

Thursday 23rd September 2021

Since our last 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.

COUNCIL & CABINET MEETINGS

As well as this Full Council meeting again being open to public attendance, it is also being streamed online, and this will continue to be the case with all Full Council and Cabinet meetings in the future. Our Cabinet meeting on 14th September saw good attendance by Members and the public, and again was also streamed. Given the very suitable space available there, and the quality of the audio-visual equipment for streaming, our intention is to continue holding Cabinet meetings in the Towcester chamber.

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation to deliver better and more cost-effective services is vital to the success and sustainability of the council. With the team in place, including the Head of Transformation Delivery, and Design Team Manager, a central projects register has been created using a digital platform, Monday.com, and this has resulted in increased consistency in approach and better structured management information to support and monitor the delivery of such a varied and complex portfolio of change and productivity initiatives.

A Transformation Board has been established which met for the first time in June and continues to meet on a monthly basis, chaired by the Chief Executive, with responsibility for monitoring the delivery of transformation projects.

There continue to be four main areas currently of the transformation portfolio:

Stabilisation

The team continue to work to complete projects that began ahead of the council coming into being on 1st April, to ensure the stability of service delivery, examples being:

- Inter Authority Agreements (IAA) finalisation continues at pace as we work with colleagues in the North to define suitable metrics.
- Projects across the directorates continue to be driven forward, and many are nearing completion against expected deadlines.

Improvement Opportunities

Opportunities and potential threats to service delivery have been examined and refined and the Transformation service has been supporting these to progress. Examples of things that are currently happening include:

- Each Assistant Director has been engaged in order to develop opportunities which could have a financial benefit. A number of those now have resources allocated to them to develop businesses cases.
- Exploratory work coordinated with Procurement colleagues has begun in the directorates in order to get the best out of recommissioning opportunities, whilst seeking positive improvement.

- The Transformation team are supporting all the directorates to engage fully with the forthcoming Star Chamber process, which will involve careful examination of all budget lines to both ensure that improvements are found, but that essential services are adequately funded.

Disaggregation / Aggregation

Work to disaggregate the services between WNC and NNC is ongoing, along with work on the pipeline of service aggregation, bringing together and harmonising services from across the legacy councils. A change request process has been agreed, which is required to give approval to any changes sought to services or timescales compared to the original task and finish group timeline and blueprint. Examples of things currently happening include:

- Planning those services which are disaggregating this year, including impact assessments
- Lead services (where NNC or WNC currently take the lead) are being reviewed for detailed separation requirements
- Plans are being created to ensure all crucial service and service user data will be available for the receiver council upon disaggregation

Recently completed work in this area includes:

- Joint Officer Board and Joint Member Committees are in place for formal assessment and approval of change requests.
- Regular enabler sessions are progressing to assess and monitor disaggregation proposals and methods.

The Council's Future Way of Working

The Transformation team are supporting the development of a plan for how council staff will work, post-covid, which we refer to as our target operating model. This work currently includes:

- The Future Ways of Working group are currently working on floor plans for the four main sites showing the teams zones to consider future requirements as more staff consider returning to buildings.
- Workstyles for all job types have been selected by managers and this evidence is now being considered and consolidated before a full consultation is launched with staff.
- A full guidance document on returning to the buildings is in progress and will be published by the end of September, supported by sessions at all of our four main sites conducted by the Corporate Services Director.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications activity includes:

- Working proactively with colleagues in the Home Office to provide clear communications regarding Afghan resettlement. We have seen such a positive response from our communities, with many offers of support received so far. Anyone who wishes to offer support can register through the relevant page of the WNC website, which is clearly marked as the first button on our website homepage. As well as update information here, there is a link to the funding page where you can donate, and a form of support to formally register what you can offer in terms of support.
- Regeneration communications promoting the future of Northampton Market Square and the appointment of heritage advisers.
- Press releases to support Cabinet papers including flood preparation work, facilities management contracts, property projects, transformation, council tax reduction scheme

- Working with Place and Economy colleagues on plans for Environment Summit including a series of targeted climate summit events which are planned for September/October covering key themes including: Climate Networks, Business, Transport, Agriculture and Rural Environment, Housing, Children and Young People. The events will be used to co-design the important Climate strategy for WNC, to be released in time for COP26 in November, helping to maximize public interest and engagement. A detailed action plan will be developed following approval of the strategy to ensure we can monitor progress, as part of important Sustainability Strategies.
- Heritage Open Days brochures have been distributed promoting events starting this month.
- Northants Chamber expo event at the Saints ground on 15 Sept - working with economic development team on marketing materials for this, Cllr Bowen to speak at launch and news release planned.

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE, POLICY & PERFORMANCE

- Our first corporate performance report has been developed and has been considered by Cabinet. Further developments are planned for our quarter 2 performance report, to ensure that we are measuring our performance against our Corporate Plan.
- Work continues on our website project to improve the quality of information and online services available to residents. Thank you to those councillors who have been helping with testing our new developments and providing feedback.
- Staff networks continue to operate for Black and Minority Ethnic colleagues, Carers, Disability, LGBTQ+, Mental Health & Wellbeing and Armed Forces Community. The networks are staff led and all have sponsors from our senior leadership team. The networks are helping to promote equalities across our organisation and to develop a new culture of inclusivity and innovation and celebrate key events including Pride and Black History Month.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY REVIEW

With the previous NCC wards boundaries having been used for the first term of our new unitary council, a full review of ward boundaries has been due to take place. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England have given us an outline timetable for their ward boundary review, which will see phases assessing the appropriate number of councillors, through to the boundaries for ward. Perhaps most importantly, I was pleased to understand that their timetable includes a briefing for all members before the process commences, plus consultation opportunities for representation to be made by WNC, party groups, or individuals throughout the stages of the review. The expectation is for their final recommendations to be ready by June 2023.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council