoped with an emphasis on Prevention and Early Intervention. External support has been engaged to explore and implement more innovative options for housing, alongside the launch of the Landlord Incentive Scheme in West Northamptonshire, which provides incentives to landlords to offer a 12-month fixed-term tenancy at an affordable rent.

A project is being designed to deliver a single Rough Sleeper Pathway, across Housing, Adults, Health and Public Health. Emphasis will also be on working with local supported housing providers and the local voluntary sector. As part of this service specification, plans have been finalised for delivering services at Oasis house.

The Debt & Money Advice project has made progress, and is currently piloting integrating Welfare Benefit Officers into Adult Social Care to provide a multi-disciplined and more integrated response to residents. Training continues for new recruits to the team, and outcomes continue to be positive for residents. Currently the project is evaluating options around voluntary sector models of commissioning including considering a lead operator model.

People

The Optimisation of Single-Handed Care project continues to deliver results, and is now moving towards embedding a lasting improved practices to optimise the use of single-handed care across adult social care. This project has led to £638k in 2023/24 to date.

The delivery of a new framework for Homecare providers has concluded, and final contracts are being returned by the appointed providers, with relevant clients being transferred to their

new providers. Fortnightly provider forums are ensuring that all stakeholders are engaged, before more complex and/or urgent care packages in the coming month.

The Supported Living Outcomes project has completed 210 reviews, and includes the completion of 126 Care Act Assessments. To date this has achieved a saving of £743k in 2023/24.

A major IT project is also underway to replace the Adult Social Care System. Procurement commenced in October, with demonstrations and evaluations being completed throughout November before the contract is to be awarded by Christmas.

Children's Trust

The council's two most senior Transformation Officers - our Executive Director of Corporate Services, and our Head of Transformation Delivery – are currently embedded in the Children's Trust. The aim of their work, alongside the council's Director of Children's Services, is to bring additional capacity that can identify and deliver transformation and 'invest to save' projects. These projects will always continue to ensure that the needs of each child are met, but will also seek to ensure that value for money is achieved, without inhibiting the ongoing improvement of children's services.

To oversee this work, an NCT Transformation Board has been established.

Examples of transformation, including the established Circles of Success project which is aimed at getting better value from more costly placements, or the work now being undertaken on the high levels of referrals that NCT receive from other agencies, are already progressing towards the delivery of substantial budget savings.

Corporate

The Connected Customer programme continues at pace, with a focus in this period of maximising the value of each engagement we have with residents. In order to do this the project has assigned extra resources to the Adults website review which is following the principles set out in our Customer Experience Strategy. The programme is now focusing on the next area of work to bring into the customer contact centre, which is to be focused on triage and prevention for adults.

This programme will then focus on rolling out a communications campaign to promote the uptake of the WNC app, given residents the information they need at their finger tips.

The West Ways of Working programme continues to deliver our hybrid working model, with plans being developed for both Northampton and Towcester, following the work done at Daventry.

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.

Following on from this year's bronze Investors in the Environment Award the team are working towards Investors in the Environment silver accreditation. The Council is very proud to have been short-listed for the best newcomer award by the Investors in the Environment.

An emissions reduction plan is in development, following the publication of our baseline emissions data, to enable the delivery of our 2030 net zero target for West Northants Council and by 2045 for West Northamptonshire residents and businesses.

A joint project with the University of Northampton is underway, funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Towards a Net Zero West Northamptonshire project (TaNZ) will help local businesses decarbonise.

A joint sustainable period product project is underway with NPH, samples of sustainable products have been supplied by leading companies.

Work continues to promote sustainable warmth schemes to west Northants residents enabling them to access grants to support energy efficiency improvements in their homes. The Government Eco funding scheme, helping residents improve the energy efficiency of their home, has had over 120 submissions approved, whilst the Government's HUG 2 funding scheme is due to start shortly.

Civic

Colleagues were proud to accept the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award in October, for our ongoing work to support our Armed Forces Community both within the council and externally. The council supported the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal in the lead up to Remembrance, selling poppies in all office locations. As in previous years, the council facilitated several road closures across West Northants to enable Remembrance parades, with representatives attending services across West Northants to lay wreaths on behalf of the authority. Efforts continue to encourage local businesses and organisations to sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

The WNC hosted Lord-Lieutenant's office has facilitated several events over the past few months including St Crispin and Crispinian's Day, the Lord-Lieutenant's Leader's Forum, and the investiture of the Lord-Lieutenant's cadets. We led a successful programme of Royal Visits at the beginning of November, with visits made by the Duke of Gloucester to Fulkrum Technologies, Corby Sixth Form, Adrenaline Alley, and the Cransley Hospice Trust. We will be gladly accepting a Coronation Oak Tree from the Lord-Lieutenant in the coming weeks, to be planted in Abington Park.

The Chairman's office is pressing ahead with plans for the upcoming sixth form debating competition to be held in the new year. In support of the Chairman's chosen theme of music for his term in office, musical performances will be continuing ahead of Full Council meetings leading up to the ChoirFest event in March 2024. Charitable efforts also continue in support of the Army Benevolent Fund and NMPAT.

Executive Support colleagues continue to provide a high-level support service to the leadership team, Cabinet, Chairman and Lord-Lieutenant as well as supporting organisational projects such as our 2024 Staff THRIVE Awards.

Support also continues for our Staff Networks, with a range of successful events having taken place in the past few months including a Black History Month talk and Early Careers networking event.

Plans are underway to introduce a Central Business Support team in the new year which is intended to supplement administrative resource across the organisation and deliver value for money through reducing our use of agency colleagues.

Communications

Alongside the recent launch of our the residents magazine, West Northants Life, we have also continued to extend our e-news offer to residents across West Northants, with over 15,300 subscribers to our latest updates including corporate news, arts and culture, museums and galleries, business and employment, SEND and community safety. Residents can subscribe through this link: [Multiple newsletters sign up form \(sibforms.com\)](https://www.sibforms.com)

Our comms team has secured dedicated resource working on behalf of all partners of the Northants Serious Violence Alliance to develop and deliver key promotional campaigns aimed at reducing serious violence countywide over the next 18 months, including a focus on youth crime and knife crime prevention.

Extensive promotion of this year's Heritage Opens Days has resulted in the most successful programme of events and activities across West Northants yet.

We have worked with partners within WNC and across health and community organisations to develop and launch the Winter Well campaign, a major communications focus on supporting our communities through the winter months, including a focus on cost of living, welcoming spaces, vaccinations, mental wellbeing and more.

We stepped up our work to raise awareness and information around the new co-produced SEND strategy and promoted key schemes progressing to provide additional places for SEND pupils across our area including the launch of the Chiltern/Hunsbury unit.

The ongoing regeneration of Northampton town centre has continued to be a key communication focus, providing residents with regular updates on schemes including the Market Square Abington and Fish Street preparatory works, and the STACK scheme for Market Walk. Two key projects have also triumphed at local business awards, with the Vulcan Works winning the Innovation Award, and 78 Derngate winning the Land and Development Award.

Preparations have been in full swing to promote Christmas waste and recycling arrangements, with residents set to receive information in the coming weeks, including bin hangers w/c 27 November.

Other key events, projects and activities promoted include Diwali, Stoptober, Customer Services Week, International Men's Day, Care Leavers Covenant, Young Citizens Scheme, Annual Canvass, Cleaner Communities, and Local Area Partnerships launch.

Business Intelligence, Policy and Performance

The newly created Business Intelligence & Population Insights Team (BIPI) has completed its transformation programme after the creation of WNC and the joining together of 4 legacy council Business Intelligence teams into a new single team structured around the needs of WNC, the services we provide, and the needs of the people we support in West Northamptonshire.

As part of the new team, new functions and departments are being supported, including Public Health, Children's Services and Communities and Opportunities, as well as the continuation of

support to Adult Social Care, Early Years and Education, Northamptonshire Children's Trust, Corporate and the Place directorate.

BIPI has been hard at work supporting and leading on many areas of insights and analytics across WNC including:

- SEND JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) for example by scoping the process agreed and producing assessment templates
- Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process established, and communicated across WNC to support the draft budget setting process for 2024/25
- Undertaking the handover of Public Health intelligence, previously undertaken by North Northants Council, including responsibility for Public Health statutory returns handover to WNC BIPI
- With a key element of BIPI's work being to maintain and submit statutory returns, this year has seen two significant new statutory returns, for Adult Social Care and for Early Years and Education being required, along with the introduction of many new scorecards, dashboards and assurance board reporting requirements now established and delivered
- BIPI has supported the SEND Improvement Board, through developing and delivering a data dashboard
- Supporting the first Performance Children's Directorate Management Team, resulting in valuable insight and discussion from the data provided
- BIPI are also supporting the procurement and implementation of the Adult Social Care Case Management System (the ARISE project), as well as the Education Case Management System and the Northamptonshire Children's Trust Case Management System
- Supporting the development of a performance framework in Temporary Accommodation
- Developing a performance framework around the 10 Live Your Best Lives ambitions across WNC and Public Health
- A key milestone for our BIPI Systems team was implementing the Electronic Medication Administration Record System (EMAR) for home care services in Adult Social Care
- BIPI Systems have also developed a suite of operational reporting from the new home care system in Adult Social Care, and are in the process of implementing a new data quality strategy.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council