

**2 December 2021**

## **Human Resources**

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 Democratic Services**

The in-house legal team is now delivering the legal service across the whole authority area, having brought back in house the contracts for Daventry and South Northants. Pathfinder legal services continue to provide upper tier legal advice to the Council. A review of legal services is underway, supported by Transformation resource, to provide quality legal advice which also provides the best value for money for the Council moving forward. The review will also look at external spend on legal advice.

The Constitution review has been completed by the Task & Finish Group and Democracy and Standards Committee and is recommended to this meeting of Council. The review involved consultation with Members and with the public and has resulted in some very positive improvements. The new Head of Law and Governance has been appointed, Sameera Khan and she will join the Council on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022.

Work has been started with the Land Registry to update all of the Council's land holdings to reflect the new ownership by West Northamptonshire Council. This also provides the opportunity to ensure that there is no outstanding unregistered land.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England have now met with officers, Group Leaders and the wider members of the Council to kick off the review of Council Size and Ward Boundaries. The Review will be conducted by the LGBCE and further updates on the review will be included in future reports as the review progresses. The outcome of the review will be implemented at the election in 2025. The elections team have continued to deliver elections. On 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021 there were by-elections in Long Buckby and Duston parishes and there are three Neighbourhood referendums taking place today, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021. The Annual Canvas has continued with the publication of the new electoral register on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021.

The three Overview and Scrutiny Committees have each held work programming events to further develop their short term work programmes into longer work programmes. Prior to the work programming events taking place, there was comprehensive consultation. The Chairs of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees contacted various community groups, Parish Councils, voluntary groups and other organisations asking them to suggest items for future Scrutiny review via a short online survey. The Committee received around sixty suggestions for future scrutiny reviews. The Leader and Cabinet Members attended the three Overview and Scrutiny work programming events and informed of their priorities for the year. All of which provided information to assist non Executives in proposing their work programmes for the year. Meetings of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees took place in November 2021 to prepare the longer-term work programmes which were presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Group at its meeting on 30 November 2021 for approval.

Recruitment of the Political Assistant posts has been completed and the new members of staff will be starting with the Council shortly.

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:

A stock and security review was undertaken from 8-11<sup>th</sup> November in both North and West Registration Districts by the General Registration Office (GRO). The Registration Service holds stock which is very valuable particularly in relation to potential fraud and therefore the GRO maintain a national vigilance in relation to the management and handling of the stock held by Registration authorities. Normally this inspection is undertaken every 2 to 3 years but we have not had a review since 2017. We are pleased to report that the review went well with some minor advisories to be picked up.

The service is still working through the backlog of customer enquiries and appointments. We commenced the recruitment of 3 temporary staff to join the team to help clear this backlog.

Conditions in the general labour market have made it difficult to recruit to these roles. We are therefore exploring alternatives including using staff from other areas in the Council on a temporary basis to clear the current backlog. There is a longer term goal to facilitate bookings online to reduce the workload.

The service has appointed a new manager, who is in charge of the Copy Records Office, and we are also recruiting for new Registrars. We have taken steps to change the calendar booking system to appointments for death registrations only, to ensure the Registration service can meet forecast increased demand during winter. Whilst this will reduce availability for marriage appointments until the New Year this is generally a quieter period for marriages. There is however an outstanding pressure on appointments and moving forward the recruitment of Registrars is essential to tackle this in the longer term.

### Coroners Service:

We reported to the last Council meeting the significant increase of Coroner's hearings to deal with the backlog arising during the period when none were taking place during Covid and we are continuing to complete Coroner's hearings at an increased rate. There were some issues with the accommodation for hearings but very positive work has been undertaken which has identified alternative accommodation within the Guildhall which will be suitable to provide a suitable court and office accommodation for the service.

As part of unitary The Leys body storage facility based in North Northamptonshire has been aligned with the Coroners Service, as both are county wide functions. The Coroners Service has recently recruited 3 casual contracted Coroners Officers to support the facility. If the request for The Leys to be activated comes from the hospital trusts, then the casual Coroners Officer's will maintain the day to day part of the service, to allow swift decision making for death registrations. Three permanent staff will be diverted to run The Leys body store. Northants Fire will undertake the hospital to site transfer system.

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 Service 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).

## **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.

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 continued 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**