

## **Report on West Northants Council:**

This report is in two parts: The first gives an overview of WNC financial governance and then moves on to some local issues that may be more relevant to local residents. The Second Part gives a general overview of the breadth of some of the activities undertaken by WNC over the past year. This report runs to four pages – but it could be much much longer.

### **Good financial governance:**

WNC has saved £34 million of taxpayers money as a result of our Unitary status and this year we will be delivering another balanced budget. This has been achieved through actions such as closing the Daventry Council offices and rationalizing the office space in Northampton – with more to do. The Forum in Towcester (the former SNC offices) is now the base for Planning for West Northants. In the last year we have created a new dedicated legal team which provides services to specialist areas, for example, Northampton Childrens Trust, Environmental Crimes, Planning – saving considerable sums in external legal fees.

Financial Pressures continue for the delivery of local services. The areas where we are obliged to meet demand as it presents itself, Adult Social Care and Childrens' Social Care continue to pressure our budgets like never before. The spike in inflation and other lingering effects of the financial pressures to the UK and world economy by Covid and Ukraine continue to have ramifications in the finances of WNC. The numbers seeking help from Adult Social Care are increasing as are the numbers of children coming under the care of Social Services.

Added to the financial pressures are the difficulties in finding staff for key areas. Carers, Social Workers, Planners, and Educational Psychologists are some of the areas in short supply and add to costs as we seek to attract permanent staff while using contract staff .

We have raised Council Tax by 4.99% of which 2% goes straight to supporting the adult social care budget.

Circa 50 Councils are on the verge of issuing Sec 114 notices (banning any further non-statutory spending because of severe financial distress). We are not in financial distress and have our budget under control.

### **Local Issues:**

Being on the perimeter of the Council area brings many significant challenges, and we suffer the frustration of seeing most attention paid to Northampton, the largest town, which has significant issues – and therefore sees, not surprisingly, the focus of initiatives, funding, and grant funding. Keeping Middleton Cheney Ward's profile high is a constant work in progress!

HS2 construction causes significant issues in our ward, engagement through our HS2 Marshall, has been particularly useful in tackling various issues as they emerge. The

suggestion that Silverstone Station should be included has not been well received, nor seems to have any central government support.

Roads – Potholes – WNC have, this year, bought a PotHole Pro machine that does 4x as many repairs and to a better standard. I continue to bring potholes and damaged roads to the attention of the council, having suffered 2 flat tyres in the last 12 months. WNC has been allocated a further £2.8m from government funds to tackle pothole repair.

Farthinghoe Bypass – Despite ongoing and determined engagement by the Parish Council with WNC Highways, there is no positive news to report at this time. It remains on the WNC priority list should a solution be found. The Council (Highways) have indicated that they are not prepared to expend the funds on developing any further plans while the Business Case does not reach the required return on investment for capital funding from central government sources. Any WNC Highways capital funding would require a vast housing allocation in Farthinghoe area to contribute.

Public Transport – The Council continues to engage with private providers to ensure continuation of existing services. WNC works with Ability – a not for profit “on demand” provider who are actively seeking to extend the range of services they can offer in our ward.

Farthinghoe Recycling: There are NO plans to change the service. It is much loved and well used. Plans had been proposed to try and control access to WNC recycling and reuse sites, by, for example, permit, advance booking or restricting access to WNC residents however Rosie and I have resisted this for Farthinghoe Recycling Centre and plans were dropped.

Social Housing Allocations are moving to a different model. Applicants on the Social Housing Register will be able to bid on available properties which will then be allocated amongst the bidders according to the applicants housing need status.

Acorn Biodigester: Following the refusal at Committee of the application in Evenley Parish but adjacent to Croughton, an appeal has not yet been lodged but is expected. The applicant has until mid June to make their appeal.

### **Planning Engagement:**

Engagement between Cherwell District Council and WNC is not as effective as it could be. It is something I am working on and encouraging a more collaborative approach but our interests are not necessarily aligned.

The Council are purchasing a traffic modelling programme which will enable the council to better understand the impact of large developments in both in the County and on our perimeters that will feed into planning applications and inform decisions on road capacity. When it is up and running I have asked that a paper be prepared that looks at existing development, granted planning applications and future allocations both in our Council Area and adjacent areas (like Cherwell and Milton Keynes) to understand the implications.

**Local Plan consultation.** This is live now and there is a Consultation day in Brackley on the 1<sup>st</sup> May at the Old Fire Station Community Rooms between 2 and 5 pm. It is important to

remember that this is a draft plan – and will be refined and adapted as a result of the consultation process. Important points to note for Middleton Cheney Ward is that there are NO new strategic allocations for either housing or economic development. This does not mean there will be no applications but that evidence obtained during development of the plan means that the housing numbers have been scaled back as have economic development allocations.

Self Build outside of the village confines will no longer be supported. Self Build allocations will now be part of allocations in larger planning applications and within village confines or as part of an ‘exception site’ where social housing may be given permission because of local need.

As part of the Consultation there is a Call for Sites, which is part of the “good practice” associated with Local Planning. Any site that comes forward would then be judged against the requirements of the emerging plan.

## **Wider WNC work and initiatives in 2023/24:**

Crack down on fly tipping – active investigations and pursuit through the courts were there is evidence to support.

CO2 omissions address climate change – a focus on reducing CO2 emissions and building resilience to changing weather patterns and environmental events.

Cleaner Communities Campaign – educating residents about their own role and the impact of environmental crime such as fly-tipping and littering.

Central Government money has been granted to introduce electric buses in Northampton.

Green flag status for WNC parks, Towcester Water meadows to work towards same award.

Trading standards focusing on the supply of illegal vapes in shops across WNC – and taking steps to dissuade, particularly young people, from vaping (WNC hosted a vaping conference for young people earlier in the year)

Food standards inspections across the council area are a priority and especially having Silverstone circuit on the doorstep with the various food business associated with activities.

## **Cost of living crisis and anti poverty strategy:**

WNC gave holiday meal vouchers for all children on free school meals

Money given to pensioners to help with fuel bills

Warm spaces which have now morphed into welcoming spaces. There are 88 across West Northants. The aim is to provide, not just a warm space but an environment that will reduce social isolation and loneliness. Brackley Library is one of the spaces available nearby. There

is not one at the moment in our ward, but the Council would pursue an opportunity with Parish Councils or community groups if an opportunity presented itself.

## **Improving Life Chances and Quality of life:**

Get up and Go exercise classes Towcester and Brackley

A new special needs school for 250 pupils is being built near Towcester to prevent children having to be educated out of our area which is an enormous drain on council resources – both in fees to the schools and in transporting children to out of area schools.

Local Area Partnerships (LAPS) (Integrated Health) are working together on Integrated Care: further information on LAPS can be found at:

– <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing-board/local-area-partnerships>

Partnered with Hope Centre to support rough sleepers in Northampton and area

Government Money allocated for adult numeracy

School attendance support service

Support for care leavers – including ensuring they get full support for liabilities like Council Tax in their first years after leaving care.

Armed forces covenant awarded gold status

Pothole pro machine to fix potholes faster and to a better standard. There is not enough money available to do all the necessary repairs fast enough!

WNC are building a new state of the art mortuary in Northampton, which will enhance services to bereaved families in difficult circumstances.

Rural Business grants available – supporting our most rural businesses, matched funding of between £2,500 - £100,000 in DEFRA's designated rural areas.

Local Consultations are live on :-

Flood Risk assessment. Make sure West Northants know where the local issues are

Transport – specifically Brackley area. The group want to know what journeys are needed by bus. Where do people need to travel to and when.

There is some Government money for improvement of rural transport and we have been chosen as a pilot area.

Ability (on call bus) was allocated a substantial grant to develop services in the rural areas

£54m is going into social housing during the next financial year. The remit of Northampton Partnership Homes has now changed and covers all of West Northamptonshire. This gives the opportunity to develop Social Housing in our Ward, owned and managed by the council rather than a registered Local Housing Provider.