

Thursday 30th June 2022

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.

Communications:

The Queen's Jubilee:

Thousands of people turned out to enjoy a bank holiday weekend of events and activities as communities across West Northamptonshire celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and making it a weekend to remember.

Across West Northants there were beacon lighting ceremonies, and hundreds of street parties or community get-togethers took place in honour of her Majesty.

The festivities got underway on Thursday evening, when the Northampton Lift Tower was lit up in red, white and blue as part of a national event which also saw a number of other beacons simultaneously lit around West Northants, including in Brackley and Towcester.

On Saturday the crowds turned out for a spectacular countywide pageant, which saw military and emergency services personnel, youth and community groups and businesses from across Northamptonshire parade through Northampton town centre.

Then on Sunday a large crowd of people braved the damp conditions to attend The Big Lunch at Delapré Abbey, enjoying picnics and a range of live music, performances, activities and stalls.

Visitors to the free event were also treated to a special performance from local dance troupe Born To Perform, fresh from wowing the judges and the nation on their run to the semi-final of Britain's Got Talent.

They were joined by a range of community acts celebrating the best of West Northants including African dance from the Power of the Mind Network, Step By Step dance school, Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust, the Queen Eleanor and Real Soul choirs, African Youth Arise and The Masque Theatre.

[A video featuring photographs and videos of celebrations across West Northants can be viewed here](#)

Talk of the Town

As part of the National 'Love your Local Market' campaign, we have developed a 'talk of the town' campaign in partnership with our local market traders in Northampton to support them and promote the fantastic produce that is available via our social media channels.

Parish Briefings:

We have launched our monthly briefing newsletter for town and parish councils, updating on key information and events from across West Northants, leading to positive feedback being received from town and parish councils.

Reorganisation:

We have completed our Communications and Engagement Team Reorganisation following the additional investment that was agreed as part of this year's budget. The new structure has enabled career progression for internal colleagues, and we have been successful in appointing externally to our vacancies. The new structure will enable us to continue to develop and improve our communications and engagement activity.

Internal communications:

As part of our first birthday celebrations, roadshows have been carried out across our office locations and depots with the Leader, Chief Executive and Executive Leadership Team engaging with colleagues about our first year and their hopes and aspirations for the future. Suggestions and issues identified by colleagues through the roadshows have been taken forward and featured in our weekly staff messages.

Our internal communications channels including intranet, all staff briefings, weekly councillor briefings, Chief Executive's Blog and teams channels continue to grow and are increasing engagement.

Staff networks continue to develop and have played a key role in celebrating events including Pride and Black History Month. Our Networks include Black and Minority Ethnic colleagues, Carers, Disability, LGBTQ+, Armed Forces Community, Mental Health and Wellbeing and Armed Forces Community. The networks are staff led and have sponsors from our senior leadership team, and are helping to promote equalities across our organisation and to develop a new culture of inclusivity and innovation

Business Intelligence, Policy and Performance

Annual Report

Our first annual report has been developed and was presented to Cabinet in June which demonstrates the many positive achievements that we have achieved in our first year as a new council. The report also sets out our key next steps for this year and enables us to have a clear baseline for our future performance.

Website Improvement

Work continues on our website project to improve the quality of information and online services available to our residents. Thank you to those councillors who have provided help with testing new areas and providing feedback.

Reorganisation

Work is underway to redesign our Business Intelligence Team to ensure that we are able to meet the needs of our new council.

Sustainability:

Following the launch of our sustainability strategy our cross-party working group has been established and has been leading work to develop our Sustainability work plan, areas of focus include:

- Planning & land use
- Transport
- Building, housing and infrastructure
- Commercial and industrial
- Energy generation and heating
- Natural Environment and Biodiversity
- Agriculture and Food
- Waste
- Emissions

- Education & Youth
- Public Health
- Community, Engagement and Placemaking

Work is underway to calculate the baseline emissions data for our first year using the Local Government Association Emissions Tool. This will enable benchmarking with comparable local authorities.

Recruitment has been completed for our new sustainability team with two additional project officers in place to join the team in July.

Two councillors from our Sustainability member working group have been nominated to attend the UK100 Leadership Academy.

Civic

Introductory communications have been issued to introduce our new West Northants Council Chairman and his chosen charities. Further work is planned to raise awareness of the role of the Chairman across our communities and with local businesses.

Work continues to design the West Northamptonshire Coat of Arms. Initial designs have been agreed by the Civic member working group and are now being developed into a final version by the College of Arms.

Transformation

Following the decision to integrate transformation resources into directorates to closer align priorities and to further enhance accountability, the transformation teams have been integrating into directorate management structures, and delivering a wide range of projects and programmes guided by their respective Executive Directors. Highlights of each directorates key developments is provided below.

Place

Green Waste Harmonisation Project is nearing completion and is due to close in October 2022. The charging process has been harmonised across all three areas of West Northamptonshire. As part of benefits realisation finance colleagues are monitoring the income against projected targets and current indications are that they will be met.

Planning & Development Management Aggregation Project continues at pace. A new single system is being designed with the support of colleagues in DTI to create a leaner, more efficient single team process. Staff engagement continues to be an important area of emphasis, with additional sessions be built in to ensure feedback is gathered, it being critical that we build and strengthen the team, ensure that they have everything they need to get this service back to strength, and involved in the improvement journey.

The Highway's Disaggregation and Restructure Project is also nearing completion and is due for closure in September 2022. In this complex and fast paced project, the disaggregation of the team is on track and is nearing completion, with the new structure for the West being launched imminently to support the new Highways contract, following the announcement of the preferred bidder.

People

The Health and Care Bill & People at the Heart of Care White Paper Project continues to support the implementation of the legislative changes that will need to be firmly cascaded, and implemented by the council. In part this will be achieved through a range of workshops and learning events which the project is coordinating.

The Establishment of Integrated Partnership Teams Project is firmly in delivery phase, aligned to corporate commitments, ICS agenda and our Live Your Best Life outcome board. This project is seeking to maximise the opportunities presented by the newly agreed locality structures, linking with key ICS partners to drive the best possible outcomes for residents in each locality.

Social Care Reform – The Market Management Project has been recently initiated to proactively engage with the legislative change that will result in very significant changes to current arrangements across social care and the structure of care provision/funding, which includes a cap on personal care costs. The design of this project will feature the inclusion of various workstreams such as Mobilisation, Governance, Market Shaping & Sustainability and Strategic Finance.

Also, across the People directorate projects have been initiated to support both Learning Disability and Transitions Support, the former initially being the design of a series of deliverables which will help the team achieve their £1.6m savings goal. The Reablement Pathways Project has increased its scope to be more ambitious and far reaching, building on earlier successes to include a wider range of pathways and options. Public Health Transition is currently underway to support staff in the changes brought about by disaggregation.

Communities and Opportunities

The Housing Solutions Project is in the concept phase and there is an Outline Business Case due in July 2022. Data gathering and analysis has taken place providing a robust baseline from which to drive improvements derived from customers, data and staff expertise, to better enable us to find people the right solutions to their housing needs. Supporting this is stakeholder mapping externally as well as a comprehensive communications plan for our staff.

The Debt & Money Advice Project aims to map, understand and then streamline the various advice sources across West Northamptonshire Council to provide an improved offer for our residents. Given the complex nature of this project a concept workshop has been held with senior stakeholders such as Citizens Advice to agree on the scope of the project, next steps and a delivery timeline. An outline business case is expected in August 2022.

The directorate is also engaged in a series of projects to disaggregate services. The disaggregation of Libraries has had the timescales extended to April 2023 via change request at June Shared Services Joint Committee.

Corporate

Work continues at pace for the How We Support Our Customer Programme with a focus on 4 main areas of activity. Improving self-service via the web by looking at continuous improvement to content and presentation, using additional resources from Customer Services to write content, Life Events development, and meeting customers where they are including a multi-agency surgery in Brackley Library to take place in June.

Future Ways of Working has now moved into implementation following Trade Union agreement on the West worker types. The key areas now being focused on are Hardware refresh, ensuring that staff have the right equipment to do their job, and the building optimisation workstream, looking at how we make the most of our office space. In addition, work is continuing on the reorganisation of space in each of our 4 main buildings. This has recently included the exit of North Northants staff from One Angel Square.

People Strategy: activity is continuing across all workstreams, including attending Corporate overview and scrutiny. The production of a Welcome / Induction video from CEO & Leader and the procurement of a new recruitment solution have been undertaken.

Pay and Grading: the preparation and attendance/presentation at the consultation negotiations with recognised Trade unions has taken place. These were productive sessions and following these the Trade unions are now consulting with their members. Planning for the next stage in the project has commenced this will involve matching and assimilating those on interim terms to the proposed West Northants Pay, Terms and conditions.

A review of our Legal service and initial conversations on how this may look in the future have begun. Unitary has left West Northants with a mixed model including some in-house and outsourced services, and therefore a full and detailed options appraisal and business case are being developed to understand the best future structure of this service.

There are numerous DTI projects underway, with some of the Key work being around supporting the Hardware Refresh to ensure staff have the right hardware to do their job. The telephony project is working to ensure we have a single platform across West Northants. This will also resolve ongoing technical issues with the phonelines particularly within OAS. Work continues on a replacement LANDesk solution and the decommissioning of Huddle and SharePoint 2007 and 2013.

Work has commenced on the disaggregation of the Learning and Development Service, this is being led by North Northants but is supported by West project resource, running concurrently with the disaggregation is the work to procure a new Learning Management system as the current joint contract is up for renewal in March 23. In addition, the disaggregation of Emergency Planning has been completed and this Service now sits within Corporate Services alongside Business continuity.

Following agreement at the Joint Committee for Shared Services, work has begun to disaggregate the Digital Team by December 2022, and a dedicated project team is being created to look at the discovery work required to understand the complexities of separating the remaining DTI services. This work will be supported by outside expertise to ensure a robust and impartial assessment.

Finance

Revenue and Benefits have initiated a project to complete an end to end review of systems and processes, following the restructure that has taken place to aggregate the service following unitary.

Our In-House Internal Audit Team went Live on the 1st April following a project to exit from the previous mixed arrangement of In-house, outsourced and lead authority services that previously existed.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council