

## **CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**2<sup>nd</sup> October 2025**

### **COUNCILLOR – JO RUST CABINET MEMBER FOR – PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES**

For the period 21<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – 22<sup>nd</sup> September

#### **Progress on Portfolio Matters:**

##### **Creating Communities**

There are a variety of differing ways that we can create sustainable and cohesive communities. One of them is building housing in the right location, like Florence fields and Lavender View in Hunstanton. I was one of several councillors who took part in a tour of our major housing projects and was impressed to see the high-quality properties that our partnership with Lovells has produced. I was a nay sayer of the South End Road development, but having seen the amazing properties I'm now a convert. I sincerely hope that we can ensure those properties are put into stock as soon as possible. Like others, I'd prefer that these were sold or rented to local people, those who either live or work in the area or who have close family here. That would contribute towards that community.

##### **Partnerships with Health**

##### **Health Hub Update - Primary Care**

King's Lynn Primary Care Network (PCN), which consists of the four Kings Lynn GP practices working together to deliver services, have been in occupation of the health hub since March 2025 and have been delivering a range of general practice services from the site. The PCN have a signed lease in place for the premises and occupy approx. 34% of the building which is as per the approved business casel. Some areas of the building have 100% PCN occupancy rights. The PCN also has access to shared spaces within the building.

A modern primary care service relies on a number of healthcare professionals not just GPs to deliver contractual obligations. The services offered from the PCN element of the health hub are for the PCN practices to decide not the ICB. The general practice services delivered by the PCN from the building are currently as follows:

- Clinical Pharmacists
- Pharmacy Technicians
- Social Prescribing

- First Contact Physiotherapists
- Mental Health Practitioners

The ICB would not object to GPs working from the building but they can not contractually insist that the GPs work from the building. This has been the case throughout the business case process.

## **NHS Trust**

The remaining approx. 66% of the building is currently unoccupied; this includes the space earmarked for the multi-purpose gym. This space is due to be occupied by an NHS Trust and it is hopeful that they will be in a position to sign a lease and take occupation of the building by the end of this financial year. NHS Trust occupation has been delayed longer than all parties would like. Delay has been caused by a mixture of issues including finance and service delivery model.

From a service perspective the move is heavily linked to activity and developments at the NHS main site which means there are a few factors that need to align before services can move. The Trust have taken the opportunity of the delay to revisit what services will be delivered from the site and it is now very likely that there will be some changes from the services listed in the original business case. The intention is for the space to be fully utilised but at this point utilisation is not finalised and as such the details of this information is not able to be shared with the council.

From a finance perspective, revenue costs are fully agreed between the Trust and the ICB. The Trust have also requested some additional capital funding which was not part of the original business case that the ICB are supportive of.

## **Site Visit / Opening**

The ICB have not arranged an official opening or follow up visit for stakeholders due to most of the building not yet being occupied. Once all services are in the building then the plan remains for some form of opening event.

## **Housing and Homelessness**

Group by	Total number applicants
1-Emergency Card	1
2-High	140
3-Medium	407
4-Low	689
<b>Total</b>	<b>1237</b>

There were 36 lets

There were 223 New or change of circumstances completed in August

## Housing Options

There were 121 cases 41 of which made a homeless application (August is normally quite slow).

We launched our housing allocations policy after considerable scrutiny and taking feedback from the Equality group. We're in a challenging but controlled situation with our housing. We spend less on temporary accommodation than some of our close local authorities, but we still can't provide all our residents with the housing that they'd ideally love. It is one of the reasons why we have two wholly owned housing companies – so we have better control over the situation. Some of the Florence Fields houses will be available for private rent through an organisation contracted by our wholly owned company and will provide security of tenure and homes of a high standard.

We have yet to complete our housing needs assessment for a variety of different reason that are out of our control. However, this is the mechanism which we will use to guide our future strategy decisions around the two housing companies.

## Housing Standards

Income generated from civil penalties imposed through various regulations relating to housing standards is now almost universally designated as usable by the council for the purposes of housing enforcement only. For example, the Electrical Safety Regulations state:

### Proceeds of financial penalties

**7.—(1)** Where a local housing authority imposes a financial penalty under these Regulations, it may apply the proceeds to meet the costs and expenses incurred in, or associated with, carrying out any of *its enforcement functions in relation to the private rented sector*.

(2) Any part of any financial penalty recovered which is not to be applied in accordance with sub-paragraph (1) must be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Regulation 7(2) this basically says that if these funds aren't used, then they will go to central government.

There are limits to the amount of equipment that can be employed and purchased in these activities.

Currently our council is able to impose financial penalties in relation to the following:

- Most Housing Act 2004 offences (e.g. breach of notice, HMO management regulation or licensing).
- Failure to belong to a redress scheme (agents).
- Electrical safety standards
- Smoke alarm deficiencies
- Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES)

Additionally, Rent Repayment Orders apply to the following offences:

Having control of, or managing, an unlicensed HMO	s.72 Housing Act 2004
Having control of, or managing, an unlicensed property	s.95 Housing Act 2004
Using or threatening violence for securing entry into premises	s.6 Criminal Law Act 1977
Illegal eviction or harassment	s.1 Protection from Eviction Act 1977
Failure to comply with improvement notice	s.30 Housing Act 2004
Failure to comply with a prohibition order or an emergency prohibition order	s.32 Housing Act 2004
Breach of banning order	s.21 Housing and Planning Act 2016

At present a tenant or council can claim up to 12 months' rent (depending on the proportion of benefit paid). Again, successful in obtaining an order for the benefit element, this is ring fenced to Housing Standards enforcement work.

Applying for a rent repayment order has been problematic to date, however, our council have signed up with a national organisation - Justice for Tenants, to support our work here and we are in a pilot scheme with the DWP (which should enable us to obtain information about benefit payments for such proceedings).

Finally, it is hoped that the new Renter's Rights Act 2025 will bring in numerous additional offences/breaches for which financial penalties will be applicable - all having the same requirement for ring fencing of penalties raised for use with enforcement in the PRS. This reform will put additional burdens on our housing standards team.

## **CIC**

Everyone in CIC is now answering calls via softphones through the MITEL omni-channel software. We now have eight CIC Advisors working from home

on a regular basis and hot desks have been introduced, so creating space for the Project Management Office on the second floor.

Laptops are being built by ICT for the rest of the CIC Advisors, just five CIC advisors left to go – these had to be paused due to some implications with a Civica upgrade.

In addition to the CIC Advisors, two of the CIC Supervisors, the CIC Operations and Training Lead are also working from home one or two days per week. Since the introduction of home working, morning meetings are taking place in MR2-4, so the team can still participate in the 'huddle' together at 8:45am. Phase two of the Customer Service Transformation (CST) programme is underway, with testing and training taking place on the 'Talkative' Virtual Agent (chatbot). The chatbot has been trained in NCC services, Waste, Planning, Benefits and Council Tax.

The plan is to initially 'Go Live' with these knowledge bases and the chatbot will continue to learn from the CIC Advisor responses – the plan is for a soft launch early October 25. A business case for 'Talkative' VOICE to replace the IVR and to assist the CIC Advisors on the telephones is being drafted and the existing knowledge base that has already been built will be utilised for this. Finally, the way customers make payments over the telephone has changed, CallSecure is now being used.

### **Social Inclusion**

This summer we have seen an increased number of travellers choosing to spend longer durations in our area. We are used to relatively frequent visits, but of a short duration. This year there has been a change which the team have worked hard to deal with in a fair and equitable manner for both the travellers, and our permanent residents. We have a level of toleration when travellers stop locally as we have no transit sites that they can legitimately use. However, it has been recognised that attendance this year has been heavier. A meeting to discuss the strategy for future has been arranged for Monday 6<sup>th</sup> October.

Our council leisure staff and outside spaces staff supported the annual Pride parade and celebration this year. Alive Corn Exchange staff led by James Heron provided sound, speakers and music. And Claire Thompsett and her team provided all the support for the celebration in the Walks. Pride organising team were extremely appreciative.

### **Healthier Lives**

Prevention of illness to negate the need for acute physical care is a focus at both national level and local level. We are being expected to provide more resources to cover this and the government's 10 year plan for health also states this. Disappointingly our local hospital has been judged to be the worst performing in the country but it does show the importance of good preventative health measures. We are close to having our first report from the Institute of Health Equity which will give us a clearer picture of where there are gaps in

services and how we can better tackle obesity, alcohol consumption and smoking rates which are the wider determinants of health. There is also a national plan to improve preventative support in early years with the roll out of best Start Family Services which will use learning from Sure Start, Family Hubs and start for life approaches.

The development of a Town Council has now been moved to democratic services and I have arranged a meeting with them to proceed further.

Support and grants are jointly held between myself and business and culture. We have recently met and agreed funding for a number of community groups which provide activities or services in their areas. It was very rewarding to be able to agree to support these groups financially.

Finally, I have regular meetings with Freebridge where I question their performance and how they manage their empty homes. If you have questions for them that you'd like me to raise, please let me know.

#### **Forthcoming Activities and Developments.**

- Chamber of Commerce Climate Change Expo
- Unison anti racism charter signing
- Creating Communities event
- Police Memorial Day Service
- Planning training
- Active Norfolk
- Leisure meeting
- Youth Advisory Board
- Health and Wellbeing Partnership

#### **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
- Transformation meeting
- Beat Your Bills
- Homelessness and housing delivery briefing
- ICB at NCC
- KLAC

West Norfolk Community Transport meeting Creating Communities event Special council meeting Health and Wellbeing Board event Marmot stakeholder meeting Housing standards Leisure facilities meeting Plan for Neighbourhood conference LGR engagement events Tapping House visit Tour of major Housing Sites Lavender View topping out ceremony Ukrainian Independence day Open Road Award ceremony Safeguarding policy review Home Grown Network Launch Heritage Day Members special interest group – tackling extremism