

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

3 December 2020

COUNCILLOR STUART DARK MBE - CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

For the period 15th October 2020 to 23rd November 2020

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Following Full Council on the 15th October 2020 the Leader communicated I was joining his Cabinet as the Portfolio lead for Environmental Services and Public Protection, with Democratic Services circulating a list to members of the functions and teams I became responsible for.

This is my first report to Full Council following that appointment.

I have commenced and am continuing a series of meetings with relevant senior staff and the Chief Executive to brief myself in on Department's/Team's functions, challenges, performance, and budgets.

This has, by the time of this Full Council meeting, included 'virtual meetings' with officers leading the Borough's collection services and Environmental Health.

However, with the Borough's response to Covid-19 being one of my areas of responsibility and with a rising national, regional and local infection rate and the announcement of a 4 week national 'circuit breaker' lockdown at the end of October with associated new restrictions, it has been both right and necessary that this serious challenge has been my main focus in the short period I have been in post, in terms of protecting the residents of West Norfolk and supporting our brilliant but affected businesses and I thank all members for the support they have given me in this.

To this end, I have worked with the Chief Executive, senior council officers and Cabinet colleagues to ensure core Council services continue to be delivered effectively, new priorities and issues are addressed as part of the tiered multi-agency response (national, regional and local) and clear guidance and support is offered.

I have, with the assistance of officers, reinstated weekly updates to all Borough Councillors on key Borough Covid-19 developments and activities, along with links to useful resources/data and ensured these have been circulated to all Parish and Town Council contacts (their current 'remote working' contacts checked by Dem. Services to ensure delivery) for their

information and passing on. These regular updates have been complimented by specific contact as and when a significant issue/development occurs.

I have made myself readily available to Councillors and others with specific questions, concerns or feedback following this regular sharing of information.

I therefore appreciate that most of which follows is already known to fellow Councillors and whilst I apologise to them for having to re-read it in summary here, I am mindful this is a public document report to Full Council and some members of the public may be reading of this activity for the first time....

Public awareness and support – With the guidance changing and local infection rates significantly on the increase as we went in to national ‘lockdown’ it was important to increase public understanding of the new safeguards and to gain high levels of awareness/support and to get this activity underway promptly and continue to reinforce it during the 4 weeks to have maximum impact on behaviours, local infection rates, illnesses and hospitalisations and what ‘tier’ we as a region might emerge into. This communication plan included holding an early, widely reported, press conference with Norfolk’s Director of Public Health, the region’s MP, the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council and follow up radio interview; co-ordinated messaging across all social media platforms throughout the entire 4 week period and more recently (following my and Officers being on a virtual meeting with NCC and West Norfolk’s school heads) the provision of support materials/banners etc for schools.

Public reassurance and ‘open’ business support – The Council has updated its site with the new guidance for businesses and proactively engaged or responded to businesses allowed to remain open or adapting to ‘delivery’ or ‘click and collect’. A complimentary tiered physical approach has been put in place focussed initially on support and awareness raising, with enforcement only as a last resort, utilising a combination of SIA accredited ‘Covid Marshalls’, Council EHO Officers, Council Officers re-deployed from other duties, Alive Leisure staff who would have otherwise not been occupied and more recently the very welcome addition of 15 ‘uniform services’ course students from the College of West Anglia. These teams have operated in all the high footfall shopping areas to provide support and a reassuring presence including Downham Market, Kings Lynn Town Centre and Hunstanton and have deployed to other specific locations based on request or identified need.

As in the previous ‘lockdown’ the Council has tried to support smaller retailers, by promoting ‘shop local’ on its social media outputs and having LILY host a directory of local businesses still open and the goods and services they provide. This facility has been cascaded out to Councillors, Town and Parish councils to increase its usage.

Support to businesses required to ‘close’ or suffering limitations to trading- The Council has moved promptly to set up the process for efficiently paying out the Business Support Grant money provided by central government and for businesses to register interest for the imminent discretionary grant. This

process will be being administered by the same team which paid out grants of just under £40M to c.3000 West Norfolk businesses during the first 'lockdown' incorporating the experience and best practice gained. As with all other aspects of its Covid-19 activity, the Council is being proactive here to ensure as many eligible businesses are aware of these grants as possible and signposting clearly how to access them.

Testing facilities – For several weeks officers have been working closely with public health and partners to identify and make ready a static Covid-19 Testing Site for West Norfolk. This is now completed and operational, increasing the local region's testing capability significantly.

Supporting the vulnerable – Norfolk County Council Adults and Children's Services alongside Public Health retain primacy for supporting the Care sector and our Schools. The Borough Council continues to assist these agencies wherever it can and sits with them on regular Prioritisation, Tasking and Co-ordination meetings. One such area where the council provides support is through Lily offering assistance and befriending to those isolated or in need.

The Council does have specific responsibility with regard to supporting the homeless, falling under Cllr Lawrence's Cabinet Portfolio. I am aware that significant work has been undertaken here and that this will be covered by his report.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

I consider there are two main areas of activity in my portfolio over the coming weeks:

Preparing with Officers and partner agencies Covid-19 plans, activities and messages to support public safety and businesses and delivering these as we emerge from the national lockdown and out in to a tiered response over December and the holiday period. This will necessarily be fast-paced and according to prevailing guidance and circumstances. Given the very welcome news re potential vaccines and their possible rollout this may well include also supporting Public Health and partners with organising/delivering this key work.

Continuing to engage and drive other areas of my new portfolio.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

Regular and irregular meetings with the Chief Executive, Communications Officers, relevant responsible Council Officers and partners with regard to the Borough's Covid-19 response.

Separate Meetings with Collection Services and EHO managerial staff.

Scheduled meetings associated with Cabinet.