

As Deputy Leader of the Council, I have continued to play an active role in the establishment of a Unitary Council for West Northamptonshire and the transition to it as a member of the Shadow Executive and as Chair of two Task & Finish Groups – Civic Matters and Equalities. However, I'm continuing to support the Leader and Cabinet colleagues across a variety of areas within the council. I can report on some of my specific responsibilities as below.

Market

Foot fall on the market remains approximately 35% down on pre Covid levels creating a tough trading environment for our market traders. Throughout July and August, traders were offered a concession on their rents to enable them to choose whether to trade during these uncertain times, which has helped in the slow recovery of the town. To further support our traders, we have also decided to reduce Saturday's market rents by nearly 50% until the 31st December 2020.

Councillor Development / Democratic Services

Meetings are continuing to be held virtually over Zoom and are still working very well; they are continuing to attract public interest. My thanks to our Democratic Services staff for facilitating these so successfully.

The Democratic and Member Services Manager was involved in the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) zoom event that celebrated 20 years of Scrutiny at the end of July 2020. There was a Panel of just four that had been invited to speak about how scrutiny had evolved since its inception. The Panel comprised:

- Director of Research, CfPS;
- Chair, Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO);
- Democratic and Member Services Manager, Northampton Borough Council;
- A Scrutiny Councillor from Sheffield City Council.

Around 60 other attendees observed the Panel in discussion and then posed several questions to the Panel. Public participation and the work programming process at Northampton received a lot of interest. A recording of the event has been published on the CfPS website.

The Mayor has continued to attend events virtually, attending very few socially distanced outside engagements. VJ Day was a great success and the event was published on the Mayor's Facebook account, and the Council's YouTube account.

Member briefings are continuing with them being held remotely. An external provider hosted a training event on 21st July regarding Member involvement in the pre-planning application process. A remote briefing session for Members on Planning Legislation is scheduled for 16th September and further sessions will be programmed as required.

A presentation / briefing session will shortly be arranged for all Members regarding the Service Blueprint for West Northamptonshire Council.

Legal Services

The Litigation and Licensing team has continued to assist with and advise remote licensing committees, including working with the Licensing Unit to bring forward a report concerning the creation of the new Pavement License scheme and the delegations to officers necessary to implement and enforce it.

The Legal team has also started criminal proceedings in the Magistrates' Court in relation to a rogue HMO landlord and two others for a combined total of 182 offences in respect of 8 unlicensed HMO properties, although the Court has not given NBC a hearing date yet.

Electoral Services

The electoral services team have been involved in the introduction of the reformed electoral register canvass this year. The reformed canvass required a national data match to determine to what extent we canvass properties this year. Where all residents at a property match, we are just required to send 1 letter to each household informing them who is registered. Where 1 or more person in the property does not match, we are required to canvass as before. We have completed our data match for this year's canvass and just 30% of properties needed to undergo the full canvass. We currently only have 18,555 properties left who need to respond to the canvass this year. This compares to 44,905 properties that were outstanding at the same stage last year.

As part of the reformed canvass we are now able to canvass using email and telephone in order to reduce costs. We have recently sent emails to properties who did not respond to the first form and we are receiving responses. We will be conducting our first telephone canvass at the end of September.

Street Lighting

The project is now forecast to finish in November although there will be ongoing remedial actions continuing post project to tie up loose ends such as lighting in the Gallery pub car park which has been reported as insufficient. Work at St Crispin's will be undertaken once estates have confirmed land ownership and established maintenance responsibilities for hedges etc. The project is still within the original budget.

Rail Issues

Public consultation on the England's Economic Heartland (EEH) Transport Strategy continues. In the background evidence supporting the Strategy is a Phase One of the Passenger Rail Study for the Heartland. This is a baseline assessment of the current rail network. Northampton is a Case Study in the baseline study. The study highlights the fact that Northampton has a relatively sparse rail service, being effectively at the ends of commuter services to London and Birmingham that make frequent stops, with relatively poor connectivity to other parts of the Heartland served by other railways, making road travel more attractive and competitive. Consultation on the Transport Strategy closes on 6th October 2020. It is intended that the Council will submit representations in response to this consultation.

Flooding

At the time of writing, I'm still asking for the Watercourse Survey documents to be published.

The survey documents are currently with the Head of Economic Growth and Regeneration who is in discussion with the grounds maintenance team regarding a maintenance regime moving forward.

Governance Review

A meeting of the Cross-Party Working Group is scheduled to take place on 16th September 2020 and the agenda has been published.

Councillor Phil Larratt
Deputy Leader of the Council