



Cabinet Member Report for Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

2nd November 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 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

The last 6 weeks have once again been incredibly busy in terms of my own personal involvement in supporting the wider Covid-19 work, in particular regular attendance at the weekly Oversight & Engagement Board (chaired by Cllr Ian Morris of NCC), where we receive detailed updates from the Director of Public Health on how Northamptonshire as a County, plus the respective Local Authority areas, are faring. Certainly, the work that our Officers have done, working in partnership across the wider Health and Economy system, has enabled us to maintain high levels of awareness around the Government guidelines which as a result, for a short period of time, saw us come off the Government's watchlist. However, with the introduction of the 3 Tier alert levels (Medium, High and Very High) Northampton has initially started within the Medium alert level and at the time of writing, remains there. It is however extremely worrying that the figures across the County and indeed in Northampton are on an upward trajectory, following the national trends of recent weeks. The importance of regular communications and engagement has therefore been crucial and the weekly press conference, which started back in the early summer, has continued and I now provide a weekly update to the media as part of that. On top of that, I have recently been interviewed by both the BBC and ITV Anglia, at each opportunity seeking to reassure people that adhering to guidance and restrictions is the only way that we will beat the virus and keep our town out of harsher restrictions.

Balancing the health and wellbeing of our residents (which has to remain our first concern) alongside the local economy, and peoples' liberty to live their lives is a constant challenge and I continue to either attend, or stay abreast of, each of the weekly Northampton Town Centre Task Force meetings, coordinated and led by Northampton Town Centre BID. The work of this Task Force is essential, in order that we can continue to ensure that local businesses feel both supported but also can see how we are looking to drive and increase footfall safely into the Town Centre. I have also had several meetings in relation to the Government's Active Travel programme, which is being led by Northamptonshire County Council, in order that we can balance the needs of the car user alongside improved social distancing and active travel through improved walkways and cycling routes, whilst seeking to introduce appropriate measures that take advantage of funding opportunities to reduce travel related emissions as part of our Climate commitments.

Future Northants Activity

With less than 6 months left to go before West Northamptonshire Council comes into being, the range of activity is accelerating further still, in relation to the wider Future Northants programme. I continue to chair the Communications and Engagement Task & Finish group and we have met 4 times in the last 6 weeks, focussing on the visual brand

and logo of the new Council. We had an excellent response to the consultation and the Task & Finish group have considered those responses and further refined the logo, which we will be taking to the Shadow Executive for approval in November. Our aims through this group's other work are to ensure that residents, staff, and other key stakeholders feel appropriately informed about the progressing work, and particularly what it will mean to them.

I have also been active in the Culture and Vision Task & Finish group and again I am pleased to say that we have the culmination of our work ready to be tested through public consultation, alongside capturing the views of staff and Elected Members across the authorities in West Northamptonshire, in order that we can shape the Vision and Values for the new organisation in the coming months. Whilst the majority of the senior appointments are now in place, the Task & Finish group that is specifically looking at the work around senior appointments has continued to meet, specifically looking at the high level structure that is being proposed by the Chief Executive, with the opportunity for the Task & Finish group to comment on that, as well as the finalisation of the recruitment of the remaining roles that need to be recruited into the senior team. My own view is that the culture of our new unitary council will be a key determiner of how well it serves West Northamptonshire and its overall success.

The regular formal meetings continue, with the Shadow authority Full Council meeting taking place in September and the monthly Shadow Authority Executive meetings in September and October. On top of this, I also attended the recent Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting, in which myself and Officers provided an update on the work that the Communications and Engagement Task & Finish group have been undertaking, together with an overview of the work that still needs to be worked through and in particular engagement with residents and our key partners around Day One readiness of the new authority, and what they can expect to see from 1st April 2021.

I have also, alongside the West Northamptonshire Executive, attended a number of workshops on specific aspects of the new council.

Economic Growth

The work being undertaken by Northampton Forward Board continues at pace with meetings held in September and October, where we continued the work on the development of the Town Investment Plan that will now be submitted in mid-December to MHCLG. This included feedback from the recent consultation that was held on the longlist of 17 potential areas that can be included in the Town Investment Plan, under three thematic areas: skills, urban regeneration and infrastructure. Stakeholder sessions on the longlist and the vision have also been held and the outcomes of this will help inform the final bid we submit.

We also received the final report on the first stage of the Place Marketing Strategy for Northampton, and we will now begin work on the next stage, in terms of developing the strategy and the action plan, with a view to concluding this by the end of March 2021.

A number of Members and I also received an excellent Member briefing session on the Government's White Paper on the Reform of the Planning System and, as you will be aware, we have also separately responded to that following a Council motion last month.

Sub-regional Activities

I continue to represent the voice of Northampton on the wider sub-regional footprint and have attended a range of meetings, including the Central Area Growth Board, the East Midlands Councils AGM, SEMLEP Board and separately SEMLEP's AGM as well the East Midlands Councils' Chairs Development Network.

Other Activities

The importance of our 3 sporting clubs in the town goes without question and I was therefore pleased to join representatives from the 12 other Premiership Rugby clubs, in which we met with the Chief Executive of Premiership Rugby and how they are working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on a support package for our Premiership Rugby clubs. The Saints, as we know, is an integral part of the culture across the town, and therefore I was very pleased to offer my support to their proposal into Central Government.

I also recently attended Northampton Partnership Homes' Annual General Meeting, which was held in a Covid-secure environment. It was wonderful to hear once again of the fantastic achievements over the last 12 months. I also recently caught up with colleagues at Northampton Leisure Trust, where they provided an updated on their activities and in particular how they are continuing to develop and build back membership and attendees to their leisure sites across the town.

Finally, I was particularly pleased to be part of the Diwali celebrations in the Guildhall, where I joined others (again in a Covid-secure environment) in lighting a candle as part of the annual festival here in the town, as part of a series of videos that will be available through social media. Although covid has stolen from us the opportunity to mark important occasions and celebrations in the usual way, it does seem to make them all the more important at the moment.

Cllr Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council