



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

21st April 2022

Human Resources

Since launching the new People Strategy (2021 – 2025) work has progressed on its three delivery streams, with over 50 projects planned for the next four years.

Talent and Retaining Talent

Work has been progressing with a new e-recruitment system that will make it easier to recruit in the future. There have been several specialist campaigns undertaken to help recruit to harder to reach worker types including online campaigns and the use of job fairs.

In terms of Pay, Reward and Recognition the Council has now agreed to pay the minimum wage of £10 an hour from the 1st of April 2022, which is above the current national foundation living wage. In addition, as the Council has locally agreed pay settlement arrangements, it is also able to pay an initial pay rise to all staff from the 1st of April 2022 of 2% (1.75% for managerial posts) which will be paid in the April cycle.

Good progress is being made on the new Pay and Grading model for West Northants Council with the creation of new Job Families. Based on feedback received from our managers and workforce the Job Families and associated descriptors have been updated and finalised. We have reviewed a selection of benchmark roles that have been evaluated using the NJC Job Evaluation Scheme to use these to help inform the levels within the job family architecture. Within each job family there will be a few levels and we are currently in the process of writing role profiles for each level in each job family.

We also held our first THRIVE awards in March 2022, with 169 nominations and celebrated the tremendous achievements of some of our colleagues. This year's winners were nominated by their peers for going above and beyond their role to deliver excellence during our first year, they are shining examples of the values that underpin how we work as a council and demonstrate what customers and partners can expect from us.

This year's Winners (a [short video of our Thrive Award winners](#))

Trust Award - Anesa Begum

High Performance Award – Kay Medway

Respect Award – Nick Dunkley

Innovate Award – The Community Safety and Engagement Team

Value Award – Kallie Sinfield

Empower Award – Gemma Foskett

Achieving our Goals Through Our High Performing and Flexible Workforce

We have started to open more face-to-face training as well as continuing with our online offer and ensured that directorates have completed all mandatory training. We launched the Manager's Guide in January to provide an overview of the WNC requirements and help guide.

The results from the Employees' survey have been shared in detail with all teams and services are actively developing and implementing improvement actions that support West Northants Council becoming the employer of choice.

Headline achievements that demonstrate our increasing visibility as an employer include the following Company Reviews:

- Glassdoor - 4.4/5 and 88% would recommend working with us to a friend.
- Indeed – 4/5 and 4.5 for job security and advancement.

Creating a Culture of Engagement and Wellbeing

We have rolled out VIP End of Year reviews for every member of staff in West Northants and are soon to launch our new appraisal system. Work is continuing to work with harder to reach staff groups and develop better ways of engagement. We will also soon be rolling out the 2nd Big Conversation with all employees to look at how we build on the culture of West Northants.

Legal and Democratic Services

The in-house legal team has now been strengthened with the new Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer coming into post. Work continues with the review of legal services and the options moving forwards.

In terms of Weddings and other Civil Ceremonies and the registration of births and marriages, the support of Election Staff to help move backlogs created by Covid has been a great success. The service is soon to launch a more user-friendly and digital offer for all weddings and ceremonies.

The Coroner's Office has been successfully moved into Guildhall in the past few months and has now caught up on its backlog created by Covid.

Digital, Technology and Innovation

The division has now been strengthened with the six Heads of Service now in place (either in-post or due to join shortly), including a new dedicated Cyber Security service and head for West Northants Council. The service continues to support all council and shared services and has ensured that there has been continuity of service through the last quarter.

Key areas of current work include:

- A [telephony replacement project](#) that will standardise phone and comms tools across all council properties, better empower internal staff with modern tools and support flexible working and provide savings on existing spend. This is just finishing the discovery phase and expected to move into procurement over the next month.
- Integration of our [customer experience platforms](#) into a single platform, empowering the Customer Services team to work with a single system and data.
- Further planning work with NNC to support their request to [disaggregate](#) the service.
- A [hardware replacement project](#) to select and deploy new personal computer hardware to staff, and meet workforce needs as well as support flexible working. Early work is starting and will focus on a more efficient hardware deployment process that speeds up the provisioning of new equipment and saves money.

- **Consolidation of contacts:** a review has just launched which has so far identified £375k of savings across just two contracts we manage on behalf of ourselves, the Children's Trust and NNC.
- Replacing our **income management system**. This is due to move from planning to delivery in May and will run for a year (as it is shared across four councils). As well as modernising and streamlining the system, it will allow the removal of another £100k system.
- Replacing our **internal helpdesk system**. The existing tool was first built in 1985 and is major inhibitor for technical staff as well as a frustrating customer experience. This is due to complete in the summer.
- Writing the first **WNC Digital, Technology & Innovation Strategy**, which is expected to come to Cabinet in early June (ELT receiving first draft in early May).
- Supporting the development of key business changes and transformation projects across Place, HR, Legal, Communities, Adults and in the Children's Trust.

Customer Services

Since launching the Customer User Experience Strategy (2021-2024) work is progressing on its delivery.

The four delivery hubs across West Northants continue to provide support to residents and the One Stop Shops in Northampton and Daventry have seen an increasing footfall. The Customer Services hubs have answered an average of 27,000 calls a month, with an additional 9,000 enquiries per month being handled via email. Many vulnerable residents have contacted the council about the Household Support Grant which launched in late December 2021.

Improving the customer experience through our website content

To continually support the customer experience, a team of advisors from across all our Hubs, including Complaints, meet regularly and focus on a particular customer journey via our website. These ideas, suggestions and alternative routes are then communicated to the Web Team, and content changes are completed on the back on this.

The wider Customer Services team have been involved with user testing and gathering feedback on proposed changes (School Admissions; Trading standards; Licensing; Highway's harmonisation); User testing on 'Apply', 'Pay', 'Renew', 'Report' buttons being added to the top of the website, replacing trending items. Continuous review of services that sit under the listed buttons and supplying suggestions for clearer labelling continue to be a focus of this work.

Disseminating learning throughout the organisation

The focus of the coming year will be to share the learning from our front-line teams with services across the whole organisation, so that we develop a Think Customer culture across WNC. This is being achieved through liaison meetings between customer services teams and other service areas, sharing customer stories and working together to design processes which keep the customer at the forefront of our minds.

Consolidating resources

The first year of operating as one department has shown that to meet the increasingly complex demand from residents, we need to facilitate their access to information and services (website content, online forms, use of social media etc.), but also provide our teams with the flexibility needed to support one another. This is being done throughout multi-skilling advisors and joining

up our Customer Records Management systems. We are well underway with this work, with the team in the Angel Square and Guildhall Hubs sharing a platform, and the Towcester Hub due to join them soon.

Meet customers where they are

Work has started on scoping out the activities needed to provide outreach services in our communities, in the shape of Customer Services surgeries. We are looking at the possibility of locating these in libraries, community centres, locality hubs, and bringing in partner organisations (Citizens Advice, Community Law etc.) to provide a wrap-around information and advice offer to vulnerable people, in their neighbourhoods.

The Clever Together first ever **Big Conversation** commenced at the end of February 2021 with 6,000 contributions, 5188 votes, 286 ideas, 310 comments looking at the future of West Northants and Council. The full results will be ready in May and used to help shape future locality working and will support how we engage and collaborate with residents.

Councillor Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services