



Report of the Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday, 3rd June 2019

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

We have now had the announcement confirming the Government's intention to proceed with unitary. At the same time, it has been confirmed that, following the work of the Children's Commissioner, Children's Services will be delivered through the creation of a Children's Trust.

It was also encouraging to see that in the announcement the Minister made reference to the integration of Health & Social Care. Improved working between these two key areas seems to be acknowledged by all as being an important priority.

The two areas of Children's Services and Social care are areas that are vital to the success of new unitary councils; both in terms of the quality of service and the significant elements that they will represent in unitary budgets, and members will recall that seeking some transformation in services such as these has always been considered as essential by all the council leaders if the new councils are to begin their lives in a sustainable position. The progress being made is therefore very much welcomed.

A reshaping of the overall unitary project plan is therefore taking place at the moment, which will take account of the date announced as the start of the new unitary council, (2021 and not 2020) and also encompassing the transformation of services delivered both by districts/boroughs and NCC. More details of this work, which is being overseen by the Council leaders and Chief Executives, will become available in the near future.

The West Northants Joint Committee has been meeting, its main work being to oversee the work of member task and finish groups on Governance, an Independent Remuneration Panel, and the Senior Officer Appointment Process for the Shadow Council.

At NBC we continue to meet as a Cross-Party Unitary Working Group, and our next member briefing is scheduled for 20th June at 6.00pm.

Northampton Forward

I updated the council through my last report that a partnership board, Northampton Forward, was in place to ensure that a good expression of interest was submitted to the Government's Future High Streets Fund. As Cllr Hadland has confirmed in his report, this was submitted, and I believe that the excellent work done by that board and the

council's officers meant that we submitted a strong case for the need and opportunity for the town to receive this funding support.

The town needs a Masterplan that reflects the rapid and dramatic change our town centre has seen in recent years, and so the process started for the Future High Streets Fund is continuing, with the current public consultation underway to get views on the initial masterplan ideas.

We have held a member briefing on this important subject, but as many Councillors were not able to attend, I would urge you to view the plans and complete the consultation questionnaire, and to publicise it actively to your residents and contacts. I am very grateful to those members who I know have already been making people aware of the consultation.

In addition to the online version of the masterplan consultation at www.northampton.gov.uk/northamptonforward, and the full version that was printed in the Chronicle and Echo for people to complete and post in to us, those who prefer to use a paper copy can collect one from the Guildhall One Stop Shop.

The ideas within the masterplan are not a 'done deal', because we do not believe that is the right approach. On the contrary, they are creative ideas, and some of them are very bold ideas, but they deliberately have not been tested against the many hurdles such as planning, cost, etc., so this is a genuine opportunity for people to have their say on unfiltered ideas put forward by a firm of professionals with a strong track record of town regeneration.

Therefore, not only will the consultation remain open until the end of June, but following this we will be moving to a stage that sees groups formed around specific aspects of the town to help shape a future vision for the town in more detail. Following this council's motion a while ago that a 'People's Panel' should have involvement, and my subsequent conversations with Cllr Beardsworth who proposed that motion, these groups will allow both those with specialist knowledge to be involved, but also wider public input, and the University is currently leading on mapping out how this would best work.

With regard to the membership of the Northampton Forward board, this is not a council committee, and would not benefit from being such rather than the successful partnership that it currently is, but to ensure that all members feel that they are getting both updates back from the committee, and the chance to input their views, we will be forming a cross-party working group, as well as holding further member briefing events on the progress being made.

I will also be ensuring that Northampton Forward, like Unitary Status, will be a heading in my future reports to council.

My view is that the success of any vision or masterplan that emerges will be the extent to which people feel they have been able to comment and contribute towards it, including councillors, and people of all ages and backgrounds.

Other Activity

Of the many other activities and meetings since my last report, some of the highlights include:

- On 7th May I was delighted to attend the Heart of the Community Awards, which recognised the tremendous work done by some of the many groups and individuals we are so glad to have working across the town.
- On 9th May I attended the Northamptonshire County Council Improvement Board Meeting. The make-up of this board includes a district/borough Leader and Chief Executive from the north and the west of the county, as well as key members and officers from other peer councils, and NCC opposition members, and so it is there to challenge and seek assurance on progress being made at NCC. This particular meeting included a detailed overview of the NCC financial position and progress being made, as well as a presentation on the service transformation projects that NCC is undertaking.
- On 13th March I was pleased to visit the New Gurdwara Community Centre to see the wonderful progress being made to the building on St James Mill Road.
- On 14th March, the Chief Executive and I took part as panel members at an Oxford – Cambridge Arc discussion and questions event at Abington Park Museum, hosted and arranged by MOLA (museum of London Archaeology) Chaired by MOLA CEO Janet Miller, a panel of high level experts from the planning, property development sector and education sectors debated what they consider needs to happen in their sector to kick start the development of the Growth Corridor and consider how the sectors can collaborate to catalyse the start of the programme, and how the opportunities that the Arc presents must benefit new and existing residents and communities in the medium and long term.
- I have both had meetings with the Chamber of Commerce, and attended a Chamber Alliance event to show support for the Alliance which we are proud to be associated with, and to which we have now committed a further two years' membership.
- On 27th March I was extremely pleased to attend the Northampton Film Festival Awards. We are glad to support the organisers, Screen Northants, in various projects, and congratulate them for making the Film Festival yet another successful project which delivered valuable outputs in many forms, quite apart from the positive awareness it generated for our town.
- I was glad to be able to learn more about the work Caring & Sharing does for local families in our area, from their base just outside the borough in Cogenhoe, and to then attend their marvellous charity auction recently.

Finally, I would like to formally note my thanks to Rick O'Farrell, who is leaving the council this week. Rick joined us initially under a short term arrangement, and it has been to our benefit that we have been able to extend that arrangement. I am certain that members will all want to join me in thanking Rick for the great work he has done within the Regeneration area, and certainly the Cabinet and I who have had the benefit of working closely with him are grateful for the way he has progressed and put back on track a range of projects and activities.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council