



Cabinet Member Report - Deputy Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 2nd November, 2020

As Deputy Leader of the Council, I have continued to play an active role in the establishment of a Unitary Council for West Northamptonshire and the transition to it as a member of the Shadow Executive and as Chair of two Task & Finish Groups – Civic Matters and Equalities. However, I'm continuing to support the Leader and Cabinet colleagues across a variety of areas within the council. I can report on some of my specific responsibilities as below.

Market

Market traders have been very resilient throughout the pandemic. Most of our full-time stall holders are now back to work. Footfall is continuing to increase month on month but is still approximately 30% down on last year.

The Saturday rent reduction, brought in on 1st September, has been well received by our regular traders and new trader enquiries are starting to come through. Two new traders started trading in September.

Councillor Development / Democratic Services

Meetings are continuing to be held virtually over Zoom and are still working very well; they are continuing to attract public interest, and this can be noted from the number of views on YouTube.

Member briefings are continuing with them being held remotely and programmed in as required. A presentation / briefing session will shortly be arranged for all Members regarding the Service Blueprint for West Northamptonshire Council.

Two Councillor Briefing sessions have been scheduled (remote over Zoom), regarding Safeguarding. These will be delivered by Phil Harris and will be held on 18th and 25th November, both starting at 5pm. Electronic diary invitations have been sent to Members inviting their attendance. Can Members ensure that they respond to these invitations if they have not already done so.

The Democratic and Member Services Manager was involved in another of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Zoom events. This one discussed Executive/Scrutiny Protocol in September 2020. There was a Panel of just four that had been invited to speak about Executive / Scrutiny relationships:

- Democratic Services Manager, Melton Borough Council
- Scrutiny Chair, Gloucester City Council
- Executive Member, Ipswich Borough Council
- Democratic and Member Services Manager, Northampton Borough Council

Around 50 attendees observed the Panel in discussion and then posed several questions to the Panel. The way Northampton involves Cabinet Members and all non-Executive Councillors created interest amongst participants. A recording of the event has been published on the CfPS website.

The Mayor has continued to attend events virtually, attending very few socially distanced outside engagements. Civic events with The Mayor have been honoured with socially distanced and on-line ceremonies. This includes ongoing Remembrance Day planning. Work to support The Mayor's charity continues with online fundraising plans. The Mayor's Civic Service which is usually held September time has been postponed until March.

Legal Services

Litigation team

The Licensing and Litigation Lawyer worked with the Planning Enforcement and Neighbourhood Wardens teams, as well as Northants Police, to secure the swift and lawful removal of a large group of Travellers that had set up an authorised encampment at a field in Banbury Lane in early August 2020. This was in the process of proceeding to seize vehicles on the site suspected of having committed environmental offences on the site by judicial order, but the entire group vacated the Banbury Lane site on Thursday 1st October 2020 before this could take place.

The Licensing and Litigation Lawyer will continue to progress an application for a High Court injunction which will effectively prohibit residential occupation of the site in future, by unauthorised traveller encampments or any owner of any of the plots comprising the site, on the basis that the safety and life of any residential occupier of that site would be threatened should the adjacent water course flood.

Property Team

The Property Team has successfully completed or have otherwise supported a number of property transactions on behalf of the Council.

Recent transactions completed by the Property Team include: eleven Right-to-Buy disposals; an electricity sub-station and the grant of an easement at Thorpeville as part of a series of transactional matters in connection with City Fibre Limited; the granting an easement to Western Power Network at Upton Country Park - a complex transactional matter; and supported work has included supporting the acquisition of the property formerly known as Marks and Spencer in Abington Street as part of the Council's regeneration of Northampton.

Electoral Services

The elections team is in the process of running the newly reformed canvass process and only has 14% of properties responses outstanding. The Team has started its first ever telephone canvass and it has already had a good response. The Team also started contacting our Care Homes as part of the canvass and only have 18 outstanding. The Team will be contacting the university to request data for university accommodation and try and find new ways of encouraging students to register outside of fresher's fairs and first day enrolment which we were unable to attend this year due to the pandemic.

The electoral services manager attended the Association of Electoral Administrators East Midlands recent branch meeting. At this meeting the Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission provided an update on 2021 polls which will be going ahead on 6 May 2021.

The electoral service manager has also been involved with the initial work on the Northampton BID.

The electoral services team, through its "sweet treat's sweepstake" raised £223.50 for Macmillan Cancer support.

Street Lighting

The streetlight project has recently encountered some issues. We commissioned a survey for some lights with no power at St Crispin's and await a cost proposal to reinstate cabling etc. It appears that the power supply was partially terminated at some point when the area was developed.

The cabling for the lights at Tudor Court, Wootton has also now been surveyed and our consultant has advised that the fuses have been removed. We will be reinstating these fuses and bringing the lights back into working condition as soon as possible. We currently await information from our estates team as to who is the management company that looks after this site as it appears that they have instructed contractors to alter power supplies etc. and take down some of the ornate lights within the shopping area (privately owned). Hopefully they won't take too much longer to get some contact details for us.

Rail Issues

On 5th October, the Council submitted its response to the draft England's Economic Heartland Transport Strategy. On rail-related matters, in summary, the Council made the following points:

- Support for the delivery of East-West Rail as an electrified route as this means that trains running through from this route to serve Northampton will be zero emission.
- Support for the infill electrification of freight services, because it will help to reduce the number of diesel-hauled trains running through Northampton.
- Support for the inclusion of the possibility of providing new services in a new Northampton-Milton Keynes/Bletchley-Aylesbury-Old Oak Common corridor in the supporting text of the strategy, but that this should also be the subject of a policy commitment, and that scope for extension of services to a wider range of destinations should be included, such as Swindon.
- Support for the commitment for England's Economic Heartland to work with Network Rail, Government and adjoining sub-national transport bodies to maximise the allocation of capacity released on the classic railway network as a result of HS2 to benefit connectivity in the region. As well as helping to facilitate connectivity on the Northampton-Milton Keynes/Bletchley-Aylesbury-Old Oak Common corridor via East-West Rail, it would also make possible the introduction of regular inter-city rail services providing strategic links between Northampton, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. We also stated that it would be important for line speeds on the Northampton Loop to be maximised, all through platforms on the Loop be made twelve car and that not too much of the capacity released be made available to railfreight.
- Support in principle for the proposal to establish a statutory Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland, provided local input is sought, as this has the potential to facilitate the development and implementation of the Transport Strategy providing a co-ordinated approach to achieving investment in transport infrastructure which is democratically accountable.

Flooding

The water course surveys have been passed to the Customer and Communities team that is working with our contractors, Veolia / IdVerde, to establish contract costs and devise the action plan required to secure the ongoing and proper maintenance of the watercourses. As soon as this work is completed the surveys and action plan will be published

Governance Review

A meeting of the Cross-Party Working Group took place on 16th September 2020 and the outcome of this meeting is the subject of a separate report to this Council Meeting. A further meeting of the Working Group will be held in the near future.

Councillor Phil Larratt
Deputy Leader of the Council