

Cabinet Members Report to Council

October 2026

Councillor Jo Rust Cabinet Member for People and Communities

For the period - 14th September to 21st October

Progress on Portfolio Matters – Creating Communities

I attended a Garden Wildlife Competition on 15th September where Cllr Devulapalli and our Mayor presented awards to the winners. There were a variety of different categories, and we got to glimpse pictures of the winning gardens. There was a strong show of the gardening community, and it highlighted that communities come in various forms.

Food for thought has restarted in Upwell. Disappointingly I've not been able to attend so far, but I know that the local councillor for the area has been. It's still in my dairy and I'm keen to go soon to see how it's brought the local community together.

I attended the opening of a new training house run by the Purfleet Trust. The house had been entirely refurbished using thrifted and second-hand items and showed exactly how people can build a beautiful home on a budget. I was genuinely moved at the thought of how this home would transform the lives of the people who would live there who have endured hardship and challenges that none of us would want to imagine.

Partnerships with Health

Like many others, I attended the AGM of the QEH in September. I had lobbied the CEO to move the event from the QEH board room to a larger venue in order that more people could attend and register their significant concerns about the review of services currently being offered at our hospital. There were at least two local MPs in attendance as well as many members of the public and councillors. Everyone who spoke expressed their concerns.

Skills

The tech team who has been contracted to deliver our Hackathon event which will follow the tech skills sessions have managed to secure a representative from Google to attend the final session in November, which is quite a coup and will encourage our young people to look out to the wider potentials available to them via tech. We're also looking to embed social value into the contracts on the back of the new hospital programme and the West Winch developments which will encompass tech skills. A work experience portal has been set up by Norfolk and Suffolk called Careers Connected which enables employers to log what they can offer to a young person looking for work experience. It also allows the employer to log all the documentation that they need to produce when offering a work placement and means that they'll only

have to do it once. A new careers strategy is being produced, and we want to ensure that it's place based, not focussed on Norwich. National Manufacturing Day was on 24th September and was extremely well attended with over 140 students visiting companies to see what they had to offer. This is about raising aspiration and increasing opportunities. We are embedding skills into our Marmot Report as good skills and employment lead to better health outcomes. I attended the annual Open Roads award ceremony where the achievements of young people were celebrated. Many of the young people would not have gained a qualification had they not attended Open Road. It's an organisation that supports young people with skills including motor mechanics and building.

Housing and Homelessness

I met with officers to hear about the amendments being proposed for our homelessness and rough sleeping strategy for 2024 – 2029. This is not a rewrite, but a refresh based on the changes that have been made due to the success of the work already undertaken. We had a requirement to revise our action plan, but it's good practice to, two years after the original launch. Our strategy had an associated action plan which was the vehicle to deliver the changes and the work needed to be done. But not all strategies did, which was a surprise to me. We continue to use lived experience to guide us. I attended a Home First Event hosted by the 5 Norfolk and Suffolk registered housing providers who make up the partnership. They set up to be able to speak to the elected mayor with one voice and while a SMA is currently uncertain, the work that they've done has put them in front if it does go ahead. We heard that the main problems with housing were related to damp and cold, overheating, overcrowding, housing insecurity and fuel poverty – of which 109,358 households experience. There were 1307 excess winter deaths due to cold housing and there are 108335 non-decent homes. Of course there are plans in place that are addressing this, such as retrofit and warm homes packages. But we still have too many people living in homes that don't meet their needs.

Housing Standards

Nothing to report

Beat Your Bills

The next ByB event will be on Thursday 29th October at Fairstead Community Centre from 1.30 until 5pm. Please let any residents that you know of who are struggling know about the session.

Community Transport

One of our officers has worked with some local transport providers to fine tune a report that he'd written about public transport and its links with better health outcomes. We have also asked the Institute of Health Equity if they would be interested in using it nationally as a template to unlocking more place funding to support better public transport. The report, titled West Norfolk Bus Service Investment explores the links between transport and health inequalities through a Marmot lens and finds that limited public transport provision can contribute towards poorer access to healthcare, reduced employment

opportunities, social isolation and wider inequalities. This is particularly the case for older people, young people, low income households and those without access to a car. The current funding system that our transport providers operate within is really challenging as we don't receive funding that recognises our rurality. The paper makes a strong case for changing the system and will be used as evidence for exploration of other options. I attended a regular West Norfolk Community Transport meeting where we heard of the work ongoing to manage finances during a time when fuel costs are high and maintenance costs ongoing. It was good to learn that passenger numbers are up and that the DFT have provided bus funding to support the increased fuel costs.

Assets of Community Value and Bus Shelters

Bus shelters are now being replaced on Fairstead estate, along Gayton and Gaywood road and Wootton Road. I took a look at one on Winston Churchill Drive and could see how much better the new ones are and how much the community value having them. Decent bus shelters encourage use of public transport.

Healthier Lives strategy

I attended the opening of the Accommodation with Care building in Hunstanton and had a tour around the facility - Lavender View. It really is a beautiful place and will enable older people to live healthier and longer lives independently while being able to access the care that they need.

Youth

I met with the Youth Advisory Board team and heard about the introduction of an open access youth group moving into Gaywood Community Centre for young people ages 11-16. There'll be a range of activities on offer as well as a space for them to just chill. It's a 14-month programme with the current group having run since April. This will support a different cohort of young people than those who usually attend YAB meetings.

Safeguarding

I attended one of the regular Health and Wellbeing Board meetings at NCC (where I was appointed Vice Chair of the board). We had reports from both Adults and Children's Services on their safeguarding processes and whether adequate safeguarding has been achieved. I raised several concerns about the children's report, one of which was the failure to fully refer to the needs of looked after children. I was given reassurance that safeguarding for looked after children was extensively covered in a separate report.

I attended an online event which focussed on Adult Social Care hosted by Local Government East and it was revealed that safeguarding adults didn't come out well and there was a need to promote wellbeing and prevent abuse and neglect. We heard that safeguarding should always come first and that nothing should take precedent over the safety of people.

Customer relations and CIC

The CIC have taken 43,993 calls to date this year and the average answer time was 3 minutes 17 seconds. When compared to some of our

neighbouring authorities this is outstanding. One, which I won't name took 10 minutes! The team undertake mystery shoppers work, where they call another authority to see how long they must wait (it's a nationwide programme) some of our staff doing this test have waited 58 minutes and another 71 minutes. We know that 51% of calls that our abandoned to our team are over 9 minutes, so we can ascertain that residents are willing to wait a certain amount of time, then they give up. Chats are answered within 20 seconds, and our customer satisfaction rate remains at around 80%. The team continue to deliver satisfaction to our residents when they call and I thanked them for the work they do and the way in which they deliver it.

Health and Wellbeing

As said previously, I have been appointed as the vice chair of the health and wellbeing board at Norfolk County and I'm keen to bring about closer scrutiny of the decisions being made. We currently merely rubber stamp presentations and reports, but due to changes in legislation and integration of health and care, wellbeing boards have a growing responsibility. The importance of the Health Overview and Scrutiny committees in scrutinizing decision is first and foremost, they have the ability to refer decision made by health trusts to the secretary of state for health. But the H&WB Boards have responsibility for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy which should inform the development of the joint commissioning arrangement (Sect 75 of the National Health Service Act 2006) in the place and the coordination of the NHS and Local Authorities commissioning including the Better Care Fund plan and Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment. So a lot to place on the shoulders of elected members, some of whom have no experience, so when one of these documents lands on the desk, might not be clear what needs to be included. As we are a statutory forum for real strategic oversight it's important that those who attend the board know what they're faced with. As such I have started attending a Communities of Practice group which I hope will help educate me. Our Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board have drafted a strategy to support men's health even though there is no legal requirement to have one. This is showing how Norfolk is leading the way. The data obscures men's health inequalities and there was a focus on behaviours and attitudes that were barriers to men accessing the healthcare that they needed, whether physical or mental. Men are still told to "man up" toxic masculinity impacts negatively on men and women and we need to work to overcome it; The strategy will include a "father pathway" and support father inclusive practice. Success will be defined by behaviour change which will normalise health help seeking behaviours.

I met with officers commissioned by the ICB who are tasked with looking at how they can keep people who suffer from ill health, in the workplace. It sounded similar to me to the Connect to Work group, but I was told that while there was overlap, they did different things. I'll wait and see before I pronounce a judgement. Connect to work are meant to be mainly for people who are already off work sick or 15% who're in employment. Whereas this group will work with all groups who promote work organisations to the employers. They'll bring together an "eco system" of work, health and skills to

support and navigate through a system to find what skills they have that can be used elsewhere. The group contributed towards the Get Norfolk Working Strategy. I fully support anything that can help people enter the world of work, move them to a better workplace for their health or help them retrain for different employment because we know that good jobs with good pay and job security improve health outcomes. Employment is one of the wider determinants of health. But I do have concerns when different but similar group are set up that could duplicate work and dilute the impact. I went to the Institute of Health Equity annual conference and gained valuable insight into what other areas are offering to help reduce health inequalities and felt pride that our borough, while small and facing challenges around our geographical spread, are delivering so many services and working closely with partner agencies to improve the health of the people we represent. There was a focus around employment as health creates wealth and wealth creates health. Money helps us to have the headspace to make better choices while industry pushes us towards bad choices – like smoking, alcohol, fast food. Good work provides income, security and the control needed for a healthy standard of living. Healthy work is a national growth opportunity, but we've never had a workplace health system. As you can imagine, the Marmot principles around employment and good work and a healthy standard of living were a frequent topic.

I attended a mental health summit in Norwich with a focus around the mental health of young people. Last year I made a commitment to talk about men's mental health, which I've made good on. This year I committed to listen to the voice of young people when talking about their mental health. The following day I met with MIND who are offering a skills for life course for young people aged between 14 and 25. The purpose is to promote positive mental health and emotional wellbeing, build confidence and self-esteem, strengthen resilience and coping strategies, develop practical life and employability skills and to support young people to feel more hopeful, prepared and connected. The programme looks to support those who may experience stress, anxiety or low confidence, who are navigating transitions (for example, exams, leaving education or entering work) who face social, academic or family pressures and who are less likely to engage with traditional mental health services. So, if you have a group near you that might find this programme helpful, please contact Stewart Oddie at MIND on stewart.oddie@norfolkandwaveneymind.org.uk. He'd be happy to hear from you

We held our regular health and wellbeing partnership meeting where we received a presentation from Lorna from Connect to Work. CtW is delivered by Working Well Norfolk.