

## **Report of Councillor Jonathan Nunn Leader of the Council**

**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

We have all been filled with great sorrow and deep sadness since learning of the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

Queen Elizabeth II was a tireless servant of this country, a most compassionate and caring sovereign, and she will be desperately missed by millions of people across the globe. We were very fortunate to welcome her to Northamptonshire on several occasions, and these special moments will live long in the memory of local people.

We continue to pass our sympathies to our newly proclaimed monarch, His Majesty King Charles III, and our thoughts are with him and his family as they make the huge adjustment to life without the late Queen.

This council reacted quickly to the news, playing its important part in the implementation of Operation London Bridge, which sets out the way that we pay respects and proclaim the new monarch locally, and I am sure that all members will join me in thanking the Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive, Directors, and all staff colleagues involved.

Particular thanks are due to our Communications Department during this time, for helping to organise the various stages and events involved, and for keeping people advised both before and after events associated with the death of Queen Elizabeth II, some of which I mention later in this report.

Since our last meeting I have worked with the Cabinet, Members, the Chief Executive, Directors and Officers across all areas of the Council. Many of these activities and issues are referred to in more detail in Cabinet colleagues' reports.

### **Recruitment**

I wanted members to be aware of the senior appointments that have recently been made, all of which:

- Fill gaps in our structure and teams, or
- Strengthen our ability to manage specific key services, or
- Put a permanent colleague into a role previously just covered on an interim basis, or
- Enable WNC to manage service outputs independently of a previous joint arrangement with North Northants.

Members will recall the appointment of Jane Carr as Director, Communities and Opportunities to increase capacity in important areas such as regeneration, economic development, and housing, and of Sally Burns as WNC's own Director of Public Health, both appointments having been confirmed by full council. We have since made a number of other appointments, including:

- Ben Pearson – AD Education, taking over from the great work that Chris Kiernan has done as interim AD, Ben has immediately begun by supporting and strengthening our vital SEND services.
- Tony Challinor – AD Commissioning & Partnerships, Children’s Services, focusing now on the west, rather than as a shared role with North Northants.
- Rebecca Wilshire – Senior Advisor, Children’s Social Care. Having worked with Doncaster’s Children’s Trust Rebecca brings valuable experience and ideas.
- Louise Seymour – AD Place Shaping. Having delivered successful regeneration, tourism and other projects in Leicester, Louise will be focusing on the vitality of our towns in West Northants.
- A number of appointments have been made in the Planning dept, both internal promotions and the recruitment of eight new Planning staff to the team.
- Asst. Director Planning – recent interviews have taken place and an offer has been made to a candidate. Meantime, Colin Walker will be continuing for the foreseeable future to drive through the Planning Improvement work, and it is planned that Colin will stay with us until after the new AD is in place. In addition, Artemis Christophi will be joining us as Interim Head of Planning Delivery, to support the implementation of the Planning Improvement work
- Highways Contract Management Team – recruitment is underway for this team, to ensure that the Highways contract is well managed and delivers for the council, residents and businesses.

## **WNC’s Financial Position**

Although other reports set out the detailed position regarding department budgets and the council’s overall financial position, I wanted to comment here on our approach to reporting our finances.

Since we made members, staff and the wider public aware that we had a projected over-spend for the current year’s budget (£7.6M), we have seen many other councils report similar, in many cases far worse, projected year end over-spends. However, our primary concern is clearly for our own council’s budget, and the administration believes that, given the financial history of our legacy councils particularly NCC, we have a responsibility to report fully, openly, and honestly, and to do that in a timely manner, so that is what we have done.

There is little doubt that councils are facing budget challenges as we are, particularly in the demand-led services such as Children and Adults Services, and we have also seen additional demand for other services such as Temporary Accommodation. Covid funding also no longer covers some income shortfalls that we continue to experience, such as reduced parking charges income. Service demand increases are further compounded by increased costs for many of the goods, services and utilities that the council buys, and at the time of setting our budget nobody was anticipating the level of inflation that we are currently seeing, and thereby the scale of nationally agreed staffing costs.

The actions that we are taking are beginning to work, focused as they are on providing a challenge and a double-check on spending, and a drive for efficiency, not reductions in services.

## **Communications:**

We are immensely proud of the way that our communities have come together to pay their respects following the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. The council was involved in the delivery and the awareness publicity for associated local and county-wide events, including:

### Evensong

A service of Choral Evensong took place at All Saints Church in Northampton on 9th September, in celebration of the life of Queen Elizabeth II.

The event brought together civic leaders including the Lord Lieutenant of Northamptonshire and Deputy Lieutenants, the High Sheriff, the Chairmen of West and North Northamptonshire Councils, mayors and other council representatives, the judiciary, military, public services such as police and fire, and inter-faith leaders.

### Wreath Laying, Floral Tributes and Books of Condolence

Wreaths were laid by civic leaders on 10<sup>th</sup> September in the Memorial Gardens at All Saints Church in memory of Queen Elizabeth II.

Five wreaths were laid by civic figures including: James Saunders Watson Esq, Lord-Lieutenant of Northants, Dominic Hopkins DL, Under Sheriff of Northamptonshire, André Gonzalez De Savage, Chairman of West Northamptonshire Council, Cllr Larry Henson, Chairman of North Northamptonshire Council and Cllr Dennis Meredith, Mayor of Northampton.

Members of the public were invited to lay their own floral tributes, and I was delighted that (in addition to the Chairman's wreath on behalf of the whole council) both myself and Cllr Wendy Randall, as Leader of the main opposition party, were able to demonstrate WNC's cross-party feelings of sorrow by laying wreaths on behalf of our groups.

Books of condolence were also opened across West Northamptonshire for the public to leave their own messages.

### Proclamation:

Hundreds of people gathered outside All Saints Church in Northampton on Sunday 11th September for an historic ceremony, when The High Sheriff of Northamptonshire, Crispin Holborow DL, formally proclaimed the beginning of King Charles III's reign to the people of Northamptonshire.

The High Sheriff read the Accession Proclamation at the ceremony, which began at 12:45pm, with the proclamation being made at 1pm. Everyone from across Northamptonshire was invited along to witness this significant event, and town centre road closures were put in place to ensure the safety of anyone who did so. From 2:30pm onwards, Mayors read the same proclamation in their respective towns across Northamptonshire, as did Parish Council Chairs.

In recognition of the new Sovereign, flags were flown at full mast from the time of the principal proclamation at midday on Saturday 10th September, until the local proclamations took place at 1pm on Sunday 11th September, when they returned to half-mast as The Queen's mourning period continued.

## Services of Remembrance for Queen Elizabeth II

Faith communities from across Northamptonshire came together to pay their respects in services of remembrance including a Service of Remembrance at All Saints Church in Northampton on Sunday 18th September. The service was live streamed on social media and provided an opportunity for individuals to come together and give thanks for the unparalleled service, duty and love that Queen Elizabeth II gave to this nation and across the world.

## Website

Our council's website was quickly altered to reflect the period of mourning, and became a key source of up to date information on issues such as where to find books of condolence, and the related events that were taking place in West Northants.

## Financial Position

Communications have been developed to highlight clearly the actions the council is taking to deal with the fresh wave of significant financial challenges emerging as issues for WNC, and for many local authorities.

## Special Educational Needs and Disability

Communications have been developed to support proposals to develop a new 250 place school for children with Special Educational Needs and disabilities, and to outline the council's commitment to listening to concerns from parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

## Regeneration

Communications to promote WNC's funding bids worth a total of £63.5 million to the government's Levelling up fund, and key regeneration developments including Vulcan Works.

## Parish Briefings

We continue to receive positive feedback on our monthly briefing newsletter for town and parish councils, updating on key information and events from across West Northants.

## Members Briefings

Thank you to those members who continue to comment positively on this weekly update. We are aware that many members have work and other community commitments, and so we continually seek to make the weekly briefing the concise summary that enables members to keep abreast of the most important news, and the things that you want/need to know, so would urge all members to read through the short articles on important matters that it contains each week.

## **Business Intelligence, Policy and Performance:**

### Performance

Completion of Quarter One Corporate Performance Dashboard, monitoring progress against the delivery of our Corporate Plan and Priorities.

Multiple Adult Social Care and Education & Early Years statutory returns have been submitted and preparation has been carried out for new pupil and client level statutory returns for Early Years/Education and Adult Social Care.

Collaborative working has been undertaken with Children's Trust colleagues to prepare for the anticipated Ofsted inspection.

Support has also been provided into the development of Local Area Profiles, using the Local Insights tool as well as offline work, and into developing and improving reporting in Adult Social Care, enhancing the department's ability to manage budgets and improve Data Quality.

### 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 ensure that our Business Intelligence Team are able to meet the needs of our new council.

### **Sustainability:**

The Northamptonshire ACRE(Action with Communities in Rural England) conference took place on Monday 12th September and I delivered a presentation on the council's sustainability commitments and work to develop our Sustainability work plan. Members of our Sustainability team were also on hand to assist and engage with the parish councils and other groups that attended the event.

Our workplan 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.

We are glad to have welcomed new colleagues to the Sustainability team, which is now up to strength following recent recruitment, enabling progress on other projects such as our Staff Sustainability Network. The team have also been meeting with each Director and Cabinet member to understand sustainability challenges and opportunities across the whole council.

## **Transformation update:**

Following the decision to integrate transformation resources into directorates, to closer align priorities and to enhance accountability, the teams have been delivering a wide range of projects and programmes guided by their respective Executive Directors. Highlights of these include:

### Place

The Post Room Aggregation project has delivered the move of Angel Square function to the Guildhall. A training and awareness day was held on 22nd July with the provider of the outgoing mail service, PSL. This was well attended, and PSL saw a significant increase in system log in requests to facilitate the move to digital post, which is a key benefit linked to the financial efficiencies the project is designed to deliver.

Work continues in the Planning service; a programme of improvement work has been created with six main work streams covering areas such as CIL/Section 106, Process Improvement, and the Local Plan. Work continues supporting Building Control to repatriate members of the team previously working within the Daventry area via a shared service model.

Soft market testing has commenced for the new Assets Management system. This project will combine all legacy data onto one system, and will have the potential to provide capacity for other service areas in the future to further rationalise systems and drive efficiencies.

### Communities and Opportunities

The Housing Solutions project is currently developing a full business case for November 2022 to fully assess the options and benefits that can be achieved in this area, and a series of staff workshops were held during August to engage with front line staff to seek their view on where efficiencies can be made to drive productivity.

The Debt & Money Advice project is also aiming to deliver a full business case with the aim of bringing together processes, information and expertise to maximise the benefits for residents. External stakeholders in this complex environment have been engaged in the outcome of the project and with that backing, work to understand how customers use these services is currently under way. Alongside this quantitative analysis workshops with front line staff are also taking place to understand the operational issues that need to be resolved.

Disaggregation: The impact assessment of disaggregating Libraries is currently moving through joint governance.

### People

The 'Social Care Reform - Market Management' Project has been recently initiated to proactively engage with legislative change that will result in significant changes to current arrangements across social care, and the structure of care provision/funding, including a cap on individual's personal care costs. Amongst the aspects of this project, there will be the inclusion of workstreams such as Mobilisation, Governance, Market Shaping & Sustainability, and Strategic Finance.

A project to support the Social Care Regulatory Compliance has delivered new senior practitioner roles, and audited current policies and practices including delivering a new assurance process and self-audit process from September 2022. Furthermore, the project has

analysed the first cut of data from the CQC regional exercise to understand West Northamptonshire's performance.

Disaggregation projects continue to move at pace, with teams from Public Health, School Admissions and Safeguarding teams being disaggregated in September and October, and the corresponding staff being moved across and welcomed to West Northants.

### Corporate

The Customer Services programme has been focusing on the final stages of procurement for the CXM system, and new contracts have now been signed. The programme team continue to work closely with the project team to replace the Telephony systems, and create a stable and more flexible platform for some of our service centres. Work also continues to develop the mailbot project to gain more automation and drive efficiencies across all customer interactions. Initial work has been delivered on setting up a Continuous Improvement Programme to continually look for and drive productivity gains which will benefit residents and staff.

Following the decision to close the Lodge Road office in Daventry, the Future Ways of Working programme has created a new workstream to manage this work. Significant work is required to ensure that staff are supported and to give them the equipment and environment that they need, and this will be done. The West Ways of working Strategy has been published, which supports and underpins the appropriate hybrid working model and Worker Types for West Northants. Procurement has commenced for the Hardware refresh to ensure that all staff have the right technology to support them.

A new Exit Interview process including amendments to procedure and supporting resources has been developed. Alongside this the build of new recruitment process has been completed and is entering its first testing stages. The programme has also facilitated the delivery of the first 'Our West Welcome' Corporate induction sessions. These sessions are important to ensure that all new staff feel that they know the structure of the council, its aims and objectives, and the culture and values that we are seeking to create. A great deal of positive feedback has been received for the first sessions, that have been run for around 75 staff.

The Pay and Grading Project continues at pace following minimal questions raised from the staff, in part because of extensive consultation, and currently all role profiles have been completed to support a desk top exercise on schedule before formal panels commence.

### Finance

Transformation's work in this directorate has been concentrated on supporting the budget process, through understanding the current mitigations in the Medium Term Financial Plan, and resulting financial benefits, by supporting the budget taskforce, and driving new projects and initiatives.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn  
**Leader of the Council**