

MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

21st July 2024

COUNCILLOR – JO RUST CABINET MEMBER FOR – PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

For the period 16th June 2025 – 21th July 2025

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters. –

I have continued to attend the Freebridge out and about days, where members of staff and the board go out and visit residents to ask their view on Freebridge as an organisation and if there are any outstanding repairs. I have attended in both the Walpoles and Hunstanton. Meeting our local residents and hearing directly of their experiences with one of our key housing providers is invaluable in getting to know more about the organisation. What cannot be disputed is the dedication and commitment of those who deliver the services within the organisation. Disappointingly the number of voids remains an issue. Freebridge have explained that despite taking on 20 more operatives they cannot keep up. They acknowledge that they have higher numbers than their peer organisations. 90% of their stock is from the old takeover and is over 60 years old. They're currently going through a reorganisation which should enable them to get the best out of their talented staff they have.

On 20th June I met with officers from Carer's Voice, an organisation which speaks on behalf of residents who are carers and are often overlooked or ignored. Our economy benefits to the tune of £182 billion a year because of the unpaid work carried out by carers. The all age carers identity passport has now been rolled out to 5000 carers across Norfolk. This passport means that the carer doesn't have to keep telling their story. It also aims to increase recognition of carers, offer support and provide a shortcut for carers to access services and benefits. Supporting carers is one of the ways that we keep people living independently at home for longer. The organisation have also produced a discharge booklet and an All Age Carers Handbook, both of which are designed to make the lives of carers slightly less challenging. It's worth knowing that a carer will spend 28 hours a month on the telephone just trying to get the services that they need.

Transport and access are an issue which is raised time and time again. If our residents can't access reliable, affordable and accessible public transport it limits their ability to function and contribute to society. So, to hear that the recent works to the bus station and railway station had a significantly negative impact on West Norfolk Community Transport was disappointing, forcing passenger numbers down. WNCT has a charitable arm and a commercial arm. Low passenger numbers impact on the financial viability of the organisation

which could have a knock-on impact on the organisations ability to deliver the charitable aims which enable people to continue to live independently for longer. Our council support the organisation with some funding, as does NCC to a certain extent. Organisations like WNCT are a valuable asset to our community and the service that they provide has a positive impact on the lives of our residents.

I was fortunate to attend Local Government Association conference in Liverpool at the start of July. It was an amazing event where I heard from council leaders, MPs, metro mayors and partner organisations. I heard how charities like Everton in the Community are making a positive difference to the lives of local residents. For every £1 invested by EitC they get a return of £30 through social value. They have people delivering health in the community to people who otherwise would be at risk of not accessing it because it's in a hospital setting. I hope that there might be scope for us to do some similar work, albeit on a smaller scale, with our local football club. I was able to ask Wes Streeting, Minister for Health, to tell Jim McMahon that a three unitary model would be best for our residents and mean that we can deliver on what's needed to succeed in the 10-year plan for health through the plans to move from hospital to the community, from analogue to digital and from treatment to prevention. Linking with our recent decision around the guildhall development, much was made of the wider determinants of health which include access to culture and the arts. I attended a really interesting APSE workshop where we heard more about procurement and insourcing and the make work pay agenda and I learnt more about the Public Interest Test, which helps us ask the rights questions at the right time. Social value was a phrase which was repeated at many of the workshops and meetings. Interestingly (to me at least), I learnt that Legal and General lend money to the government who then lend it to councils through the public works loan board. L&G were keen to stress the importance they place on this partnership work to benefit social need. There is too much for me to list, but if you have an area of interest and would like to know if I attended a workshop or session on it, please just ask. While at the conference I took part in judging a competition on climate champions in schools. It was amazing to see the excellent work undertaken by children in their schools and it was hard to decide which should be the overall winner as they had all worked so hard and so creatively.

At the monthly health and wellbeing partnership meeting we heard from Community Action Norfolk about the fragility of the VCSE sector. We have 4500 charities in Norfolk as well as 8000 smaller, unregistered charities. 71% said that their financial situation has worsened and 33% are using unplanned financial resources. VCSE service fill the gaps in provision from statutory services and are vital to our residents. They're also the partner organisations which will help us deliver on our Marmot work and the 10 year plan for health. Yet, they're seeing a 61% increase in the number of people they're supporting and a 45% increase in the level of complexity of the support needed. The short term funding issue is unclear but referrals from statutory services has increased. Poor public transport was referred to as were digital barriers and geographical isolation. LGR is impacting on the confidence of the VCSE sector. As portfolio holder for people and communities I understand the importance of

the VCSE sector on our ability to support our residents and deliver on our commitments. I will, of course, be keeping a close eye on the situation as I'm keen to see these services strengthened not weakened further.

On Thursday 10th July members of KLAC visited the fire station in North Lynn. We were given a tour and show the many tools and pieces of equipment that are used to deliver life saving actions. We also learnt that there are 42 fire stations in Norfolk and at any time, up to half of them could be unavailable due to staffing. Expenditure per head of population, is £34.90 compared to £41.80 in England, so a very efficient service.

On July 15th I attended an online session held by the LGA around LGR support. It was a very informative session and we heard that any services which aren't statutory will be devolved to town or parish councils. This makes the establishment of a King's Lynn town council even more important.

On 16th July I attended a Marmot stakeholder event in Downham Market and met with more key organisations who will be fundamental in supporting our authority to deliver on reducing health inequalities

The new MITEL omni-channel software has been implemented in CIC and everyone in the team are answering calls via softphones instead of handsets. Initially, some issues were experienced with two-way conversations from home, however, these have now been resolved by connecting through a VEN instead of the VPN. This means, there are now five CIC Advisors working from home and coming into the office one day per week. Laptops have been ordered for the team, with further CIC Advisors commencing home working when they have been built by ICT. In addition to the CIC Advisors, one of the CIC Supervisors, the CIC Operations and Training Lead and the team manager are also working from home one or two days per week.

Since the introduction of home working, the team dynamics has positively changed and five desks have been removed from the area. Those who are home working are now hot desking, and everyone is happy with this situation and team morale is much improved. The team are now working on phase two of the Customer Service Transformation (CST) programme, which is the implementation of MITEL webchat and the introduction of the 'Talkative' Virtual Agent. There is a proof of concept being BETA testing and this is initially focusing on waste enquiries.

In the background, there is investigation into the knowledge base for other service areas, so the plan is to GO LIVE with 3 to 5 services areas initially, as the CIC Advisors will be able to assist with the other service areas and continue to build on this. Once this is up and running (hopefully late Summer 2025), the Corporate Web team will then be looking at SMS and WhatsApp for the team. The third phase of the CST programme is the introduction of 'Talkative' VOICE to replace the IVR and to assist the CIC Advisors on the telephones. A business case for this will be written in August 2025.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

CoWA business breakfast
Age Friendly communities' discussion
Guildhall Briefing
Full Council
King's Lynn Community Conference
LGR stalls
KL JCP apprentice discussion
Norwich Pride
Royal Philharmonic concert
WNCT
Leisure facilities working group
QEH briefing

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

Portfolio briefings – Health and Wellbeing
Portfolio Briefings – CIC
Portfolio Briefing - Housing
Full Council
Health and wellbeing partnership meetings (monthly)
E&C
Freebridge briefing
Joint Group Meetings
Cabinet/special cabinet/cabinet sifting/Cabinet Briefings
IDB meeting
Food for Thought
Homelessness and housing delivery briefing
ICB at NCC
KLAC
West Norfolk Community Transport meeting
Beacon Church Creating Communities event
Special council meeting
Health and Wellbeing Board event
Marmot stakeholder launch
Housing standards and ASB portfolio meeting
Leisure facilities meeting
LGR engagement events
Hunstanton sea defences