

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

28th April 2024

COUNCILLOR – JO RUST CABINET MEMBER FOR – PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

For the period March 8th – June 27th 2024

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters. –

Housing register

1527 live applications

1 Emergency
198 High
504 Medium
824 Low

210 new or change in circumstances forms received - the forms were unable for a week to allow for essential maintenance by our IT provider

Housing Options

133 applicants given housing advice, 80 new homeless declarations and/or are ongoing investigations.

Lets advised - 38

The figures above really don't show the depth of the housing challenges that we face which absolutely reinforce the need for our council to take active steps to provide a remedy through our wholly owned housing companies. On the list of houses that were available for residents to bid for, 6 had over 100 bids each. The most bids for one property was 129. Under this administration the housing companies are starting, for the first time, to actually function in the way that they should. In time this will give us more control over the private rented sector as well as the supply of homes available through our registered housing providers.

I have attended regular meetings with Freebridge and heard how the review of the Decent Homes Standard 2 has still not been finalised. The government committed to review the Decent Homes Standard and in their 2022 Levelling Up White Paper, they committed to half the number of non-decent rented homes both in the private sector and social housing by 2030. Evidently, following the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak, caused by the damp and mold in his home, the law needed to be changed for social housing providers. Consultation closed on March 5th and the government is now

analyzing the responses. Freebridge feel that currently neither of the two main political parties have set out a clear strategy for housing or rent. I learnt how the board of Freebridge has committed the budget to turn voids around this year, which will be welcome news for us as Freebridge is our main provider of social housing. Since the meeting in March I have seen an improvement in the number of homes available to bid on and in May the lettings team had 60 properties to offer out.

On March 8th I attended a meeting with a local resident who has set up a Sisterhood Village, a not-for-profit social enterprise to provide support for the community by connecting like minded women to build meaningful relationships and get opportunities for personal growth. The project is in the early stages but sounds exciting. I provided Krystal, the founder, with funding information from the Health and Wellbeing Partnership. From that meeting this organization has successfully applied for funding and got their own office premises from which to operate. They are already making a big difference to the loneliness and isolation facing parents and helping to improve their prospects through training. So far the organization has seen 230 women attend an event in the 127 days that they have been operating.

On Saturday 9th March I went to Wisbech to attend their International Women's Day event, which was really well organized and attended. It was great to attend such an event which celebrates the achievements of women everywhere.

On 12th March I took part in a meeting to discuss our plans for accessible play areas. There is a strong desire and need to get it right the first time. It was agreed that there is so much they we can offer to make The Walks more accessible and to fully integrate accessible play. There will be more work to follow on from this and it is now looking like a phased and staged development will take place as we were successful in our application for funding new equipment. It's important that we don't lose this funding and so will be going out to tender for some equipment with a view to developing further into a fully integrated, accessible area. Since then there have been more discussions and meetings and the project has been handed over too the operational team who will deliver it.

Following on from that I attended a meeting to discuss the work undertaken by the money Advice Hub and Shelter. These are important external services which offer peripheral advice to stop our residents becoming homeless. While these are not core statutory services, they do support our core work by the preventative upstream work. These contracts have now gone out to tender with very specific criteria which the winning contractor will have to show how they can meet them. Our council works to ensure that we get the best value for money from the contracts that we award as would be expected when commissioning services as a prudent financial organization.

On March 13th I met with Superintendent Sonia Humphreys of Norfolk Police where to discussed some of the work being undertaken to reduce and tackle anti-social behaviour and serious organized crime. Working in the local communities which are more vulnerable to SOC there is a need to build and strengthen community cohesion. A launch of the Clear-Hold-Build initiative then took place on Thursday 18th April which was very well attended and created so many discussion points about how we can improve the outcomes of those living in some of our most disadvantaged areas. There was a room

wide commitment to engage with the project.

In March I visited the Citizen's Advice Bureau and heard of the amazing work that they are doing to help our local residents who are struggling with debt and other problems caused by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. More and more people are presenting with higher rates of debt as they are finding that the income they earn is not able to cover the costs that they incur in just being alive. One of our borough councilors made reference to the increased number of children and families needing to use the local foodbank. It is indeed a disgrace that in 2024 as the sixth richest nation we have a growing need for such provision. Now one in seven people across the UK are facing hunger simply because they don't have enough money. Our social security system is the driving factor pushing people towards hunger. According to the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), there are at least 1,172 independent food banks operating in the UK—almost as many as in the Trussell Trust network which has more than 1,300. I had two portfolio briefings on Thursday afternoon. At the second one I learnt of the work that our officers are doing to support staff who will be dealing with the currently paused initiative called Right Care, Right Person. The police presented this initiative at an Integrated Care Board meeting some months ago. But after the tragic murder of a family in Norwich it was paused. What it will set out to do is to minimize police input into cases of mental health presentation and seek to direct people to the most appropriate care provider. This means the different teams that we have that provide advice, guidance and support to residents may face distressing calls where a resident declares that they're in a mental health crisis and may take action which would impact on their life or the lives of others. Now having voted in a new PCC commissioner, Labour's Sarah Taylor, local trade unions have written to her and asked that this initiative be paused.

On 16th March I was proud to open St Faith's Spring Fair. I always feel spring is really here once the fair has taken place, but writing this report in chilly June, I was wrong! Anyway, St Faith's Church and the other places of worship really contribute to the health and wellbeing of residents. They host lunches and events, fund youth support and offer parishioners funding to overcome financial difficulties. They make a real difference in our communities.

On Sunday 16th March I attended King's Lynn Minster's Celebration of Youth. It was wonderful to see so many people come together to enjoy the many talents and skills that our young people have. They showed real aspiration and this needs to be nurtured and grown and built upon and then harnessed so that they go on to lead rewarding and fulfilling lives and make a positive contribution towards our local communities. Ensuring that the talent of young people is nurtured and encouraged will go a long way to improving levels of aspiration and hopefully to retain young talent in are area.

Before full council on March 21st I was able to attend the council's formal farewell to Jill Bennett, our longest serving local radio journalists. I remember being first interviewed by Jill in 2010 and we had to go to the quay in order to get a signal. That's a definite improvement between now and then, that we can get a signal almost anywhere. I'm pleased to support the motion of award of the Freedom of the Borough for her services to journalism and our area I visited the REST hub in the High Street on April 3rd and heard of the work being undertaken by MIND to help our residents with their mental health.

They're looking to do some collaborative work with other local organisations such as CAB. MIND sees, on average, 380 people a month. Sometimes an individual needs only a couple of sessions for them to feel in a stronger place and so no ID is needed for them to access that support. But other times they might need 6 or 12 weeks and in these cases that person would be logged on their system. There are a wide variety of demographic who attend the services and now it's in a more accessible place, the number is expected to grow. The prevention work needs to be bigger than the acute work and MIND want to shape and influence what is delivered by other services locally to support the mental health of our residents.

Following that I met up with a local youth worker, local police officers and the Reverend of St Faith's to discuss setting up a project at Centre Point in the same style as that at the Beacon. I attended its launch in April and was heartened to see how many children and young people attended and how they appeared to enjoy the event. I'll watch out for an expected decrease in the cases of anti-social behaviour in that area the same as has happened around the Beacon Church.

I attended a regular health and wellbeing partnership meeting which showed that referral numbers for Active Now courses have significantly increased which should mean that our residents are keeping fitter than they otherwise would have been. But it also noted that the programme has struggled with referrals from GPs. This is often seen as a barrier for engagement with a variety of different programmes. But the framework for action is about adopting a locality approach and getting the people of West Norfolk active. We heard more about the expansion of Place, which is a Sports England initiative. I will be attending a two-day training programme on this on the 14th and 17th June. We had an update about changes to the way the QEH will work differently and will deliver services in different places for the falls prevention programme. Acute patients will be seen at the QEH, but non acute will be seen in the community. They listed their 3 priorities for the year ahead – Urgent and Emergency Care, health Inequalities and Systems. We then heard from local organisations who were applying for funding, one of which was the Sisterhood Village I referred to earlier in my report. We then heard from the QEH and their new strategy for the future which is around Quality, Engagement and Healthy Lives, under which 9 strategic objectives have been developed. We learnt that while our hospital can't become a university hospital, it can become a teaching hospital.

On Tuesday April 8th I have the pleasure of spending the morning with Ady of West Norfolk Community Transport and seeing first-hand the work that the organisation undertakes. It was really uplifting to hear the complimentary comments that were made about Ady, the other drivers and the organisation in general. The most frequently used word was "lifeline". WNCT offer a door-to-door service for those in King's Lynn who have joined as a member of the organisation and pay a small, £10 per annum fee. They are then charged £4 per journey. We collected people from their homes and took them into town, or to a GP Surgery. We collected one gentleman from the hospital and then transported him back home. WNCT offer far more than a mere lift to and from a location. The staff who drive are helpful, courteous and recognise that the people they are transporting are individuals with their own needs and who, with the support the service offers, can still live independently despite

advancing years. WNCT do offer services outside the King's Lynn area, but they are more limited. They can also do group trips, for example, for residents of a supported housing complex like Hanover, to go to places like Springfield shopping, or for a day at the coast. This goes such a long way to alleviating the loneliness that can easily occur when you're living alone. It maintains the independence of the person so they can continue to contribute to their community. I've recently sent you all further details about the services that are on offer from WNCT and to direct any of your older residents to them. Many of you got in touch following receipt of that information to say that you'd be passing it on to your parish councils, so thank you.

It was pointed out by Cllr Lintern that cabinet reports would benefit from having updates on the matters we have previously reported on. So, with this in mind I'll go back to WNCT at some point and ask them how their numbers have fared, hoping that more people will have taken up membership to access the service and so reduce social isolation and loneliness and continue to live independently. Having asked and got this organisation to come and speak at the Friendship Café I attend on a weekly basis, I'm as keen as anyone to see more people use them.

I popped into a Help Hub networking day on Tuesday 16th April. The Help Hub provides our residents with joint support from multi agency teams. It's designed to stop people needing more in-depth services later on. The event was put on to help front line staff find out more about the Help Hub and how it can enable these services to support individuals and families that they interact with. The event invited professionals from a range of support services and charities to attend and it gave them a chance to showcase their services and develop stronger partnership links. There were about 16 partners that attended and I noticed that there was a real buzz in the room. All these partners were talking to each other and learning more about how they could work better together to the benefit of our residents. I've asked that the Help Hub team look at how we can collect some data to evidence better outcomes for those that they support.

We've held further successful Beat the Bills events and these are leading to people being able to improve their financial situation taking note of the advice that they receive. I saw for myself how one Downham resident just "popped in" and was still there about an hour later getting advice regarding benefits which she wasn't aware she was entitled to. This resident will hopefully find herself less worse off than before she attended.

On Tuesday 23rd I and Cllrs Ring and De Whalley met with the manager of West Norfolk Disability Information Service – WNDIS. This organisation provides exceptional value for money, bringing £1 million into our local economy through their benefit support. For every £1 spent on the service they bring in £16. They receive funding from a variety of different sources, but it really amounts to a very small sum for the amount of work that they do. They support SEND and educational tribunals as well as PIP tribunals – 50 of which they supported last year. The group have developed some online training to give people knowledge of how best to fill in a PIP application and they advised us that social prescribers can fill in PIP forms. As a result of our meeting I went away and asked Freebridge how many of their properties are accessible.

On Monday 29th April I attended a group meeting of Breath Easy which runs monthly sessions from the Gaywood Church Rooms. At this event I spoke of the work our energy efficiency officer is doing and how many of those who attend this group would benefit from getting in touch with him. The energy efficiency measures could help vulnerable people remain in stronger health and less likely to need hospitalisation. Keeping warm and dry is vital to their health.

On April 30th I met with the Health and Wellness manager of Lynnsport and learnt more about the work that is being done there to keep our residents strong, healthy and well. They have previously delivered the former GP referral scheme which then moved into the wellness scheme. Health professionals refer in, but they do it in a reactive and not proactive way. They also take part in the Falls Prevention scheme and people can self-refer in. This is a 10-week seat to chair aerobics course running from 8 venues. There's also a Just Move programme which again, residents can self-refer into. Lynnsport also provide an outpatient's pathway to do cardiac rehabilitation and then come out to the community and undertake cardiac rehabilitation. The staff at Lynnsport do a lot of health checks, including coming to our council for events like International Women's Day. There are low-cost gym groups in other venues in the area, but they staff in those can't offer the same services as our own Lynnsport staff do which includes having a cardiac rehab specialist. Lynnsport works alongside the QEH to offer a cancer wellbeing centre, working with people who have had cancer, on a one-to-one basis. This is low volume and high quality and will enable our residents to remain in better health than otherwise. We discussed the importance of the social side of all the referral schemes and the social popularity of Lynnsport, including the bar and snack area. As a frequent user of the whole facility, I can vouch for the importance of the facility on my own wellbeing and that includes the importance on mental health alongside the physical.

I took part in a photocall on May 1st about Sandi Starfish. This was named after Sandi Greenacre, a popular PCSO who died in a tragic car accident. She was also a friend of mine, and I hadn't realised that the scheme was named after her. This made it even more important and personal to me and I was glad to have been able to take part. I hope that it keeps the children who use our beaches safer by making their parents aware of what they can do – take a picture of their child, take note of where on the beach they are and call 999 if their child goes missing. These are simple steps to keep children safe. I visited our Housing Standards team in South Lynn on Thursday 2nd and was really impressed with the work that they do to try to improve the standard of housing in our borough which in turn improves the lives of our residents who live in those houses.

Like many others in the borough, I ran GEAR on May 5th. This annual event really contributes towards the happiness and health of those who participate and those who spectate. I know I get boosted by the support of the spectators I know that the event wouldn't be half as pleasurable to do without them all. This year Greyfriars school boosted our spirits by providing jelly sweets and fruit for the runners. It was great. The two choirs along the way helped keep us going too. A huge thank you to all those who support the event and ensure it takes place. The volunteers make such a huge difference

to the way in which this event is run and managed.

I was proud to take part in a presentation to the Contractor of the year, which we awarded to CDA – Charles D Allflatt. A local contractor we have had a long association with. Their customers spoke very highly of the operatives who attended their homes to make necessary adaptations to allow them to continue living independently for longer.

Later that day I attended the 1st Birthday Celebrations of the Purfleet Pantry. The group have been nominated for a prestigious MJ Award and on Friday 21st We'll find out if they've been successful. Regardless of whether they win the award or not, they're winners to the people and community that they serve and for us as a council. Karen, Paula and the whole team really make a difference to the lives of the people that they support.

On Tuesday 14th May I went to Lynnsport and worked alongside the organisation we have tasked to discover what our residents think is important and where they like to go. It's part of our economic strategy and we're engaging with stakeholders on ambitions and priorities. What will follow is a draft of the vision, strategic and investment priorities. I was there as our people and communities are fundamental to getting the vision right and we want to ensure that our area is a good place to live, work, visit and invest. We want to support our people and communities to access opportunities, creating better quality, higher skilled jobs across sectors. This has come about as a result of the announcement of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment. Bearing in mind we're heading to a General Election and the funding has not yet been released, I suspect an incoming government will review this and we may well not get what has been promised.

I had a meeting with a member of the Mancroft Advice Project (MAP) on Friday 17th May. This organisation supports those aged between 11-25 with a whole raft of different things. I suggested that they organise a hustings and have the young people chair the event and ask questions of the general election candidates. This is taking place on June 27th, which disappointingly means I'm going to miss it as we have full council that evening. I have suggested that members of the group also attend a full council meeting and submit a question to one of the cabinet and observe how our meetings are conducted, so watch this space!

I was thrilled to attend the launch of our bike hire service at Lynnsport later the same day. Bikes can be hired for £10 a day for adults, £5 for Juniors, £5 for trailers and they're open from 4pm – 10pm Monday to Friday and 10am till 6pm at the weekends. The hire period is 24 hours so this represents good value. It will encourage families to use active travel and increase their level of activity.

I enjoyed a holiday away with my family towards the end of the month so have a gap in reporting.

I attended a Dentistry briefing for councillors on my return on 31st May where we heard of the long term dental plan. While it's laudable, I don't think it goes far enough and much of this is because of the challenges with the national contract and how dentists are paid for their activity. It does nothing to incentivise dentists to take on NHS contracts and there's little to encourage dentists to come to our area. We know we don't have enough dentists to meet all our needs and that's not set to change any time soon, sadly, even

with the plans to build the dental workforce.

I attended the Freedom of the Borough event awarded to RAF Marham on Thursday 6th June and was so proud to see so many members of our communities attend in support. It was a lovely event and the marching band were excellent.

The civic reception for the Mayor was on Sunday 9th June and it was interesting to learn more about the history behind the protocol from David Cole and the history of our borough from Dr Paul Richards. Both are a font of knowledge.

Finally, I report that I attended the ICB Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board meeting on Wednesday 12th June and learnt more about the strategy to address health inequalities and how the monitoring of the better care fund is going to change. Both will impact on us, but hopefully in a positive way.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Legal Walk 13th June

Place Leadership Training 14th and 17th June

Celebration of 50 years of sharing at St Faith's – 16th June

Judging art for LD week 17th June

MJ awards – 21st June

Freebridge member briefing 26th June

Health and Wellbeing partnership 27th June

Peer Review 27th June

Southgates Mastplan Briefing

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

KLACC/KLAC/KLAC sifting

Portfolio Briefing – Housing

Portfolio briefings – Health and Wellbeing

Portfolio Briefings – CIC

QEH briefings

GRT briefings

Full Council

Creating communities

Beat the Bills

Energy efficiency briefing

MIND visit

Targeted Youth Support meeting

Health and wellbeing partnership meetings (monthly)

Walk and talk – PCs C Geary and D Brock

Padel Court development discussions

West Norfolk Community Transport

E&C

Knights Hill Development briefing

Help Hub

Pizza Project

Clear-Hold-Build

Freebridge meetings (monthly)

Economic Strategy discussion

Joint Group Meetings
Shareholder training
WNDIS meeting
Cabinet/special cabinet/cabinet sifting/Cabinet Briefings
Improving support for care leavers briefing
Local Hero Award (well done Bharti)
IDB meetings
Breathe Easy
Food for Thought
King's Lynn Community Football
Sandi Starfish
Housing standards team visit
Planning/planning training
Guildhall Briefings
Contractor of the year award
1st Birthday Purfleet Pantry
Economic strategy consultation
Council AGM
MAY/YAB meeting
Lynnsport Bike Launch
Homelessness and housing delivery briefing
Dentistry briefing
Neighbourhood plan briefing
Freedom of the Borough special event
Inauguration of the Mayor
ICS at NCC