

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

26th March 2026

COUNCILLOR SIMON RING - CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS, PROPERTY AND LEISURE

For the period 21st January-16th March 2026

Leisure

In this report I wish to start to socialize the social values of the work we do in the leisure space. Too often we simply look at the financial revenue position. This is wrong for a Council that has a much wider objective than a commercial 'profit' motive. Yes, we still should seek to try to make the finances add up, but there is much more to it than that. I hope this report helps this understanding.

The current year has marked a significant evolution in how the Borough's leisure and cultural services are delivered. Increasingly, these services are being understood not simply as operational facilities, but as critical elements of the Borough's social infrastructure.

Over the past year the service has moved towards a more integrated, community-led model. This model recognises that leisure and culture play a fundamental role in delivering the Council's broader priorities around health, wellbeing, community resilience, and social capital.

While financial sustainability remains important, it is vital that Members recognise that the Borough's leisure and cultural offer carries responsibilities that extend far beyond the purely commercial. These services are designed not simply to generate revenue but to improve the health of residents, tackle social isolation, widen access to sport and culture, and support communities across the Borough.

This distinction is particularly important in the context of wider Local Government Reorganisation discussions. The Borough's in-house model demonstrates how publicly owned leisure and culture provision can deliver measurable social outcomes alongside operational sustainability, something that purely commercial operators are rarely positioned to achieve.

Overall Participation

The scale of community engagement continues to grow.
Year to date (January 2026), leisure and cultural services have delivered:
1,251,840 attendances

This figure reflects not only traditional leisure use, but also the growing role of our sites as community hubs delivering health interventions, wellbeing programmes, cultural access, and social connection.

Expanding Social Impact Through Innovation

The most striking example of the Borough's social impact approach is the continued expansion of Kaset.

Attendance figures demonstrate extraordinary growth:

Previous full financial year: 8,717 attendances

Year to January 2026: 10,585 attendances (February and March still to be added)
Kaset has proven particularly successful in engaging hard-to-reach demographics, including younger residents and those from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The programme has created a positive environment that builds community pride, encourages participation in physical activity, provides constructive outlets for young people, and helps reduce anti-social behaviour.

This approach has been recognised externally. A recent visit from Sport England and Active Norfolk highlighted the programme's strong community focus and its alignment with the Borough Council's wider work on health inequalities, Marmot principles, and place-based health improvement.

While the social benefits are the programme's primary value, it is notable that Kaset also exceeded financial expectations, with January income 96% above budget, enabling continued subsidised access for community sessions.

Tackling Social Isolation and Supporting Active Ageing

Responding to national participation trends, the Borough introduced Pickleball at Lynnsport and other sites.

This activity has seen rapid uptake, particularly among residents aged over 50. Pickleball's appeal lies in its accessibility, offering low-impact exercise, social interaction and inclusive participation regardless of prior sporting experience. In a rural Borough where social isolation remains a challenge for many residents, particularly older residents, programmes such as this play a significant role in maintaining physical health while strengthening social connections.

Innovation in Health and Rehabilitation

The Borough continues to explore innovative approaches to health improvement through leisure facilities.

Recent initiatives include:

Virtual Hydrohex – water-based digital coaching programmes delivered in swimming pools, enabling structured exercise programmes without requiring additional staffing.#

Good Boost – an NHS-approved AI-supported rehabilitation programme delivering personalised aquatic exercise for residents with musculoskeletal conditions.

Virtual Les Mills Classes – digital group fitness sessions that increase facility utilisation while also offering lower-cost class options.

At the Oasis site in Hunstanton alone, these programmes have resulted in more than

900 additional attendances since January 2026.

Leisure Centres as Community Wellbeing Hubs

Across the Borough, leisure sites are increasingly acting as holistic wellbeing centres rather than traditional sports venues.

Successful programmes include Sit to Fit sessions designed for residents with limited mobility and Ride United adapted cycling sessions providing inclusive opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

These programmes highlight how leisure facilities contribute directly to the Council's work on health inequalities and inclusive participation.

Supporting Physical and Mental Health

Partnership working continues to expand the Borough's ability to support residents. In partnership with The Big C, specialist exercise programmes are now delivered for residents recovering from cancer treatment, led by Level 4 qualified instructors.

Mental health initiatives such as Time to Talk Football, delivered with the 8:56 Foundation, use sport to break down barriers and encourage open conversation among men about mental health challenges.

With staff trained in Mental Health First Aid, leisure centres are becoming safe and supportive spaces where residents can access both physical activity and emotional support.

Supporting Women's and Girls' Sport

Participation among women and girls remains a key priority.

A significant recent development has been the relocation of the West Norfolk Netball League to Lynnsport, providing a high-quality venue for competitive netball and strengthening opportunities for female participation in sport across the Borough.

Bringing Health Services into Leisure Facilities

At Downham Market, an unused school changing facility has been converted into a Community Meeting and Health Room.

This space now hosts NHS clinics and community groups, bringing healthcare provision directly into a leisure environment and strengthening partnership working to support preventative health.

Cultural Services and Community Engagement

The Borough's cultural venues continue to deliver significant social value.

The Corn Exchange pantomime achieved record attendance of 23,000 visitors this year, the highest in the venue's history.

This included thousands of local school children experiencing live theatre for the first time.

Accessible performances such as Autism Friendly and Dementia Friendly shows

ensure that cultural access remains inclusive for all residents.

Heritage and Education

Stories of Lynn and the Town Hall continue to strengthen their educational impact. More than 1,300 school children have visited Stories of Lynn this year to learn about the Borough's heritage, strengthening civic pride and local identity.

Workforce Development and Skills

Leisure services are also delivering social value through employment and skills development.

Teams at St James and Oasis now deliver in-house Swimming Teacher qualifications, NPLQ Lifeguard training and Pool Plant technical qualifications.

This creates local career pathways while reducing recruitment costs and building a homegrown workforce.

Future plans include expanding apprenticeship opportunities in partnership with local education providers, particularly within the cultural sector.

Strategic Investment in Lynnsport

Work is progressing on the next phase of development at Lynnsport.

This includes feasibility work for a new 8-lane 25m swimming pool to replace the ageing St James facility, a town centre wellness provision pilot to maintain equitable access, and feasibility work on expanding accessible sport provision including padel. These developments will strengthen Lynnsport's role as a regional hub for sport, health and community wellbeing.

Digital Transformation

The new leisure and culture website launched at the start of 2026, with a mobile app scheduled to launch shortly.

These platforms will enable more bookings to be made digitally, allowing staff to focus on higher-value customer interaction and community outreach.

The Value of a Publicly Led Leisure and Culture Service

It is important for Members to recognise that the achievements outlined in this report are the outcome of a deliberate policy choice by the Borough Council to deliver leisure and culture services with social outcomes at their core.

Across the country many councils have outsourced leisure provision to commercial operators. Those arrangements can deliver efficiencies but are fundamentally designed around financial performance rather than wider community impact.

By retaining a direct role in shaping the service, the Council is able to prioritise outcomes such as preventative health programmes, youth engagement, disability sport provision, tackling social isolation and ensuring equitable access across the Borough.

These outcomes reflect the broader responsibilities of local government and demonstrate the unique value of a publicly led leisure and cultural service.

Leisure and Culture: Core Public Services, Not Optional Extras

Leisure and cultural services are sometimes viewed as discretionary activities. Evidence increasingly demonstrates the opposite.

Physical inactivity, loneliness and poor mental health place significant pressure on public services. Leisure and culture play a key role in preventative health.

Every swimming lesson delivered, every adapted cycling session offered, every community fitness class attended and every cultural event experienced contributes to healthier residents, stronger communities and greater civic pride.

For many residents, leisure centres, theatres and heritage venues represent their first opportunity to connect with their community, improve their wellbeing or experience culture.

Recognising leisure and culture as core public services ensures the Council continues to prioritise community wellbeing and long-term social value.

Conclusion

The evidence from this year clearly demonstrates that when the Borough invests in innovative, inclusive leisure and cultural programmes, residents respond.

Initiatives such as Kaset, Pickleball, Hydrohex, Good Boost and Virtual Les Mills have shown how modern leisure provision can deliver both strong participation and significant social value.

As the Borough moves into the next financial year, the focus will be on scaling these successes to ensure every resident of West Norfolk has access to opportunities that support better health, improved wellbeing and stronger communities.

Crem and cemeteries

Much has happened in this part of my portfolio since I regained the responsibility. Not least has been the decision to delay the closure of the Gayton Road Cemetery. This has been as a result of a good scrutiny task group and creative thinking from our Cemeteries team. Long-term, the closure stills seems inevitable, without a change to Environment Agency rules, but this gives us time to continue and explore opportunities that have recently materialised.

Below are some operational numbers that Members may find useful, particularly the numbers of available plots within Council control in the Borough.

- Crem and Cemetery volumes Financial YTD, and a comparison against same period LY and also LY full figures below.

Service Type	25/26 (April - Feb)	24/25 (April - Feb)	24/25 (Full Year)
Cremations			
Unattended Direct	207	183	199
Attended Direct	85	82	86
Full Service (Adult)	1203	1396	1523
Baby & Child (No fee)	38	37	44
Total	1533	1698	1852
Full Body Burials			
Gayton Road	35	61	67
Hunstanton	5	6	6
Walpole St Andrew	7	3	4
Marshland St James	1	3	4
TOTAL	48	73	81
Ashes Burials			
Gayton Road	43	44	55
Hunstanton	5	6	8
Walpole St Andrew	3	1	1
Marshland St James	1	1	1
Hardwick Road	0	3	4
TOTAL	52	55	69

- National cremation stats are collected in Feb by the Cremation Society, and normally published April / May, at that point we can benchmark locally and nationally.
- Crem improvements this year:
 - New carpets and catafalque curtains in chapel
 - New carpets and furniture in waiting room
 - New carpets in chapel corridors, bearers room and vestry.
 - Total Capital spend £30k
 - RFQ issued to contactors for toilet refurb
 - RFQ closes 20 March
 - RFQ issued to contractors (today) for drainage improvements in Gardens of Remembrance.
 - RFQ closes 1 May
- Cemetery spaces:
 - Gayton Road = 48 single depth graves
 - Additional capacity created by converting graves not yet formally mapped, expected to create additional 130 spaces

(TBC – once due diligence is completed to check families wont be “split” by placing a grave in between spaces) – E&C recommendation to go to cabinet in April.

- Hunstanton = 304 double depth spaces mapped.
 - C.38 spaces allocated for Islamic burials if required in the future.
- Walpole = 131 single depth spaces mapped.
- Marshland = 35 spaces mapped (usually double depth).

Business

It has been a very busy time for the business team.

King’s Lynn Manufacturing Group has been reestablished, with the first meeting taking place on the 14th April at the College of West Anglia.

Mayor’s Business Awards took place on the 6th March, with a new Agricultural category introduced to highlight the importance of agriculture within the West Norfolk economy.

- Collison Cut Flowers Ltd – Mayor’s Business of the Year
- British Sugar – Environmental Champion
- Molly Pybus (British Sugar) – Apprentice/Trainee of the Year
- Goodwins Hall Care Home – Customer Care
- Hayley Dexis East Anglia – Established Business of the Year
- Will Charter – Business Leader of the Year
- S&L Self-Harm Distraction Kits – Business Innovation
- O.W. Wortley & Sons Ltd – Champions in Agriculture
- Ellie Yusuf (Dedicated Care East Anglia) – Employee of the Year
- Mabel Bakery – Independent Retailer
- Stephenson Smart – King’s Lynn Champion
- Majestic Cinema – Leisure & Tourism
- Charterhouse Property Solutions – Small Business of the Year

On the 10th of February the Department of Work and Pensions in conjunction with the Borough Council, held an event at the Corn Exchange for local students and the general public to promote the career and apprenticeship opportunities available in West Norfolk. In just two hours, 845 people attended the event, with 55 businesses having a stand at the event. This is a massive expansion of the event that was previously held within the job centre with around 15 businesses.

£50,000 Business Growth Fund through Norfolk County Council has been awarded to a manufacturing business within King’s Lynn, there are also other West Norfolk businesses that currently have grant award applications in progress.

We are now almost full on the Enterprise Zone completed units, and are having talks with potential buyers for plots.

Property

This report provides Members with an update on property and asset management activity, including progress with property disposals, operational property management work, and the development of the Strategic Asset Management Plan.

Capital Receipts and Property Disposals

The Council continues to progress its property disposals programme in line with the adopted Disposal Policy, supporting the generation of capital receipts and ensuring that surplus assets are identified and managed effectively.

Item	Number	Total Value
Properties sold or sales agreed since April 2025	5	£2,320,000
Properties currently on the market	7	£4,460,000
Further properties identified as surplus under the Disposal Policy	23	£3,576,000
TOTAL		£10,356,000

Strategic Property Activity

A number of strategic property matters have progressed during the reporting period, including ongoing negotiations with the landlord of a key town centre property following a change in position regarding previously agreed terms, engagement with a national leisure organisation regarding potential opportunities relating to a town centre site, and preparatory work undertaken to support continuity within the property and projects service.

Operational Property Management

- Completion of the first condition survey, with approximately 100 further properties scheduled for inspection.
- Resolution of a building safety issue at Broad Street including reinstatement of contractor works to complete a new external fire escape staircase.
- Review and updating of Gerda Boxes across the estate to ensure compliance with fire safety requirements.
- Ongoing work with the legal team regarding matters relating to the Nar Ouse Enterprise Zone.
- Actions agreed following an unexpected fire alarm activation at Kings Court.
- Resolution of fire door compliance queries at Kings Court with scheduling agreed with the manufacturer.
- Presentation of an updated property compliance report to senior leadership.

Priority Property Issues

- Statutory property compliance
- Corporate landlord restructuring

- Implementation of the Property Disposals Policy
- Delivery of capital receipts
- Property data validation
- Addressing backlog of rent reviews and lease renewals
- Letting of vacant units
- Development of the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP)

Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP)

Work is underway to produce a comprehensive Strategic Asset Management Plan which will provide a long-term framework for managing the Council's property portfolio. The plan will address a wider brief than property disposals alone and will rely on condition surveys across the estate to understand repair liabilities, forecast maintenance costs and inform decisions about whether assets should be retained, invested in or disposed of.

While the commissioning of IT equipment and software delayed the start of the survey programme, these issues have now been resolved and on-site surveys commenced this week. The Council is working hard to bring forward the Strategic Asset Management Plan and it will be presented to Cabinet once the necessary information has been gathered and analysed.

Conclusion

The Council's property disposals programme is progressing well, with over £10 million of potential capital receipts identified alongside further opportunities currently under consideration. Operational property management continues to focus on compliance, safety and effective estate management while work advances on the Strategic Asset Management Plan to guide future decision making.

Finally, I would formally like to thank Jason Birch, who is leaving us and the end of the month to take up another interim role in Newcastle. Jason has achieved giant steps forward for our Council since joining as an interim last year. His work has been invaluable in the challenge of making sense of the Commercial portfolio and this work will now be continued by our new AD for Property, Liz Macdonald, who joins us shortly from NORSE.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Many and various across the whole portfolio

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

I have met with the following officers, most of which are scheduled for further meetings in the coming months.

Duncan Hall
Kate Blakemore
Michelle Drewery
Emma Hobbs
Stuart Ashworth
Martin Chisholm
David Morton
Chris Black
Jason Birch
David Gent
Anne-Marie Ketteringham
Jemma Curtis
Connor Smalls
Robin Lewis
Tim Fitzhigham
James Grant
Tim Baldwin
Phillipa Sillis
David Whiles
Hannah Wood-Handy
Nicola Cooper
Jo Stanton

Apologies if I've missed some which I'm sure I have!