

## Report of Councillor Jonathan Nunn Leader of the Council

Date 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024

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.

#### **Communities** & **Opportunities**

The suite of projects under the Housing transformation programme continues to deliver outcomes. The consultation phase for the re-organisation of the Housing Solutions team has now passed and all responses have been reviewed and informed the final report. The recruitment process will commence at the end of March. The new structure will form the basis for new ways of working, and employees have been fully included throughout the planning and delivery of the project.

The project to implement the new Housing Allocations scheme and IT system by 1<sup>st</sup> April is progressing at pace. With a focus on ensuring we continue to provide an efficient service to our most vulnerable residents during this transition phase, and communicating to all existing and future customers about the project and what it means to them.

A second stakeholder workshop for the Rough Sleeping Pathway project was held in February which brought together services and organisations and was a useful session to continue this vital work to improve how we work together on West Northamptonshire's challenges to support people with complex lives. Public Health, Housing and Place shaping provided information on their current prevention strategies. The group work focussing on real life case studies identified what works well now and what the future could look like. There were some hard hitting themes raised, some positives to draw from, and clear opportunities to make things better. The feedback from the stakeholder engagement is informing the design of the project and new pathway.

Preparation for hosting the LEP function continues to be delivered at a fast pace, ensuring the legalities are in place but also focussing on ensuring a warm West welcome is given to the new staff joining WNC. Whilst WNC will be hosting services such as the Growth Hub and the Careers Hub from 1<sup>st</sup> April, with our management costs reimbursed, it is a firm principle that the council will neither make 'a profit' on operating these services, or be exposed to risk that is not shared across the six councils involved in the South East Midlands.

The Debt and Money Advice project is in the final preparations for launching the new service across West Northants from the 1<sup>st</sup> April. Internal and external communications are being

drafted to ensure colleagues, members and VCS partners are aware. A revised VCS grant process will also be in place by 1<sup>st</sup> April, which includes a performance and data reporting framework.

### **Corporate Services, DTI and Finance**

The Connected Customer programme continues to build on the outreach model, seeking to extend the surgeries to further our engagement with residents and bringing in the triage and prevention for adults into the contact centre.

The Office Optimisation programme has a clear plan to consolidate operations in Northampton to a central office and the Northampton One Stop Shop based at One Angel Square while retaining the historical part of The Guildhall for Democratic Services and the Coroner This work has started with staff consultations in Towcester.

The roll out of the new Vodafone Storm telephony solution for the Contact Centre services has begun and continues at pace alongside the refresh of physical handsets where they are still required. For all other teams, the roll out of Teams Dial Pad has been completed and work is starting to remove physical handsets where they are no longer required. Teams Dial Pad is a 'softphone' solution built into Microsoft Teams, which allows colleagues to call customers from their PC or laptop.

The first phase of the software upgrade to replace our multiple legacy Revenue and Benefits systems with a single, modern platform designed to streamline operations and improve the online experience for residents when interacting with the council has been completed. The upgrade will be rolled out in stages with residents within the Northampton area being the first to experience the changes.

The first two phases of the Pay & Grading programme to design and deliver a WNC job family architecture and pay structure and then job match all roles in scope to the new pay structure and implementation of WNC pay, terms & conditions for those on interim terms has been successfully completed and work is now starting on Voluntary Assimilation and schools.

### **People**

The Optimisation of Single-Handed Care project has achieved its financial efficiency target resulting in savings of over £1million for Adult Social Care through the reduction in 2-person care visits. In addition to this, process improvements have been made to ensure that efficiencies continue when the project concludes.

Extensive work has been undertaken to enable the disaggregation of the Assistive Technology service from North Northamptonshire council. Final tasks are in the process of being completed and this service is on track to disaggregate on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 as planned.

The Supported Living Outcomes project has completed 362 reviews, and includes the completion of 204 Care Act Assessments. To date this has achieved a saving of £913k in 2023/24.

Project Arise, which is overseeing the replacement of the Adult Social Care Case Management System continues to move forward. Contracts have now been signed with a new software

provider following the completion of the required procurement exercise. Work has been planned and is now in delivery to undertake the necessary activities to support the transfer to the new systems within the next 12 months.

## **Place**

In Planning, the new structure is in place and recruited to, the delivery of the single DEF Mastergov IT system has enabled the full process redesign to commence, including Section 106 & CIL. The new integrated Asset system is set to go live in April which will give greater transparency to our buildings and assets in one place, across the organisation. The preferred provider has been chosen for the Regulatory Services system, so implementation will commence imminently. Post 16 Home to School Transport policy is in consultation and will close on 1<sup>st</sup> April. Within Highways, three locations are now live across with the moving traffic enforcement cameras, aimed at keeping traffic moving and reducing pollution through keeping yellow box junctions clear.

## **Supporting the Improvement Journey for Children, Young People and Families**

To support the Transformation and Efficiency activity associated with the Children's Trust and helping to deliver better outcomes to children, young people and families, senior transformation leadership resource has been seconded into the Trust to provide additional capacity. This is with the aim to:

- Create a systemic improvement in services for children in Northamptonshire.
- Address historical structural deficits in services of children.
- Improve partnership understanding of what a 'good' system looks like.
- Improve and drive value for money services that manage demand.
- Currently Ofsted rates both WNC and NNC as "Requires Improvement" a "Good" judgement at Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) may also lead to removal of DfE statutory intervention notice which could enable a review of options for future delivery.

There is now a defined improvement plan in place with over thirty key projects in train that cover:

**Commissioning and Procurement** - Projects looking at how we deliver services, who delivers services and different models that deliver better outcomes, meet our needs and are most cost effective.

**Demand Management and Early Help** - Projects and initiatives considering how we can reduce, delay or prevent demand and do more to more to stop escalating needs becoming a crisis requiring expensive and intrusive interventions.

**Technology and Innovation** - Projects and initiatives considering how we can reduce, delay or prevent demand and do more to more to stop escalating needs becoming a crisis requiring expensive and intrusive interventions.

**Operational Efficiency** - Reviewing how we do things to establish areas where we could reduce costs, optimise processes and reduce administrative burdens.

**Workforce** - Projects that consider the development and make-up of the workforce to maximise the quality of practice and ensure that we can most effectively meet need.

**Policy and Practice** - Consider where we can change our approach, policy or practice interventions to drive improvement in care experiences and progress or reduce the cost of demand failure.

Key pieces of work underway include a review of the Front Door into Children's Services including the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the development of joined up early help and preventative services within both councils. Significant work is also underway to look at different ways of providing placements within Northamptonshire to help tackle the current market where placements need to be commissioned from other providers. This includes the development of children's homes directly by both councils.

## **Business Intelligence & Population Insights (BIPI)**

BIPI are now fully established with the addition of 8 external members, increasing the skills, experience and diversity of the team. This additional knowledge from a combination of private and public sector backgrounds is bringing a new dimension to the team which has quickly and seamlessly integrated into the new structure and job roles in place. As well as the traditional areas of support BIPI offered to Adults, Education, Public Health and Place, BIPI are increasingly expanding our expertise and knowledge to other areas of the council which currently included support for Corporate Finance, Adults financial forecasting, Planning department, Revs and Benefits and Highways.

BIPI are beginning the journey to embrace new technologies, approaches and ways of working. These include locally and in partnership with DTi promoting the use and capabilities of systems such as MS Power BI, Power Automate and other software solutions which can improve the reporting capabilities thereby improving the data and analytics which is available to all in WNC, including senior managers and decision makers, to make sound decisions and set direction based upon better intelligence.

As part of the BIPI restructure a BIPI Project Manager was established who has led us through a change programme of the restructure as well as many other key pieces of work to make BIPI an efficient and effective hub of data and intelligence in WNC. To support the wider WNC and NCT goals, BIPI has seconded this post to NCT to manage the procurement and implementation of a new Northamptonshire Children's Trust Case Management system. A priority and key system development essential to providing NCT a sound and efficient case management system supporting the Children of Northamptonshire. This project is at its very early stages but progressing well and at pace.

Below is a summary of just some of the critical and priority projects and "products" BIPI is leading on or supporting to deliver since June 2023 (when BIPI was established).

- BIPI supported the procurement of the Adult Social Care case management system and led on the reporting workstream of the programme. This system is scheduled to "kick off" on the 18th of March where there is a 12 month implementation to go-live programme in place.
- A new WNC Data Quality Policy was implemented. Understanding how data quality effects all areas of the Council and it's important is crucial to making good decisions, whilst also adhering to legislation.

- In the Autumn of 2023, BIPI were audited by WNC internal audit. The “Performance Management 2022/23” audit provided a opinion of Good for “Adequacy of System” and Satisfactory for Compliance, which is a good outcome for the council and the team which will only improve now a full established team are in place with clear objectives and directions are set. BIPI are also supporting the external Value for Money Audit by Grant Thornton.
- Successfully implemented and completed the new process for Equality Impact Assessments (EQiA) supporting the budget setting process for 2024/25. This streamlined and efficient process was well managed and communicated throughout WNC.
- New Statutory returns responsibility has now transferred to BIPI following the disaggregation of Public Health Performance Team from NNC, and those returns have been completed and submitted.
- Public Health Smoking Cessation analytics are now being produced utilising MS Power BI, a new and emerging technology in WNC. This visualisation of performance metrics and trend data is proving a big leap forward for the team with extremely positive and supportive feedback being received.
- Adult Social Care are also receiving approximately a 40 page performance report covering financial commitment, Equalities information, client pathway, statutory safeguarding, data quality, internal audit of supervisions, client numbers and cohorts and for the first time LAP reporting integrated into dashboards supporting the strategic goals of the council are now being produced via a Power BI model. Improvements and advancements are made on a weekly basis.
- Supporting the current SEND partnerships Inspection by OFSTED and CQC is underpinned by sound and accurate data provision which BIPI lead on and supply. This is a current (March) priority for the team lead by BIPI experts.
- BIPI shall be part of the Elections Working Group, our expertise in collating, managing and reporting data shall be an important element of a successfully run and managed Election night.
- BIPI have successfully managed the handed over of work from the Public Health Intelligence Team (a hosted resource in NNC).
- A new area to support was received following a presentation by the BIPI HoS to all managers of WNC. A member of the BIPI Systems team spent time understanding the issues being faced within the Planning team and the amount of time and double keying of data from one system to another was taking. A new automatic report was created which gives all the information and more at the touch of a button, which was taking approximately a day a week to complete. Using the visualisations included in the report immediate improvements could be made and issues spotted which led to service improvements. This ethos of supporting new areas of WNC and putting in place quick reporting solutions to reduce resource in the business area is a fundamental goal for BIPI moving forward and a great success story. The member of staff in BIPI was nominated for a THRIVE award as a result.
- A new WNC Annual Report - Service Plan has been implemented in March 2024, this streamlines the many requirements placed upon directors and the council by using a single service planning template to record and communicate directorate service plans, aims and objectives along with the vision and mechanism to produce the WNC Annual Report, which is made available to the public each year. This new plan also aligns to the

principles of the VIP programme and shows the golden thread from personal objectives through to the Corporate priorities.

There are many other areas of work both strategically and locally which could be mentioned as the impact and influence of BIPI is beginning to be seen throughout the council. This is reflected in a recent shortlisting for “Best Collaboration Award” at the forthcoming THRIVE awards 2024 which the team are very proud to have been recognised. Many members of BIPI were also personally nominated for awards. This is great news for such a new and developing team, but something which we strive to achieve and aim for in the next 12 months.

## **Chief Executive Office**

In January, we were pleased to introduce our new Central Business Support function in a new initiative to reduce agency spend across the Council and make the delivery of our short-term business support more efficient and robust. Following induction and training on our corporate systems, the team are now supporting several key projects across the Council and, in the short time that they have been with us, they have already supported work in Planning, DTI, Housing, Major Events, School Admissions Appeals, Adult Social Care, Waste, and the Children’s Trust. This is a very positive start for the team and the work carried out so far is already showing results by identifying contract savings for the Council.

Colleagues in our Executive Support team continue to provide dedicated support to our senior leadership team and have been proud to support the delivery of several projects in recent months. This has included the staff networks, Employee Appreciation Tour, the recent West Northants Council Peer Review, and the upcoming staff THRIVE Awards 2024. Whilst supporting the delivery of the event itself, the team were also very pleased to be shortlisted for the ‘Respect’ award.

In the Chairman’s Office, colleagues were pleased to support the Chairman’s recent sixth form debating competition which saw six West Northamptonshire schools compete. It was an inspiring event which is intended to become an annual feature of the Chairman’s year in office. As we head into spring, colleagues look forward to the upcoming Choir Fest event in support of the Chairman’s chosen charities – NMPAT and the Army Benevolent Fund. Colleagues are also now looking ahead and beginning to plan for the incoming Chairman’s year in office.

The Lord-Lieutenant’s office was delighted to welcome HRH The Princess Royal to Northamptonshire for a Royal Visit to Off the Streets in February. Colleagues in the Lord-Lieutenant’s office is now looking ahead to the summer Garden Parties and issuing invitations to those selected to attend. The office was also saddened by the recent passing of David Laing CBE, who served as the Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire from 2014-2020.

With the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day Landings coming up on 6 June, colleagues are supporting the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery through their D-Day co-curation board. Plans are also in the pipeline for Armed Forces Day in June and colleagues are working on an Armed Forces Community event for September, in partnership with Northampton General Hospital and the Defence Medical Welfare Service. Colleagues attended the annual National Transition Event at Silverstone this month and were pleased to attend an Armed Forces

Covenant mass signing event at Northampton International Academy in February. The team continue to support drop-ins through our Welcoming Spaces, and the next Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Board is scheduled for April.

## Communications

Communications and consultation activities during the winter months have supported a broad range of corporate priorities across the Council, with key promotional campaigns and projects including:

- The 2024/25 Budget and public consultation – extensive promotions across all channels to encourage residents’ feedback on the budget-setting proposals
- Winter Well – seasonal advice and information to help people stay well physically, mentally and financially
- Cost of living and Household Support Fund – ensuring residents are aware of local support and services available if they are struggling with financial hardship has continued to be a priority
- Christmas and New Year service arrangements, including waste and recycling promotions including updated calendars, bin hangers and social media campaigns
- Publication of the second edition of the West Northants Life residents magazine, distributed to households across the area
- Working with our highways partners, Kier, to increase awareness of the work of our fleet of gritters keeping roads safe over the colder months, as well as highlighting the impact of investing new technology, including the Pothole pro, to carry out essential road repairs across the network
- Regeneration of Northampton town centre – keeping the public engaged and updated, including the Greyfriars Amplify consultation and publicising progress on Northampton’s Market Square, with bespoke stalls and regenerated paving, and on works starting at Abington and Fish Street to deliver a revitalised public realm in one of the town’s busiest shopping areas.
- Live music events, with Collide: Choirfest taking place this spring and James Arthur and Let’s Rock coming to Delapr e this summer, as well as preparations getting under way for the Women’s Rugby World Cup hosting in 2025
- Encouraging voter awareness and participation in future elections including the Police Fire and Crime Commission election in May and future General Election
- Continuing to update the public on our ongoing improvement journey for children’s services including those for SEND families, including work towards embedding the new partnership strategy and schemes to create new places including the Tiffield School development.
- Developing our early help offer with partners for children and young people, including developing a new digital offer providing information for parents, children and teenagers and a consultation seeking their views on what service offers they would like to receive as we work on shaping our family hub model.
- Co-ordinating communications on behalf of our partners countywide to publicly launch the Northamptonshire Serious Violence Prevention Strategy.

Preparations have also continued on future communications arrangements for key issues including the transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership functions to WNC and developing promotions around the new Local Area Partnerships.



There has continued to be growth across all functions of the communications team, with increased reach to audiences by social media and ongoing e-news development.

Future objectives and priorities for further developing all channels and activities have been set out within the Corporate Communications and Engagement Strategy 2024-27 being considered by Cabinet this month.

**Cllr Jonathan Nunn  
Leader of the Council**