



Cabinet Member Report for Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

14th September 2020

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 an incredibly busy period of activity since my last update for Council in July. From the end of July, the local outbreak was becoming apparent - initially across a couple of wards within the Northampton Borough area, but that then was overtaken by the outbreak at Greencore, a key employer at Moulton Park. As a result, and with the Government's focus now on managing outbreaks at a local level and for the Leader of the Local Authority to be front and centre of engagement with the local community, I found myself involved in the weekly press conferences which began at the end of July and have proved to be an extremely effective way of keeping the town up to date with our situation and the latest guidance, and at the height of the Greencore media interest in August, we had over 60 people on the Zoom media briefing. It was important to take every opportunity available to alert local people to the risks and to the guidance for staying safe, but also to reassure that all the right actions were being taken to reduce infection rates, and so this level of media interest led to opportunities to do this through radio and TV interviews which included BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC Radio Northampton, Inspiration FM, Heart Radio/LBC, ITV, Sky's Good Morning, BBC national TV News, BBC Look East and also on Channel S, an Asian Network Channel, which was particularly useful for us to get some of the key messages across to some specific communities within the Borough. I am grateful to Cllr. Haque for arranging the visit by Channel S to Northampton.

In terms of the local outbreak, this has been managed through a Strategic Command Group which I have therefore ensured that I attended regularly, to ensure that I am fully up to speed with all of the key data and activities that are taking place in relation to what is happening in Northampton.

As I write this report, I am pleased to say - although there is no room to be complacent - that Northampton's figures are diminishing, but because of the outbreak in Greencore, we are understandably still an area of government intervention, although that is still specifically aimed at the self-isolation of Greencore employees until the 5th September. I think it is important to stress the excellent work that is being undertaken by our staff, perhaps particularly by Ruth Austen and her team, Vicki Rockall and her teams and Town Centre Management and Wardens who have all gone above and beyond to ensure that we manage these local outbreaks in both a rapid and a proactive fashion.

Linked to this, I have also (again because of the focus around local outbreaks being managed locally) been a regular attendee at the Oversight & Engagement Board, which is chaired by Cllr Ian Morris (NCC) which takes place weekly, where we understand from the Director of Public Health (Lucy Wightman) and a range of other specialist Officers, activities not just within Northampton but across the County and wider Subregion, and how we are managing activity. These meetings are streamed on YouTube as well.

The economic recovery of the town is crucially important, and the Eat Out to Help Out scheme has helped to encourage people back to the food and beverage industry across the Borough. Feedback from the fifty four town centre venues that participated in the scheme is that it was a success for them. I am also continuing to attend the weekly Town Centre Task Force meetings, coordinated by the BID, to ensure that we not only maintain and promote the Covid safe guidelines, but also look at further ways to drive footfall back into the Town Centre.

Most recently I have been pleased to work alongside Cllr. Stone in the development of videos by young people, in which Northampton Association of Youth Clubs facilitated a socially distanced workshop, held outside in the Guildhall courtyard, which enabled around twenty young people to discuss the risks and important guidance to be followed to stay safe. From this, videos have been produced for social media, which will be posted through our media channels and also by the young people themselves. Given the age range and the many cultural communities represented by the young people involved, it is hoped that these messages will reach many important parts of the town's community.

Future Northants Activity

With less than 7 months before Vesting Day, work around both the Future Northants programme and the more formal Executive and Council meetings continues at a pace.

The Exec meetings alongside the West Northants Shadow Authority meetings continue via Zoom and have taken place in July and August. There have also been similar monthly meetings of the Joint Implementation Executive, which continue on a monthly basis. The focus has been around the development of the Blueprint, which you will all have seen, and which is now starting to take shape in terms of the key functions which will be present within the new West Northants Council. Further work and meetings continue on the Blueprint, which will be formally signed off at the West Northants Shadow Authority Executive in September, but before then there will be an opportunity for all members to attend a briefing session to understand the detail and ask questions.

July and August were also busy in terms of the preparations for the Senior Recruitment of the three statutory officers for West Northants Council, firstly beginning with some interview panel training which I attended, which was then closely followed by the recruitment of the Chief Executive for West Northants Council, including both the long-listing and short-listing meetings and then the 2 day interviews themselves.

Earlier this month I was involved in the recruitment of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) for West Northants and that role alongside the S151 Officer will be formally ratified at the next West Northants Shadow Authority Council meeting in September, completing the 3 key Statutory roles for the new Council.

The work around the Task & Finish Groups continues and as Chair of the Communications & Engagement Group, we have met twice in July and once in August to progress the development of the visual identity (logo and branding) of the new West Northants Council. Some of you may now have seen the three shortlisted designs which we are now testing through a public survey with residents across West Northants, as well as Elected Members and staff, in order that we can finalise this by the autumn.

My work on the Vision & Values Task & Finish Group, chaired by Ian McCord, continues and again we hope to test some of the thinking behind that with residents, partners and staff as well as Elected Members in the coming weeks. My view is that the culture within the new council will be a highly significant factor in its level of success, as will its ability to demonstrate values of putting residents and customers first.

Outside of these formal meetings, there continues to be a range of meetings linked to the further development of the West Northants Council. I was pleased that the Leader, Cllr Ian McCord, and I were able to meet with Danny Moody of NCALC to ensure that Town and Parish Councils retain a prominent part within the wider partnership arena across the West Northants area from April 2021.

Economic Growth

Although we have just gone through the summer months, activity within the Economic Growth arena continues at a rapid pace and the Northampton Forward Board continues to meet as it looks to develop the Town Investment Plan as part of the wider Towns Fund that I have referenced within previous reports here at Council. We have had presentations from Grant Thornton who are working with us on the development of the Investment Plan and have just launched a public consultation on the proposed areas for investment, to support our Town Investment Plan which we are required to submit by the end of October.

Sub-regional Activities

My involvement in both the Arc Leaders Group and East Midlands Councils continue and I have been pleased to attend various meetings in July, August and September both on behalf of Northampton and the wider West Northants Authority.

As I have mentioned before, it is particularly important that we have a seat at these sub-regional meetings to ensure that future opportunities are grasped when they come along, but also so that we can take best practice and learning back to Northampton to ensure that we continue with our ambitious growth plans across the town.

Other Activities

Following Council back in July, and representation made by Northampton Town Football Supporters Trust, I am pleased to say that myself alongside the Chief Executive met with representatives from the Football Supports Trust in August to hear from them and their views in relation to ensuring activities in and around the Football Club continue to thrive, we will be meeting with the Football Club shortly.

I was also pleased to attend a virtual Federation of Small Businesses networking event, in which I was able to update them on how any local outbreak would manifest itself in terms of management at a local level and any potential impact that may have on local businesses, should we go into a potential lockdown scenario. I was also glad to be able to thank the FSB for their help during the administration of the covid business grants, when they assisted businesses to provide the necessary evidence to support their grant applications.

Civic events during the past few months have all mainly been marked online; something which NBC colleagues and the others involved in them have adapted to incredibly well, and VJ Day was marked in the same way. For my part, it was an honour to lay a wreath on behalf of the council as part of this event.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council