

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

28th November 2024

COUNCILLOR – JO RUST CABINET MEMBER FOR – PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

For the period 17th October – 18th November 2024

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters. –

I've taken on board comments about cabinet reports and have used AI to summarise my 8 page report into a more condensed format. Thus for those of you with limited time, you can still be familiar with my activities without reading the full thing. However, there are links in the main body of the report and I am asking that you take part in the consultations that I've included.

1. Portfolio Progress Summary

Housing and Homelessness:

• Housing Register Status:

- The current housing register includes 1,258 applicants:
- Emergency priority: 1 (0.08%)
- High priority: 144 (11.45%)
- Medium priority: 409 (32.51%)
- Low priority: 704 (55.96%)
- A total of 234 new or updated applications were received within the reporting period.

• Housing Advice and Homelessness Declarations:

- 140 residents received housing advice, leading to 78 new homelessness declarations or ongoing investigations.

• Housing Lettings:

- Only 30 lets were recorded in September, a notably low figure that is currently being investigated for accuracy.

Healthcare and Community Support:

• Hospital Infrastructure and Care Initiatives:

- A comprehensive tour of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) revealed ongoing remediation and the development of new units (e.g., endoscopy, diagnostics). Discussions highlighted issues like the ward closures linked to the trust's patient discharge strategies and the significant cost implications of delayed discharges (£4 million annually).
- The "discharge to assess" scheme was discussed as a more efficient method of evaluating patient care needs outside the hospital, leading to quicker and more realistic care planning.

- **Community Engagement:**

- Attended events such as the Beat Your Bills session in Downham Market, showcasing local support for residents amidst the cost of living crisis.
- Participation in Carer's Voice and advocacy for Carer's Identity Passports to streamline support processes for caregivers.

2. Key Activities and Developments

Training and Strategic Initiatives:

- **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Training:**

- Undertook a comprehensive EqIA training to ensure decisions do not unlawfully discriminate against protected groups. This will enhance decision-making processes and support the council's corporate strategy.

- **Housing Regulation and Development:**

- Engaged in discussions about Freebridge Community Housing's strategy, its new leadership direction, and the implications of government funding, such as the £500 million boost to the Affordable Homes Programme and its potential impact on local housing.

Healthcare Consultations:

- **NCC Housing Support Cuts:**

- Highlighted the critical nature of the ongoing NCC consultation on proposed budget cuts to housing-related support services, from £4.7 million to £2.7 million. Emphasized the potential negative impacts on residents reliant on services such as floating support and young people services.

- **NHS and Health Inequalities:**

- Advocated for participation in consultations to shape future NHS services, reinforcing the importance of council-provided preventive services.

Community and Social Support:

- **Dementia-Friendly Initiatives:**

- Supported the rollout of a Dementia Friendly Town programme in Downham Market, which, if successful, could expand to King's Lynn and Hunstanton.

- **Support for Young People:**

- Engaged with youth-focused programs, such as accessible play area initiatives and meetings with Youth Advisory Boards to bolster youth aspirations and opportunities.

3. Engagements and Community Presence

- **Cultural and Remembrance Events:**

- Attended art exhibitions and Remembrance Sunday services, demonstrating commitment to community support and awareness.

- **Workshops and AGMs:**

- Participated in the Homestart AGM, supporting their preventive work with young parents, and encouraged donations that will be match-funded in December to aid local families.

4. Challenges and Forward Strategy

Budget and Funding Concerns:

- The council faces challenges from proposed budget cuts at various levels, affecting support for vulnerable residents. Advocacy for maintaining essential services remains a priority.

Future Commitments:

- **Upcoming Engagements:** Scheduled involvement includes events like the White Ribbon Day and continued collaboration with housing and community health organizations.
- **Strategic Monitoring:** Continuous assessment of developments related to government housing programmes and their potential impacts on local housing delivery.

Conclusion:

The period showcased dedicated efforts toward housing stability, community health, and support for vulnerable groups. Despite budget constraints, proactive measures, training, and community engagement remain central to meeting residents’ needs and advancing the council’s strategic objectives.

Housing register

Group by
1-Emergency Card -1 = 0.08%
2-High – 144 = 11.45%
3-Medium – 409 = 32.51%
4-Low – 704 = 55.96%
Total 1258

234 new or change of circumstances received.

Housing Options

140 were given housing advice, of these 78 progressed into new homeless declarations and/or are ongoing investigations.

Lets

30 lets in September. This figure is low and is being investigated to assess accuracy

Last month Total number applicants	Percentage	
4-Low	749	55.73
3-Medium	443	32.96
2-High	152	11.31
Total	1344	100.0

231 new or change of circumstances received

Housing Options

152 were given housing advice, of these 76 progressed into new homeless declarations and/or are ongoing investigations.

Lets

We were advised of 73 lets in September. Please see attached list of properties advertised.

On Thursday 17th October I attended an internal meeting to discuss White Ribbon accreditation. I'm pleased that following that, we passed a motion at full council on 31st October where White Ribbon accreditation was discussed and fully supported. We will now work towards gaining full accreditation which is a significant move on from solely supporting the one day of the year which is set aside to mark this. While this will be at a cost, it was agreed that this cost will be born out by trying to eradicate violence against women and girls which actually costs our society up to £66 billion every three years.

Like other councillors I attended a tour of the QEH on Friday 18th October. This was a full and comprehensive tour around the site where we all saw the extent of the remedial work that's taking place to make the building safe to use. We were also able to visit the new buildings which include endoscopy and the diagnostic unit. We had the board minutes from the meeting where off-site options were discussed as a location for the new build and better understood why the on-site option was chosen. It was interesting to learn that if an off-site option was going to be taken up, West Winch was the preferred location. I have recently been contacted by a number of staff concerned about matters at the trust which include the closure of two wards, the use of bank staff and the appointment of a new team connected to the New Hospital Programme. I met with two of the exec team and learned that the ward closures were related to the trust better managing the discharge of patients who were clinically fit to be discharged. Figures for daily discharge had been as low as 6 a day, but the trust had worked hard to increase that to 13, with a target of 15 per day. The cost to the trust to host medically fit patients was £4 million a year, with no funding coming to support this cost. The most important matter though, is the longer patients remain in hospital, the worse they become and then they end up being medically treated. There is a scheme called discharge to assess, which sees patients discharged and then their care needs assessed in the place that they are residing in. I was previously sceptical over this, but the explanation I received made far more sense. When patients are assessed in hospital, they're over prescribed care, sometimes prescribed complex packages of care that actually don't exist, and which lead to a far longer discharge time. When patients are assessed in their own environment it takes far less time and the care needed is more realistic. I was told that the use of bank staff had been significantly cut because posts had been made substantive. This cuts costs too. Finally, I raised the matter of concerns about new staff who were being taken on for the New Hospital Programme. Staff are being employed, but they are on fixed term contracts and funded by central government and not the hospital budget.

While I know we and our residents, remain concerned about the state of the NHS and our hospital in particular, the information that we were given on the 18th, combined with the information I obtained at my meeting, has given us a clearer picture of the situation and the desire to continue to improve and secure our local NHS services.

On Tuesday 22nd October I attended a full days Equality Impact Assessment training. It was great to have this refresher as my training was undertaken over a decade ago! The training was useful and informative and I look forward to seeing changes in the way our EqIA are completed for cabinet reports and briefings. The reason that this is important is because some of the decisions that we take may have a negative impact on those with protected characteristics. Vulnerable people already face challenges, and we have a legal duty to make sure that we don't unlawfully discriminate or disadvantage any protected groups. If this is the case, steps need to be taken to mitigate or minimise this impact. If they can't be mitigated against, we need to understand why and justify why the decision taken is in the best interests of our residents. It was interesting to learn that the government's decision to withdraw the Winter Fuel Allowance didn't go through an EqIA. Our corporate strategy is about making the lives of our residents better and improving our services. Undertaking accurate EqIA supports this. The training was so interesting that I forgot to attend the planting of the Kalyna tree presented to the mayor by members of our Ukrainian community. Apologies Oksana.

My regular meetings with Freebridge continue and at this meeting I heard about the newly appointed chair – Bob Walder, and the desire to evolve from compliance and governance to opportunities. The organisation is developing a community plan for North Lynn and has aspirations to engage with the local community when drafting it. At the invitation of Freebridge I attended a conference in Ipswich on 6th November. It was an Independent East Board and Tenants meeting. Independent East are a collaborative of the 5 regional housing providers, and they work together to access economies of scale for services like audit etc. I genuinely found the conference incredibly useful and will be using what I learned to ask Freebridge some more probing questions. I learnt that the regulator of social housing (RSH) has introduced new consumer standards requiring landlords to provide safe and good quality homes for their tenants, along with good quality landlord services. It was stated that a lot of C3 ratings are coming from local authorities because they don't have the resources to bring them up to a rating of C2. C1 is the highest rating. I have attached the rating which was awarded to Freebridge last year. It's the most recent one.

[Current regulatory judgement: Freebridge Community Housing Limited \(13 December 2023\) - GOV.UK](#)

The report is interesting as the financial viability was regarded downwards from V1 to V2. The reports are the equivalent of an Ofsted rating on schools. This links with the recent government announcement about the £500 million boost to the Affordable Homes Programme and the intention to use it to will build up to 5,000 additional affordable homes. Taken alongside a 5-year commitment for a social housing rent settlement of CPI+1% and the reduction in Right to Buy discounts, this will have an impact on us locally, but we just

can't be certain exactly how at the moment. So whilst the £500million is additional money there is no certainty how this will be used, for example whether the £500million extra equates to X amount of new affordable Homes. The current Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) which is in place until March 2026 and to which the £500million will be added to could be amended in a number of ways, including to support the drive for more social rent homes as opposed to affordable rents. To achieve social rents a higher grant rate is required. So the extra £500million could therefore, be used to support higher conversions in the existing programme or indeed additional homes. It's worth noting however that there has been no extension to the AHP which finishes in March 2026, therefore if it is to be used for the latter option i.e. additional units there isn't a lot of time to deliver (March 2026). As a council, we just don't know at this point, but the situation is being monitored closely.

Our officers also think that the 5-year rent settlement will provide much greater certainty to our Registered Housing Providers (RPs) and potentially support more capacity in the sector to deliver more. Over the last 12-18 months there has been a significant reduction in RPs development capacity and appetite to take on new affordable units and commit to new schemes. This isn't down to a single factor. In the main it's down to higher interest rates/borrowing costs, regulatory requirements i.e. focus on damp & mould etc, lack of certainty around rent settlement which affects borrowing and legacy impacts of the rent reduction requirement under previous government. The 5-year settlement is certainly a big step in the right direction to increase confidence and certainty across the RP sector. This along with the recent interest rate reduction will hopefully translate into greater capacity.

Finally on the Right to Buy discounts, this will mainly affect stock holding authorities but those tenants who transferred to Freebridge under stock transfer and still hold their tenancy will have the Preserved Right to Buy (PRTB). When we last enquired about the number of PRTB disposals with Freebridge it was on average between 10-20 properties per annum. The reductions in discount levels proposed will potentially see the number of disposals decrease.

Our council will continue to monitor all that is emerging and of course the sectors response to it. A key document that we are all waiting on is the Housing Strategy that was referenced in the summer along with the announcement on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

An issue of huge importance to us is the consultation taking place by NCC at the moment over services to support people in their own homes or other accommodation. NCC currently spend £4.7 million a year and they are proposing to make savings in the amount they spend on these services. It's well worth remembering that there have already been cuts to these vital services, from £10 million previously to the current £4.7. These current proposals will see a further reduction down to a mere £2.7m a year on housing related support. This is another huge cut. While NCC claim to know that other partners – like our borough council - also spend money on these types of services, I strongly suspect they don't understand exactly how much

it is we do provide. NCC funding currently covers the following types of services: Floating support, short-term support that helps adults stay in their homes, Homeless services, Young People Services and Sheltered Housing support. Our residents need and use these services. If they are cut our residents will suffer, so your ward will be impacted and you will be affected. I urge you to take part in the consultation and say our area can't afford a further reduction, especially following so soon after the last round of cuts. We have until December 16th to have our say. Attached is the link necessary to take part in the consultation

[Your views on our proposal to review our Housing Related Support Services - Norfolk County Council - Citizen Space](#)

Another consultation I'm urging you to take part in is the one about the future of our NHS – attached is the necessary link. It's vital that we play our part in shaping our healthcare services as our council provides many services which are designed to negate the need to use hospitals and are meant to keep us healthy for longer.

[Change NHS](#)

I attended a Carer's Voice partnership meeting on Thursday 24th October, hearing of why having a carers passport is important to ensure those who care get the support that they need. Carers often have to tell their story time and time again. They're often passed from pillar to post to try to access support, a carer's passport would negate this. We will have residents who are carers, if you know of any, please check if they have a passport and if not, help them to obtain one. [Carers Identity Passport – Carers Voice](#)

I referred to a situation I had been informed of by West Norfolk Carers where they had carer who requested a carer's assessment only to be asked why they wanted it! Also, WNC rang for a young carers needs assessment and was advised to telephone CADs, only to be told they didn't meet the criteria for a tier 3 support. This is incorrect as young carers needs assessment isn't tier 3 support. This meant the member of staff was forced to call again, adding to their workload. If you have residents who are young carers please encourage them to seek support - [Young carers and families - Norfolk County Council](#). I reported this at the meeting and it's now been resolved with the staff involved getting some refresher training and the young carer getting their assessment.

On Friday 25th October I went to Downham Market to see some of the team deliver a regular Beat your Bills session at the marketplace. The event was well attended and many people benefitted from the information given out by Jacob, Lorcan, Julie from Community and Linda from Housing Standards. This facility helps our residents manage the continuing cost of living crisis and also provides them with other avenues for support.

I attended the Norwich YAB meeting with the Exec Director of Play England on 29th Oct. We hear further about how it costs 3 times more to raise a child who has a disability and the importance of accessible play areas. This is something that we're working on in King's Lynn, with the intention of securing

not just the funding for accessible play equipment, but the officer time to plan and deliver it. Following on from that meeting our local YAB are attending a KLAC meeting in January to present to the group once again, about the importance of accessible play.

On 30th October our council arranged that we light up the corn exchange blue to acknowledge National Care Leavers week. Our council have included Care leavers as a protected group on our Equality Impact Assessments to ensure that they are given consideration when we're making our decisions. As part of our care leavers covenant we have an action plan to develop our local offer and there is an officer working group who are working to progress the ideas that they have. We have a survey for care leavers with the aim of understanding what's important to them, and how the council can further support them. If you have any care leavers in your ward, would you please ask them to take part - https://online.west-norfolk.gov.uk/care_leavers/sncic_care_leavers_survey.htm
. [Support for care leavers | Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk](#)

I chaired our regular Health and Wellbeing Partnership on 31st Oct. It's a really well attended meeting with lots of participation from our partner organisations. This month we had a presence from the DWP who provided leaflets to distribute on applying for pension credits. - [Pension Credit: How to claim - GOV.UK](#)

We heard from the NHS about the work that's going on at a Place level, this sounds a bit jargonistic, but it basically means Trusts deliver essential healthcare services in the places that people live and work. In the context of integrated care systems (ICSs), 'place' refers to a **smaller geographic footprint within a system** which often aligns with a local authority area or patient flows for acute care. So in our Place area there's a specialist diabetes project trying to deal with the massive pressure that community nursing is currently under, a lot of which is due to insulin administration which is very pronounced in the West. There's dental support to care home residents and then the Food for Thought initiative which works to reduce health inequalities in our diets and which might be expanded. We discussed the data sharing which is taking place and which means our council can target vulnerable residents to try to help them access the grants available to retrofit their properties with energy efficiency measures to reduce their bills, cut carbon emissions and keep them warm. We have already had 3 people going through the programme and another 5 starting, so that data sharing has already shown results. Other points discussed at the meeting was an Active Travel Promotion Grant, introduced by Professor Lee Smith. Lee explained that as a local person he was acutely aware that there was no academic research emanating from our area and he was keen to change that. He had worked with the Purfleet Trust (recently awarded the Kings Award for Voluntary Service which recognizes the dedication and hard work of its volunteers) looking at the high prevalence of cancer in homeless communities. As a result of that research a cancer prevention screening programme for homeless was introduced with Purfleet being the main group in the UK. This helps us further our programme to reduce health inequalities.

Following on from my meeting in Downham Market with some local residents I was pleased to see the launch of the programme to make Downham a Dementia Friendly Town. If it can be rolled out there we can try to replicate it in King's Lynn and Hunstanton. This helps to tackle the inequalities that residents might face due to their condition.

We had full council on 31st October where we passed some important motions including one about working with our young people. Cllr Jones and I are arranging to meet with the member of youth parliament and YAB. Our policies officer will also be involved to close any gaps in communication between us and those who represent the voice of young people. Ensuring young people are able to access opportunities, increase their aspirations and achieve their potential is a corporate goal.

On Saturday 9th November I visited an art exhibition at Eternity Church in Downham Market to see the display from No More Silence, of survivors of child sexual abuse. It was very powerful and moving. This is a subject which is uncomfortable to talk about, but services for survivors must be improved. Jean, who leads the group, has made contact with Sarah Taylor, the PCC and Zoe Billington of Norfolk and Suffolk Mental Health Trust about this matter and has asked Terry Jermy, MP for South West Norfolk, to speak in the House about the matter.

Like many of you, I laid a wreath on Remembrance Sunday, mine was at St Faiths Church. The service had a focus around children and young people and the Reverend Kyla was so welcoming to everyone. It was very moving and nearly 400 people were present including the local councillors and our Deputy Mayor.

I attended Food for Thought on Tuesday 12th. I love going, not purely for the free and tasty food I get to sample, but to see the enjoyment experienced by those present and to hear of how the sessions have helped them to prepare new foods on a budget. You can see groups of friendships forming over the 12 week sessions.

On 13th November I attended the Homestart AGM. This is an important service to support as it undertakes preventative work with young parents who are struggling, helping them to build better lives, empower them to make sustainable decisions and building bonds in their local communities. They help make sure that every child gets the best possible start in life. Which is one of the Marmot Principles and something we aim to achieve. From midday on the 3rd to the 10th December you can donate and your donation will be match funded, so worth double the amount. A £3 donation will be doubled to £6 and could fund books and toys to support children's home learning. While a £5 donation, doubled to £10 could fund a volunteer's travel costs to a family in their local community. [Home-Start Norfolk | Because childhood can't wait](#)

DWP Household Support Fund

The DWP Household Support Fund amount is determined by the DWP for Authorities in England. For Norfolk it is distributed and project managed by

Norfolk County Council based on each districts:-

- Universal Credit claims / Free School Meals / Free Prescription thresholds
- Data on people receiving guarantee credit and/or savings credit elements of Pension Credit
- Data on people on income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Data on people who are in receipt of Housing Benefit only

However, support is not restricted only to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits, districts use other sources of information to identify vulnerable households.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Swan Youth Project 13th birthday celebration – 15/11/24

Regulator of Social Housing Local Authority Engagement session 18/11/24

Cabinet Away Day 20/11/24

An Introduction to Age Friendly Communities 21/11/24

KLAC special expenses meeting 21/11/24

Downham Market Foodbank Visit 22/11/24

White Ribbon Day events 25/11/24

West Norfolk Prosperity Funding Partnership meeting 25/11/24

Norfolk and Waveney Health and Wellbeing Partnership event 26/11/24

West Norfolk Community Transport Meeting 26/11/24

E&C 26/11/24

Culture and Heritage Strategy Meeting 28/11/24

Full Council 28/11/24

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

Portfolio briefings – Health and Wellbeing

Portfolio Briefings – CIC

Full Council

Health and wellbeing partnership meetings (monthly)

E&C

Freebridge briefing

Joint Group Meetings

Cabinet/special cabinet/cabinet sifting/Cabinet Briefings

IDB meetings

Food for Thought

Homelessness and housing delivery briefing

ICS at NCC

SLA meetings

QEH tour

Carers Voice

EqlA training

Youth Advisory Board Play meeting

Safeguarding meeting

Licensing
Independent East Board and Tenant conference
No More Silence
Remembrance Sunday Service
Homestart AGM