

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

21 January 2021

COUNCILLOR STUART DARK MBE - CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

For the period 24th November to the 13th January 2020

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Covid-19

The period since my last report to Council has been and remains very challenging.

Reflecting rapidly increasing infection rates, driven by the new variant across the region, England and the UK West Norfolk went first in to Tier 4 restrictions and then a national 'lockdown' commencing on Boxing Day. Our local hospital, the QEH and it's staff remain under considerable pressure coping with the very sick and the key messages to residents have to be for the time being:

Follow the guidance, stay home as much as possible, only venture out locally for one of the reasons permitted (and return home as soon as possible) to protect yourself, protect the NHS and save lives.

I have worked with the Chief Executive, senior council officers and Cabinet colleagues to ensure core Council services continue to be delivered effectively throughout the period and holiday season, new Covid-19 priorities and issues are addressed as part of the tiered multi-agency response (national, regional and local) and clear guidance and support is offered to residents, businesses and particularly the vulnerable.

I have, with the assistance of officers, provided weekly updates to all Borough Councillors on key Borough Covid-19 developments and activities, along with links to useful resources/data/materials and ensured these have been circulated to all Parish and Town Council contacts for their information and passing on. These regular updates have been complimented by specific contact with ward members as and when a significant issue/development occurs in their area. I thank everyone who has assisted in this important work.

The Revenues and Benefits Team continues to work extremely hard to support affected businesses, paying out several existing grant rounds and developing the new platform to speedily deliver the next round for those

affected by the newest, necessary, restrictive measures. The Chief Executive and management are streamlining processes and increasing staff numbers in this team to assist with demand. I will not include the payout totals or structure of this round in this report as I am conscious that there is time between my writing it and Full Council. I will provide the exact figures as part of my introducing the report at Council so that they are the most up to date they can be for members/public consideration.

It is immensely encouraging that the NHS/CCG vaccination programme is underway and accelerating, rightly focusing on the elderly, most vulnerable and frontline NHS staff initially. At the time of writing this report the QEH and Terrington and St James surgeries have been up and running for over two weeks and Snettisham and Swaffham surgeries are just coming on line to support residents in their surrounding areas. Again, I will provide up to the minute information when I introduce this report as I am conscious of the member and public interest in this aspect of the response.

Whilst much of the preliminary work in establishing local centres, including the mass vaccination sites is necessarily highly confidential and sensitive, I can assure readers that significant progress is being made and that information will be shared at a time deemed appropriate by the NHS/CCG, who have the primacy and the expertise for this work. The Council remains firmly committed to proactively assisting partners and this vital programme in whatever way it can. Members will be aware from briefings that we have been actively lobbying the NHS via the CCG for a vaccination site local to 'Downham Market' and that strategic assurances have now been secured for this.

The COVID-19 Testing centre at Lynnsport continues to work effectively and the Borough is becoming one of the initial district areas to take on locally enhanced 'Track and Trace' contacting (supplementing the NHS effort to contact and support people who should be isolating) and 'lateral flow testing' to better determine and intercept risk of infection in localities, workforces, schools etc. Both of these developments will increase our local ability to get ahead of the virus but come with a new 'demand' and necessary redeployment of staff to cater for them.

Members will be aware that there has been initial constructive dialogue with the Chief Executive with regard to temporarily drawing back on or extending usual timescales on some important, but non-critical democratic and administrative functions imposed on officers. Whilst I fully understand this is undesirable, I am fully supportive due to the length of time (over 10 months) certain essential teams have been working with a significantly increased workload, the current and foreseeable incoming increased officer workload to support the Covid-19 multi-partner response in the next few vital months (outlined previously in this report but also including (at the time of writing) preparations for County and PCC elections still scheduled for May) and new staff working protocols to protect from the virus variant and current infection levels and I would ask Councillors to remain understanding and sympathetic to this in their direct interactions with officers and if we reach the point of making strategic decisions collectively on the 'short-term' way forward.

Waste Collections

Waste collections continue to operate well. Despite the ongoing demands of the pandemic all black and green bin collections continue to be maintained across the district. It is unfortunately still the position that food waste cannot be collected safely.

Advanced information went out prior to the holiday season to remind people of how to check their collection times and procedures for dealing with the usual increased waste and recycling people might wish to leave out.

Unfortunately there have been a couple of isolated incidents in Kings Lynn itself and in a rural location of 'fly tipping' over the holiday period, whilst numbers remain thankfully low, proactive media has taken place to highlight this is pre-meditated anti-social behaviour and reiterate the council will investigate and take legal action against anyone caught doing it.

By Full Council a delegated decision will have been taken to move forward the incoming 'Waste and Related Services Contract' from the 1st April 2021 to the 29th March 2021. Whilst this may seem a minimal change of just a couple of days it is imminently sensible to move the start of the new contract away from the Bank Holiday weekend to ensure any unforeseen teething challenges as things embed can be best addressed. There are no additional budgetary implications in severing the existing contract or starting the new one early.

Officers continue to work diligently to ensure a smooth transfer with partners and the incoming contractor and I have taken my place on the tri-Council member oversight team to support, challenge and review.

Licensing

The Council's 'Statement of Licensing Policy' has now been reviewed, updated and approved as required by legislation.

'Statutory Taxi Standards' In July 2020, The Department for Transport published a range of robust measures to protect taxi and private hire vehicle passengers, particularly those most vulnerable. Licensing Authorities, including this council, are requested to consider the new standards by the end of January 2021 and expected to make appropriate changes to their policies and procedures thereafter. Our standards have been duly amended and are currently out for consideration.

BREXIT

The Council's Food/Health and Safety Team have been exceptionally busy during this period. In addition to its ongoing delivery of tiered guidance, support and if necessary enforcement to commercial premises and businesses around Covid-19 guidance it has taken a lead role on supporting local businesses through the UK's transition out of the EU at New Year. This

has included:

Priority visits/interventions with businesses identified as 'high risk' affected by:

Sector Specific Official Controls and EU exit priorities including:

Imports at points of entry

Shellfish and water sampling from local harvesting areas

Granting of approval under Regulation (EC) no.853/2004 to a total of 50 local premises

Conducting fishing vessel registration and inspection – to a total of 24 local vessels

Export Health Certificates for Fishery Products

Moving through to ongoing proactive interventions with lower rates and identified new businesses.

Public Protection – Flooding

There were several local 'Flood Alert' warnings issued over the holiday period either due to high rainfall or exceptionally high seasonal tides. Thankfully none of these came to pass. The most 'high risk' was a river, necessitating warning letters to be served on a handful of affected nearby properties. This situation did test 'Christmas on-call' supervision (including myself), out of hours links to partners, the Borough Councillor, Parish Council and planning around potential evacuation to relief premises that were Covid-19 safe and all worked well.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

The primary focus of my upcoming activity before next full council has to be the Borough's continuing response to the rapidly changing Covid-19 situation regarding both its core services and its assistance to the wider effort. I will continue to keep members, Town and Parish Councils informed of activity by weekly reporting or by exception if a development merits it.

I will also be working with officers to ensure local businesses get the help, guidance and new protocol support around the UK's recent departure from the EU and towards successful introduction of the substantial new 'Waste and Related Services Contract' due in two months time.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

Regular and irregular meetings with the Chief Executive, Communications Officers, relevant responsible Council Officers and partners with regard to the Borough's Covid-19 response. This included continuing these meetings and taking my place on the Christmas 'on call' rota of senior officers to ensure

continuity of Covid-19 oversight and support and reaction to emerging events and demands throughout the holiday season.

Separate Meetings with Collection Services and EHO managerial staff.

Tri-District responsible lead member 'joint Waste Contract Review and Development Board'

Scheduled meetings associated with Cabinet.