

## **CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL**

### **COUNCILLOR STUART DARK – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, CHAIR OF CABINET**

For the period 14<sup>th</sup> October – 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022

#### **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.**

##### **QEH**

We remain committed to supporting and magnifying the Hospital Leadership's vital bid for a new, modern, safe QEH and remain in regular, close contact. Councillors will be aware from previous updates by both the QEH and myself of work in this regard. By the time of this meeting a further official letter will have gone in to the relevant Minister as a further reminder at a potential critical stage in the process, if one needed, of the urgent need for a safe, modern, new hospital, community concern and support.

During this period, I was honoured and humbled to attend the QEH Hospital staff awards night, with the Chief Exec and Councillors from across this chamber – this starkly highlighted the current gap between the brilliant staff and care given and the poor infrastructure.

##### **Ukrainian refugees**

We as a Council and across this chamber, remain totally committed to supporting those who have fled the awful, unjustifiable war in Ukraine and come to West Norfolk. Councillors will be aware from previous briefings of the significant activity undertaken to date. The Support centre in Kings Court (this Council's Head Office) remains open and we are currently supporting c.200 adult Ukrainian refugees across our Borough, but this figure is much higher when accompanying children are included. The centre has gained a well-deserved brilliant reputation and continues to act as a hub for connecting to key services and support and 'community' builder/connector for its users. Staffing continues to comprise of staff from the Hanseatic Union NGO commissioned very early on by this council to assist, council staff including the LILY and Housing Teams and partners including DWP. What is touching is several early Ukrainian users of the service and those in our community of Ukrainian origin are now also helping others within it with interpretation and other assistance. By the time of our council meeting King's Lynn's 'Christmas Lights Switch on' event will have taken place. This year, Ukrainian children now resident in the Borough will have sung Christmas carols in Ukrainian to the assembled crowd as a 'thank you' and the lights will have been switched on by representatives for Ukrainian refugee families and those in our community who are hosting them – a clear message of unity and compassion at a time when we turn to Christmas thoughts of peace, hope, families and children.

### **Armed Forces Covenant and Remembrance Sunday**

I know many councillors, like myself, participated in or attended Remembrance events across our Borough during this period and I for one was proud of how our community continues to turn out in force and respectfully mark this important national occasion. Many volunteers, Town and Parish Councillors, council staff and police officers work hard to make these events go so well and I gratefully thank them here.

On a connected note, I was proud to accept as this Council's Leader and 'Armed Forces Covenant' Member champion an award for re-validation of our 'Silver Award' at a regional (Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridge) ceremony during this reporting period. This award recognises this Council's commitment to being a proactive supporter/employer of ex-service personnel and reservists and I pay tribute to the HR staff, managers and personnel who helped us achieve the high assessed standards necessary. We have an aspiration to use this as a springboard towards achieving the 'Gold standard' and will be working with Armed Forces support to achieve this in the future.

### **Fireworks night and events**

During this period this Council put on 'Fawkes in the Walks' once more, an event described on Look East as 'one of the largest free fireworks events in the region'. This free event, at a time when many councils across the UK cancelled theirs due to fears of increasing costs, gave c.15,000 attending residents of all ages (c.1/10th of West Norfolk's population) a very good, safe, fireworks night. This is one of the largest events the Council's staff put on and follows on from numerous successes this extraordinary year including hosting, supporting and often financially assisting; Her late Majesty's Platinum Jubilee Celebrations, regular events throughout the Summer and events respectfully marking Her late Majesty's passing and accession of the new King. By the time this report reaches the Council meeting it is intended for the same staff will have also delivered the 'Christmas lights' and related free switch on event. I thank them for this excellent work here.

### **Cost of living**

This council remains acutely aware of the genuine concern and difficulties faced re the current economic climate. Despite rising cost pressures on the Council itself and services we are creating free or reduced cost activities to help children and families, administering and paying out substantial 'fuel bill' support on behalf of central government, creating our own additional hardship support schemes or initiatives targeted towards the vulnerable, or 'topping up' schemes coming online from partners (such as the recent substantial funding given by us to supplement NCC's and Norfolk CAF scheme to fund grass-roots community 'hotspots') to make them far greater here. A 'headline' section has now been created on the Council's webpage to signpost users to available help and support and plans are being put in place to co-ordinate messages and promote available help across partners such as NCC, Town and Parish Councils. Focussed work has already commenced with officers to develop further assistance, including contacting local partners who we have previously funded or have identifiable community support roles to gauge

increased demand or emerging issues so that these can be addressed promptly with impactful support.

Connected to this, we know as a responsible employer in the public sector, that we also have a clear duty to support our staff who are the backbone of what we do – we deliver services through people to people. We have therefore moved quickly and constructively with Officers and the Trade Association representatives and mindful of the direction of the national pay dialogue to bring a settlement paper forward that reflects the current cost of living pressure on our staff and those in our associated companies. This is on the Agenda for the Council this paper is coming to.

### **Appointment of new Executive Director**

I am pleased to report that a selection process has concluded to recruit a new Executive Director – Place and a very good appointment made. I recognise the contribution and thank the Councillors from all groups who sat on this. This is clearly a key position going forward given the ambition of the council and the multi-million pound regeneration and improvement projects either already underway or potentially about to land (if submitted bids such as the 'Levelling Up' projects are agreed by government). In the meantime, our excellent 'Interim' appointment will continue to add value in this space.

Finally, as this paper is due to be presented at our final Full Council of 2022 a historic, exceptional and demanding year on so many levels, I will take this opportunity as Leader to wish all my fellow Councillors a happy, restful holiday season amongst family and friends.

## **2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.**

A briefing is being arranged for Councillors with regard to the current position of a 'County Deal' for Norfolk. Whilst I and fellow district Leaders have been formally reassured that the sovereignty and dignity of Borough Councils will remain and this is 'top-down' devolvement of central government powers and funding to the county – ie. not a Unitary/re-structuring issue, it is felt an opportunity to better understand where the process is currently at and its emerging detail would be beneficial.

We await outcomes of the QEH bid and both LUF bids (County for the Southgates and our Council's re the Oasis replacement) and will communicate these as soon as known.

## **3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled**

In addition to attending numerous usual formal meetings, development and review meetings with officers and cabinet colleagues, meetings with opposition group leaders and members, I have during this period also attended (in no particular order) the following meetings of potential interest to members;

Meeting with the KL Civic Society

Site visit of the Purfleet Trust (with Councillor Sandell)

The LEP

Kings Lynn Internal Drainage Board

Strategic Meeting with Freebridge Housing

Liaison meeting with the Trustees of the Kings Lynn 'Nightshelter'

Liaison meetings with both Hunstanton and Downham Market Town Council's

The Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Liaison meeting