



## Report of the Leader of the Council

### Northampton Borough Council

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018

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. Many of these activities and issues are referred to in Cabinet colleagues' reports.

#### **Unitary Status**

Member involvement and knowledge was greatly increased through the Seminars of 29<sup>th</sup> November and 3<sup>rd</sup> December, which saw us hear a number of senior Members and Officers from councils who have been through unitary give us insight into what went well, what did not go so well, and what to prioritise or watch out for. Their experience and their frankness made these seminars both engaging and extremely helpful.

The other unitary activities continue, such as the regular staff briefings by the Chief Executive, the cross-party working group, and the West Steering Group, with the Deputy Leader and Cllr Hibbert also now attending the Steering Group, with Cllr Hadland as our substitute member. The Steering Groups are beginning to deal with a further level of detail, and we recently undertook a workshop with Monitoring Officers helping us to better understand the key issues around Joint Committees, which are a likely next step, and the Structural Change Order, which although written by the Government, will take a lead from the suggestions that we as councils put for to be included within it.

I had previously raised concerns over the timing of the next steps that the Government needed to take, and it was with this in mind that myself and other council Leaders met with the Minister on 28<sup>th</sup> November. In particular, we felt we urgently needed to understand if the Government were intending to proceed with their own consultation, and whether the elections scheduled for next year were indeed going to be postponed. We were pleased to see that, following the assurances given during that meeting, an announcement was made the following day that confirmed the consultation as running until 25<sup>th</sup> January, and that the Secretary of State intended to postpone the 2019 elections. This gives us certainty that the work that members, officers and the unitary project team are all doing needs to remain at 'full steam ahead' for the time being.

I also attended the NCC Improvement Board on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, which discussed and commented on the County Council's Stabilisation Plan, and was given a presentation on how Cultural challenges can be tackled within the organisation.

#### **Economic Development**

I have had meetings with several developers and local businesses about their aspirations to invest in Northampton, and on 1<sup>st</sup> December it was a great pleasure to call in on some of the town's small businesses to celebrate Small Business Saturday. This included some businesses for whom the support of the council's Business Incentive Scheme had meant the difference in being able to take on new premises, in some cases long-term empty premises, and to bring their offer to the town centre economy.

Having met with Metro Bank a number of times over the past year or so, it was a great pleasure to see their new branch open on Abington Street on 16<sup>th</sup> November. Metro Bank made a clear

choice that Northampton was a key town for them to locate a new outlet, in addition to which they have become active in the business community through sponsorships such as the Community Foundation Awards on 30<sup>th</sup> October, and through the Business Improvement District.

The BID's recent mystery shopping awards followed independent mystery shopping visits conducted throughout the town, and demonstrated many great examples of high quality customer service in our town's shops.

I was very pleased to meet with the Churches Conservation Trust on 30<sup>th</sup> November – an organisation with a focus on preserving church buildings and ensuring that they are of value and of use to their nearby communities. With our ongoing ambitions to support the improvement of the important heritage area around the castle and Marefair, I am certain that they will be a key partner in this.

## **Homelessness**

I was glad to take part again in the Rough Sleeper count on the overnight of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> November, and have also had meetings with some of the other agencies involved in Homelessness in the town, including the Acting Chair and the Treasurer of the Hope Centre. These discussions have been helpful, and focused on practical action to best serve the Homeless of our town, and NBC's desire to support the Hope Centre, ensuring its key role continues.

## **Other Activity**

Whilst many of the things I have been involved in are referenced in more detail in colleagues' cabinet member reports, some of my other recent activities of particular note include:

- On 20<sup>th</sup> November I attended the Unity Leisure AGM, marking a further year of the Trust's success and growth, by offering the best ever quality of service to residents using the town's leisure services. It was a pleasure to mark with the Trust the fact that over recent years they have reduced the tax payer support they receive from NBC from being over a £1 million p.a., to zero. Beyond that, the coming year will actually see the Leisure Trust making a positive cash contribution back to the council to support the delivery of other services, as well as continuing to expand their own offer of activities.
- The wider success and ambitions of the Leisure Trust were clear when I attended, along with around forty other partners and stakeholders, a joint event hosted by the Leisure Trust and the NHS regarding the exciting concept of a combined Health & Wellbeing Centre for Northampton. Whilst there are many further steps to deliver such a project, the enthusiasm for, and the benefit of this make it a project to which we are committed to work on further.
- A visit to Fairfields school on 20<sup>th</sup> November to learn more about the specialist education they provide, and to join the welcome extended to HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO, who was visiting to help mark the school's 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
- As we progress our budget plans for next year, I have been keen to ensure that I strengthen my own knowledge of what other councils are doing to innovate and to maximise the value that the town and our residents see out of the finite money that the council has available, and so on 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> November I attended an LGA workshop for council Leaders and Finance Portfolio Holders to share ideas.
- 21<sup>st</sup> November saw the Guildhall host a reception for the Honorary Recorder, allowing myself and the Mayor to reiterate the council's view of the importance of this role, to an audience comprising, amongst others, a wider membership of the Judiciary. As well as a celebration of the new Honorary Recorder being in post, this also ensured that the links that we have said we have been keen to establish between the council and the Judiciary for the good of our community were very much broadened and strengthened.
- I was extremely pleased to join the Street Pastors on 17<sup>th</sup> November to celebrate with them their 10 year anniversary. Not only was this a chance to mark the great work that

they do in supporting those who find they need support in the town of an evening, but it lead to the great opportunity to visit the New Testament Church of God Heritage Centre, and learn the important role that Northampton plays in that Church.

Finally, although I am sure that Cllr King's report will cover community events fully, I am sure that nobody could have felt other than extremely proud by the way in which our town marked Remembrance Day. The number of people that filled the town during the Church service and parade was incredible, and the additional activities for the centenary, such as the Lord Lieutenant lighting the beacon in the evening, all showed the tremendous sense of pride and community in Northampton. This has been made further evident by the thousands of people who visited for Diwali, the Christmas Lights switch-on, the Frost Fair and Parade, and so on during the past month or so.

Some of these sorts of positives were noted at the recent BBC 'Love Northampton' event held at All saints Church, a great initiative in my view, and one in which the council is determined to play a full part. Our hope is that, as well as quite rightly holding the council to account for anything it should be doing better, this campaign will really help to promote the positives about our town well.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn  
**Leader of the Council**