

9th September 2022

1) Customer Services

Meet customers where they are

We now have a rolling programme of outreach surgeries in several locations (Brackley, Brixworth, Weston Favell, Moulton, St James), with more locations in the near future. These are proving very popular, and we are collating the learning and working with colleagues in other departments (Housing, Revenues and Benefits etc) as well as partner organisations (Citizen Advice, Community Law Service) to ensure we have the right representation to service the communities we interact with. It has been very positive to see parish councillors and community leads reaching out to ask for our attendance at various events, as this has allowed us to engage with people who would otherwise be harder to reach.

Consolidating resources

The department are focusing on ensuring there is enough flexibility built into our structures and ways of working to adapt to any changes we may see in the organisation (for example, moving out of the Lodge Road offices) or in society (an offer which is fit for purpose in the context of the Cost-of-Living pressures). As such, staff continue to be trained on a wide range of services, and management structures are being reviewed to build more capacity at operational level.

Disseminating learning throughout the organisation

The Customer Experience e-learning module is now part of the mandatory training package for new starters, which is an excellent opportunity for staff to familiarise themselves with the offer of the Council, our values and standards of service. The first week in October is also National Customer Services Week, so we will plan a series of activities building on the success of last year's events and promote the value of excellent customer experience across all areas of WNC.

Improving the customer experience through our website content

The focus of this workstream has been on improving the accessibility of our online presence, to increase people's ability to interact with us via the web. This has taken the shape of the 'look and feel' of web pages, navigation options, re-writing content. We are now supporting the Web team to review the online forms customers use to submit service requests, so they are easy to use, intuitive, but also reduce double-keying and duplication once they reach us.

Emergency planning and Business Continuity

Great progress has been made under both workstreams, with Strategic and Tactical Command training delivered by the Emergency Planning College to our senior management team, as well as in-house training to loggists, incident liaison officers and reception centre managers identified on a volunteering basis across WNC. This is excellent progress, as it

allows us to build a network of trained and confident staff who can support both the organisation and their communities in case of emergency.

September is preparedness month, with Northamptonshire leading the national 30 Days, 30 Ways campaign via social media and throughout the LGA network, with a focus on increasing awareness in the population of potential risks and the actions each household can take to be prepared and respond adequately to emergencies.

More than half of service areas in various locations have been engaged with to bring our Business Continuity impact assessment, plans and practices to a high standard which will allow us to continue to deliver services in case of loss of premises, IT, staff or contractors. An awareness campaign has also been run with local businesses to make them aware of the tools available to them to ensure they have the right contingencies in place.

2) Legal and Democratic Services

Legal and Information Governance

The new Head of Legal, Sarah Hall, has been appointed and is starting with the Council on 31st October 2022. The team has continued to deal with a high volume of legal work on behalf of teams across the council for example the team successfully prosecuted 2 individuals for fly tipping who were fined in total £500 and ordered to pay the Council £1k in costs. The project to review the future provision of legal services has continued and will be referred to Cabinet for a decision.

The Information Governance team have continued to process information requests and provide advice over the summer including 125 requests (FOI's and EIR's) in July and 122 in August. Total cases recorded including Subject Access Requests, data incidents, GDPR advice and police enquiries were 222 in July and 253 in August. Joint work has been undertaken with the North to complete nine DPIA's (Data Protection Impact Assessments) to ensure all personal data connected to the highway disaggregation was considered and protected. The Data Protection Officer is also producing data breach reports for individual managers to assist them in identifying and mitigating common data incidents to further improve the Council's compliance with UK GDPR.

The ongoing review of the initial set of Privacy Notices is nearing completion. This has included standardising the format, adding services that required their own and updating notices following services changes and disaggregation. The service continues to support the Information Governance workstreams for the delivery of the ICS (Integrated Care System) with our health colleagues. The team also successfully submitted the Council's DSPT (Data Securities and Protections Toolkit) on 30th June providing our health colleagues throughout the county with ongoing data assurance and allowing data sharing agreements to continue. Without this assurance it would be difficult to drive forward the ICS and other joint health projects such as the planned integrated care hub at Turn Furlong.

Coroners and Registration

The summer is inevitably a very busy period for weddings for the West Registration Service and this year has been particularly busy after Covid. In July 195 couples and in August 246 couples were married by the service. Ceremonies online is progressing. This project was delayed in the West due to an extended semi live testing period in the North. But it is hopeful that the service will be going live from September.

Work has been done to establish an overarching plan for dealing with a mass fatality event in the country. The draft Mass Fatality plan is out to consultation to all relevant stakeholders (Police, NHS, Fire etc) and consultation ends on 16th September. A tabletop exercise is currently being planned for the County for 21st October. The exercise will start at Police Headquarters in the morning and will involve The Leys Body Store in the afternoon. The team has also supported the business case for the provision of death management services.

Democratic and Elections

The first stage of the review of ward boundaries has been completed and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England have accepted the Councils submission and agreed on a 77-council size for West Northants Council from the next local elections in 2025. Work is now underway by the elections and democratic services teams to draw up the map of the new wards and to support the Democracy and Standards Committee in preparing a submission on ward boundaries. The report will be presented to the Council meeting on 3rd November 2022.

The Democratic Services team has been shortlisted by the Association of Democratic Services Officers in the 'Team of the Year' category for their annual awards. It is a great achievement to be shortlisted for the award. The winners will be decided in November. In the meantime, the team have now finished hearing the coordinated admission appeals lodged during the 2021-22 academic year. The team arranged a total of 592 appeal hearings, supporting families through the appeals process in time for the start of the new school year.

3) Human Resources

Attracting and Retaining Talent

- Work has been ongoing with the agency Fluid to create our WNC employer brand, key to help us stand out from our competitors to attract new talent. A preferred concept has been chosen and we will be launching the new branding across our print and social media vacancy advertising in the early Autumn.
- Aligned to this we will be launching our new recruitment solution in late September which should help managers to better manage recruitment and facilitate improved reporting, it will also improve the applicant journey and make applying for a role at WNC easier and quicker, including via mobile phone.
- Continuing to work with managers and services on identified 'hard to fill' roles.
- New corporate induction programme launched in August, our West Way is a face to face induction, with associated videos and revised guidance for inducting new starters now available on the intranet.
- Pay, Reward and Recognition: Feedback received from the Trade Unions on the new WNC pay structure and associated terms and conditions. No significant issues received

and we are moving forward with a collective agreement in September over the terms and conditions.

- 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: We have got our first cohort of staff who wish to become mentors and we will be launching the mentoring programme in the Autumn
- Diversity and Inclusion: We have launched a second EDI data improvement campaign to increase the number of equality monitoring responses.

Creating a Culture of Engagement and Wellbeing

- Culture and Engagement: Analysis has been undertaken in relation to the themes from the THRIVE Big Conversation with the workforce and action planning underway.
- Drafting of the behaviours framework is complete and will be rolled out in the Autumn.
- Work underway to plan for our first managers marketplace event in November to assist with collaboration and understanding of directorates priorities for all managers.
- West way of working strategy has now been published.
- Wellbeing: Our Wellbeing Strategy has been drafted and will be launched in the Autumn.

4) Digital, Technology and Innovation

Strategy

Cabinet recently approved our very first WNC Digital, Technology & Innovation Strategy. This three-year plan sets out our mission to use technology to do more, for less, quicker in the delivery of public services. Its twelve key initiatives and sixty-five activities act as our roadmap to achieve a vision of West Northamptonshire as a leader among local authorities in the employment of technology to deliver maximum public good.

Disaggregation

Members of the Joint Committee on Shared Services will soon meet to:

- Agree the dates to disaggregate the Digital service, one of six services within our Digital, Technology & Innovation (DTI) division. This will mean that NNC will run their own digital team and we will hand over responsibility for software and website development.
- Commission a detailed investigation and options appraisal, offering members a series of timed and costed choices on the potential disaggregation of more of the DTI division, for examination and discussion with our counterparts at NNC.

Key projects

- The DTI division is committed to finding ways to help increase productivity and realise financial savings - doing more, for less and quicker. To that end, a new architecture team is being

formed to identify greater efficiencies that can be made in consolidating and streamlining our 800+ systems in operation.

- Mindful of the need to rapidly identify and deploy new technology developments that can help us achieve this vision, our DTI division will be staying an open technology fair at One Angel Square in November. This event, primarily aimed at members and directors, will offer a direct opportunity to interact with and experience some of these new developments. Invitations will be issued in the coming weeks.
- We are launching our new internal e-recruitment system in the coming weeks 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.
- Procurement is underway 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.
- A hardware replacement project to select and deploy new personal computer hardware to staff, and meet workforce needs as well as support flexible working. This is now entering procurement and is particularly timely as it will aid the closure and exit from our Lodge Road offices in Daventry.
- Replacing our income management system. This is in delivery, running 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 a major inhibitor for technical staff as well as a frustrating customer experience. This is due to complete this month.
- We have been working to support Northamptonshire Partnership Homes in the life extension of their existing housing system, and the commissioning of suitable a replacement over the next two years.
- Supporting the development of key business changes and transformation projects across Place, HR, Legal, Communities, Adults and in the Children's Trust.

Councillor Mike Hallam
Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services