

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

18 July 2024

Leader of the Council – Cllr Adam Brown

West Northamptonshire Council Chief Executive – Anna Earnshaw

Report Title	Annual Report 2023-24
Report Author	Becky Hutson, Head of Communications becky.hutson@westnorthants.gov.uk

List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	08/07/2024
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	08/07/2024
Other Director	Anna Earnshaw	08/07/2024
Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	08/07/2024

List of Appendices

Appendix A – West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) Annual Report 2023/24

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To present the West Northamptonshire Council Annual Report for 2023/24 to members for consideration. The report provides:
- A review of each Directorate’s work.
 - achievements and challenges during the year.
 - A summary of our performance against the Corporate Plan and other key strategies and policies.
- 1.2. The annual report also sets out the Council’s direction of travel for the year ahead by summarising key priorities for 2024/25.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Annual Report provides an opportunity for Members, the public and other stakeholders to reflect on the progress West Northamptonshire Council has made towards its vision to make West Northants a great place to live, work, visit and thrive. It also sets out how the authority aims to develop further and what activities and priorities it plans to embark on during its fourth year as a Council. It is a public-facing document setting out to all stakeholders the Council's corporate objectives, organisational values and the design principles for shaping future service delivery to meet resident needs. It also provides a comprehensive review of each Directorate's work over the past 12 months and their key priorities for the year ahead.
- 2.2 Directorate sections within the report highlight the many achievements and successes of each service area alongside information about the operational and financial challenges we have faced in 2023/24 and may face in the year ahead.
- 2.3 Also included within the report is an overview of performance indicators measuring the Council's progress against its corporate priorities during 2023/24. These metrics summarise the year-end position taken from our corporate scorecard and are also provided to Members on a quarterly basis. The metrics have been subject to ongoing review and challenge in order to ensure they are relevant, meaningful and allow us to be benchmarked against other Councils.
- 2.4 The report reflects the significant scale of both the changes and challenges faced by the Council during the year as it continued to bring together, modernise and improve services, processes and functions inherited from the predecessor councils. This has all had to be done while prioritising crucial work to support communities and protect the most vulnerable. It also recognises the continued good progress around developing and embedding fresh strategies, more sustainable places and better outcomes for residents. Despite this, we acknowledge there is more work to be done and we will always face changes in the wider environment and in meeting our customers' needs that may mean we need to adapt and change our plans. But we are well equipped now with robust processes and strong leadership which will help us to respond as required.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Members:
- 3.1.1 note the detailed content of the WNC Annual Report 2023/24 and the progress directorates have made against plans, objectives, and commitments during the Council's second year; and
- 3.1.2 note the key priorities for 2024/25 and potential challenges ahead.

4. Reason for Recommendations

- The 2023/24 Annual Report is for information but provides an opportunity for members and residents to reflect on progress against the priorities the Council set out for 2023-24 in last year's report and what can be expected in 2024-25.

- The Council is required as part of Local Government legislation to report performance of the Council to Members, with the Annual Report providing a 12-month summary of its progress.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 It is important the Council is clear, transparent and accountable about how it is performing against its priorities and objectives, providing services and delivering improved outcomes for its local communities. The Annual Report plays an important role in this process by setting out the progress of the work and activities undertaken by the Council's directorates and providing the public, elected members, partners and other stakeholders with a summary review of WNC's operational performance over the past 12 months.
- 5.2 It is also an opportunity to review retrospectively how the year progressed in terms of the priorities we set out in last year's plan and to explain any instances where and why that did not happen. This learning also feeds into the plans we have set for the year ahead and our risk mitigation plans.
- 5.3 The report provides a checkpoint for all these activities, plans, opportunities and risks and sets out the roadmap for our next year.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1 2023/24 was once again set against a backdrop of challenging economic circumstances and public sector funding pressures, as we, like many councils across the country, found ourselves dealing with significant rises in costs and unprecedented demand for services. Despite these ongoing challenges, we maintained and protected essential services within budget, while continuing to make good progress towards delivering better outcomes for all our residents.
- 6.2 Supporting our residents through the cost-of-living crisis continued to be a key focus, as we worked with community partners to distribute over £5m of government funding, including food and meal vouchers, hardship payments, funding for food banks and larders, and helping residents pay for practical measures to reduce their energy bills. We continued to deliver upon our new anti-poverty strategy with partners, with 100 welcoming spaces promoting community connections.
- 6.3 We took further strides on our improvement journey for children's services, with our Children's Trust fostering service being rated good by Ofsted and by developing a fresh approach to improving outcomes for youngsters with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). We have also supported around 12,000 adults a year to remain safe, well and independent.

7 Implications

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 There are no direct implications arising from the publication of the Annual Report however the document provides an overview of the Council's performance and challenges during 2023/24

relating to its finances and resources, including information on budget expenditure and general overview of how the Council received and spent its funding.

7.2 Legal

5.2.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the report or recommendations.

7.3 Risk

5.3.1 There are no risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. The 2023/24 Annual Report includes information on perceived service risks and challenges for each Directorate as part of their performance updates.

7.4 Consultation and Communications

7.4.1 The performance information included in the Annual Report is based upon the priorities identified within the Corporate Plan and in consultation with Cabinet and the Executive Leadership Team. The Corporate Plan priorities and wider service objectives underpin the council's communications and consultation activities to keep the public, staff and stakeholders informed and engaged on what the council is doing and how it is performing.

7.4.2 The Council will publish the 2023/24 Annual Report on its website and promote its publication across its communications channels to encourage residents, businesses and other stakeholders to find out more about how the Council has performed during the past year and the key priorities for the year ahead.

7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

7.5.1 Relevant performance data will be provided to Overview and Scrutiny Committees as required to support their agreed work plans.

7.6 Climate Impact

7.6.1 There are no direct implications on climate/environmental impact from this report, it does however provide an update on the Council's performance against the corporate plan objectives, which include a commitment to be Net Zero by 2030.

5.6.2 Within this report, the work and achievements outlined in the Directorates' reports highlight the effort and commitment WNC is making in delivering against its Sustainability and action to address climate change commitments.

7.7 Community Impact

7.7.1 Managing and highlighting our performance is key to ensuring we are making a positive impact on our communities, celebrating our successes and addressing our challenges. The Annual Report sets out a broad range of activities and services that have and will continue to support positive outcomes for communities.

This report provides a high level of public transparency to all our customers and stakeholders, on the progress and achievements we have made in our second year as unitary authority and to the work being undertaken by the Council to deliver effective services and our corporate plan.

8 Background Papers

None