

## CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024

### **COUNCILLOR TERRY PARISH - LEADER**

For the period 23 November to 31 January 2024

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

The New Year is moving along and there is always much to do so it is fortunate that we have an extra day in which to do it. New Years are often a time for reflection, so it is apposite that I have had occasions to meet both with New Starters and those officers of Long Service in the Borough Council. The wheel turns and I hope that the new will, in the fullness of time, become the 'old', perhaps with diversions elsewhere to gain different experiences.

We are particularly good at providing training to our officers to make them better at their jobs and to allow them to aspire to posts of more responsibility. We also take on apprentices and their appetite to get on is well supported. This requires mentoring by senior staff who must be in post and likely need to be on site more as it is difficult to foster inhouse staff development without that level of expertise. Consequently, I have no regrets at enabling such staff to have pay conditions in 2023 which recognised their value and encourage necessary internal or external recruitment.

The New Year has also generated a plethora of news stories, in fact they began around Christmas time. Some provided 'sensational' news headlines. One was concerned with planning conditions. These are important and should be followed and, if not, enforcement should follow. Contrary to the beliefs of some people, they cannot be dismissed at a whim. If changes to them are considered necessary, then an application to amend them can be made to planning who may refer the request to planning committee. A significant complaint from Parish Councils has been the failure to follow up on breaches of planning conditions. I am glad to say that things are improving with additional staff in the enforcement team.

In italics below is part of the content of an email recently received from a Parish Council. It nicely sums up concerns that parish Councils have and the need to ensure that they are properly informed about planning matters. I am having second meetings with all Chairs or their representatives on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2.30 start and 6pm start. I ask all Borough Cllrs to take note of concerns raised at those meetings (I will copy you in) and to help and support Both Borough and Parish's to resolve them.

*'XXX from the Parish Council attended (meeting last November) and was very pleased to hear that Parish Council views and comments are being taken seriously especially surrounding planning. The Parish Council look forward to working constructively bringing the Borough Council and Parish Councils together.*

*Similarly, we would welcome additional measures to ensure that Parish Councils are consulted on revised applications and discharge of conditions applications – which*

*again, have often been determined without the PCs being made aware of the process. We see these as very positive initiatives which would build trust and co-operation between the two tiers of government.*

*This will assist in giving the Public more confidence that the democratic process is working correctly and that their voices are being heard.*

*Overall, the Parish Council were very impressed with the way in which this consultation/discussion was held on very pertinent and important matters which would make a significant difference to the positive and effective functioning of all parties. We would therefore like to thank you for initiating this process and look forward to supporting you and the Council in bringing these elements forward in the future.'*

Another significant issue raised by Parish Councils last November was the increasing number of vexatious or difficult actions being taken against Parish Councils or members of. I am glad to say that some help that can be provided by the Borough is now being organised.

Returning to news stories, newspapers feed on soundbites which they acquire from either people, agenda items or minutes. The better journalists ask for a reply or check the veracity of such quotes before publication. Some don't. Feeding newspapers half-truths at best, does not serve a useful purpose and wastes resources.

Money seems to be a looming story and others may have made the position clear. The Council spends more than it receives and tops up the shortage from general reserves. The general reserve pot is falling and will currently reach the minimum permitted before the next Borough elections. This is not due to us; it has been the case for some years. There are other reserves, ring fenced reserves, which have purposes to serve. Extracting money from those is a risky and short-term measure and could create further financial problems down the line unless investigation reveals it can be done with little risk. The Peer Review said, '(Use of reserves) it is not a sustainable strategy for the medium term'. And. 'A plan needs to be developed to bring the council's finances back into alignment and peers saw evidence that this is underway in the development of a Cost Management Plan.'

We need to spend less and earn more. Many councils are in the same position and much of the problem is down to government hence my letters to our MPs which were prompted by a request from the District Council Network.

I did try and get a fair share for west Norfolk of the business rates growth which would be retained via the Norfolk business rate pool for 2024/2025 but it required an agreement with the other Districts and County. They appeared happy with their lot. This year we are continuing to pursue IDB finding from government and Liz truss MP is helping with that. We are also asking Council agreement on council tax changes to second homes and empty properties. Other changes will come forward in the budget.

I briefly mentioned the peer review in which some of you, (160 including those external to the Council), were involved. The report identifies strengths and weaknesses and suggests strategies which might address the latter. The new administration had a mention, 'the new political leadership have hit the ground running'. We also had, 'There has been a positive reception to the new administration among partners. The new corporate strategy and financial management got positive

comments as did changes of governance to the Council's companies.

There were 8 recommendations, all of which are set out in the report. Most had work started on them before the report and work has been progressed since. Some require consultation, reorganisation and change all of which will be examined and plans developed as part of the action plan which we are required to prepare as part of the Corporate Peer Challenge Review process. The action plan will be considered by Cabinet at the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024 meeting.

May the next 11 months be happy for you (and me).

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

Session for all Parish Councillors on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2.30 pm and 6 pm  
Tour of the new build health hub in King's Lynn  
Celebration event for the apprentices  
Opening of the Mart

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

In addition to cabinet meetings, cabinet briefings, communications briefings and multiple one offs with officers or councillors:

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| 28/11/23 | Leaders and S151 officers North Norfolk  |
| 29/11/23 | Conservative Leader/Leader Weekly Meeting<br>Independent Leaders/Labour Leaders Weekly Catch-up<br>Hunstanton Advisory Group update call |
| 30/11/23 | Norfolk Leaders Group Meeting  |
| 01/12/23 | James Wild MP<br>Unison  |
| 04/12/23 | Planning<br>FCH CEO and Chairs/Leader<br>LGA Independent Council Leaders Meeting<br>Coastal Working Group meeting<br>Joint Group Meeting |
| 07/12/23 | Local Government Finance Policy Statement webinar<br>Meet Arboriculture officer<br>Budget Development Group<br>Mayor at home             |
| 08/12/23 | Leader/Deputy Leader and MO Catch-up   |
| 09/12/23 | Meeting regrading 2nd homes council tax/additional council tax<br>Guildhall  |
| 12/12/23 | Climate change<br>Solar Farm   |
| 13/12/23 | Member Major Project Board   |
| 14/12/23 | LGA Leadership Academy   |
| 15/12/23 | LGA Leadership Academy   |
| 18/12/23 | LGA Independent I Leaders Meeting  |
| 19/12/23 | Portfolio Meeting – Central Services   |
| 20/12/23 | Gypsy/Traveller sites meeting<br>Pay award   |
| 22/12/23 | Leader/Deputy Leader and MO Catch Up   |
| 02/01/24 | CEX/Leader Briefing  |

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| 03/01/23 | E and C Panel  |
| 04/01/23 | Cllr Adams North Norfolk<br>CPP  |
| 05/01/24 | Leader/Deputy Leader and MO Catch Up   |
| 08/01/24 | Local Plan Task Group<br>Council companies training  |
| 10/01/24 | R and D Panel  |
| 11/01/24 | Training on statement of accounts<br>Special KLACC meeting   |
| 15/01/24 | Conservative Leader Meeting  |
| 16/01/24 | Council companies training   |
| 17/01/24 | Pay award<br>Meet New Starters<br>Budget development session   |
| 18/01/24 | Long service awards<br>Consultation with Representative Bodies of Non-Domestic Ratepayers and<br>Voluntary Sector Representatives about proposed Borough Council Budget<br>Plans for 2024 – 2028<br>Freebridge member briefing |
| 19/01/24 | Unison<br>Springwood School  |
| 23/01/24 | Council/companies training   |
| 24/01/24 | Norfolk Rivers IDB   |
| 25/01/24 | Labour Leader meeting  |
| 26/01/24 | Public Sector Leaders Board  |
| 30/01/24 | NHS tour   |
| 31/01/24 | Apprentice event<br>HAG update call<br>Full council  |