



Report of the Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 11th March 2019

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

The Lead Project Officer who has been running the Dorset transition to Unitary has been recruited to lead the Northamptonshire councils unitary project. Dorset has been seen to have been a well-run project, and although there will inevitably be many aspects of the Northamptonshire project that will be different to Dorset, the knowledge and experience, processes and lessons learned from Dorset will be extremely valuable to us. Transitioning to us from Dorset he is currently working with us for two days per week, and will soon be full time on the project.

The Council Leaders and Chief Executives asked the new Programme Manager to give his initial assessment of the Northamptonshire unitary project, and from some early headlines on timescales, risks and costs, we are now setting about examining a number of areas in greater detail, most particularly in relation to the project budget.

Many influences on the cost of the unitary project will include, for example, the extent to which we ask our own staff to undertake some of the work involved, versus other staff being brought in. It is my view that we have a responsibility to deliver this work efficiently and cost-effectively, but to also ensure that we maintain good levels of service to our residents and do not allow our performance to suffer during the period of the unitary project. There will therefore be some difficult choices to make on managing this process, and I will keep members informed through these reports and other briefings.

Economic Development

The initial main focus of a new board that the council is leading; Northampton Forward, is to ensure that the council submits a strong Expression of Interest form for the Future High Streets Fund. Cllr Hadland has described in his report the membership of this board and the deadlines for the process, but it is worth noting that the Expression of Interest application form allows for only very concise responses to the questions that it asks, broadly aiming to establish two key things, which is firstly the scale and strength of our ambition for the town, and secondly the need for the change that the Fund could assist us with. It does not seek details of specific projects or initiatives at this stage, but that level of detail will form an important part of a second phase application, following a successful Expression of Interest. This will therefore mean a greater level of public and member involvement in the second stage, including seeking the input of the wider public, the forums and groups that the council is involved in, and those other groups established or newly forming who are showing their commitment to the future of the town.

At this stage, we are working with those partners that the Government would want to know were supportive and involved in the Expression of Interest, such as the University, the County Council, Businesses and Business groups, etc. Although the council chairs the board and will ultimately submit the Expression on Interest, the board is working collaboratively, and the input from our partners is vital in making our submission the best it can be.

Other Activity

Whilst many of the things I have been involved in are referenced in more detail in colleagues' cabinet member reports, some of my other recent activities of particular note include:

- Meeting with the new Chief Executive of the NN Contemporary Gallery, and discussing plans for the future and their role in the cultural life of the town
- A meeting with the key organisations involved in supporting the homeless in our town, seeking to move towards closer and more aligned working relationships
- The District Councils Network conference, hearing ideas and best practice from key speakers and other councils
- Attending the University of Northampton graduation ceremonies for the Faculty of Business & Law, and the Chinese New Year celebrations at the Deco Theatre
- The opening of Lakeview House, a wonderful NPH development of 45 new apartment homes

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council