

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

31st July 2025

COUNCILLOR ALISTAIR BEALES – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

For the period from 26-06-25 to 31-07-25

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

It being now over a year since I was elected Leader of the Council, I thought I might reflect on the role as I see it. The three other councillors in our midst who are former leaders, will be well aware of the demands of the role in terms of time and responsibility. However, the dreadful COVID period aside, local government reorganisation (LGR) probably places the most extraordinary demands on council leaders since 1974. The normal day-to-day demands of the role remain, and under the strong leader model operated by this council (as defined by the Local Government Act 2000), the demands and responsibilities of the leader are at the centre of how the council operates. In that technical respect, time and resource demands of LGR are sometimes unwelcome as it is more difficult to be involved and familiar with all the decisions that are taken. Nevertheless, that can be accommodated. What is less easy to accommodate is the reduced time available to spend with elected members and officers of this council. I attach great importance to that and try to be as open and accessible as possible, and it doesn't sit well not to be able to focus on it as I would like. But LGR is the biggest thing on the agenda for 50 years and has to be a priority.

It seems like a very long while since I last reported to full council, in fact I did report to 26th of June Council but was unable to attend. As I reported, that was due to the Future Norfolk presentation at the Royal Norfolk Show. (Future Norfolk is the branding for the six district councils that have come together to present the 3 unitary option). The presentation was the launch event for Future Norfolk, the 3 unitary proposal and associated survey, and it went extremely well. As well as me doing the presentation, our Borough Council events team managed all the logistics and put the event together. Other Borough council officers also attended to field questions and meet and greet. I was extremely proud of our team who in the opinion of all the gathered leaders did an excellent job.

Progress on the three unitary solution continues to be very good, and excellent work is being done with our consultants and leaders of other councils. I will update in detail as soon as I am able but for the moment it remains a work in progress. A very enlightening and satisfying work in

progress that focuses on the positives and what we can do better for our community. By contrast, we have seen some frankly reprehensible social media posts from Norfolk County Council talking about how a West unitary will go bankrupt from day one. We have seen the questionable judgement of what senior NCC figures see fit to post on social media, and you would hope and think they may have learned something. Not a bit it seems.

The geography and finances they talk about, as a matter of fact, are actually no more than their own guesses and projections of what the districts may do. I don't recognise what they say and it certainly doesn't accord with the work being done by Future Norfolk. We've now seen the social media posts compounded by a lengthy opinion piece in a local paper. Again it is asserted that the West will go bust and I think those writing such things, really ought to think about the impact it has on staff and residents. A guessing game as to the intentions of others and then boldly stating assertions as facts is not the way this debate should be conducted.

In fact this negative approach attacking alternative models sits badly at odds with the welcome constructive approach taken by other senior NCC members and officers. The joint working between NCC and the Borough Council on the ferry would be a prime example of this and I for one would like to see more and will continue to encourage that approach.

Despite that, it seems that some senior figures at NCC are determined to pursue their own Project Fear. We all know how that turned out.

Turning to devolution, the Government have confirmed that mayoral authorities will be set up and mayoral elections will proceed next May. In my view, that means it is certain that delayed County Council elections will go ahead, and so they should. This council almost unanimously supported a motion against the delay of County Council elections, and with unitaries not starting until May 2028, there is no case for further delay.

Returning to the subject of the Mayor, this is an absolutely key role for our own county of Norfolk and our neighbours in Suffolk. Frankly I have no care for the political stripe of the Mayor as long as they are competent, conscientious and energetic in pursuing the best for our Norfolk and Suffolk community. Nothing less will suffice. Good luck to those who want to take on this huge role.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

I will continue to attend as many meetings as I can related to LGR and devolution and recently attended the Local Government Association along with colleagues from this council, and a Local Government Information Unit event in Westminster at which Minister McMahon spoke.

Having long been a sceptic of “networking”, I’ve been proven wrong and these meetings are of immense value; just being in the room hearing first hand from the decision makers and other colleagues is invaluable. This council will continue to play a full role in devolution and LGR.

To prepare this Council for consideration of the LGR business case for the 3 unitary option, I have asked officers to organise scrutiny training and meetings with an experienced council leader from another authority (via the LGA) who has been through the unitary process. The timetable for this and scrutiny meetings and Cabinet (at which SO34 questions will be taken) and Council will soon be published so that members are aware of the dates and can prepare diaries accordingly.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

27 June

- Norfolk Leaders Meeting
- Area Group LGR meeting

30 June

- Norfolk District Leaders – LGR
- Guildhall Meeting

01 – 03 July

- LGA Conference

04 July

- Tour of Guildhall

07 July

- Cabinet Briefing
- Norfolk District Leaders – LGR
- LGR – District Leaders and Chief Execs
- Special Cabinet

08 July

- Future Norfolk Roadshow
- Labour Leaders Briefing
- Leader/Chief Executive Briefing

09 July

- Reform Leaders Meeting
- Meeting with Chairs and Group Leaders

11 July

- West Norfolk Transport
- BC/Freebridge Community Housing Liaison Meeting

14 July

- Leaders Session with ICC – LGR

15 July

- Conservative Group Leaders
- Officer LGR Meeting
- Exhibition Viewing
- Greyfriars Introduction

- Pre Council Briefing
- Civics re RAF Marham

16 July

- APPG on Local Government Reception – House of Commons

17 July

- Norfolk/Suffolk Leaders Meeting
- Special Council

18 July

- Purfleet Trust
- Monitoring Officer Meeting

21 July

- Norfolk Leaders Learning – Housing
- Norfolk District Leaders – LGR
- LGR – District Leaders and Chief Execs
- Cabinet
- Officers re LGR
- CWA/BC Strategic Liaison
- Planning Officers
- West Area Board – LGR – Inner Circle (TEAMS)

23 July

- Future West Norfolk Roadshow -Sandringham Flower Show

24 July

- LGR Peer Briefing
- Norfolk LGR Leaders
- Leader/Chief Exec briefing
- Norfolk Leaders Learning Session
- Cabinet

25 July

- LGR Stakeholder Breakfast
- District Meeting with Suffolk

28 July

- Norfolk District Leaders
- LGR District Leaders

29 July

- Civic Society Meeting
- Pre Council Briefing
- Major Housing Meeting
- Scrutiny Meeting

30 July

- Visit St Germans Pumping Station
- District Devolution
- Cabinet Briefing

31 July

- Norfolk Business Board
- Joint Norfolk & Suffolk Leader / CEX Devo Meeting
- Full Council