



Cabinet Member Report for Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

18th January 2021

Cllr Jonathan Nunn Leader of the Council

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

Since my last report to Council in early November, the challenges faced across the town in relation to the Covid19 pandemic have been felt by us all. The number of those with Covid have continued to increase rapidly and whilst we stayed in Tier 2 for a few weeks, we soon moved up into Tier 3 and then over Christmas into Tier 4. We are now in the third national lockdown, which is inevitably putting its own strain on the people of Northampton - both residents and businesses alike. However, the excellent work that the organisation has undertaken, alongside the wider Health and local government system and with wider partners, has meant we are far better prepared to manage this current lockdown. The dedication of staff across the council, whether at the frontline of tackling the pandemic or working hard to keep regular services operating, has been tremendous. That said, with the massive number of covid infection cases including very high hospital occupancy due to covid, it is imperative that we continue to observe all of the guidance in relation to this, and most importantly continue to support one another over the coming weeks as, with the roll out of the vaccine, there seems to be some hope for a way through this terrible virus.

As you can imagine, Covid19 has dominated my own workload, continuing with regular briefings, and attendance at the Oversight and Engagement Board (chaired by Cllr Ian Morris of NCC), where we continue to receive detailed updates from the Director of Public Health on how we as a County, plus the respective Local Authority areas, are faring. I have continued to regularly attend the weekly press conference, to support the efforts to share information publicly, and to support the safety messages to residents and businesses.

I have also joined my fellow Leaders and Chief Executives across all 8 Authorities, together with the key Chief Executives of the Health sector, to brief the 7 MPs on the work that is taking place across the County. This covered not just the activities in our hospitals and the roll out of the vaccination programme, but also the support that we are providing to businesses through the Local Restrictions Support Grant and Additional Restrictions Grant that is currently being distributed.

Similarly, with the focus on how the economy looks to respond to the last 11 months, I have continued involvement in the Northampton Town Centre Task Force meetings, coordinated and led by the Town Centre BID, in order that we can continue to ensure that the town centre has been as safe as possible for visitors, and that local businesses feel supported, can operate safely and, following this current lockdown, can reopen

safely. A key part of the work will continue to promote the town and therefore drive footfall back into our town centre.

Future Northants Activity

There are now less than 90 days to go before West Northamptonshire Council comes into being and therefore the level of activity, and my involvement, has continued to increase in the last 8 weeks, and will continue to do so in the run up to Vesting Day on 1st April. Throughout November and December, I was heavily involved in the preparation for the remaining senior appointments at West Northamptonshire Council (Executive Director for Place, Economy and Environment and Executive Director of Corporate Services) and I am pleased that they were concluded successfully just before Christmas.

I have also continued to lead the Communications Task & Finish Group, which I Chair, and in the last 8 weeks we have had a further 3 meetings, culminating in both a presentation to the Full Shadow Executive in November where the new logo and branding guidelines were presented for West Northamptonshire Council, after extensive consultation with staff, residents and Elected Members alike. In December I also provided a further update to the West Northamptonshire Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in which we were able to bring the Committee up to date on the Day One Readiness campaign starting this month and running until March, alerting both residents and businesses of the changes that will be coming. For many residents, who have less frequent contact with their local council, the move to unitary must simply just be seamless, with for example their bins continuing to be collected as normal. Our need is to provide awareness to those in more regular contact, and likely being more vulnerable, along with reassurance on how their services will continue, and how they can contact their council should they need to.

I have also been part of a number of development sessions arranged for the wider Shadow Executive, including on Leadership Development, Finance and Preparation for the Budgets for 2021/22, as well as briefings on the draft Budget that was recently presented to the Shadow Executive on 5th January.

In terms of the development of the new Parishes and Town Council for Northampton, we have met as the two Community Governance Review Cross Party Working Group, but as the new councils have all now met formally, I am delighted that the new councils themselves are now operating with full authority over their respective issues, budgets and futures, and look set to make a great contribution to the quality of life and wellbeing of their respective residents.

Economic Growth

This has continued at a pace, particularly as we had to submit the Town Investment Plan (part of the wider Towns Fund) by 11th December. A number of Northampton Forward Board meetings therefore took place during November and early December, in order to ensure that the deadline was hit, and a bid for £25m was submitted for 10 projects across the town. We expect to hear back in March 2021.

You will also be aware that we were successful in the Future High Street Fund bid, with £8.4m successfully secured. We hope to have formal confirmation of that, subject to some further feedback that we need to provide, in February 2021. This fantastic news will enable us to progress the redevelopment of the Market Square which we consulted residents and businesses on last year, which will be a real catalyst for positive change in terms of the wider regeneration of the town centre.

Kevin Langley (Acting Director of Economy and Assets) and I also took the opportunity to brief the West Northamptonshire Shadow Executive on the wider regeneration activity that is taking place across the town. That was subsequently followed up by a 'walk-around' the town for some of those Members, which again was extremely beneficial as we move towards Vesting Day, as a lot of this work will be continued through by the new West Northamptonshire Council.

I also Chaired the quarterly meeting of the Waterside Enterprise Zone Board meeting, at which we had positive discussions around the 7 key priority sites that have now been agreed by the Board and we are now looking to develop out, some of which will form part of wider Town Investment Plan (referenced above).

Sub-regional Activities

I continue to represent Northampton in the wider region and sub-region, and in the last 2 months have attended a range of meetings including the ARC Leadership Group, the District Councils Network webinars, particularly focussed on the impact of Covid, and also various meetings of Southeast Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership.

Other Activities

In the last 8 weeks I have also managed to meet virtually a range of key stakeholders, including the President, Kevin Rogers and new Chief Executive, Louise Wall of Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce. We have consistently maintained a strong positive working relationship with the Chamber, so it was good to meet with them both and where we were able to understand and maintain those positive working relationships as we transition into the new unitary authority. We also provided an update on Local Government Reorganisation to them both.

I have mentioned the importance of our Leisure facilities in previous Leader's reports, and along with NBC officers have continued to stay in touch with, and support, Northampton Leisure Trust. This will continue throughout this current third lockdown.

I have also attended a range of other meetings including the Town Centre Business Improvement District meetings, of which I am a Board member, and was also pleased to attend the Youth Forum Q&A session before Christmas, which is also particularly rewarding in meeting the young people of Northampton.

Working with our partners, particularly around the Homelessness agenda for example, is extremely important to the way that we work. It was therefore positive to meet with Board members of the Hope Centre, alongside the Chief Executive, in which we heard of their proposals of a refreshed business model in light of the way that Covid has impacted on their way of working. My view remains that, as with other important areas of our work, effective and permanent solutions to Homelessness can only be achieved by constructive joined up working with our key partners.

I was particularly pleased to once again be one of the judges in the Male Role Model Awards. As with the Inspirational Women awards for which preparations are again now beginning, this is an important annual event, celebrating the many wonderful people we have in our Northampton community.

Similarly I was once again proud to represent members on behalf of the Borough Council at the (virtual) Remembrance activities in November.

During the past few years, I am proud that the council has achieved progress across a wide range of areas, but this has been during a time of very challenging circumstances,

including covid-19, the move to unitary councils, and the most dramatic change in towns centres for generations, to mention just a few.

My firm belief is that the future success of Northampton relies on strong collaboration with Partners, in the broadest of terms, from businesses and residents, to all public and private organisations, public bodies and Government, and across the political spectrum, and so it is my sincere hope that we see a strong thread of collaboration and unified ambitions for our town, and the wider west Northants area, as a hallmark of our future local government.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council