



Cabinet Member Report - Deputy Leader of the Council

Northampton Borough Council

Monday 22nd February, 2021

As Deputy Leader, I have continued to play an active role in the establishment of West Northamptonshire Council as a member of the Shadow Executive with the Highways and Waste Portfolio, 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 this council. I can report on some of my specific responsibilities as below.

Market

Since my last report the country has remained in lockdown with all non-essential retail venues mandated to close, leaving only fresh fruit and vegetable stalls and our butcher able to trade. I am pleased to report that while not at pre Covid levels, the few traders that remain are able to make some living from the limited footfall.

The lockdown has given us an opportunity to accelerate our maintenance programme with the full replacement of stall sheeting now complete. In addition, more deep cleaning has taken place as well as some painting to improve the cosmetic appearance of the rest of the market structures. We have also been able to consolidate our stalls.

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 confirmed by the number of views on YouTube that are monitored. Member briefings are continuing with them being held remotely and programmed in as required.

The Mayor has continued to attend events virtually. The Mayor is planning his Civic Charity Sunday service for Sunday 7th March. On January 27th there were commemorations to mark Holocaust Memorial Day online.

The Mayor had oversight of the investiture of Earl Spencer as a Hereditary Freeman of the Borough on the 18th February. This was an inaugural Teams Meeting Investiture.

Legal Services

Legal Services have dealt with one buy back during January and they have also completed a couple of Right to Buy Sales. Five leases have also been dealt with during this period. The service continues to be very busy dealing with transactions and providing advice to officers.

Electoral Services

Electoral services are preparing for the local elections that are taking place on 6th May 2021, including contacting potential staff, finalising the polling station bookings and getting mailing plans in place.

The team have been continuing to work on the Northampton Town Centre BID vote, ensuring all the documents are correct and have been sent in time. The BID results will be confirmed on the 26th February.

The annual postal vote refresh letters were sent out in January and these are coming back in.

Street Lighting

The streetlight project is now in the defects period and will remain so up until December 2021. Outstanding items are being dealt with including the St Crispin's lights which have now been replaced along with a new power supply, as the supply had been cut off by the developer.

At Tudor Court, Wootton, some of the lights are in operation now using a temporary supply from the Co-op store. We are pushing Western Power to make the feed live so that we can remove this temporary supply.

The maintenance contract for our lights is being finalised and will be coming to Cabinet in March.

Rail Issues

On 23rd January, the Government announced £760 million of funding for the delivery of the Bicester to Bletchley section of East West Rail. East West Rail Company have announced that this will allow the operation of two trains per hour between Bicester and Milton Keynes. This is important to Northampton in the wider context of the Council's expressed wish for East West Rail services running from Old Oak Common, Aylesbury, Bletchley and Milton Keynes to continue to Northampton so that Northampton is well linked into the Oxford-Cambridge corridor.

Flooding

Water levels remain high in the Billing Lakes. There are trees and other foliage partially blocking the outlets. We have engaged contractors to remove these items when it is safe to do so.

Governance Review

Northampton Town Council, Kingsthorpe Parish Council and Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council have all set a precept for 2021/22. These Councils are up and running in shadow form.

A further meeting of the Cross-Party Working Group will be held in the next week or so to further discuss asset transfers.

Signing Off

This is my last report as Deputy Leader of the Council prior to its demise on 31st March. It has been a privilege to serve in this role for just over four years. Having served as a Member of the Council for almost 34 of the last 38 years the 31st March will be a very sad day. I would like to thank the residents of St George Ward and East Hunsbury Ward for putting their trust in me from 1983 to 1995 and 1999 to date respectively. I've always put my residents first and I will continue to do so if elected in the future.

It's been a rollercoaster ride throughout the years, but much has been achieved for the benefit of Northampton, the town we all care about. It has been a pleasure to work with all colleagues across the Council who, despite political differences, all have the interest of the town at heart.

Similarly, I consider that we have all been very lucky to have had the support of so many able and competent officers and staff who have been committed to Northampton and the work of this Council. There are far too many to mention, but I would just like to put on record my thanks to Caroline Burke for all her help and support in assisting and organising me!

The culture of this Council is now fantastic. I have enjoyed the camaraderie and humour that has existed as I believe that this has helped deliver good outcomes. I can only hope that the culture of this Council is replicated in West Northamptonshire Council.

Councillor Phil Larratt
Deputy Leader of the Council