

## **CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**September 2023**

**COUNCILLOR ADAMS - CABINET MEMBER FOR STRATEGY, COUNTYWIDE WORKING AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS, PERFORMANCE, COMMUNICATIONS, HR AND LEGAL SERVICES**

For the period September to November 2023

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

#### **Human Resources**

Working with the Health and Wellbeing Group, the HR Team ran a successful Wellbeing Week at the beginning of November with a range of events held over the week that were all well attended by officers.

Work has progressed to ensure that the pay award (back dated to 1 April 2023) is paid at the earliest opportunity.

The Apprenticeship Network Group which has been established across the Council continues to be well attended, providing support to those employed as an apprentice on a monthly basis

#### **Elections:**

The Canvass process is now drawing to a close with non-responding households being chased up for a response. We are currently reporting a total response of 93% which is as usual an excellent return.

The team have been getting to grips with the new Online Absent Vote Application (OAVA) portal where electors can now make their postal or proxy vote application. While numbers of applications are low so far, it is expected to increase so consideration has been given on how to deal with an influx of applications ahead of a national election and feedback has been provided to the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities in terms of suggested improvements and 'bug' reporting.

Parish invoices from the local elections in May have been issued and are now in the process of having payments received through the Finance team.

#### **Communications**

A quieter period for communications from October 8 to November 14, though we did still turn around 51 news articles and videos across the Council's multiple digital platforms [www.north-norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.north-norfolk.gov.uk), Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and NextDoor – and have released these to media where appropriate.

These have been on a range of topics including a week of content to support

National Recycling Week, important updates for residents before, during and after Storms Babet and Ciaran, promotion for our Community Connectors' Positivitea event in Mundesley and confirmation of planning permission for the Cromer and Mundesley sea defence works set to start this winter.

Like all departments at the Council, we took part in the recent LGA Peer Review process and it was pleasing to receive very positive feedback about our comms output, particularly around our development and implementation of video content. We then also worked with senior colleagues to facilitate sharing of the report and – the Council's reaction to it – with members, staff and the public.

We currently have a combined social media following of **44,520** people directly consuming regular content about the Council's activities on our social media channels, though it's important to note there is some overlap, with some residents following us on more than one platform.

### **Legal**

- Eastlaw have successfully recruited a trainee solicitor to the team. They will be undertaking their qualification training under the new solicitor apprentice scheme and will study alongside their period of work-based training.
- Eastlaw have also recruited a permanent legal assistant who will undertake a majority of the debt recovery work.
- Eastlaw have also gone out to advert for a permanent litigation lawyer.
- Eastlaw will be offering to attend at other department team meetings to provide bite sized training on relevant issues, over and above the regular meetings our solicitors have with their various client departments.
- Eastlaw have successfully recovered £10,000 following a breach of a Disabled Facilities Grant, and have had some progress on one of the larger council tax debts (in the region of £29,000), with £7,000 already recovered and have instigated winding up proceedings in relation to the remainder.
- In relation to planning, Eastlaw have just enabled a second development to proceed which would otherwise have been delayed because of the "nitrate neutrality" rules.
- The Cedars lease template has now been agreed internally.
- FOI request figures show that the Council's current performance at responding to requests within the statutory 20 working days is at 92%. The national target is set at 90%.
- The legal service has also provided training sessions on FOI and general information governance to all staff members who have a key role to play such as Information Asset Owners and Assistants.

### **Democratic Services**

- The Youth Council started their mental health awareness campaign by lighting up Cromer pier in blue for World Mental Health Day on 10<sup>th</sup> October. This was accompanied by a social media push on Instagram.
- The Town & Parish Council Engagement Forum met virtually on 8<sup>th</sup> November. The next meeting will be in person at the Council offices.
- The Committee schedule continues to be busy, with an additional Development Committee meeting in November.
- The team is recruiting to a vacant post and hopes to be back to full capacity soon.

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

### **Corporate Peer Challenge**

The Council is pleased with the conclusions of the Corporate Peer Review conducted in September through the Local Government Association's sector-led improvement programme. The Council is now drawing up an Action Plan in line with the recommendations of the review.

### **County Deal**

Discussions continue around the County Deal including how the functions of the LEP will be incorporated into the County Council as part of any new arrangements.

### **Elections**

The team are currently preparing for both the Salthouse Parish Council election (23<sup>rd</sup> November) and also the District Council election for the Briston Ward (7<sup>th</sup> December) with arrangements for both going well.

In addition to this, arrangements have begun already in terms of the election for the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk which will be held on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024 with Polling Staff being contacted to seek their provisional availability to work at the election and to ensure details are up to date. Locations to be used as polling stations will shortly be contacted to firm up bookings and also to be made aware for the potential of a short notice request to hold a Parliamentary election which will take place at some point before 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

In terms of parish councils we are still working to support a couple of parish councils who are not currently operational.

### **Legal**

There is currently an audit being undertaken of the Council's FOI processes and procedures, the results of which will be detailed in a report due in December 2023.

### **Democratic Services**

The Youth Council is supporting the NOTAS Christmas Toy Run, which collects toys for sick children and distributes them to the Children's ward at Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital (NNUH). NNYC will be fundraising and collecting toys for this event.

## **3 Meetings attended**

### **Meetings attended:**

- UK Power Networks
- Annual Action Plan member workshops
- Fakenham Town Council
- Holt Town Council/ Love Holt
- Norfolk Leaders Group

- Woodland Trust
- Cromer Artspace
- DLUHC
- Norfolk Community Law Service
- Corylus Environmental & Planning Ltd
- Healthwatch
- Transport East
- Rocket House (Opposition Leader visit)
- Town and Parish Forum
- Norfolk Public Sector Leaders Board
- Remuneration Panel
- To occur:
  - Bacton - Perenco
  - Bacton Hydrogen Hub
  - Rocket House ( members visit).
- Various meetings with officers across the Council in addition to Business Planning, Cabinet.

**Events:**

- UEA Court
- High Street Task Force - Stalham
- Nourishing Norfolk - Sandringham
- Deep History book launch - Cromer TIC
- Sheringham Little Theatre production
- Rural Services Network Conference
- To occur:
  - Thriving East - Anglian Water Parliamentary event.

**Media interviews:**

- Telegraph
- That's TV
- EDP
- East Anglia Media LTD