

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

19 OCTOBER 2023

COUNCILLOR TERRY PARISH – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

For the period August to October 2023

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

A busy and diverse month. Key themes were meeting with key partners and organisations; the importance of skill building; environmental matters, and a touch of finance.

I met with the Saxon Shore Parish Councils at Old Hunstanton and listened to their concerns including potential impacts of the proposed Wash Barrier. I made a presentation to Downham Market Town Council and took questions. Issues raised have been communicated to relevant portfolio holders and officers. I invited all Parish Council Chairpersons, or their representatives, to meet with me at the Town Hall. This was done through two meetings, one at 2pm and a repeat at 6pm. Total time was 4hours 15 minutes and around 50 attended. An agenda was followed which included planning matters; vexatious actions by parishioners; Parish Council recruitment, and communication with the Borough. Both meetings concluded that they were worthwhile. A record of them will be distributed to Parish Councils and action points stated.

Internal meetings included ones associated with BOOST, the programme which provides a 'catch up' for older school students and young adults. Funding from this originates with the Towns Fund and this could be picked up by the UKSPF funding stream next year. I will look for further funding opportunities into the future. BOOST dovetailed into a meeting with the College of West Anglia who exist to enable students to acquire skills and do it well. Council should congratulate their participation in World Skills UK. They acquired two silver and a highly commended awards last year and have 50 students registered this year. Very recently students also came away with a silver, 5 bronze and a merit at the International Salon Culinaire held at the Excel Centre.

I had a meeting with the HT of Springwood High School and followed this with an extensive tour of its facilities, meeting staff where possible and observing procedures. Wearing my dusty OFSTED hat I was very impressed and am confident that knowledge and skills are being well imparted. I will follow this up by joining a meeting of all secondary HT's. I did attend such a meeting of primary HTs at the TH. I heard an interesting presentation about raising the

skill levels of teachers so that they are better prepared for career advancement. I also enjoyed the obvious rapport between headteachers and will ensure opportunities for these meetings, hosted by the BC, continue. I visited my local junior school, Heacham, had a tour before school started, met with some staff, appreciated the start arrangements and then spoke to all pupils at an assembly. They asked me very good, unrehearsed (an exemplar for this Council), questions about me and my job and I emphasised that things happen to you, opportunities occur, that you would likely not think of. Consequently, the best way to be prepared is to learn all you can – and build up your skills. This school also impressed me as did the infant school at a visit last year. So, from dips into primary, secondary and college, I am confident that West Norfolk has the seeds by which improvements to all aspects of the community will be driven forward.

Reverting to the College, there is a bid into NCC to access some government underspend that has been offered (linked to the proposed devolution deal). We have submitted plans for a second phase of the nursing school. In addition, Health Education England are supportive of dentistry related training, dental hygiene, dental nurse training, and, maybe, these skill sets could come to Lynn. I ask Council to support such opportunities as and when they become available.

Environmental matters I have been involved in are: EA reports into sea defences from Hunstanton to Wolverton, sea water pollution particularly, but not exclusively, at Heacham, and a briefing on Nutrient Neutrality by two representatives of the District Council Network (40 members). I asked for this briefing.

I have been criticised for reporting the facts, provided by the EA, about sea defences. I did so to ensure clarity in what is their current position. It appears the pot was stirred and motions at County and, coming forward, at this Council will request a different approach. I will leave the debate to Council. Issues around sea water quality have been discussed for several years, primarily at regular Heacham Beaches meetings involving me and Cllr Dark. Some EA funding was found, and investigations continue. This problem is extremely important to locals, tourism, and the shellfish industry. Nutrient Neutrality has not figured large in WN as it potentially affects about 24 proposed developments (number may not be accurate before anyone challenges it, but it is a small number). Anyway, a statement went out that all Districts supported the new government stance on this, or words to that effect. I hadn't said any such thing, hence my briefing. The House of Lords threw out HMG's proposals so we are where we are. I note that the Leader of NCC has recently roundly condemned Natural England's stance on nutrient neutrality. I don't, my understanding is that they are doing a good job and if their guidance is followed new homes will be built without concurrent pollution. It may take a little longer and upset developers but if you want to challenge river and sea pollution, then you can't pick and choose which pollutant makes you happy.

I also had an interesting meeting of District Leaders held at Dereham. An item on the agenda, due to this Council's interest, was business rates and how they are distributed. A proportion of business rates growth that we collect would normally go to the government unless the council is in a pool arrangement with other authorities then this proportion is paid into the pool. If they are paid into a business rates pool then the members of the pool, overall, benefit. All districts in Norfolk and NCC are members of a pooling arrangement for Norfolk. Forecasts for 2024/25 will provide a potential £1.7million to go into the pool. However, how the pooled funds are allocated is decided by a vote of District Leaders. An option 1 was agreed two years ago which is estimated to return just £0.7million to WN. There is an option 2, a default DLUHC position, which would return £0.86million, and an option 3 which I asked for which would have returned £1.114million for the year 2024/25. Option 3 would have also benefited all members of the pool except Norwich and NCC. Despite this, all districts, except us, voted to continue with option 1 as, 'It has worked well and/or it is the recommendation of our section 151 officer'. Strange but true.

Options for allocation of forecast 2024-25 Pool funds

Local Authority	Option 1		Option 2		Option 3	
	Current model		DLUHC default model		Alternative model	
	£m	%	£m	%	£m	%
Breckland District Council	0.642	9%	0.672	9%	0.929	13%
Broadland District Council	0.598	8%	0.574	8%	0.831	12%
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	0.440	6%	0.217	3%	0.474	7%
Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk	0.724	10%	0.857	12%	1.114	15%
North Norfolk District Council	0.631	9%	0.648	9%	0.906	13%
Norwich City Council	0.356	5%	0.028	0%	0.286	4%
South Norfolk District Council	0.615	9%	0.611	8%	0.868	12%
District sub-total	4.006	56%	3.606	50%	5.408	75%
Norfolk County Council	3.205	44%	3.606	50%	1.803	25%
	7.211		7.211		7.211	

There is an argument that NCC, recognising that we lose out, may be more generous towards projects that come along. This may or may not be true, but projects are capital funds and likely lead to more revenue being spent whereas business rates can be used for appropriate revenue funding.

The second significant agenda item at District Leaders was the proposed County Deal. Another presentation was made. The collective unanimity of DL's which was displayed about business rates dissolved though, perhaps not quite so vocally as a previous debate about the fate of the LEP integration, an earlier but related topic. Suffice it to say that everyone seemed to 'agree' that the proposed County Deal did not have sufficient money, proposed governance arrangements, though improved, were not good/secure enough, and district leaders should have been involved from the start of the process. However, it remains the only deal on the table and, although others have delayed decisions (Suffolk for a year I believe), it should be seriously considered. I will be astonished if County Councillors do not recommend it in December. All Council members will have a chance to comment at the November Council but you, unless you are a twin hatter, don't have a vote.

My meeting with the Sandringham Estate was about the traffic and other impacts of the Bank Holiday concerts. After discussion they asked me what I would like to happen at future events. I said, 'No four-day events; not on a Bank Holiday; more communications with local Parish Councils, and more discussion with the Borough. Whether these or some of them will come to pass we will have to see. I did keep in contact with Dersingham Borough Cllrs prior to and after the meeting and was thanked for doing so. Councillors should note that the Kings Lynn evening economy 'saw the biggest drop in footfall since monitoring began, 15years ago (excluding the pandemic) – some 70 to 80% fall between 8pm and midnight'. And, a respected Hunstanton trader said, 'This Bank Holiday was a disaster for Hunstanton – down on previous years due to the mismanagement of the traffic system'.

2 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

LGA Independent Leaders
Local Plan task Group
Equalities Training for Members
Liz Truss MP
Affordable Housing – Ark property Centre
Labour/IP joint meeting
Waste Water connection with EA
Beach Clean Snettisham to Heacham with RSPB
Member Major Projects Board
Various Corporate Strategy Meetings
Corporate Performance Panel

Devolution Underspend proposals with officers
East of England LGA for district cllrs
Nutrient Neutrality with some District reps
Changing places toilets - with procurement officer
Unison
Sandringham Estate
Downham Market Town Council
Permitted Development - proposed changes, with EEELGA and then officers.
Springwood High School
Wash east Coast Management Strategy
Business rates Pooling with S151 officer and CEO.
UKSPF and REPF briefing.
Joint Welfare and Safety Committee
West Norfolk Primary HT's
Norfolk Leader's Group
Heacham Junior School
Leader meetings with Parish Council Chairpersons.
Meetings with Leader of labour Group
Meetings with Leader of Conservative Group
National Grid – Pathway to Net Zero, on line

All Group Leaders Meeting
LGA Leadership Academy
Corporate Performance Panel