



Council
Wednesday, 31st January, 2024 at 5.00 pm
in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, Saturday Market
Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

Reports marked to follow on the Agenda and/or Supplementary Documents

1. **CABINET MEMBERS REPORTS - Councillor Rust updated report**
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CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

31st January 2024

COUNCILLOR – JO RUST CABINET MEMBER FOR – PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

For the period November 9th – January 25th 2024

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters. –

Housing register

1484 live applications

3 Emergency

216 High

487 Medium

778 Low

102 new or change in circumstances forms received - the application forms were unavailable over the Christmas period whilst there were no staff available to assist applicants which explains the lower number

Housing Options

99 applicants given housing advice, 57 new homeless declarations and/or are ongoing investigations.

Lets advised - 16

I attended my first Internal Drainage Board (IDB) meeting on Friday 10th November at Pierpoint House (There are a number of ways that this is spelt, which I commented on). I found it really interesting and useful. As ever, with any of the meeting that I attend, I am happy to provide a photo copy of the notes that I took while present. I attended my second meeting on the 19th of January. If anyone is interested, as the information we hear does affect our communities and it certainly effects the amount of council tax we have left to spend, Id be happy to provide further information. You might be surprised to know that for every £1 we collect in Council tax, 43 pence of that goes to the IDBs.

Later that day I visited Regis House and met a few of the Care and Repair Team. Much like the other teams in my portfolio they provide an absolutely vital service, which is very often under the radar and overlooked. I was

incredibly impressed with what I heard and I believe that our borough really benefits from the services that are available. These services all enable our more elderly or vulnerable residents to be able to live independently and healthily, for longer. The intention and plans as we move forward are that local councils such as ours, take steps to ensure that local residents don't need to go into hospital. There is a lot of work that needs to take place in order for this to happen, and the financial burden is increasingly being placed on local government. Sadly, with no significant additional extra funding to support our delivery of these services.

I continue to have regular meetings with the Freebridge Chief Exec and I raise concerns with them about the number of empty properties that there are and the time that it's taking to turn these around and make them available for our residents to bid on. We met on Friday 10th November and then again on Friday 12th January. We also had a councillor briefing from the CEO and the Director of Operations on Thursday 18th January. At this briefing all councillors were told of the strategic plans that the organisation has and how they plan to release 55 homes back for bidding by the end of March and a further 25 in April. We were advised that 86% of Freebridge homes have had a stick conditions survey completed. It's important that the organisation has an accurate picture of the state of the properties that they maintain. This will also affect their dispersal strategy. Like many of you I'm contacted by residents who are in need to social housing and we're very aware of the impact that a lack of housing has on our communities. However, I have been reassured that the plans are on track to turn around the empty homes and the first step to this was permission from the board to obtain contractor support. Freebridge have priorities over their properties, the first is over safety, ensuring the homes residents live in are safe to do so. The second is to deal with the damp and mould problems, then to turn around the voids and then to make those repairs our residents are in need of. It's important for us to remember that 270 homes were brought back in the year to date. I attended a meet and greet with some of the Board Members of Freebridge on the 13th November. It was good to meet residents who were giving up their time to sit on the board and play a part in the decision making process.

I attended the first Homelessness and Housing delivery sub group meeting, which has not met since the May local elections. I previously sat on this sub group as a member. I will now attend as the portfolio holder with responsibility for homeless and housing standards.

On the 15th November I attended the AGM of Homestart, a community network of trained volunteers and expert support in helping families with young children. This group won an award from King Charles for the amazing volunteer work that they do. It was an honour and a privilege to meet some of the volunteers and staff. There are 185 years of combined experience in the current Norfolk Homestart staff team. They gained 77 new volunteers in 2022/23 and in Norfolk, Homestart has had a presence since 1986. Many of the organisations in our borough are reliant on the support of volunteers. In our corporate strategy we set out our vision for recognising and supporting the role that volunteers play. If anyone has time to fill and an interest in

supporting families who are in need, then I'd urge them to contact Homestart with a view to becoming a volunteer.

On November 14th I meet with our energy efficiency officer who continues to promote the energy efficiency schemes that area available to residents who meet the criteria – earning less than £31,000 a year, having a health condition or long term illness, and being in receipt of certain social security payments. If you have a resident that you think might be eligible, please do contact Jacob. He has recently made councillors aware that the team are doing some joint work with the ICB in identifying residents who would be eligible due to having a health condition which is adversely affected as a result of living in a cold home. The ICB will provide the team with a list of individuals, their data will be cross checked and then the team will make contact with the residents with a view to beginning the application process for ECO flex (Energy Company Obligation Flexible Eligibility). It's important for us to remember that while we have the benefit of an officer to help our residents access these schemes, the schemes themselves are not ours and once the declaration has been issued, technically our involvement ends. However, the team do check in on the progress of the works being undertaken and check the condition of the property once the work has been completed. As a result of the Housing Standards Teams work, our borough has saved 254 tonnes of CO2. Impressive I hope you will agree. So there are more than just one benefit to having your home well insulated.

The work that the Health and Wellbeing partnership does is progressing well, with a teams meeting on Thursday 16th November and a face to face meeting on 11th January. We had presentations from several of our partner organisation about the success of earlier funding of projects such as the YMCA SOS bus, which helps to reduce pressures on the ambulance service and to provide a variety of people from different demographics with the support that they need, when they need it. We discussed the accessible play equipment which we have applied for funding for and will be located in the Walks and allow children with a disability to play with their friends in a way that there are barriers to currently We were able to agree to some funding to go to groups which provide service that meet our local needs to keep people healthy and mentally strong and so continue to participate in our communities and contribute positively to society. The impact of this on our communities shouldn't be underestimated. It is part of the work that our council is expected to undertake. We received reports on the work funded by the covid recovery grant. 12 projects were funded including the Community Alcohol Partnership, Lily, the Hanseatic Union among some. Over 5000 people were supported. This funding was a one off and it made a huge difference to the lives of people. Officers were commended for the work that they did. We also heard about the work being undertaken by Public Health Their reach is much further than many imagine and they can do social prescribing which also helps and supports us to improve the health and wellbeing of the people in Norfolk and reduce the health inequalities, with a focus on prevention. It costs us far more once a person is in any kind of system, than it does to help stop them entering it in the first place. On November 24th I attended a meeting to try to look at ways that our health and wellbeing partnership could work more closely with

the Place Board. These terms are new to many of us and we aren't all familiar with what they actually mean. But the place Board are more responsible for the health aspect - those who need hospital treatment, while the H&WB P take steps to avoid people needing to go into hospital. But there is overlap and we want to work more collegiately to overcome any potential duplication.

On November 17th I attended a United for Warm Homes event, where I was able to give a flavour of the work that our Energy Efficiency Team are undertaking and provide information about the various schemes available. It was a well attended event and I hope that some of you were contacted by your residents as a result.

On 28th November I took part in some online training about Community led Housing. This initiative sees members of a local community lead, develop and drive forward local housing developments in a way which suits their community. It allows housing to be built or brought back into use by local people. It helps to build community cohesion, leading to a lasting legacy and better, higher quality housing stock. It also provides affordable properties for local people. It is an initiative that I've been speaking about with our officers for a little while and one which I am keen to see come to fruition in a suitable location. Nothing is planned at the moment, but I look forward to being able to announce a positive move forward about this while holding this portfolio.

I, along with my fellow cabinet member Simon Ring and Cllr Henegan, attended a Friends of the Walks meeting on at the end of November with a view to re-establishing the group of volunteers who looked after the walks alongside our amazing open spaces team. I think we can all agree that the work the teams does ensures our central park and play area is a jewel in our crown. It's beautiful and a really well used area. But previously volunteers had added value to that work. Sadly covid saw us lose many volunteers but there is a move to get them up and running again. The meeting was well attended and there is another meeting planned to move forward with the group. This again contributes towards our corporate plan, and as the portfolio holder for people and communities, I look forward to seeing this section of our community grow and thrive.

I attended alongside Cllr Ring, a Classical Music Rocks events at Greyfriars school on December 5th. The pupils were treated to a recital of The Nutcracker by an amazing flautist and pianist. They really brought it to life and the children were enthralled and captivated. They actively participated in the event and it was a joy to see and to join in with. I hope that CMR gets the local support it deserves as it ensures that classical music is accessible to all and not just the preserve of an elite few. They have scheduled a number of shows, one of which is Alice in Wonderland on July 5th. 3 artists will narrate the magical story whilst playing a dazzling range of exciting pieces. There are spaces still available and id urge you to make contact with CMR and book tickets.

On 6th December I spoke on Radio Norfolk about the closure of the Norfolk Street Vape Shop and the dangers posed to young people by the use of illegal vapes. While this might appear to some to be a victimless crime, the sale of illegal vapes is all a part of an organised crime group. The substances used in the vapes can be incredibly harmful and they are not manufactured in a legal way. The OCG can also involve people trafficking, money laundering to name but two linked matters. These groups are dangerous to the health and well being of our community. If you are worried that such things are going on in your community, please speak to CSNN.

I visited the Open Road on December 12th and learnt about the amazing work they're doing to help students who have been left behind by mainstream education. They offer a safe place to learn that is fun and exciting. I saw for myself how the young people in attendance were actively engaged in the learning, which was different to that offered in schools. The organization also provides volunteering opportunities. The young people who attend learn the value of hard work and where their application, positive attitude and teamwork are acknowledged and rewarded. Ultimately the students gain industry recognized qualifications as opposed to dropping out, which might have been the result had they stayed in mainstream education.

I attended a Place Partner Inception Meeting on 14th December. I have found that often the titles of meetings don't accurately reflect what they mean! In this case, Sports England want to extend the work that they are doing and our area will be one of the new "Places" that they do it in. It will aim to increase the activity that people here do, decrease the activity, it wants to tackle inequality and improve children's experiences. I know some will say that we've had initiatives like this before, and I don't disagree, but at this moment in time we need all the help that we can get to make things better for our residents, many of whom are really struggling. This will be a longer term initiative not just a single year of funding and then it stops. They want to empower people to lead, which will fit in well with the Community Led Housing. Sports England will offer leadership support to help develop a local leader and for elected politicians so that they understand the role that they will play. As such I will be attending some training on 28th and 29th February. I look forward to letting you know what I gained from the sessions.

I attended a Beat the Bills session in Downham market on 19th December. Despite the horrible weather that stopped many people from venturing out that day, there were still lots of people in attendance who really benefitted from the information that they gained, finding out the social security entitlements that they may not have been claiming and ways to cut their heating bills. A huge thank you to all the officers who attended and who worked really hard to make it such a success. There was another BtB event on 23rd January and well over 100 people attended. I had planned to attend but was then diverted to an emergency homelessness and temporary accommodation summit in Westminster. If you have a Beat the Bills event taking place in your ward, I'd urge you to attend and to encourage your residents to do the same.

I'm a proud member of our local political community and as such, enjoyed

taking part in our social event on 18th January at Titash in Downham Market. The food was amazing and the company even better. Thanks to Sandra for doing the leg work and to the others who made it such an enjoyable evening. On 19th January many councillors were treated to a tour of the Salters Road development, a partnership between ourselves, Lovells and Freebridge Housing. The quality of the accommodation was first class. There will be 78 homes of which 10 will be shared ownership and 68 being affordable rents. 54 will have PV panels and 28 EV charging. I was so impressed with the development and know that these houses will make wonderful and much needed family homes for our residents.

The Holocaust Memorial Day was a moving event and it was heartening to see so many sections of our community present. The participation of pupils from two local schools was lovely, in particular the children from St Marthas who sung beautifully.

The Housing summit I earlier referred to was even more of an eye opener that I had anticipated. I learnt that Eastbourne council spend 49 pence out of every £1 Of Council Tax that they collect on temporary accommodation. This emergency is not going to get any better until central government provide more funding. While the increase in LHA is welcomed, it's no good if it doesn't continue to keep pace. In addition, the amount of money that councils can reclaim from the LHA is capped at the 2011 rates meaning that councils are paying hugely for every person they are forced to place in temporary accommodation. The government can and must rectify this.

We've had two recent briefings on the state of play with dentists and dental services. Or rather the lack of them. It's a dies situation for too many people.

I wanted to save the best bit of news for the end, or nearly the end. This news is the work that is being undertaken to see our area become a Marmot Place. this is exciting and could be genuinely transformational. The six marmot Principles are to give every child the best start in life, to enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives, to create fair employment and good work for all, to ensure a healthy standard of living for all, create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities and strengthen the role and impact of ill-health provision. You can see how these principles link in to the work that is already being undertaken by the health and wellbeing partnership and would dovetail with the Sports England initiative around Place and also with my aim to introduce Community led housing in our area. It also reinforces the need for our council to have more control over the local housing that we provide. The fact that there have been around 130 bids on the houses on Salters Road is evident of the need for more decent homes that our currently not coming forward in the numbers that we need. Decent housing is one of the wider determinants of health and we have a responsibility to our residents to deliver on it. Becoming a Marmot Place would help this.

Finally, apologies. The report I submitted earlier was not this one. A lesson learnt for me, that when overtyping a previous report on my iPad, save that

version before sending it! I was not best pleased to have to write half of this all over again. But it does include items that you would otherwise have had to have waited for. It's also made this report 8 pages long. Sorry! And for any typos.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

10/11/23 - IDB meeting Pierpoint House
10/11/23 – Regis House Care And Repair team meeting
10/11/23 – Freebridge meeting
13/11/23 – Homelessness and Housing delivery meeting
13/11/23 – Freebridge Board meeting
14/11/23 – Meeting with Energy Efficiency Officer – South Lynn Community Centre
14/11/23 - Environment and Community
15/11/23 – Homestart AGM – Norwich
16/11/23 – Health and Wellbeing partnership meeting
16/11/23 – Ethics in Politics meeting
16/11/23 – Housing briefing
16/11/23 – KLACC special meeting re special expenses
17/11/23 – United for Warm Homes
20/11/23 – Statement of accounts meeting
20/11/23 – Housing Officer meeting
20/11/23 – CIL meeting - Cabinet
22/11/23 – Cabinet Briefing
23/11/23 Portfolio Meeting
23/11/23 – Full Council
24/12/23 Padel Tennis Meeting
24/11/23 – Place and Health and Wellbeing Partnership collaboration meeting
28/11/23 – Community Led Housing meeting
28/11/23 – R&D
29/11/23 – planning training
30/11/23 – Falls project meeting
30/11/23 – Friends of the Walks meeting
01/12/23 – Meeting with officer re contributions to foodbank
04/12/23 – Joint group meeting
05/12/23 – Greyfriars School – Classical Music Rocks
05/12/23 – Cabinet meeting
06/12/23 – Cabinet briefing
07/12/23 – health and Wellbeing partnership Health Inequalities group
08/12/23 – Portfolio Officer meeting
12/12/23 – Open Road visit
14/12/23 – Housing Portfolio Briefing
14/12/23 – Place partner inception meeting
19/12/23 – Beat the Bills Downham Market
19/12/23 – Padel tennis meeting

20/12/23 – Cabinet Briefing
21/12/23 – portfolio briefing
22/12/23 – Licensing sub committee meeting
04/01/24 – Portfolio meeting
05/01/23 – Cabinet meeting
08/01/23 – Cabinet Briefing
09/01/23 – Planning meeting
09/01/23 – Company Training
10/01/24 – KLACC run through meeting
10/01/24 – Cabinet Briefing
10/01/24 – R&D
11/01/24 – Health and Wellbeing Partnership Meeting
11/01/24 – Housing Portfolio Briefing
11/01/24 – KLACC special meeting
12/01/24 – KLACC sifting
12/01/24 – Freebridge CEO meeting
12/01/24 – Officer meeting
13/01/24 – attendance at the local Peace and Justice forum held by Churches Together – Gaywood Allotments Trust
15/01/24 – Cabinet sifting
15/01/24 – Cabinet
16/01/24 – Residents meeting
16/01/24 – Council companies training
17/01/24 – Budget development session
18/01/24 – Meeting re local parking issues
18/01/24 – Portfolio Meeting
18/01/24 – Freebridge member meeting