

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

Thursday 22 February 2024

COUNCILLOR TERRY PARISH - LEADER

For the period 1 February - 22 February 2024

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

The budget is the thing today. No doubt others will reference it in their reports, and it forms a substantial and wordy set of documents that I hope you have taken note of. There was an excellent opportunity to consider the budget and ask questions or put forward views at the joint panel meeting. I thank Cllr Bearshaw for his excellent chairing of that meeting and the Section 151 officer for her very clear explanation of the details. Almost a week later, there was another opportunity to comment on the budget at the extra cabinet meeting set aside just for it. Indeed, I would have allowed questions as I have done at other cabinet sessions. Several cllrs attended under SO34 but did not comment. I assume that a budget which is the first step towards achieving a true financial balance whilst still providing services, discretionary activities and money to those organisations who meet appropriate criteria and can use it effectively, can be accepted by all.

To secure the Council's financial future significant income needs to be raised or significant outgoings curtailed. Council agreed to changes to empty homes council tax and to doubling council tax on second homes. At present, most of this extra revenue benefits the County. A meeting was arranged with County to discuss the issue. They cancelled it but we will be pressing forward and expect co-operation. I ask all twin hatters to consider their position on this matter.

The thrust to reduce outgoings centres on IDB fees. Last year, government gave us around £200K; the bill was £3.2M. This year, so far, we will likely receive about the same. However, early in the month, there was a House of Commons event hosted by MP Liz Truss. This was due to a group of 29 Councils, The LGA Special Interest Group, lobbying for IDB fees to be picked up by someone else, preferably government. I introduced her to this group at one of our regular meetings. The section 151 officer attended the meeting on our behalf and reported that it was organised well. We await results though any significant change will not happen before 2025. I was interviewed on the same subject by Countryfile. If it is used it will appear in March. My excuse, if it is below par, is that trying to make sense whilst walking along a muddy track into a half gale is difficult.

Something different. It was National Apprenticeship week, and a gathering was held to celebrate our apprentices. An edited version of my official 'speech' below gives some details though the highlight was a 'video' of apprentices telling us how good the experience is. This was produced by an apprentice in the communications team and will be used for promotional purposes at secondary schools and at the college.

'110 people have taken Apprenticeships since we started the current scheme. We currently have 35 working across our organisation including planning, accountancy, democratic services, Lily, tourism, communications and others.

Not only do our apprentices benefit from learning new skills while on the job, the

Borough benefits from the knowledge and enthusiasm they bring into the organisation.

Agreeing to be an apprentice takes commitment and is taken on alongside the day work they do. Additionally, it takes commitment from our managers to give our Apprentices the time and support they need to undertake this additional learning.

As a council we encourage lifelong learning, and an apprenticeship is an excellent way of achieving career progression and motivation for individuals.'

I visited two health related sites, the NHS Kings Lynn Health Hub at South Lynn and Birch Tree House outside Downham Market run by Mind. The former is a new build and is currently at the fitting out and cladding stage. It has taken a few months as it is a smart modular construction. Very impressive and it will reduce pressure on the hospital services. I asked about building a hospital. This company could have a 500-bed hospital functioning in under 4 years and that includes a lead in time of 2 years (when they could start). Food for thought.

The Mind property is a large, new, open market house. No modifications have been needed and it should prove an excellent facility. They have three such properties and they are hoping for a fourth. This is the first one in West Norfolk and it will provide respite and support for up to four people for 5 nights. I was there in the morning and Cllr Rust and Cllr Rose were also engaged in discussions with staff. Other cllrs may have visited later.

I had two meetings related to the Oasis Centre in Hunstanton. The first was an item within a wider discussion about Alive Leisure. The company directors, Cllr Ben Jones and Cllr Jim Bhondi, called it and it was good to see their enthusiasm to move things forward. A paper will come to cabinet in due course. The second linked, to an extent, the Oasis with a proposal for a Lido which originated before my time. A member of the Hunstanton Advisory Group attended along with a County officer. Work will be done to consolidate appropriate data which is already held as it was considered unnecessary to engage more external consultants at this stage as £50K (County) had already been spent.

There have been some local flooding issues which the portfolio holder, Cllr Squire, will no doubt answer questions on. To be clear, Borough officers will consider problems experienced by the public and related to floods and sewage on a case-by-case basis for particularly vulnerable or elderly residents. Indeed, they have done this in the past by providing portaloos when appropriate authorities were, for whatever reason, unable to respond quickly. These 'goodwill gestures' (an MP's words) were, apparently, wrongly attributed to Anglian Water in a letter I received. The same letter asked me to establish a protocol which would allow our officers to work with Anglian Water. I have, as yet, not fully considered my response but I found it interesting that, in the last financial year, Anglian Water made £169M profit and, in the last 10 years they paid dividends amounting to £1.5 billion. I don't think they need us to sub them but I am willing to discuss how they can better support our residents.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Pay award

FCH Liaison meeting

Meeting the senior team at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Mayors Business Awards

East of England – LG White Paper Roundtable

East of England Local Authority Water Summit

College of West Anglia

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

In addition to cabinet meetings, cabinet briefings, communications briefings and multiple one offs with officers or councillors:

01/02/24 Norfolk Leaders Group

02/02/24 West Norfolk Transport and Infrastructure

05/09/24 BBC TV filming

09/02/14 Apprentice event

14/02/24 Opening of the mart

19/02/24 Personal safety and conflict resolution training for all councillors

21/02/24 Meeting with all of the Parish Councils

22/02/24 EELGA Assembly meeting
Council meeting