



Report of the Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

2nd March 2015

Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning

Since taking control of the Borough Council in 2011, one of this Administration's main priorities has been the economic regeneration of Northampton. Working with a number of partner organisations, this Administration has attracted many millions of pounds of inward investment, supported hundreds of businesses and created over a thousand jobs for local people.

In 2012 we set up the Northampton Alive programme to guide the regeneration of our town working with our partners. To date the project has delivered a new railway station, new bus station, the St Johns student accommodation, the new innovation centre, the reopening of Abington Street to traffic, the heritage gateway, cultural quarter and the boot and shoe quarter and the expansion of facilities at our towns three major sports clubs.

The Government awarded Northampton an Enterprise Zone in 2011, which has been an important tool for attracting inward investment and creating new jobs.

This Administration has given support to local businesses through our Business Incentive Scheme, by lowering market rents by 25% and introducing free parking in the town centre, which has increased the number of visitors by 40%.

We have also helped major employers such as Carlsberg, Cosworth and Churches Shoes to expand and create more jobs in our town and cement their relationship with Northampton, and Cllr Tim Hadland and I were pleased to welcome the Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, to the Enterprise Zone on 18th February, where we visited Cosworth to show how the Council has helped attract extra investment and create new jobs.

Finance

In 2011 we pledged to cut waste at the Borough Council, to reduce senior management, invest more in front line services and to freeze Council Tax. This Administration believes that public money is precious, and that a well-run and efficient council benefits all residents.

In June 2013 the Borough Council entered into an agreement with Local Government Shared Services to combine back office functions with other authorities and save Northampton's tax payers £9.5 million over five years.

Under the previous administration this authority became overloaded with expensive senior management, diverting money away from front line services. Over the last four years this Administration has reduced the number of senior managers from 21 to 10, in the process freeing up around £850,000 to be reinvested in front line services.

These savings have meant that for the last four years this Administration has not increased its share of Council Tax, relieving the burden on local tax payers and making more money for front line services.

I am grateful to Cllr Alan Bottwood for presenting four budgets to Council which have prioritised frontline services, protected services and have not increased Council Tax to help hardworking people.

Community Engagement

The Administration has worked hard to empower communities and make Northampton a great place to live, play and do business. Through the diverse community events we have celebrated Northampton's history and talent and also created some new set-piece events including the Alive at Delapre concerts. Cllr Brandon Eldred has played an active role in ensuring the Council has engaged with the communities and we have a proud record over the last four years of events which have brought tens of thousands of people into the town and enjoyment to many.

The Administration also helped the town to celebrate the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games with the Olympic Torch passing through the town - a truly historic day. The Council has also empowered our communities with new parish councils and transferred the management of our Community Centres to a range of community organisations.

The Councillor Community Fund has also been an effective tool to help councillors engage with communities and support community events and the Administration is proud to have introduced this and to have helped hundreds of organisations in the town.

The Administration also introduced the Armed Forces Community Covenant for Northampton in March 2013 and I was proud to sign this historic document to recognise the important role played by our Armed Forces and to make a formal commitment to mark annual events like the annual Armed Forces Day in June and Remembrance Sunday in November and to support serving members, veterans and their families through services provided by the Council and partners.

Housing

The Administration undertook the largest consultation exercise with tenants during the Housing Stock Options review in recent history which resulted in the creation of the Arms Length Management Organisation, Northampton Partnership Homes. I was very proud, alongside Cllr Mary Markham, to officially hand over the keys to the Council's housing stock in January and we will both watch with pride as the organisation grows and develops in future years.

The last four years have also seen major changes in Housing with new policies and ways of working plus a new partnership approach with the opening of Oasis House. I am proud to have become a Patron of The Hope Centre and have seen first-hand the important work undertaken by all of the partnership agencies and, although only for one night each year, Cllr Mary Markham and I have slept rough to raise money and awareness of homelessness and we are both proud of the work done at Oasis House.

The Administration has worked hard to address the negative impacts and concerns with the introduction of Houses of Multiple Occupation in residential areas, which was a key priority for the election. Since May 2011, the Administration has introduced an online register of HMOs, new rules on the conversion of properties, additional licensing and a Landlords Forum to work with landlords who understand and follow the rules.

Environment

This Administration was elected with a pledge to bring back Neighbourhood Wardens and to introduce Park Rangers. The Administration has invested over £250,000 additionally to the Neighbourhood Wardens and Park Ranger schemes and there are now 15 Neighbourhood Wardens and 6 Park Rangers.

Over £14 million has also been invested in our parks and green spaces since the Administration took control in 2011.

The Administration has also needed to address a number of challenges within the Enterprise contract during the last four years which was inherited by the Liberal Democrat administration. They signed the contract on 20th April 2011 and it began in June 2011.

Cllr Mike Hallam has ably chaired the Northampton in Bloom committee which has enhanced the town with the floral displays and brought partnerships together to improve the town. The Administration has remained committed to the Bloom programme and has sought to involve more schools, businesses, community organisations and neighbourhoods in the annual competition. The Administration has also extended the flower displays to Winter in Bloom and Spring into Bloom, as well as the traditional summer flowers.

Community Safety

The Community Safety Partnership continues to be the best forum for partnership working between the authorities and the Police, and has helped to deliver many schemes that have enhanced community wellbeing across Northampton.

The Administration has also worked proactively with Community Payback to promote schemes through the Probation Service, and to publicise the work to show restorative justice being done in our town.

It was an unexpected honour to suddenly find myself elected as Leader of the Council in 2011 but it is a job I have enjoyed to take forward the town where I was born, grew up and which I love. The last four years have been both challenging and rewarding and I believe we have left the town and this Council better than we inherited.

I would like to put on record my thanks and appreciation to my Cabinet and to Cllr John Caswell and Cllr Mary Markham who both served as my Deputy Leader. The Cabinet have all played important roles in supporting the work of the Administration and taking forward our policies and so much has been achieved due to their hard work, commitment and ability to get things done. The Assistant Cabinet members have been an important support too in helping with the large workload which comes with an Administration seeking to effect big changes and make a difference.

I would also like to thank all members of the Conservative Group for their support and steadfast approach to improving the town and in taking some of the difficult decisions required when in administration.

The officers and directors across the Council have all coped with massive change and transformation over the last four years and have ably supported the work of the Administration with all the challenges we have faced which have included restructuring the Council to share the back office with LGSS, create the Northampton Partnership Homes Arms Length Management Organisation and reduce the number of senior managers whilst maintaining frontline services and delivering the largest regeneration programme in a generation.

I have been constantly impressed by the level of public service and commitment I have seen from the officers at the Council and, where that commitment was lacking, they left. The team at Northampton Borough Council now, I believe, is best equipped to support councillors in taking forward the authority and to cope with the challenges and opportunities which I am sure lie ahead for Northampton.

The Council plays a massive role in the town alongside a large number of partner organisations, businesses and voluntary sector groups. I have met many people over the last four years and seen how many great things happening across the town. Sometimes there have been challenges and sometimes it has been difficult, but it has been a pleasure to work alongside so many great people who have constantly reminded me why I love Northampton.

None of us know what the future will bring and there are elections ahead where I hope to take up new responsibilities but I remain committed to serve the people of Northampton and the town I love, and I know that the town's best days are still yet to come.

Councillor David Mackintosh
Leader of the Council