

Cabinet Members Report to Council

24th September 2026

Councillor Alistair Beales – Leader of the Council

Report to Council for the period 30th July to 23rd September 2026.

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters

I had two things in mind when sitting down to write this report. Firstly, does anyone actually read them and do they offer value to members. (I have canvassed views among Cabinet colleagues, and they are very keen to continue with reports in what has become the normal fashion. So be it). Secondly, does AI have a role in easing the burden of writing them. To that end **this report has minor tweaks but is essentially a creation of Co-Pilot** set to work mode, so it crawls over all my work data. I am quite impressed (I use ChatGPT in my personal life) and welcome views and feedback.

Introduction

This report provides Members with an update on significant activity undertaken since the last meeting of the Council and highlights the major issues currently facing the Borough Council and our communities.

The period has been dominated by three principal matters:

- The Government's decision to pause Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Norfolk.
- Continuing concerns regarding the future of services at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.
- Progress on the Council's major investment, regeneration and transformation programmes.

Alongside these matters, the Council has continued to deliver day-to-day services, support residents and businesses, and progress key strategic projects across West Norfolk.

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

The most significant strategic development has been the Government's announcement on 7 September that implementation of Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk has been paused whilst a wider review is undertaken. The Government has been clear this is a period of review and reflection rather than a cancellation of reorganisation, and Ministers have reaffirmed their commitment to both devolution and local government reform.

Council officers and Members have contributed substantial time and expertise to the Norfolk-wide programme over the last year. Whilst this review creates uncertainty, the work undertaken has not been wasted and much of the organisational readiness and transformation activity will continue to benefit this authority.

I continue to advocate strongly for the three-unitary model proposed jointly by this council and five other district councils, which I believe remains the arrangement best suited to serving communities across Norfolk.

The pause also allows us to focus renewed attention on the priorities of West Norfolk and the delivery of key local projects while we await further Government direction.

Next Steps

- Continue engagement with Ministers and sector partners.
- Ensure the Council is well placed to respond when Government announces revised arrangements.
- Maintain focus on transformation and efficiency programmes that support residents irrespective of the LGR outcome.
- Continue discussions regarding devolution opportunities for Norfolk.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Members will be aware of concerns arising from recent national media coverage regarding future NHS service configurations across Norfolk and the position of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Recent reporting has generated significant public concern regarding the future of key services, including emergency, maternity and intensive care provision.

I have held discussions with hospital representatives, council officers and Members to understand the implications of current proposals and ensure that the interests of West Norfolk residents are fully represented.

Whilst the NHS has indicated that no decisions have been taken regarding the closure of key services, it is essential that any future changes are subject to robust scrutiny and full public engagement.

The Council's longstanding position remains that West Norfolk residents require safe, accessible and high-quality acute hospital services locally.

Next Steps

- Continue engagement with QEH leadership.
- Explore enhanced scrutiny arrangements with partner authorities where appropriate.
- Advocate strongly for the retention and strengthening of critical services serving West Norfolk residents.

Guildhall and Creative Hub

The Guildhall project continues to advance well. Members recently received a detailed update confirming substantial progress in demolition, structural repairs and restoration works. Planning applications relating to external works have been submitted and major heritage restoration works are progressing on schedule. The project remains one of the most significant cultural investments in the borough's history.

Town Centre and Pride in Place

Work continues on town centre regeneration initiatives aimed at tackling vacancy rates, supporting economic activity and improving the attractiveness of King's Lynn. Various projects linked to the King's Lynn Vision and Pride in Place programme continue to move forward.

Southgates

Members will be aware of ongoing works and planning activity associated with the Southgates area and arch repairs. These works are important to preserving key heritage assets and supporting wider town centre improvements.

Next Steps

- Progress Guildhall construction programme.
- Advance town centre regeneration initiatives.
- Continue stakeholder engagement on King's Lynn investment projects.
- Maintain oversight through Member Major Projects Board and Cabinet processes.

Community Leadership and Partnership Working

I have continued to represent the Council at a wide range of partnership and leadership forums.

These have included:

- King's Lynn Neighbourhood Board.
- Health and wellbeing partnerships.
- LGR and devolution discussions.
- Major project and regeneration boards.
- Regular briefings with the Chief Executive and Deputy Leader.
- Engagement with MPs, NHS representatives and business leaders.

The King's Lynn Neighbourhood Board continues to develop opportunities around investment, health inequality reduction and community empowerment. Discussions have increasingly focused on ensuring that future investment leaves a meaningful long-term legacy for residents.

Organisational Leadership

Alongside external priorities, significant attention has been focused on supporting staff and maintaining organisational stability during a period of national uncertainty around local government reform.

Recent staff briefings have sought to provide clarity regarding LGR, organisational transformation and future workforce planning. Together with the Chief Executive, I remain committed to keeping staff informed and engaged as circumstances develop.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments

Looking Forward

The coming months will be particularly important for the Borough Council.

Key priorities include:

- Responding to Government decisions on Local Government Reorganisation.
- Protecting the interests of residents regarding QEH services.
- Delivering major regeneration projects.
- Preparing for future devolution arrangements.
- Continuing organisational transformation and service improvement.
- Maintaining financial resilience amid ongoing pressures affecting local government.