

Communications

- We have been working with Rugby World Cup and Northampton Saints to prepare our comms strategy for the Women's Rugby World Cup event which will involve promotion across a wide range of assets in the lead up to the event as well as coordinating the city dressing across the area. Comms will highlight the economic benefits of holding this major sporting event in our area and showcase West Northants as both a major sporting and tourism destination to a worldwide audience.
- We have provided extensive communications support for the PFCC and General Elections, both in the lead-up – including bespoke content about voter ID – and during verification and count events. This has included managing media and there is a great deal of interest for the General Election in our patch.
- Engaging residents, community groups and planning organisations on the future of planning services across West Northamptonshire as we launched the local area plan consultation. This will guide planning decisions across the area up until 2041.
- Following the closure of the public consultation on the air quality action plan, we are now working with DEFRA to further enhance the plan which will seek to improve air quality across West Northamptonshire and reduce the impact of air pollution on our communities.
- Vital funding to carry out home energy upgrades – we are working with Agility Eco to promote Government funding which is available to low-income households who are not connected to the mains grid gas. The funding allows households to upgrade their home energy systems, to reduce their bills, and enable their homes to be more efficient.
- We worked with colleagues across the council and Northampton Saints to deliver an incredibly successful victory parade after the team won this year's Gallagher Premiership. Our social media content was incredibly well received and had some of the best engagement we've seen since WNC launched.
- We've been working with highways and planning colleagues to tackle reputational impact around the extended closure of Sandy Lane, which has impacted both residents and businesses in the area. The link between Berrywood Road and the A4500 opened at the end of June.
- We've produced the third edition of our residents' magazine, packed with content including a comprehensive listing of events throughout the summer. This is due for distribution during the first two full weeks in July.
- We coordinated extensive comms activity to promote Collide: A ChoirFest Experience which included a range of digital and printed marketing activity across a variety of channels as well as working with partners and other Council services, including Northampton Town FC, the Saints and Libraries, to arrange a series of pop-up events in the lead up to the main event. We also coordinated a press evening event at

Northampton Museum and Art Gallery, with all comms activity generating substantial positive press and promotion resulting in increased ticket sales.

Business Intelligence and Population Insights (BIPI)

BIPI are in a very exciting and transformational period. As well as business as usual work (report requests, analytical support and data and intelligence provision across the authority and our partner agencies) and completing a series of Statutory returns on behalf of Adult Social Care, Public Health and Early Years and Education we are leading a significant number of projects, aimed at fundamentally changing the reporting/data landscape and technological capabilities of the council using the tools and skills which BIPI are developing at a rapid rate.

This focus is in line with the BIPI Service Plan and supports the strategic direction articulated by ELT and members of the Cabinet.

The points below are just some of the highlights the team have recently achieved and are currently engaged in:

- Since the last update, BIPI have purchased and led the implementation of Microsoft Fabric into WNC. Power BI provides access for all staff to create market leading visualization dashboards and reports and share with colleagues throughout the organisation, where previously we could not. The introduction of Power BI shall also realise savings after a period when legacy and out of date reporting systems can be discontinued.
 - Fabric also gives us access to tools to rapidly improve efficiencies within the organisation by automating many routine currently manual processes, releasing capacity to focus on making service improvements and other efficiencies.
 - We are also able to design an infrastructure which will be able to join corporate datasets and build towards a data warehouse/lake house, improving access to data and analytics across the organisation and link systems together to create richer data sources to make better decisions supported with accurate, timely and joined up data.
- Collaborating with DTi, BIPI are driving forward the project to implement a Centre of Excellence, supported by Microsoft, to establish a framework and structure around the new tools and opportunities we have embracing the wider Fabric suite of products. This includes AI, predictive analytics and further cutting-edge technologies to improve efficiencies, reduce spend and enhance our data environment.
- Supporting the wider council and NCT goals and objectives, BIPI continue to project manage the procurement and implementation of the NCT Case Management System, an NCT priority and since the BIPI Project manager involvement the project has now seen a provider selected and contracted to provide the new system, improving the processes and management of Children Social Care cases and ultimately improving the services we jointly offer and the lives and life chances of our young people.
- Using the technology, we have implemented, BIPI are already reaching out across the whole organisation to support improvement to working practices and organisational efficiencies. Working within limited resources BIPI are actively working on priority areas to seek savings wherever possible. Following a presentation, we gave to senior managers we have been asked in July to see how we might be able to support the Transport team with their data systems and if there are possibilities of identifying areas of savings with the

reconciliation of accounts and charging protocols. Data products and reporting improvements we have already delivered in this new arena include Adult Social Care strategic and financial reporting suite, proof of concept delivered to Corporate Finance to improve budget position recording and reporting, Prevention & Early Intervention Dashboard, Public Health Smoking Cessation dashboard, automated process for requesting the build of a Power BI workspace via connection with HALO and Power Automate, iLearn modules provided covering Power BI training courses whilst corporate L&D seek corporate solution, access and download of AWS data warehouse into MS Fabric – draft Complaints report already produced at pace.

- Other new areas we are currently supporting include the Customer Services Centre and in particular the Customer and Digital Board with a study into the feasibility to link the many different disparate data systems (17) to produce a common strategic dashboard to help direct and prioritise focus across the authority.
- BIPI supported the recent Ofsted SEND inspection and were specifically thanked for our dedication and contribution to the process and significant amount of data and information required as part of the inspection.
- In Adult Social Care, BIPI lead the redevelopment of the reporting database and analytical architecture which is required moving forward when the new case management system is live ensuring the current circa. 400 reports, dashboards and indicators are redesigned, planned and built-in line with a reporting schedule timeline. This will include decommissioning the current data reporting system, which has been in place for over 10 years.
- BIPI continue to be influential in the Elections Working Group and were throughout the night of the General Election, with many members of BIPI supporting the count on the night and 6 out of the 8 members of the control table being from within BIPI. Our expertise in data handling is critical to ensuring a smooth and accurate process.

Chief Executive Office

Since our last report, colleagues within the Chief Executive Office have continued to provide dedicated support to our Senior Leadership Team, Leader, Cabinet, Chairman, and the Lord-Lieutenant. The team has seen some changes in support arrangements due to changes within the Leadership team and Cabinet, a new Chairman coming into office and changes to the Vice Lord-Lieutenant and High Sheriff.

Key projects, activities and achievements include:

- Colleagues have provided support to several events within the Council including the staff THRIVE Awards and the Chairman's Honorary Alderman drinks reception.
- Our Central Business Support colleagues are now fully embedded in the organisation and have been received positively across directorates. The team have supported with projects in Housing Allocations, Adult Social Care, Elections, School Admission Appeals, Contract Management and Major Events. Their administrative support with staffing the General Election was invaluable and we have been pleased to see this new service being used effectively. Looking ahead for the next few months, the team have several different projects planned, including support to Home to School Transport, the Coroner's officer and Assets.

- Within the Chairman's office, we have successfully implemented our Honorary Alderman Scheme which saw eight former councillors being recognised for their extraordinary contributions to the Council and local community. Plans are now underway to introduce an Honorary Freeman scheme.
- Our Armed Forces Covenant project team have continued to support our local military community through community hubs and engagement activity. Plans are underway for an engagement roadshow during the summer and an Armed Forces Community information day in September. The team also attended a recent 'Conversation with Cadets' event at Yardley chase, aimed at raising awareness of employment and apprenticeship opportunities.
- In recent months, the team have organised and facilitated commemorative events to mark the 80th Anniversary of D-Day, and Armed Forces Week. Attention will now turn to plans for Remembrance later this year.
- The Lieutenancy office was pleased to support a number of deserving individuals to attend the recent summer garden parties. The past few months have also seen us support several Citizenship Ceremonies, which are always such a special event for those who have undertaken the process to become a British citizen. The office continues to bid for future Royal Visits to Northamptonshire.
- Executive Support colleagues continue to assist with the day-to-day diary management of colleagues within the organisation but have also been involved with several exciting projects including the Streets of Change launch, THRIVING marketplace event, Long Service Awards and Elections.
- The team are also set to welcome several students from local schools to carry out their work experience within the Chief Executive office during the summer months.

Transformation

This month sees WNC moving to the new Transformation governance arrangements with the introduction of 4 key enabler boards, revised PMO processes and establishing consistency of paperwork and stronger tracking. This will take a small number of months to embed and given that transformation across WNC is under the management of each Exec Director individually there will continue to be significant engagement across all transformation teams in WNC to ensure buy in to the new arrangements. In addition the PMO are working with ELT to review and refresh our organisational 'wicked issues' and aligning current transformation and change programmes to them to better identify the right problem to solve.

In terms of the big projects across Corporate and Finance, these remain Telephony project delivery (front and back office), Revenues and Benefits single system, office optimisation, Mortuary project and numerous other smaller projects.

Children's Trust and wider system transformation update

Introduction

West Northamptonshire Council is committed to supporting Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and ensuring a whole system approach to transformation and efficiency.

Additional capacity to the Trust has meant that in the past few months, more capacity has helped to better understand the operations of the Trust and the inter-relationships with both councils alongside wider partners.

The Transformation and Efficiency Board was created in November 2023 and oversees the Transformation and Efficiency Programme which looks at NCT Core Transformation as well as Council and NCT Transformation activities.

In terms of spend within the Trust, the key significant areas of spend are Placements (approximately 50% of the Trust's budget) and Staffing (30%) with smaller percentages relations to Children's Homes and Adoption (approximately 6.5%).

To develop a comprehensive work programme, the work has been split into six key themes and they also align to the inspection framework supporting the improvement plan for West's future Ofsted inspections of Children's Services.

- A) **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 more cost effective. This picks up the highest level of spend relating to placements.
- B) **Demand Management and Early Help** – projects considering how we can reduce, delay or prevent demand and do more to stop escalating need. This picks up the work to help avoid more children and young people going into the Children's Trust and preventing demand as well as looking at how best to manage demand in NCT from front door to fulfilment of services and advice.
- C) **Workforce** – projects that consider the development and makeup of the workforce. Again, this is one of the higher spending areas.
- D) **Technology and Innovation** - systems and innovations that can support greater productivity through automation and reduced duplication.
- E) **Operational Efficiency** – Reviewing how we do things to establish areas where we could reduce costs, optimise processes and reduce administrative burdens.
- F) **Policy and Practice** - consideration of changes in approach, policy or practice interventions to drive improvement.

July 2024 Update on Progress

A) Commissioning and Procurement Update

i) **Alternative Residential Accommodation**

West Northants Council has started to identify alternative residential accommodation for all ages of children and young people, including care leavers, that could be added to the current programme of new provision between the councils and NCT. This supports work on the increasing demands of post 16 and post 18 accommodation needs which has been significant in the past two years. It also looks to provision of high cost and specialist placement alternatives such as mother and baby and provision for individual children with very specific needs and requirements.

ii) **Strategic Partnership for Placements**

At Transformation and Efficiency Board in December 2023, it was agreed for NCT to explore the options to enter a long-term contract (till 2030) with one provider as an opportunity to co-design ways to work together to flexibly provide Ofsted registered homes for children in care

and care leavers, and additional services to meet needs of our children and young people, whilst also providing stability through existing arrangements.

This supports the development of a mixed model of provision for residential placements and helps to avoid the number of unregistered placements. More work will need to be done to fully evaluate this approach by both West and North Northamptonshire Councils and Northamptonshire Children's Trust working through the detail.

iii) **Circles to Success**

Work continues positively with the reduction of placement by stepping children down and reducing the impact of children coming into care. There is currently work being undertaken to develop a model of assessing strengths and capabilities in the wider system (councils, NCT) to ensure good practice can be embedded and the work continues on "valuing care" assessments.

B) Demand Management and Early Help Update

Work continues about the design of the **front door and redesign of MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub)** and a programme of work has been developed. It is expected that initial changes to improve the front door commence in early autumn.

Early Help – West Northants council progresses well with the development of the Early Help Offer, including a new digital presence, work on developing Family Hubs (hub and spoke model across West Northants, building on local assets) and creating an overarching strategy, solely for West Northants that supports early help and prevention work and lower levels of support for children and families. This remains a key priority for the wider system to help prevent more significant demand resulting in statutory interventions through the Children's Trust and support family resilience.

C) Workforce Update

The Trust has continued to be successful in converting a number of agency workers into permanent workers alongside recruiting to full time members of staff. Work with OPUS has also led to improved rates for temporary direct recruits. The key areas where temporary members of staff are still required are the Safeguarding, Initial Referral and Court teams which is in line with other councils.

D) Technology and Innovation Update

There has been a successful procurement of a new case management system for children's services. The decision has been to award to System C (Liquid Logic) .

Once contracts have been signed an agreed implementation plan will be co-produced with System C. In preparation for this, a draft implementation plan based upon a 13-month implementation has been developed, with a potential go-live in July 2025

E) Operational Efficiency Update

Office Optimisation roll out is continuing in West and the changes to OAS and Towcester have been signed off and the Trust has agreed its interim and final plans for OAS, including a

new home for the Social Work Academy and learning and development. The work programme for Towcester has been reprioritised to ensure improvements to the Ground floor commence first.

Legal Services work to move towards council provision is working at pace and a new service level agreement has been developed alongside working arrangements to allow a smooth transition from Pathfinder to the councils.

F) Policy and Practice Update

There are considerable pieces of work associated with improving practice and quality of the offer and ensuring that there is sufficient support for both West Northants council.

Resources have been agreed by the T and E Board with regard to the **Edge of Care** work (diverting children and young people from care) and the creation of a **Family Drug and Alcohol Court** which helps to prevent children coming into care.

A work programme is being developed with North Yorkshire council as the councils' SLIP (Sector Led Improvement Partner).

G) Rugby World Cup 2025

The Women's Rugby World Cup 2025 event planning continues. Recent Host City Steering Group chaired the Leader of the Council was held on 21st May. Established working groups fed back on a wide range of event planning covering the RFU Impact Programme Plan which has four ambitions:

- i. Inspire the next generation
- ii. Workforce Development
- iii. Thriving Clubs in West Northants (club development)
- iv. Raising awareness and achieving RWC2025 engagement.

The Welcome Ceremonies & Fan Engagement working group has been focussing on the official welcome ceremonies event. West Northants will host four teams and host an official ceremony the week prior to the tournament start date. The ceremony will be held at the Guildhall and include player presentations and a celebration of Northamptonshire's culture and history.

The Marketing & City Dressing working group are working with Rugby World Cup and tournament media suppliers to draft a city dressing plan for approval by the Host City Steering Group in August.
