



Report of the Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 12th March 2018

Since my last report to Council, I have continued to work with the Cabinet, Members, Directors, and Officers across all areas of the council. Many of these activities and issues are referred to in Cabinet colleagues' reports.

Unitary Status

Thank you to all those Members who were able to attend the Deloitte Members' briefing on 23rd January, which proved to be an extremely valuable opportunity for us all to discuss this important issue. Views were consistent across all of the political parties that, should there be any future unitary arrangement made, it must be fully sustainable, with the top priority being to ensure the best services and representation for our residents. The Leaders and Chief Executives of all seven of the District and Borough councils continue to meet regularly, as the Deloitte work now reaches a conclusion. Deloitte are also currently undertaking some separate analysis that we at NBC have commissioned, looking specifically at the implications and benefits to Northampton of pursuing a unitary Northampton with the option of an extended boundary (consistent with this council's unanimous motion of January 2017), versus becoming part of a unitary council with other areas, such as under the two unitary model that has been widely referred to recently.

Governance

In my last update I advised that the Interim Chief Executive had completed the review of internal management boards, and I can now confirm that the rationalised arrangements were implemented during February. Progress continues to be made on a revised project management framework and on the review of the Constitution.

Independent Chair of Audit

This position has been re-advertised, including through the Institute of Chartered Accountants website, and I am delighted to advise that we have received fourteen applications for the role, many of which look to be very strong applicants. Shortlisting is being done by the Governance & Risk Manager, the Head of HR, the Monitoring Officer, and the Section 151 Officer. Following this, interviews will be undertaken by a panel including the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader, the current Chair of Audit, and the Leaders of the two opposition parties.

Delapré Abbey

Over the past few months Delapré Abbey has welcomed many visitors to its café, has seen many local groups hire its coach house community hire space, and has provided a venue for corporate events. It has also successfully hosted a number of weddings, and its other public events, ranging from wedding fairs to street food events, have all proven to be extremely popular. It is therefore a source of great pride, and a tribute to those who have been involved over the years as professionals or as volunteers, that the next phase of its opening will take place later this month, as from 17th March members of the public will be able to explore and to take a tour of previously unseen parts of the Abbey.

Not only is this the first time in the Abbey's nine hundred year history that the public have been able to see so much of the Abbey's internal space, but of course it is the first time that so much of the Abbey has been in so excellent a state of repair and renovation. The quality and authenticity of the renovation work undertaken makes a visit to the Abbey a must for those interested in history, architecture, and historic buildings, and with a policy of free entry for children, I am certain that it will also prove extremely popular with family and school groups as well.

Other Activity

Amongst my other meetings and activities, it was a pleasure to meet recently with the Chief Executive of Carlsberg, and to learn about the exciting plans they have to drive ahead with both some technical innovations and also some of their wide range of brands.

I was also extremely glad to have attended the launch of the Grey Dog Trust, a new, non-profit organisation, who are seeking to put on a one-day music festival in August 2018; the Grey Dog Music Festival. The festival is aimed at adolescents, and will be seeking to raise awareness of mental health issues and to challenge the stigma of mental health.

Staffing and Council Officers

I am grateful to those Members, Staff, and other Stakeholders across the town who took part in the various panels and events involved in the recruitment of the new Chief Executive. Your feedback was extremely valuable in informing the process and the final decision.

George Candler comes to us from Shropshire Council, where he has been Director of Place, with wide ranging responsibilities, and an impressive track record of achievements, but he also brings with him a wealth of experience across many other areas. I am certain that George will be instrumental in driving us on our journey to deliver the best services for our residents, playing our leading role in driving the town forward, and making the council a good place to work. George has already begun spending some time around the Guildhall, and will continue to do so up until he joins us formally at the end of April.

I believe that we are in a stronger position to tackle the tasks that lay ahead as a result of the hard work of Simon Bovey, who has done an excellent job as our Interim Chief Executive during the past six months. Under Simon's stewardship, we have seen strides forward in so many areas across the council.

I would like to personally thank Simon for all of his hard work, and the complete commitment that he has given to Northampton and to the council during his time with us.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council