



Report of the Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 18th September 2017

I have continued to work with Cabinet Members, Directors, and Officers across all areas of the council. Specific items include those below.

Interim Chief Executive

I am delighted that Simon Bovey is now in post full-time as Interim Chief Executive. Whilst, at the time of writing, this has only been for a few days, Simon has already made himself known personally to all staff, and has quickly understood many of the key challenges and issues that the council is dealing with, and I am certain that his skills, experience, knowledge of local government and of Northampton are already making him a valuable asset to the council and the town.

Amongst the priorities that I have discussed with Simon are the need to make the working environment one in which our staff colleagues feel inspired to contribute ideas to deliver the best service we can for our residents, and to build strong partnerships with other key organisations around the town, both public organisations and private, to drive the town ahead.

Unitary Status

Deloitte's report that they are nearing the completion of their work, and on 13th September a workshop is being held with the Chief Executives of all the participating Districts and Boroughs, in order to finalise their report. It has been agreed that immediately following this they will give us possible dates for the NBC Member workshop/briefing that has been previously agreed.

Governance

A number of papers are going to Audit Committee on 11th September, including an update of the actions under the Governance Action Plan. The implementation of the Action Plan is an ongoing journey, but in order to make tracking the individual actions easier, they have now been reviewed and in some cases combined, which gives a clearer picture, and demonstrates that of the 48 actions, 22 have been fully implemented and 21 part implemented.

Infrastructure

On 5th September I was part of an NBC / NCC Officer and Member presentation to the National Infrastructure Commission in London. Our presentation to the Commissioners outlined the challenges that Northampton faces in terms of transport infrastructure. Our stated position was that, whilst we are enthusiastic to take advantage of the economic growth that could result from being a part of the Oxford – Cambridge growth Corridor, significant improvements are required to infrastructure in order to support the town's population and sustain its economy, and certainly to deliver the housing growth targets that we face.

Our presentation identified the pinch-points and local transport issues, and the specific large scale infrastructure needs that were highlighted included the delivery of the North West Relief road / Northern Orbital.

History & Heritage Project

As part of our determination to enhance the visitor experience to the town, and working in conjunction with Scrutiny's work on promoting our history and heritage, it was a pleasure to host a meeting of some of the town's many knowledgeable historians. As a result of the general knowledge that they have regarding the town's past, and the specific areas in which they each specialise, we have been able to put together a very comprehensive 'stock-take' of the town's historical assets, both physical assets and historic facts. Part of this work has helped to ensure the success of the recent Heritage Open Days weekend, and we are now looking at how we further promote our history, in due course linking this to Scrutiny's review of how other towns promote theirs.

Traveller Encampments

Over the summer we have seen a massive increase in the number of Traveller encampments across the town. Whilst some have not caused disruption or damage, it is sadly fair to say that many have, and the reports from residents of anti-social and threatening behaviour have been significant, as has the damage to property and the cost of cleaning up after these encampments. The council has sought to respond to the requests from individuals and Residents' Groups by working with the other agencies involved to act quickly, and by funding the installation of bollards at many of the town's open spaces, although clearly this is not an ideal solution.

Having been in continual dialogue with them throughout recent weeks, on 4th September Officers and Members met with representatives of the County-wide Traveller Unit, NCC, and the Police to review and discuss the most effective use of processes and powers to ensure that the swiftest and most effective action is taken at all times.

Other Activity

Amongst many other activities, on 15th July I was pleased to visit the Battlefield event at Delapre Abbey, and to take a tour of the battle site, and on 25th August to visit one of the NPH managed properties that has recently had photovoltaic solar panels installed, to bring significant energy bill savings to the tenants.

I was very proud to be asked to attend the Night Shelter event on 6th September, to thank the many volunteers who have supported either by giving their time regularly to help run the Shelter, or having given their time or donations to help renovate the building and get the Shelter open.

I recently visited the Pinnacle Climbing Centre, one of many leisure activities in the town, catering for a wide audience from families, all the way through to the more professional climber looking for a training centre of national significance. With the number of centres that the town has offering specialist leisure facilities, our intention is to work with them to promote them to both local residents and to the wider region as another reason to visit Northampton.

Finally, it is always a pleasure to attend our Corporate Induction sessions for newer staff, as I did again recently, and welcome new staff to the council, and it was a particular pleasure to tour the whole Guildhall recently and take the chance to say hello to all staff, as part of introducing Simon Bovey. Whilst busy daily life tends to mean only coming into contact with staff colleagues regarding particular issues as they crop up, it is always extremely rewarding to take time to understand the tremendous work that our staff are involved in, and to see more closely the expertise and dedicated work being carried out in each department.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council