

Report for Parishes

Apart from a couple of Parishes meeting in April, most annual Parish meetings will be taking place after day one of the new council!

That we have got to this point after the testing year we have had is quite something. Before writing this update I had a look at the last and my, what a difference a year makes. It was written in February, just as the news was beginning to be dominated by the virus. Last February blueprints for the operation of the services of the new Council were being developed and the ambition was for significant transformation in the way services were delivered – to improve the customer experience and, of course, save money. The impact of Covid, and the need for council staff to become deeply involved in the response hampered much of the preparation, and it was feared that the most basic ‘safe and legal’ delivery would be all that could be achieved. However, significant ambition has returned and major transformation in ways of working began in Q3 2020 in adult services, the Children’s Trust was established in November and most services have been split in two – unless there is a good reason not to.

In addition to splitting services from NCC across the two councils, we have had to combine and incorporate the services offered by SNC, Daventry and Northampton Borough. This work stream has shown that there are in excess of 1000 different services offered across the council.

We will be the 5th largest Unitary in England after Cornwall, Buckinghamshire, County Durham and Wiltshire

Have a net budget of £326,570,000

Have a staff headcount of 2295

Serving a population of 432,000

One of the major issues in establishing a new Council, has been preparing its first budget and setting Council Tax. Of course with three different local councils and a county council there were 3 different council tax rates. It is a legal requirement that by the start of year 8 we must all be harmonised and charged the same band rates. There is very little leeway in how to achieve this, however it was agreed that it should be done over 3 years with a consistent adjustment across each sovereign council until parity is reached.

	Average Band D Council Tax 2020/21	Average Band D Council Tax 2021/22	Change (£)	Change (%)
Daventry	£1,451.56	£1,536.55	£84.99	5.83%
Northampton	£1,516.26	£1,584.20	£67.94	4.46%
South Northamptonshire	£1,481.75	£1,559.80	£78.05	5.25%
Average	£1,491.94	£1,566.39	£74.45	4.99%

We have had to raise Council Tax by 1.99% and the Social Care Precept by 3%. 2/3 of council income is now made up of Council Tax (compared to just over 1/3 just eight years ago), and, while the new Council will seek to deliver more, for less, the average Band D council tax in West Northamptonshire (excluding Police, Fire and Parish) is £1566 vs an average for English shire unitaries of £1618.

To assist working age households struggling to pay Council Tax – The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme has been set at 20%. Although this is higher than the 8.5% the poorest households were paying before, we have again, had to harmonise the rates across the West. Prior to Unitary, the poorest households in Northampton Borough had a minimum payment of 31% and Daventry 20%. There are some 10,000 households in Northampton paying this higher figure and they have seen their maximum contribution decrease. In Daventry 1800 claimant households have not seen any change, but of course households some of the 1800 households in SNC will have seen their minimum payments increase. In recognition of this I proposed, and the Council agreed that a Discretionary Hardship Scheme be set up to help those households who have seen their LCTRS awards leave them worse off and are in the most need.

In recognition of our role as Corporate Parents and in order to help young adults leaving the care system at 18 I have also overseen the establishment of a Care Leavers Assistance Package which will see Council Tax due for these youngsters potentially eliminated altogether until the age of 25, subject to various situations.

Over the last 3 years the finances of the County Council been brought under control. Following a transformation of and by the finance team, NCC has gone from a position of negative reserves in 2018, to in 2021, bequeathing reserves of c£48m to West Northamptonshire, as well as a year of delivering services within the expected budget envelope. This profound change of ethos will serve our residents well as we embark on our journey as a new unitary council in the heart of England.

As well as dealing with Council work in the wider sphere, I have done a number of items of case work for individuals, whether dealing with planning issues, dealing with the Social Care system and trying to get particular road defects repaired. I sit on the Adoption Panel which approves both the capacity to adopt children as well as confirms approval of matches of adults with children.

In particular I have secured the £250,000 which has been spent on the initial preparation of the works for the Farthinghoe Bypass and I have secured the commitment of £1m by the former County which now sits in the West Northamptonshire budget for the final planning and preparation for the bypass. This investment totalling £1,250,000 will, when complete, ensure there is an 'oven ready plan' to present for central government funding to build out the bypass. A cabinet paper is due to go to the first post election cabinet of the West Northamptonshire Council, with the outcome and analysis of the public consultation and the next steps.