

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

23 FEBRUARY 2022

COUNCILLOR STUART DARK MBE - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

For the period 26th January 2022 – 23 February 2022

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

COVID 19- As is now customary, I will be providing a verbal update to Councillors on the very latest figures and situation at our meeting. I would like in this report to draw readers attention to the fact that there are currently two grants open 'The Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant' and the 'Additional Restrictions Grant' both for businesses affected in the run up to Christmas and New Year. These are due to close on the 18th March (with all payments scheduled to be paid by the end of March). These latest grants are on top of the c. £75M already paid out to support great local businesses by the Council's Revenue and Benefits Team since the start of the pandemic.

QEH Hospital – It is understood that a decision on whether the QEH new hospital bid has successfully made the 'long list' will be coming out fairly soon. It has been heartening to hear the QEH Management directly thanking this council for its extensive work in magnifying the bid throughout the process and I hope this and the lobbying of the MP, County and members of the public combine to achieve the result we all hope for.

County Deal – Councillors will have seen in the media that Norfolk is one of several regions that has been recently highlighted as a front-runner for conversations with central government around the potential for 'Levelling Up'/Devolved Powers'. The paper on this has just been published and is in excess of 350 pages long. The Norfolk Leaders (all Districts and NCC) have agreed to jointly enter into initial constructive talks with central government to better understand what is actually on offer and an officer led briefing is being arranged asap for all Councillors on the contents of the paper. In order to reassure, I draw Councillors attention to my previously made comments in the media that whilst tentatively welcoming a conversation re more powers and funding into Norfolk, my firm starting point is the details of any emerging 'deal' will have to work explicitly for the residents of West Norfolk and this Council (through its formal Committees, Cabinet and Full Council meeting structure) as well as all, or any other part of Norfolk.

Appointment of full-time Assistant Director Legal Services and Monitoring Officer – I am pleased to report to Council that I chaired a meeting of the Appointments Panel during this period which selected a strong candidate in to our newly created Full-time Assistant Director Legal Services and Monitoring Officer post, agreed as a necessity by Councillors. I'd like to publicly acknowledge the help of Councillors Joyce, Rust, Devereaux and Middleton who sat on the panel alongside me and actively contributed to this outcome.

Budget – Whilst the significant updating on this matter will be in Councillor Dickinson's

report, I as the Leader of Cabinet and other Cabinet members have been involved in its formulation at this crucial time in its progress.

(Members Major Project Board Meeting) MMPB – As agreed at the first meeting I chaired of the MMPB a series of officer led presentations have taken place in this period to bring all members of this important board up to a similar, current level of understanding to enable informed questions and debate in upcoming meetings. These presentations were opened up to all Councillors not on the board and were also recorded for those not able to attend.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Continuing focus on Budgetary Process up to Full Council, Cabinet Forward Work Plan, leading or helping in formulation of emerging policy, initiatives and papers.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

In addition to those meetings mentioned above and my regular meetings with Cabinet, Officers and other groups Leadership, I have during this period, attended;

Norfolk Public Sectors Leaders Board

Covid 19 Engagement Meeting

Water Quality Co-ordination Meeting with MP, EA, Anglian Water and Officers

Joint Panel meeting on the Budget

Meeting on IDB estimates

Meeting to progress the impending 'Legal Services Review' paper coming forward

It was my pleasure to attend both the recent opening of 'The Mart' and 'Hunstanton's Rainbow Park' and see both these events which give pleasure to many opening back up.

I also joined many Councillors and Officers (past and present) to pay our respects at the funeral of Honorary Alderman Ian Stockwell, a widely and highly regarded ex-Leader of this Council.