

Report of the Deputy Leader of the Council



Northampton Borough Council

Monday 15th June 2020

As Deputy Leader of the Council, I have continued to play an active role in the establishment of a Unitary Council and the transition to it as a member of the Shadow Executive, while continuing to support the Leader and Cabinet colleagues across a variety of areas within the council. I can report on some of my specific responsibilities as below.

Market

Due to the pandemic the market was forced to close to all but fresh food stalls in late March. During this time only our butcher, Hung Vo fruit and veg and one takeaway café chose to continue to provide a vital retail service, especially by supplying fresh produce to their customers.

On 2nd June the market reopened to all traders and they are tentatively returning with the appropriate social distancing and additional hygiene measures in place to protect themselves and their customers. We will continue to work closely with our traders to ensure we adapt to government guidelines as they evolve.

In addition, the discretionary grant funding has been extended to our market traders at this difficult time.

Councillor Development Group

Since the March 2020, due to the Covid 19 lockdown, meetings of the Council and Committees have taken place remotely over Zoom.

Intensive training regarding Zoom has been provided to Members and practice sessions have taken place prior to meetings over Zoom.

The Democratic Services Team has worked very closely with the Legal Services Team in interpreting and implementing the new law on virtual Council Meetings and Committees so that they have ran in accordance with the government's remote hearing regulations.

The Democratic Services Team has successfully hosted several remote meetings, including the Annual Council Meeting which involved our new Mayor being gowned and wearing his chains. A lot of background work goes into the staging of the remote meetings that Democratic Services have hosted. Cabinet and Planning Committees have also successfully run, again being hosted by the Democratic Services Team

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Democratic Services and Legal staff for all their hard work in delivering the transition to Zoom enabling the Council to continue the democratic process in accordance with legislation. I would also like to thank them for the delivery of training and practice sessions. Thanks also to Councillor Jamie Lane for his assistance with Zoom training. Their patience is very much appreciated!

My thanks must also go to our IT personnel for all their support in ensuring the smooth operation of our IT systems.

No other training for Members has taken place since March, however,

- **S106 – What it is and how Members can become involved and engaged.** An external training provider has been contacted and remote training, over Zoom has been set for **21st July 2020** commencing at **5.00pm**. All Members are invited to participate in this training.
- Officers are continuing to work on potential sessions for Members around - **Gangs and Knife Crime** – information and video material shown to schools by the police will be provided to Members. It is expected that this will now take place later in the year.

Can Members wishing to attend any of these events please inform Tracy Tiff as soon as possible.

Legal Services

Legal Services have been very busy. Their activities, in addition to their work with Democratic Services have included:

- Completing the drafting of the constitution for the West Northamptonshire Shadow Authority which was presented to the meeting of the Shadow Council on 2 June 2020 and approved.
- Advising multiple service areas about the implications of the Coronavirus Act and associated public health regulations on the provision of their service to the public.
- Advising private sector housing regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and charging five individuals with in excess of 50 HMO related offences.
- Continuing to progress criminal prosecutions already commenced whilst the criminal justice system is effectively suspended on a temporary basis.
- Working towards the LEXCEL standard which will assist clients and direct our resources on where they are needed. It will help us to achieve excellence in compliance and practice management.

Street Lighting

The streetlight project is progressing well and is currently on time and budget.

There are a couple of areas that need further investigation as the power supply appears to be being fed from a different / unknown source. We will have to release a

small part of our contingency to investigate this issue, but it shouldn't cause any time delays.

The draft maintenance contract from Balfour Beatty continues to be scrutinised by our officers and consultant. We still hope that this contract can be finalised and brought to Cabinet soon.

Rail Issues

No further meetings of the East West Rail Consortium have taken place since the lockdown began. However, work continues on the project, in particular with regard to the Bletchley flyover that has been partly dismantled to facilitate its refurbishment to accommodate East West Rail services.

Work is continuing on the England's Economic Heartland (EEH) Transport Strategy, and a report was presented at the May meeting of that organisation's Strategic Transport Forum. The draft Transport Strategy includes a section on improving East-West rail connectivity and makes particular reference to the benefits that improved East-West rail connectivity, in combination with the delivery of HS2, could have for North-South connectivity along key corridors such as Northampton – Milton Keynes / Bletchley - Aylesbury – Old Oak Common, linking these regionally significant hubs with wider economic opportunities and allowing easier access to Heathrow Airport. EEH envisage going out to public consultation on the Transport Strategy later this Summer.

Flooding

Following the flood event of 27th May 2018, and the subsequent receipt of Flood Investigation Reports, we commissioned a condition survey of all watercourses of ours within the Borough.

The survey has now been completed with updated drawings being provided. We will be inviting quotations to clear any areas highlighted in the report in order to move forward with a more managed programme for maintenance and flood mitigation.

Councillor Phil Larratt

Deputy Leader of the Council