



## **Report of Councillor Mike Hallam Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services**

**23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021**

### **Human Resources**

As lead authority for payroll, we have continued to successfully process both West and North Northamptonshire payrolls, updated all staffing information, position changes and hierarchy restructures. This was done alongside continuing to provide the payroll for Children's Trust, Fire Service, Law, Cambridgeshire and Milton Keynes, as well as the Elections Payroll in June. All payrolls remained above 99.5% accuracy during this period. Focus for the coming months is on responding to a number of substantial Payroll changes/business requests (payment of increments and a new absence scheme) across the various clients

The HR Strategy, Policy and Projects team have continued writing and consulting on the new HR policies for WNC alongside building the HR pages of the intranet, to ensure information relating to HR is accessible to all staff. The new WNC employee (lifestyle) benefits scheme was launched in late July to all employees (and Councillors), currently c700 staff have registered. We will be focusing over the next few months on further communication to publicize the scheme as well as looking at what other benefits can be added to enhance the overall employee package.

The design activity around the creation of the new WNC People Strategy has moved forward at pace this quarter with the team carrying out c16 staff focus groups as well as various meetings with senior managers. We are also out for procurement for an employee survey which will provide a valuable baseline to move forward from. As we move into quarter 3 the focus of the team will be to start to shape the work streams arising from the emerging people strategy themes, such as induction, leadership and management development and talent management/succession planning.

In July the Learning and Development Team (hosted by NNC) launched our new WNC 'managing and leading performance excellence' course, which is a 12 week programme designed for experienced managers who want to refresh or develop their leadership and management knowledge and skills. Take up on the first course has been excellent. We have also been planning and piloting a new Microsoft 365 training across the workforce in collaboration with IT and Transformation, Councillor development programmes and working in partnership with Health, Safety and Wellbeing to review and refresh the key training offer.

Work has continued during this quarter on pay and grading for WNC. In addition to conducting the local pay bargaining for 2021/22 we have been undertaking 100 plus job evaluations jointly with our trade unions using the NJC job evaluation scheme. The outcomes of these will then be used to shape our new pay structure for new staff to WNC during the Autumn.

Finally, we remain busy in the HR Business Partnering and Advisory team, supporting some restructuring and early transformation activity in addition to the business as usual in terms of employee relations casework. We have also produced the first quarterly management information dashboards for services

## Legal and Governance

The delivery of effective, efficient and timely legal advice to all parts of the authority is key to ensuring the council acts lawfully in delivering against its objectives and protects itself from risk. A rationalisation of the contracts for the provision of legal advice inherited from the predecessor authorities is underway. This will result in a combination of in-house and external provision that best meets the council's needs.

The Constitution review is in progress, in conjunction with elected members in the form of a Task & Finish Group established by the Democracy & Standards Committee. A consultation was undertaken during August, including all members, parish councils and the public, which will inform the review and culminate in a report being submitted to full Council in December. Also being reviewed is the council's overall governance framework. This is an important piece of work, looking at the way in which we work together to make good decisions.

The Chief Executive, Leader and Director of Legal and Democratic met with the Chief Executive of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to start the review of Council Size and Ward Boundaries. The Review will be conducted by the LGBCE and they will be meeting with all members in the coming months. The outcome of the review will be implemented at the election in 2025.

The three Overview and Scrutiny Committees have produced short term Work Programmes, all of which have been approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Group. The Coordinating Group met on 6 September 2021 to agree the process for the longer term work programme. The Chairs of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees will contact various community groups, Parish Councils, voluntary groups and other organisations asking them to suggest items for future Scrutiny review via a short online survey. Press releases will be issued and the questionnaire promoted on the Council's social media sites. The Committees are scheduling their work programming events in October 2021 and comprehensive consultation will take place with members and the public before then.

Recruitment of the Political Assistant posts previously approved by Council is now underway. It is expected that successful candidates will take up their posts later in the autumn. The motions from previous Councils have also been collated and will be considered by the Democracy and Standards Committee at the end of the his month.

In partnership with Property Services and IT, work is underway on the procurement of a modern audio visual system that will be able to meet the needs of future Council meetings, as well as enhancing the facilities available at OAS and The Guildhall.

Registration and Ceremony Service: The government lifted restrictions on wedding ceremonies on 19<sup>th</sup> July, and so ceremonies have been allowed to be undertaken with no maximum limit subject to the building capacity. However WNC ceremony staff continue to follow social distance measures.

General interest in new ceremonies has increased and additional temporary staff have been taken on to handle the volume in calls relating to the arranging or re-arranging of ceremonies. During the height of the "pingdemic", urgent calls were made to staff across the Council to support the conduct of wedding ceremonies and with support from Communications colleagues, 45 staff expressed an interest in being trained to support the conduct of ceremonies so that weddings could go ahead.

Coroners Service: At the beginning of April 2020 all Inquest hearings were adjourned to the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020. Since resuming hearings, the Office has concluded 363 hearings. Normally we hear around 225 cases per year. In August we successfully completed 2 jury Inquests within the council chamber. An external supplier attended to facilitate the hearings, which went very well. The external provider is due to attend in October and November for further Jury Inquests.

Since October 2019 both Kettering General Hospital and Northampton General Hospital have had a Medical Examiner Service, to scrutinize all hospital deaths. The next step is to roll out the Medical Examiner service throughout the community. This will be a statutory obligation by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. Both Medical Examiner areas have modelled their boundaries on the WNC and NNC boundaries. Both are about to commence pilots with GP surgery's, then progress a gradual rollout. The Registration and Coroners manager is working with the lead Medical Examiners to ensure all three service areas work together to provide a joined up service.

## **Technology and Digital**

A full strategic review of our technology provision has commenced ahead of budget setting and the publication of our first technology strategy as a WNC service. An in-depth analysis of the existing capabilities of the service has been completed, which has highlighted areas to develop and invest in – most notably cyber security, architecture, data, project management, business analysis, user training and relationship management of external entities who use our services. Our executive leadership team have approved an initial set of new hires to bolster these areas, and we are developing additional plans to take through service and budget planning for 2022. In addition, we have commenced a formal management training programme for all senior and middle managers to raise the standard and consistency of existing team management, as we seek to drive greater productivity with our current staff. A full reorganisation of the service, which will see former sovereign council teams merged and staff grouped by skill/function is expected c. Oct-Nov, with efficiencies in these teams identified during Q1 2022.

A complete governance structure for handling the complex web of stakeholders and approvals (given we support numerous internal and external customers) is in draft and expected to be approved and published to the organisation in the next month. This will include new early invention from Technology staff in projects, ensuring stakeholders are supported to devise systems that are the best technical as well as business fit.

We continue to work with partners at the Children's Trust, Northampton Partnership Homes, Northampton Leisure Trust and Northampton Museums to set and meet appropriate service standards. In addition, we are supporting work from North Northamptonshire to investigate the service with view to presenting options for potential disaggregation to members.

We are presently running two assessments in partnership with Microsoft, to help determine a) the economics of a full Cloud migration, ahead of a formal Cloud First strategy, and b) the full state of our security, ahead of the arrival of our new cyber security function.

Notable team work over the last several weeks has included:

- Rolling out Office 365 to all user desktops
- Recovery of services following fire outside County Hall
- Numerous adjustments to our main website as services "settle" into it
- Development of an automated mailbot to handle and reply to customer queries and reduce contact centre work

We have also been developing the following projects:

- Migration of children's services to a new Cloud-based application
- Hardware refresh of personal equipment to support new ways of working
- Desk booking system for all sites to support flexible working
- Migration of deprecated Sharepoint 2007 and 2013 instances to new WNC Sharepoint
- Deployment of new a service desk solution (to replace end-of-life)
- New income management tool (to replace end-of-life)
- Enhanced DR options

We will shortly be publishing the first service plan and technology strategy, and taking a number of immediate project priorities through the executive leadership team (replacement phone system, CRM, IT procurement policy, hardware refresh).

In August we also dealt with a significant business continuity issue. At approximately 1930hrs on Weds 11/08/2021, a fire in an electrical substation caused a power loss to the former NCC data centre at County Hall. At the same time and unrelated to the fire, engineers had taken the uninterruptible power supply (UPS) and backup generator unit offline for its annual maintenance. As a result, power was abruptly lost for all systems in what is now WNC's primary data centre. Power was restored by the power company at 0530hrs the following morning, but systems were not fully restored to staff until 1127hrs on Fri 13/08/2021. This meant disruption for the bulk of our services, as most business applications are still hosted on-premises at the data centre.

## **Customer Services**

The Customer Services department has continued to work on developing the approach to the Customer Experience Strategy by gathering customer stories, customer feedback and mapping customer pathways to understand where interactions can be streamlined.

August has proved challenging, with a number of telephony functionalities being lost due to a fire at County Hall. The team have adapted very quickly and put in place alternative ways of working to mitigate the impact on customers, and support back office teams affected by the outage.

Work has been carried out on developing a more effective and transparent process for logging and managing Councillor and MP enquiries, with a view to removing any unnecessary steps in the process. Following feedback from Councillors and the Leader, Responders have been identified in each Directorate to coordinate responses, provide updates, and be available for additional clarifications should these be required by Members.

The project to gather requirements and define the best solution for an organisation-wide Customer Experience Management system has now been initiated, and the department are working closely with ICT and Transformation to ensure that any solution developed is future-proof and offers the one view of the customer.

Over the past two months we have witnessed a steady increase in footfall in our One Stop Shop and receptions and are continuing to multi-skill advisors so they can assist customer with a multitude of queries when they make contact.

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