



Cabinet Member Report - Deputy Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 18th January, 2021

As Deputy Leader of the Council, I have continued to play an active role in the establishment of West Northamptonshire Council as a member of the Shadow Executive with the Highways and Waste Portfolio, 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 this council. I can report on some of my specific responsibilities as below.

Market

The market continued to gain some momentum despite the downturn in footfall until the second national lockdown was enforced. The trading period up to Christmas Eve was encouraging but, in most cases, not up to the same level as last year. As the new lockdown has been introduced there are only fruit / veg and butchers trading.

We suspended rents to assist the traders at this difficult time and have supported them with a further discretionary grant.

During the second lockdown, a deep clean of the market surface was undertaken as well as replacement of most of the stall covers, in addition eight unused stalls were removed to prevent anti-social behaviour in the area.

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, and this is being monitored by the number of views on YouTube.

Member briefings are continuing with them being held remotely and programmed in as required. Two Councillor Briefing sessions were held remotely over Zoom, regarding Safeguarding. A Member attended a virtual event hosted by East Midlands Councils regarding Overview and Scrutiny. Members are booked in to attend externally hosted remote events on homelessness and rough sleeping early in the Spring 2021.

The Mayor has continued to attend events virtually, attending very few socially distanced outside engagements. Civic events with The Mayor have been honoured with socially distanced and on-line ceremonies. This includes ongoing Remembrance Day planning. Work to support The Mayor's charity continues with online fundraising plans. The Mayor's Civic Service which is usually held in the summer has unfortunately been postponed indefinitely now that we are in lockdown again.

Legal Services

The Property Team have completed several transactional matters in recent times. These have included Right to Buy Sales, the sale of garden land, a lease of a hot food takeaway shop and a licence assignment, whilst continuing to support and progress a number of on-going transactional matters.

Electoral Services

The electoral services team have been working on the final stages of the register canvass and published the register on 1st December. Registers have been sent to the required bodies.

The team have been doing some preparatory work on the Northampton Town Centre BID vote and are currently working on the notices that need to go to businesses.

This month the team supported the Romanian embassy by providing polling booths for their elections.

Initial preparations are being made for the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner, Unitary and Parish elections on 6th May 2021, including booking the polling stations and preparing a project plan. The elections teams covering West Northamptonshire have had their first meeting with the new Returning Officer where she outlined her vision for running this year's election.

Street Lighting

The streetlighting project has now been completed under the terms of the contract. The contractor will continue to snag any issues that come in and following our consultant's final inspection. The new lights at St Crispin's are ready for Western Power to connect as this was not in the original contract (decommissioned by others previously). We have managed to cover the cost from within our budget.

The streetlights at Tudor Court, Wootton, have now been connected and again Western Power are attending to turn them on shortly. These lights were fed from the adjacent shop precinct / Co-operative supermarket site. Unfortunately, they were turned off and decommissioned at some point by the landlord. This may have been a billing issue as our estates team cannot find any invoices for power previously for these.

The maintenance contract for our lights is being finalised and will hopefully be in place in the near future.

Rail Issues

England's Economic Heartland have considered responses received to their Draft Transport Strategy. At its meeting of 27th November EEH considered a report setting out a revised introductory section to the Transport Strategy placing more emphasis on decarbonisation of the transport system, prioritisation of investment in strategic public transport schemes and recognising the ongoing critical role that freight and logistics has to play. As such the report proposed that the Transport Strategy should:

- highlight the importance of using East West Rail and mass rapid transit as the catalyst for the transformation of strategic public transport networks.
- ensure that freight and logistics needs continue to be met whilst lowering the environmental impact of their delivery – making the strongest case for investment in the rail network to accommodate the longer distance movements of freight – not just to the benefit of the Heartland but the UK as a whole.

Flooding

The waste management / grounds maintenance team are now addressing the issue of watercourse management. The team has recently assisted with various issues and awaits our contractor's attendance at Green Lane, West Hunsbury, as the water running off Hunsbury Hill Country Park is still causing issues to the rear of local houses.

Recent flooding events will lead to further flood investigations. By the time these are completed any recommendations will be for West Northamptonshire Council to address.

There is a significant flooding issue that has arisen in Collingtree village affecting the rear of properties in High Street and Watering Lane, and on NCC land. We are pursuing the investigation into this issue. WinVic, the contractor working for the developer of the new Rail Freight Terminal, have thoroughly considered if the works that they are undertaking on the other side of the M1 could be causing the problem. They have been very open and transparent and have reassured us that their activities on the site are not contributing to the problem. The possibility of the works currently being undertaken to the M1, especially piling, causing the problem is now being considered.

Governance Review

The shadow Town Council, shadow Kingsthorpe Parish Council and shadow Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council are up and running.

Meetings of the Cross-Party Working Group took place on 2nd and 9th December 2020 and the outcome of these meetings is the subject of separate reports to this Council Meeting.

Councillor Phil Larratt
Deputy Leader of the Council