

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

March 2023

COUNCILLOR STUART DARK – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CHAIR OF CABINET

For the period February to March 2023

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

New QEH bid

During this period I met the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon Rishi Sunak MP in Downing St. I took the opportunity of directly raising the issue of our Hospital in furtherance of my letter to him (Jan. 2023) and this Council's united position. The Prime Minister was clearly aware, without prompting, of the QEH's dire need and unwanted status of being the most-propped RAAC hospital in the country and made me confident that the message/urgent need for a replacement was clearly understood at the highest levels of government, reinforcing the impression I received from Stephen Barclay MP the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care at my reported meeting with him last month. Whilst I, like everyone else locally, am frustrated at the delay in the right decision being announced, I am hopeful this will occur imminently and am understanding of the mitigating context that whilst the 'urgent need' is clearly there a potential infrastructure spend of several hundred million pounds (possibly £1Bn by the time of build) into West Norfolk will be going through many layers and departments of central government and the NHS prior to sign off. This interaction with the Prime Minister follows my meetings with two Secretaries of State for Health and Social Care (one twice), the Minister for Health and seven formal letters into government timed to land at critical times of the bid process since June 2021 in lockstep with the QEH leadership team, MPs and partners and this Council led petition that raised over 15,000 signatures.

IDB Levies

Councillors will be aware from the budget setting process that IDB levies, from many different boards, over which this council has little control, now account for c.43% of this council's council tax – severely depleting our available finances. This makes us one of the most impacted councils in the country - several of the others being our neighbours on the Wash/Fenland low lands. Whilst it is undeniable the IDB's do fantastic work, making areas safe, habitable and farmable it is also important that we argue the case to central government that equitable central funding support should be forthcoming due to this impact and the areas role as a major contributor to the UK's 'food economy and security' ie. the cost should not be borne disproportionately by West Norfolk residents alone. In furtherance of this I

met with Lord Porter the Leader of South Holland District Council during this period, to link us in with work they and others have started to lobby for such support as likewise affected councils and we will be now working together on this important issue. Post this meeting I wrote directly to the relevant Minister Lee Rowley MP setting out our Council's issues, copying in both our regions MPs who I had previously briefed, both are now engaging in parliament on this. Following this letter I had the opportunity to raise the issue directly with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove MP who agreed he would look in to the issue and I have followed this up with a reminder letter. This is work that will continue over the coming weeks and the next administration, whatever shape it takes, will need to continue progressing.

Record of thanks

This is my final report to Council before the end of its four year-term and elections take place. Elections where it's known some Councillors are standing down after many years public service to West-Norfolk and new faces are inevitable in this chamber. I would like as Leader, knowing this report goes on the public record for years to come, formally thank everyone, from all sides of this chamber, standing down or not for the role they've played in this council and our community over the last 4 years, collectively we have differed on many things, but agreed on many more – your role has been appreciated.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Service of Youth and Hope – I am pleased to be attending this Service with others at the Minster

30th March – I am honoured to be speaking the address, as Leader, at the Council Meeting making former Mayor and Council Leader, Nick Daubney an Honorary Alderman of the Borough

2nd April – I am looking forward, as are many, to the Hunstanton Soapbox Derby, run by the Borough Council – that this year, the 70th since it started in 1953, already has over 40 racers entered (including the team I'm in for the Hunstanton RNLI)

26th April – I'm honoured and no doubt will be proud and humbled in equal measure, once more to be attending the West Norfolk Hero Awards with the Mayor and seeing and hearing about some of the amazing people in our community.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

In addition to attending numerous usual development and review meetings with officers and cabinet colleagues, meetings with opposition group leaders

and members, I have during this period also attended (in no particular order);

The Vigil in support of Ukraine 1 year on from the invasion

Member Major Projects Board

Joint Safety and Welfare Meeting

Hunstanton Sailing Club

Norfolk Leaders Group

Meeting with the groups wishing to progress the 'adaptive sports hub' at the Pelicans site

Liaison Meeting with the Mayor and Clerk Downham Market TC

Hunstanton Heritage Society

Hunstanton Advisory Board

Water Quality Meeting with the EA and AW with officers and Cllr Parish

The first 'Shareholder Committee' meeting

Meeting with the Kings Lynn Civic Society

Opening of the Stoke Ferry Pavilion and community gym – part funded by CIL grant