

30th June 2022

Digital, Technology and Innovation

Strategy

Our first WNC Digital, Technology & Innovation Strategy is coming before Cabinet in July and will set out our plans for using technology to improve council services over the next three years, to the direct benefit of our residents and staff alike.

The strategy lays out 58 initiatives organised into three key themes:

- *Technology*: how to build the right infrastructure and foundations for improving services and efficiency at WNC.
- *Digital*: how we can use technology to create ever-faster, better and more tailored services that directly benefit our residents.
- *Innovation*: how we, in partnership with our community, identify future technologies that could further enhance how we work and the services we provide.

Key projects

- Implementing a new internal e-recruitment system that will streamline our recruiting process, speed up getting roles to market, reduce management time spent on the recruitment process and provide a far better candidate experience to people applying to work at West Northamptonshire.
- Supporting the Children's Trust with their implementation of a new case management system which improves the service we are able to offer to vulnerable children and families in Northamptonshire.
- Work on our 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 is ongoing. We have been doing work to better tailor the needs to better support colleagues working remotely and this has now moved into procurement.
- 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, including agreement from members to disaggregate the Digital service, one of six areas we currently share with North Northamptonshire. The latter is due to complete by December.
- A hardware replacement project to select and deploy new personal computer hardware to staff, and meet workforce needs as well as support flexible working. We are developing a map of our staff needs to ensure that everyone is supported, and this will enter procurement shortly.
- Consolidation of contracts: our review of contracts has so far identified £700k of savings across just three contracts we manage on behalf of ourselves, the Children's Trust and NNC.

- Replacing our income management system. This is now in delivery will run until April next 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 August.
- Supporting the development of key business changes and transformation projects across Place, HR, Legal, Communities, Adults and in the Children's Trust.

Customer Services

Meet customers where they are

A very successful pilot was carried out at Brackley Library, allowing residents to come in and speak to council colleagues, as well as partner agencies (Citizens Advice, Community Law Service) about a variety of queries and concerns. This allowed us to deliver a wrap-around service in people's community. The learning from this event will be taken forward with similar initiatives across a range of locations, starting with Weston Favell and East Hunsbury in Northampton.

Consolidating resources

Work continues at pace to bring most of our services at the front door onto one Customer Experience Management system.

In addition, we are working closely with DTI to refine the business case for the procurement of a new telephony and contact centre management solution which will allow us to improve accessibility for residents and make better use of our resources.

Disseminating learning throughout the organisation

We are working closely with a number of service areas to support their ability to manage customer complaints and Member's enquiries in a timely and effective way – currently, there is positive work being undertaken with the Planning department.

Improving the customer experience through our website content

Additional resources are being identified to expedite the process of transferring content from the legacy websites with a focus on customer engagement and accessibility. Customer Services will continue to work very closely with the Web team to reflect customer feedback and improve interactions.

For example, the front page now reflects the way customers navigate various services, with a focus on action, so it is clear what they can do themselves.

Emergency planning and business continuity

The team are now fully resourced, and training is under-way to ensure WNC can deliver its own on-call rota with limited reliance on NNC by September. Quick action cards are available to officers via PC, laptop or phone, when they need to respond to any incidents, with a similar offer being developed for Members.

We are in the process of engaging with service areas to update their Business Continuity plans, having fully revised forms and templates to make them easily accessible and easy to keep up to date.

Human Resources

Attracting and Retaining Talent

- Continuing to review and implement recruitment strategies for hard to fill roles. Last Quarters focus has been on Planning and Adult Social Care with successful campaigns across both areas.

Planning

- Targeted advertising on LinkedIn, plus posts from the WNC LinkedIn account promoting vacancies, jobs advertised on industry specific job boards and Facebook targeted pay per click campaign
- Total of **111** applications received for the first round of 13 Planning jobs

Adult Social Care

- Recruitment campaign branding created "All in a day's work" to give the campaign a clear and strong identity. Recruitment events held at services monthly (2 recruits from the 2nd event held in May). Bus advertising, "recruiting now" banners, leaflets and posters, recruitment open days, Job Centres, NHS jobs & targeted FB ads.
- Feedback from local manager in social care
"We are interviewing 9 people in Spinney this week which is never heard of! We have interviewed 20 in Reablement this month, Southfields have appointed at least 3 new staff, Obelisk have interviewed more than 10! Steve and I had over 90 people apply for dept manager, we interviewed around 15 and got 3 smashing people on board. One striking comment that candidates have said is that they want to be part of what WNC can offer!"
- Pay, Reward and Recognition: Proposals made to the Trade Unions in respect of the new WNC Local Pay Structure and the remaining 'Day One' terms and conditions following week of negotiation and consultation in May. Currently awaiting outcome of their consultation. Report to Cabinet in July and associated engagement activity across the workforce commenced 13th June.
- Under 34s survey carried out around benefits.
- Cycle to Work scheme to be launched this month and continuing to publicise other lifestyle benefits and our Pennies from Heaven charity giving scheme.
- Recognition - First birthday celebrations THRIVE awards and the Kudoboard for peer-to-peer recognition.
- Activity now commencing on additional employee benefits and recognition including long service, volunteer days etc.

Achieving our Goals Through Our High Performing and Flexible Workforce

- Leadership and Management: Pilot scheme for Coaching and Mentoring developed and ready to launch shortly.
- Developing for Autumn launch management development programmes (in addition to MALPE which launched in 2021)
- Basics of being a good manager produced and circulated.
- High Performing Teams: 2021/22 End of Year Conversations rolled out in March 2022.

- Valuing Individual Performance (VIP) Continuous conversation approach launched in June 2022 which are being supported by lunch and learn sessions:
- Diversity and Inclusion: Undertaken data improvement campaign to increase the number of equality monitoring responses (20% increase to date). This will help inform future strategy, however at this stage further activity is required.
- Culture of Learning and Development: Review of mandatory training requirements undertaken and paper going to ELT.
- Additional supporting resources for managers produced to encourage discussions around self directed learning.

Creating a Culture of Engagement and Wellbeing

- Culture and Engagement: Building on last year's employee survey, THRIVE Big Conversations were rolled out.
- Drafting of the behaviours framework is now underway.
- Survey carried out with managers of WNC's non office-based workforce to ascertain most appropriate methods of communication to aid engagement and participation. Outcomes of the survey delivered to ELT and the Communications team to form a basis for a future internal communications strategy.
- Work Environment: Categorisation of workforce into the worker types has taken place and West Ways of Working supporting documentation has been developed including policy and working with Health, Safety and Wellbeing to implement.
- Work in this area reaches across learning and development to produce supporting training material for managers and colleagues to equip them to work effectively in their work environment and aid adoption of a high performing culture.
- Wellbeing: A number of wellbeing roadshows took place across all sites, which are informing the design of the Wellbeing Strategy.

Legal and Democratic Services

Legal

The in-house legal team has continued to deliver a high level of property, contract, litigation and other transactions arising from the transition to unitary and to carry out the work that continues to be generated as part of the day-to-day work of the Council. The Land Charges Team have successfully transferred across from the Planning Team into the Legal Services Team. The Council recently underwent its first inspection under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act which concluded that

'In conclusion, although your organisation is still in its infancy, you seem well placed to manage covert activity should you choose to conduct it'.

Coroners

Following the successful move of the coroner's service to the Guildhall steps are underway to enhance the facility for coroner's hearings in the council chamber at the Guildhall. The team have also been developing a plan in the event of a mass fatality in the area including carry out a testing exercise with the police and senior Coroner.

Registrations

The Registration Service is poised to launch online ceremony bookings. This is a significant step forward which will improve the service to the customer as they will be able to book ceremonies at any time, but it is also more efficient for the delivery of the service. There will

as a result be system downtime on 29th June and delays to email responses while we configure the system, but the service should then be up and running within a few weeks. This is a busy time for weddings and due to the backlog of people wanting to get married after Covid the team is busier than ever giving people their special day. As another service improvement the opening hours of Towcester Registration Office have increased.

On 25th May the Registration Service (North and West) took part in a Thank you Lunch, and Team build event at County Hall, Northampton. Each service had a tour of County Hall, and then a mock trial as a team build. The lunch was provided as a buffet style lunch to say "Thank you" to the service in receiving the Rose of Northamptonshire Award.

Elections

The Elections team have carried out two Neighbourhood Planning Referendums, one in Great Houghton on 5th May and the other in Pitsford on 16th June 2022. Great Houghton voted in favour of the Plan and the result for the count for Pitsford is not known at the time of writing.

The Elections Team have seeking to provide easy access information to parishes in response to discussions with parish about we could improve the services we provide. The team have introduced a parish page on our website under the elections page. The page is a developing resource, and more information is added as an when issues arise.

Democratic and Elections Services

Through a combined effort across the Directorate Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee have been supported to prepare the submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. The work for the Elections team involves the gathering of significant data and population predictions at the request of the Commission as well as helping to prepare the Council's own submission on Council size. The Committee has also been supported to present the first Annual Report on its work and ethical governance.

Democratic Services are in the final stages of completing the coordinated admission appeals for secondary schools and academies. The team have held around 200 appeals for families in West Northamptonshire since the beginning of the summer term. This is a significant undertaking for the team each year and they carry out this exercise with sensitivity recognising that this can be difficult time for families affected.

Councillor Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services