

Report for Leader of Council
Northampton Borough Council
Monday 16th September 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 report.

Unitary Status

Over the summer the new governance structure whereby Leaders meet now on a monthly basis has continued with the Leaders Oversight Board taking place in both July and August. The discussions have focussed primarily on updates of the Programme team, the appointment of the new Programme Director as well as monitoring how the Business Rates Retention Pilot monies that we received from government should be best spent. I have also separately met with the new Programme Director, Paul Helsby, and was impressed with this willingness to engage as we go through this next phase where the focus will be on transformation over the coming months. We have continued with the regular meetings of the Cross Party Unitary Working Group where again we have been keeping members informed of progress and these will continue on a regular basis going forward.

I, alongside the other Leaders and Chief Executives, attended an update on the Children's Trust by the Children's Commissioner Malcolm Newsom where he took us through the planned next steps including the development of a Project Board which will be chaired by Malcolm as well as the timetable for the appointment of the Chair of the Trust and the Chief Executive of the Trust.

An important part of the wider unitary activity is the development of a new Town Council for Northampton that we are currently undertaking. As part of the Cross Party Working Group for the Community Governance Review, I attended the most recent meeting in which we heard from Opinion Research Services on the proposed second phase consultation that will be undertaken on the two options as well as the separate consultation that will be undertaken regarding the area covered by Duston parish Council, and proposals for Far Cotton & Delapre and the Kingsthorpe area. A report will come back to Council at the conclusion of the consultation period to agree the final geographical area of the new Town Council for Northampton.

Economic Development

Building on the news that Northampton was one of only 50 local authorities that were successful in getting through the first round of the Future High Street Fund we have since had a number of Northampton Forward board meetings as well as further meetings with the newly formed Cross-Party Town Centre Regeneration Working Group. The focus now is on pulling together the project team that will need to develop our full business case, which needs to be submitted to government by the middle of January 2020 and we are therefore proposing an update on all the work in a Cabinet paper in October. We are also finalising the outcomes of the consultation and we plan to publicise this alongside the final master plan in the near future.

We await further news on our recent application for Heritage Action Zones funding, but in the meantime we have been delighted to learn that we have been listed amongst the 100 locations

who will be invited to apply for the Government's new Towns Fund, with the opportunity of winning up to £25 million for transformative investment in areas such as transport, technology, skills and culture. We await further details of the criteria and process for applying to this funding, but for clarity, this funding is in addition to the Future High Streets Fund.

Linked to the town centre regeneration, the Chief Executive, Economic Growth and Regeneration Manager and I recently met with representatives from Legal and General and Montagu Evans (commercial property agents) on the work that we have been undertaking in the last 12 months in the town centre. As Legal and General are a significant land owner in the town, not least as the owners of the Grosvenor Centre, I feel that it is particularly important that we keep them regularly briefed on the work that we are doing and how they can assist with both our short term and medium term plans for the future development of the town. The meeting was positive and we have agreed to continue the dialogue over the coming months.

The Chief Executive and I have also continued our positive relationships with the Managing Director at Cosworth where we met recently to discuss St James Mill Link road. Members will be aware that the increased costs following the land analysis continues to make this a challenging project, but I wanted you to be aware that we are still continuing our dialogue with SEMLEP with regards to this project and will be providing a further update on the work at the Enterprise Zone Board in November, with a view to providing a more detailed, updated business case for further funding from SEMLEP to enable the road to be completed. There is no guarantee we will be successful, but it is important that we try to complete this particular scheme.

Over the summer months we held discussions around the North West Relief Road with representatives from WASPRA and the County Council as well as officers here, to ensure that proposed developments will meet the future demand of road traffic in the area.

Brackmills Business Improvement District continues to go from strength to strength under the leadership of Sarah Homer, and I was pleased to attend one of their recent board meetings to hear of the work they are undertaking and the future investment that is going into the area. Similarly, I have held positive meetings with representatives of the Leather Museum, currently located in the Grosvenor Centre, continuing to explore the opportunity of alternative locations for them in the town centre, ideally in the Cultural Quarter.

I was also pleased to attend a networking event hosted by Metro Bank in early September and also the Chamber Business Awards at the Park Inn, celebrating all that is great about business in Northampton and the wider county.

Other Activity

It was a pleasure to attend the 100 Years of Housing celebration event in July which included the official opening of 5 new council homes in Northfield Road and again further adding to the housing development that our ALMO, Northamptonshire Partnership Homes, are continuing to do on our behalf.

It was wonderful to see the graduates from the University parading through the town back in the summer and a pleasure to attend one of their graduation ceremonies celebrating their success in their time here in Northampton.

Most recently, the Chief Executive and I, alongside other Leaders and Chief Executives, were invited by the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner Stephen Mold and the Chief Constable Nick Adderley to hear first hand of the impending Peel Report on the inspection done last year

on Northamptonshire Police (and due to be published this month) as well as the significant improvements the police are starting to make in their operational model. There will be wider briefings and communication on this by the police in October, but it was positive to hear of the improvements they are making particularly in the work around residential burglary.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council