

Report of the Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 20th January 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. Many of these activities and issues are referred to in Cabinet colleagues' reports.

Unitary Status

Work on Future Northants (the new collective name for the Unitary activity) continues and the Leaders Oversight Board has met again in November, with a further meeting scheduled on a monthly basis from January 2020 onwards. I have also been involved in three Discovery & Design workshops. These are sessions that are led by the Senior Responsible Officer and Programme Manager, to test thinking and ideas on certain elements of the wider Future Northants programme. The Design & Discovery workshops have focussed on Corporate Services areas, including LGSS, Customer Services and IT.

As we approach the last full calendar year before the go live date in April 2021, activity for myself and fellow Leaders will intensify and we have already scheduled in Leaders workshops every week in January and February, to progress matters. Most recently there has been another meeting of the West Northants Joint Committee, and as you will have seen, the agenda items focussed on an update on Programme activity as well as a paper on the finances and two papers on the recruitment process of the interim Statutory Officers and the permanent Statutory Officers. These meetings of the West Northants Joint Committee will continue with one a month in February and March.

As I write this report, I am due to meet with the Leaders from South Northants and Daventry District Council with the new Children's Commissioner Andrew Christie. Andrew was Director of Children's Services for the tri-Borough partnership of Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster and brings a wealth of experience to this important role. It will be interesting to hear his vision and development of Children's Services through the Children's Trust when we meet.

Work continues on the development of a new Town Council for Northampton and this will be covered elsewhere through the Deputy Leader's report, who chairs the Working Group. The council paper on the agenda is an outcome of those meetings and the recent consultation undertaken.

The Cross-party Unitary Working Group has continued to meet on a regular basis, whereby myself and the Chief Executive provide detailed updates on Programme activity as well as future discussions that are forthcoming from the Future Northants programme.

Regional Activity

As I have mentioned in previous reports, I am now actively involved in a number of sub-regional Boards and have recently attended the Arc Leaders meeting in November, the SEMLEP Board meeting and the East Midland Councils' Executive Board, ensuring that Northampton's key issues and areas of opportunity are promoted on this sub-regional stage.

Economic Growth

Work on the development and regeneration of the town continues at pace and I have chaired a number of Northampton Forward Board meetings over the last 10 weeks. Work continues on the development of the Strategic Business Case through Grant Thornton, which will need to be submitted as part of the wider outline Business Case to MHCLG at the end of January. We have also been working with Gillespies (Landscape Architects) who are leading on the design for the new Market Square, and as you will have seen, was recently subject to consultation during the month of December. Part of that consultation included a dedicated Members' Briefing where we were able to take those that attended through the process of getting to the three designs, as well as seeking feedback from Members in the room. Prior to this myself, the Chief Executive and the Head of Economy and Assets had met with Market Traders to seek their views, and again this was a positive meeting where we were able to factor their comments into what will emerge as the final design.

Reflecting the desire from a Motion last year of a People's Panel, I have continued to progress this and recently chaired a meeting to help formulate several Sub Working Groups, which is being led by the University of Northampton. We hope to finalise this at the end of January and I will continue to update on the progress through the Cross-party Working Group that we have also established for this work, to keep Members up to date on activity of the wider growth agenda for the town.

In December I was pleased to formally open the Economic Growth Strategy workshop at the Park Inn, where over 20 key businesses came and fed into the current draft Economic Growth Strategy that is being developed. I was very pleased to hear the feedback as well as the level of energy there was in the room and to really help prioritise and focus on the key areas that we need to develop in order to maximise the Economic Growth of the town. We asked the businesses that attended to continue supporting the work as it progresses, and were delighted when they all agreed to do that. The outcomes of this event will be fed back to the 50-plus businesses that we have been consulting with on the development of the Strategy, with the final Strategy going through Cabinet before Easter.

November and December have also seen a number of Annual General Meetings linked to the wider Growth agenda here in Northampton. Amongst these, I was pleased to attend the Chamber AGM and to hear of their significant achievements and exciting plans for 2020, in supporting business growth.

Other Activity

Culture is one of the key strengths of the town and I have been involved in a number of discussions linked to this wider agenda, including a recent catch up with the CEO of the Royal & Derngate, Jo Gordon, as well as discussions on the development of a Shoosmith Gallery, which is still in its embryonic stage, and also discussions with the Chair and Director at Delapre to work with them and build a long term sustainable Business Plan for the future operation of this wonderful attraction we have in the town.

I was again pleased to be involved in the Rough Sleeper Count at the end of November and support the 50-plus volunteers that got involved this year, which is a key part of our understanding of Rough Sleeping in the town.

I was very glad to be able to visit the LowDown and better understand the great work that they do to support young people recently, and to be invited to take part in the International Men's

Day judging panel and attend the event and awards ceremony, as well as enjoying the wonderful Christmas events in the town, delivered by NBC and other partners, such as the Igloo Cinema, and the Frost Fair and Christmas Parade.

The Northamptonshire Sport launch of 'See Active Be Active' was a wonderful event to attend, as was the Northants Hour event in Cheyne Walk, as were the screening of Screen Northants film 'Nene' at the Cineworld cinema, and Rotary's splendid Santa Fun Run.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn

Leader of the Council