Woodford & Weedon Ward Annual Report 2023/24

Cllrs David Smith, Jo Gilford and Rupert Frost

Over the past 12 months we have prioritised the environment and considered the carbon cost of our decision-making, working hard towards our sustainability goals – from improving energy efficiency, reducing waste and achieving net zero emissions by 2030, to making our streets, parks and open spaces cleaner and greener. Our Cleaner Communities campaign was launched to educate residents on their household duties, raise the profile of the work of our neighbourhood wardens and crackdown on environmental crime such as fly-tipping and littering.

Helping our residents through the ongoing cost of living crisis has been a top priority over the past 12 months and we've worked with a range of partners to provide a broad range of practical and financial packages. Northamptonshire Sport, Get Up & Go classes have continued to grow in popularity with more residents attending than ever before, helping with strength and balance exercises to keep people well in a friendly atmosphere.

Our Licensing Team and Northamptonshire Police Safer Roads Police Team are working in partnership to carry out spot checks, focusing on vehicle safety. As part of our new commitment to care leavers, we announced that from April 2024 a discretionary Council Tax discount will be automatically applied to the accounts of eligible Care Leavers aged 18-21, after considering other applicable discounts and exemptions.

We were awarded Gold status in the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme for our work in supporting our armed forces community, also setting up community hubs and resigning the Armed Forces Covenant for the year ahead.

This year we procured a new and exciting piece of technology which will provide a much more efficient way to carry out road repairs, around four times faster when compared with standard methods. The JCB Pothole Pro enables WNC's highways partner Kier to carry out an improved repair service allowing them to cut the defect, crop the edges and clean the area with one machine before it is filled. The investment in this new technology forms part of the Council's long-term vision to improve the road network across the area and follows the Government announcement to invest more than £2.8 million additional funds into our Highways in 2023/24.

The council launched grant funding opportunities which create additional volunteering opportunities in West Northants. The Community Funding grants project has received £47,000 from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

We launched a Rural Business Grants programme to support businesses in the most rural parts of West Northants to diversify and grow. Utilising £919,772 of UK Shared Prosperity (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Funding (REPF), this programme will provide up to 50% of equal match-funding of between £2,500 and £100,000 to businesses located in Defra's designated rural areas within West Northamptonshire.

Our work on transforming and improving public services inherited from the old legacy councils continued at pace throughout the past year, with the new unitary council's efficiencies on course to save taxpayers a further £34million over and above that originally anticipated by the end of 2025/26. This year we worked hard to set a balanced budget for 2024/25, despite facing the same financial pressures as other councils with high inflation rates driving up running costs and an increase in demand for services, particularly around supporting children in care and vulnerable adults.

We made tough choices to set a Council Tax increase of 4.99% for 24/25, which remains well below current inflation levels but crucially generating an extra £12m to protect essential frontline services. This represents an average increase of £1.63 a week on a Band D property. 2023 saw the first full year where public health sat solely within West Northamptonshire Council, working closely with partners to serve residents of West Northants with services that meet their needs. We continued to develop the way we inform, engage and interact with residents. This includes making key improvements to our website, residents e-newsletter and social media channels and giving regular briefings to town and parish councils.

Please let us know if we can help with any service provided by West Northamptonshire Council, you should find us easy to contact and we will continue to try to make sure one of us attends all your parish council meetings.

Very best wishes, David, Jo and Rupert