

September 2022

Transformation Work

There are multiple areas of transformation that are taking place in the Planning service. at the core of it are 6 improvement workstreams, which are being driven by a range of staff from within and outside of Planning. A strong governance framework and support framework has been put in place around these workstreams, which will not just provide oversight but also help to unblock issues where and when they appear.

Engagement on this work is making progress, with regular reporting to EPB, as well as regular sessions with myself as Portfolio Holder, together with Leader/Deputy and senior officers. We've also recently started meetings with Planning Committee chairs and vice chairs, and we are planning to provide an update to all Members in an open session scheduled for early October. Finally, we are considering setting up an agents/applicants forum in the coming months as part of improving the flow of customer feedback and helping to build external relationships. Parish and Town Councils will also form part of our emerging communications agenda.

Strategic Plan

A report on the responses from 2,000 respondents making approximately 11,000 individual representations on the Options and Call for Sites consultations was considered at the June Policy Committee.

Work is progressing on the production of the plan and the evidence base necessary to support policies in it.

Northampton Part 2 Plan

At the June Policy Committee Members agreed that consultation could take place on proposed modifications to the plan. The modifications have been identified by the Local Plan Inspectors as necessary to make the plan sound. 29 responses were received to the consultation, and these have now been sent to the Inspectors for their consideration. Subject to the timely receipt of the Inspectors Report, it is intended that a report be presented to October Planning Policy Committee and then November Council requesting that the plan be adopted.

Employment areas SPD

Over 300 responses have been received to the consultation on the Employment Areas SPD. Staffed exhibitions were held at the Forum in Towcester and in Old Stratford.

The responses are now being analysed, and it is intended that a report on the consultation and way forward will be presented to Policy Committee in October.

Planning Policy Committee

At the June Policy Committee members agreed to make the reviewed neighbourhood plan for Kilsby and to adopt Conservation Area appraisals for Cottesbrooke and Canons Ashby and to agree a Housing Delivery Action Plan for Northampton.

Development Management

Planning application caseloads continue to be very high, and we are taking steps to recruit to vacant posts and also bringing in agency staff to try and reduce the backlog of work. One of the steps taken was a 'focus week' where planning teams spent five days working closely together processing new planning applications and determining decisions on existing cases. Throughout the week decisions on 273 cases were determined, nearly four times the average decisions made in one week.

We are going through a period of transformation of the service and are consulting and engaging with staff on a new structure so that it feels and functions as one team rather than three separate ones. We have engaged a series of workstreams to help form that structure, create a vision, and improve processes. We have also received approval from IT of delivering a single planning software system across the West which will greatly help the work of the team to share resources and work pressures across the west.

Enforcement Management

The Enforcement Team is being brought together under a single manager who will be responsible for the whole service, rather than the previous arrangement of separate teams for each Planning area. This is in line with a WNC Enforcement Policy applying across the whole area. This is to improve the ability of staff to work across WNC and therefore resilience.

Councillor Rebecca Breese

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment & Rural Affairs