



Cabinet Member Report for Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

22nd February 2021

Since my last report to Council I have continued to work with the Cabinet, Members, the Chief Executive and Officers across all areas of the Council albeit once again virtually, in light of the ongoing Government guidance to work from home wherever possible. Many of these activities and issues are referred to in Cabinet colleagues' reports.

Covid-19

It has been almost 12 months since the Covid-19 pandemic first materialised here, not just in Northampton but also across the UK. Clearly it has affected so many people tragically, and as a society we have all had to come to terms with new ways of living our lives and going about our daily business. This has put an incredible strain on us all, and as a society. However, I am immensely proud with the way that we, as a Borough Council working alongside our partners both across the Local Government and Health systems, have responded. I do genuinely believe that we are moving forward now with a sense of optimism, particularly with the significant roll-out of the vaccination programme here across Northamptonshire. Of particular note is the opening of Northamptonshire's Covid-19 vaccination centre, which opened at the Royal Pavilion building in Moulton Park on 25th January, and has seen significant acceleration of the vaccination programme as a result, to the 4 key cohorts. I believe we can also look forward with some optimism, that the easing of lockdown will be forthcoming and we will be able to meet up with our friends and family in a safe and secure way, as and as Government guidelines permit. Until then, it remains imperative that we continue to observe all the current guidance and most importantly, as I have mentioned before, continue to support one another over the coming weeks whilst the vaccination programme is rolled out.

Activity around the Covid-19 pandemic has occupied a large proportion of my own workload, including regular attendance at the Oversight & Engagement Board as well as the weekly attendance at the press briefings that are provided on a Friday afternoon to the media across print, radio and TV. I also maintain an active engagement in the Northampton Town Centre Task Force which is led by the Town Centre BID, as we now look to plan for the easing of lockdown again, and to encourage people back into the town centre safely to ensure the future long term viability of our economy here in Northampton.

Future Northants Activity

At the time of the Council meeting, there will be less than 40 days until West Northamptonshire Council comes into being, and therefore the level of activity and specifically my involvement, continues to increase in these final few weeks as we prepare to go live as a new Council on the 1st April.

The momentum and range of initiatives that we have built up, and which we all feel are vital for the future of the town, must continue without interruption or delay, as must the service to our residents, and I continue to press this point in discussions that involve the new council, doing all I can myself to ensure that this is the case.

I have continued to lead the Communications Task & Finish Group which I Chair, and the focus now is very much on our external communications campaign to residents, businesses and wider key stakeholders on what will change, but also what will not change, on Day One. A range of mediums are being used, reflecting the way that we are living our lives at the moment, and this targeted campaign will have started at the time of this Full Council meeting and run through until Vesting Day.

There have also been a significant number of formal meetings that I have attended, including 2 West Northamptonshire Shadow Executive meetings, in particular approving the budgets for 2021/22, which then went on to the West Shadow Council meeting for formal approval. Alongside these have been the regular monthly West Implementation Executive and Joint Implementation Executive meetings, with the final round of meetings to take place in March.

Also arranged have been a number of Member briefings, covering the essentials that Members need to be aware of across Adult Services and Children's Services, which have proved to be invaluable in broadening Members' knowledge in these 2 key areas of activity that previously were part of Northamptonshire County Council. Alongside this have been discussions on West Northamptonshire legacy projects – 'show & tell' type events that so far have enabled members to become aware of the legacy projects being progressed by Daventry District and South Northants councils.

There are two further dates for these sessions, both of which will focus on NBC lead projects, and these are:

- 25th February at 6pm - Town Regeneration, the Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund projects
- 12th March at 2.30pm - House building projects, Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness

Invitations for both of these sessions will be in your council diary, and it would be appreciated if you were able to attend these sessions, to show your support for these projects and initiatives to remain priorities in the new council.

As well as being Deputy Leader of the West Northamptonshire Shadow authority, I am also Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, and was therefore pleased to have an initial catch up with the incoming new Director of Place & Economy, Stuart Timmiss, who will be joining West Northamptonshire Council on 1st April. Stuart and I were able to cover a number of key topics, most particularly around the importance of keeping momentum on Town Regeneration activities.

In terms of the development of the new Town Council for Northampton, and two new Parish Councils, again I have been actively involved in wider discussions, and am tremendously glad to now see them up and running.

Economic Growth

Whilst there may be less than 40 days until Vesting Day, work around the Economic Growth agenda continues at a significant pace, not least our Town Investment Plan which, whilst submitted ahead of schedule on 11th December 2020, we have now taken the opportunity to publicise the detail of our £25m bid. I am pleased to say that this has generated significant excitement and optimism across the town and, as a result, I was pleased to undertake a number of media briefings, alongside fellow Northampton Forward Board members. We hope to hear in early March the outcome of our Towns Fund bid.

Similarly, in my last report I updated on our success with the Future High Street Fund bid, securing £8.4m. Since then, we have been able to provide further feedback to colleagues at MHCLG and hope to hear formal confirmation of the bid again towards the end of February or early March. This once again, being positive news, generated media interest and I was pleased to provide updates, including to the BBC.

Northampton Forward Board continues to meet and recently we have received updates on progress with regards to the stripping out of asbestos in the former M&S building, which is progressing well and should be concluded by the end of March. We also had an introductory meeting with Pavement Creative, who will be developing the Place Marketing Strategy for Northampton between now and July 2021. This Strategy will be aimed at businesses and attracting them to Northampton to increase inward investment, but also to the wider visitor economy and indeed our own residents, encouraging an inclusive economy here in Northampton.

As a Board member on the Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID), I have also attended their most recent Board meeting and also a BID event on 29th January, and am hopeful that their current renewal ballot will be a success.

At the end of January, I also Chaired an additional meeting of the Waterside Enterprise Zone Board, in which we had an update on the 7 key priority sites that are currently being developed, as well as an overview of the Town Investment Plan previously referenced.

All NBC members have shown a keen interest, and much appreciated support, for the Town Regeneration work, and it has been some time since we provided you with a more detailed briefing, and so on Tuesday 2nd March, 6.00pm-7.30pm, we are presenting an all-member briefing to bring members up to date on the Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund bids, with an opportunity of course to ask any questions that you may have.

Sub-regional Activities

A number of Sub-Regional Boards continued to take place virtually. I was pleased to represent Northampton and ensure that our voice is heard, as well as contributing to the wider partnership agenda at both the SEMLEP Finance Risk & Audit Committee, the Central Area Growth Board as well as attending both an MHCLG webinar and a District Councils Network All-Member call, both focussed on elections and the vaccination roll-out.

Other Activities

Towards the end of January, we received the Public Interest Report from our former auditors KPMG, which I have discussed both with Members and with Officers as we develop our response to it. This important issue is subject to a separate report on today's agenda.

I am also particularly pleased to be part of a wider team of judges in the Inspirational Women Awards, alongside Cllr Anna King and the Chief Executive.

Finally, as this is likely my last formal report to council, with a different format anticipated for our last full council meeting on 8th March, I would like to place on record that having been Leader of Northampton Borough Council has without doubt been one of the greatest honours or privileges of my life.

I am hopeful that the past few years will be thought of as years in which positive progress has been made across a number of areas, and I would like to thank the Cabinet, and all members across the council, the Chief Executive, Senior Officers, and all members of staff, as well as the array of partner organisations and individuals that it has been such an honour to work alongside during the years. Working with so many wonderful people, however difficult some of the challenges faced have been, has been an extraordinary experience. Thank you.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council