

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

25 JANUARY 2022

STUART DARK MBE – CHAIR OF CABINET AND LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

For the period 3 December 2021 – 25 January 2022

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Covid 19/Omicron

Councillors will be aware that the Omicron variant and high infection rates caused particular concern nationally in the run up to Christmas and over New Year. Thankfully the peaking figures did not translate into similar high-levels of hospitalisations, due to a combination of the success of the vaccination programme and ‘booster’ drive and a seemingly weaker strain with less severe symptoms. Officers have been working to support the NHS re vaccination/booster take up and to facilitate access to vaccination centres and were on standby to assist re hospital pressures/staff absences if needed.

Due to the delay between my writing this report, its publication and my speaking to it at full council it is likely any figures quoted will become inaccurate. To remedy this, I will provide the latest figures verbally at our next meeting.

Three new grants have just been approved to help businesses affected by the downturn Omicron caused to expected business over the financially important holiday season and these will all be in operation by our meeting. These are in addition to the £70M plus that has already been paid out during Covid to support local businesses in West Norfolk by the Revenues and Benefits Team.

QEH

It was encouraging to hear that several of the region’s MPs met with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in this period to press the case for a new QEH and that Mr Javid was reportedly personally aware of the needs of the hospital, the RAAC situation, formal active support for the bid by both our Council and NCC and the strong public support for the bid including the 15K plus signature petition. I and officers remain in contact with the hospital’s leadership team re anything we can do to assist them or magnify their message as we lead up to the NHS funding announcements.

MMPB

I chaired and welcomed members to the first meeting of the reconstituted Member Major Projects Board during this period. The members of this Board (consisting of representatives from across Council) will imminently be receiving structured presentations on all current major projects by officers to bring a consistency of knowledge and allow informed debate and Q and A’s at its future regular meetings.

Council Tax Relief (CTR)

During this period I was personally pleased to chair a Cabinet which recommended, at its

own volition, a significant 9% increase to the Council Tax Relief applicable to nearly two thousand of the Borough's residents on the lowest incomes.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Finalisation of the proposed budget for 2022/2023

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

In addition to chairing and attending numerous routine and policy development meetings with Cabinet colleagues, the Senior Leadership Team and external partners over this period, Council may be interested in the fact I have:

Chaired a special cabinet with regard to approving Council's Insurance

Chaired the first meeting of the reconstituted Member Major Projects Board

Chaired a meeting with Parish Councils with regard to the Woottons and Knights Hill

Attended Norfolk Leaders Board (with Leaders of other Councils)

Attended Norfolk Covid Engagement Board (multi-partner re Omicron/Covid)

Attended the Norfolk Coastal Partnership Meeting (re the AONB area)

Attended the Members presentation upon the MUCH - part of the Towns Fund projects

Met with the Environment Agency re progressing operational matters

Met with Festival Too

Met with the leadership of the Citizens Advice Bureau

Met with Unison and staff representatives (meet every six weeks)

Attended webinars with the District Councils Network (DCN) re 'post Cop26' and with the Secretary of State for DLUHC re Omicron and business support

Took the 'on call' Cabinet support role over the Christmas Period

Over the coming reporting period, due to the annual cycle of Council, I will be primarily engaged in meetings finalising the proposed budget (2022/23) with Cabinet colleagues and officers along with overseeing the Covid response, policy and project development and the routine business of council/Cabinet.