

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2021****Human Resources**

In the first three months we have successfully transitioned all staff from the four key sovereign councils into West Northants, with HR Business Partners actively supporting the new directorates and all their staffing issues. We have written and consulted with Trade Unions on upwards of 37 different policies and procedures and contracts of employment, signed the TUC Dying to Work Charter and commenced the briefings for changes for EU Citizens which commenced on the 1<sup>st</sup> July. In terms of pay and reward we have completed and implemented phase 1 on terms and conditions and started the work on phase two relating to a new pay structure. In recent days we have also agreed with Trade Unions, on a three day “closedown” over Christmas, from Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> December through to Friday 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021. To provide consistency with former SNC and NBC colleagues, 1 day of additional paid leave will be given to former NCC and Daventry DC employees and employees on the new WNC terms and conditions.

As lead authority for payroll, we successfully processed both West and North Northants payrolls and updated all staffing information, reflecting the large-scale changes to line manager updates, position changes and hierarchy restructures. This was done alongside continuing to provide the payroll for Cambridgeshire and Milton Keynes too. All payrolls remained above 99.5% accuracy during this period.

The health and safety and wellbeing service have been working with the new directorates and particularly involved in the Covid work, relating to teams coming safely back into the offices. They have updated a lot of guidance on the new staff intranet as well as launching a number of wellbeing support offers, including the eye care voucher scheme and a number of campaigns around mental health wellbeing. There are a number of mental first aiders deployed across the services that support employees and are trained to spot, engage and support someone who is suffering from poor mental health, including a mental health crisis. Their role also involves reducing stigma, education and encouraging behaviours for positive mental health.

Our learning and development service, hosted by the North continue to provide a wide range of services and support to the council, underpinned by a business partner model that works with all directorates. A new Middle Management and Leadership programme has been developed and bespoke support is being provided to new teams. Apprenticeships continue with over 400 people on apprenticeship programmes and all directorates are now considering future opportunities for the use of apprentices, looking at new staff and existing. The new digital i-learn platform is operational with over 1700 sign ups to date and all mandatory e-learning training available.

**OPUS Report**

At July Cabinet a report was presented that ensured that the new council could continue the arrangement with OPUS, who supports the council to bring in temporary staff. The county council used OPUS since 2016 and in 2017 it became a shareholder in this local authority led

organisation (alongside Cambridge County Council and Milton Keynes Council). Previously to 2016, the county council used Guidant or went to a range of providers. OPUS provides support directly but also negotiates on behalf of the council to bring in other agencies. This model has provided better value for money over the years.

The Cabinet report ensured these arrangements would continue, and now include West and North Northants Councils as well as the Children's Trust as shareholders and continued users of OPUS. Opus is an ethical employer and pays its staff at least the living wage and has no staff on zero hours contracts. All workers engaged via Opus on behalf of WNC are paid in line with our organisational policy which is not determined by Opus and again none of these workers are on zero hours contracts.

## **Customer Services**

Since Vesting Day, Customer Services have continued to provide a range of customer services and have started the improvement journey to bring four different councils, with four different offers, four different sets of technology and working practices together. The team is actively working with the other directorates to support the following:

- Standardise call openings and email templates across the teams
- Create a centralised complaints and compliments team
- Review and improve the customer experience when calling our central number, by simplifying the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) based on customer journeys
- Operate customer-facing hubs for walk-ins, facilitating safe face-to-face interactions at the One Stop Shop at the Guildhall in Northampton, The Forum at Towcester and the Lodge Road offices in Daventry
- Cross-skill the advisors so they can handle as many enquiries as possible without the need to transfer to another colleague (general enquiries, bus pass applications etc.)

Currently, the management team are working on developing:

- The Service Plan for the year 2021-22, which focuses on how we will align our processes and ways of working across the 4 hubs
- The Customer Strategy draft, to be co-developed with directorates, prior to wider engagement which demonstrates how Customer Services will support delivery of the Council vision
- The culture, values and behaviours in the Customer Services department, in coproduction with the whole team which embodies the THRIVE ethos

## **Volume of contacts:**

- April: 27,038 calls and 9,017 emails – highest demand in Housing, General Enquiries and Waste
- May: 25,887 calls and 6,533 emails – highest demand in Housing, General Enquiries and Children's Services

In addition, there were 113.3k page views in April and 96.4k page views in May on our website, most of which related to searches against Council Tax, Contact Us, News and Election Results (May).

## **Volume of complaints, compliments and Member Enquiries:**

- Logged 451 during April and May (highest volumes are in the Place directorate and Northamptonshire Children's Trust)
- Closed 426 during April and May (some of them inherited from the sovereign councils)

## **Technology and Digital Services**

Technology and digital services are a key enabling area and the current team provides support to both West and North Northants as well as to the Children's Trust. In terms of ERP Gold, where HR and finance data are held, this service is also provided to Cambridge and Milton Keynes too. We also provide services to Northampton Partnership Homes and Northampton Leisure Trust and supply small services to several other authorities.

As well as ensuring that the basics are in place across the services (such as the roll out of Office 365, the roll out of computers and changes needed to bring services back into the office during Covid) the team is doing a thorough analysis of its services, its teams and capability and capacity (after bringing the new teams together). In the last three months, the service has continued to manage and bed in the over 800 systems in use at the council, including splitting of key systems and data between the two new authorities and the Children's Trust, and the management of compliant access arrangements where data must still be shared.

The service is now beginning work on the development of an improvement road map, prioritisation of programmes and projects and work to align and bolster key areas of capability, supported by the development of a technology and digital strategy. This will ensure we continue to harness technology to drive increasingly efficient, effective and customer-focused services.

A key priority is ensuring the council continues to develop its approach to cyber security. As part of these measures, a member cyber security development session will be arranged for all members in September. Securing cyber security staff, systems and training are top of the new directorate's priorities, followed by building a service equipped to help the council transform both internal services and those it offers to the wider public: from websites and online tools, to support around public technology in Northamptonshire (e.g. broadband rollout and 5G).

## **Legal and Democratic Services**

As a new council, significant work went into developing the new constitution for the council which went to the first Cabinet and Council meetings. This will be refined during the next few months to adapt to the changing nature of the council.

Prior to Vesting Day, considerable effort also went into ensuring the council was safe and legal from Day 1, which meant a lot of work for legal services, including the drafting of legal agreements to split the county council and to onboard the new district and borough councils. There was also the need to support the lead and hosted services between the West and North new councils with IIAs (Inter Authority Agreements) being in place.

The Council's property, assets, liabilities, proceedings, memberships, orders, decisions, policies continue to be adapted and require ongoing legal advice to help us remain safe and legal as we move forward and meanwhile the usual prosecutions, applications, leases, sales are still going on.

West Northants Council successfully held its first election, using Silverstone at the key site for counting, with great input from each of the four council's elections teams and support from a wide range of employees. A significant work goes into the organisation of an election, let alone

a Covid safe one, from the checking of nominations, issuing and verifying postal votes; the staffing and equipping of 276 polling stations not to mention the verification on 6th May and the various count events over the weekend and into Monday. Since then we have had a by-election in Talavera and work is being undertaken on neighbourhood referenda. The next project is already underway as we have been bringing together the electoral registers of the three District areas into a single register. Many of the staff involved in the election were straight into the delivery of the Annual Meeting and the extensive member induction programme. which many of you will have taken part in.

Less visible but no less vital is the work undertaken by our staff handling the myriad of information and personal data requests to the Council and the Children's Trust and bringing together all the paper, digital and archived records of the predecessor councils. In relation to data protection, the council has responded to more than 400 FOI and EIR requests in the first three month and more that 650 requests, taking into consideration the police enquiries (Schedule 2's) and SARs (Subject Access Requests).

The Registration and Coroner's Services have been significantly impacted by Covid with a backlog of weddings, other ceremonial events and Coroner's hearings. The national flux of requirements has presented ongoing challenges and strong feelings from those looking forward to their special day.

Moving forwards, all the key services will be aligned as part of the transformation plans for the council.

### **Future Reports**

All of Corporate Services are currently developing their Service Plans and underpinning strategies which will be shared in the autumn and aligned to the Corporate Plan, which was approved last month at Cabinet in June.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all of the team' for their hard work over the transitioning period and a warm welcome following my appointment as the Cabinet Member.

**Councillor Mike Hallam**  
**Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services**