

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

25 SEPTEMBER 2024

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

For the period July to September 2024

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Electoral Services

Following the successful planning and delivery of the Parliamentary Election in July, the Elections team have been carrying out important post poll jobs which require actioning following all large elections.

The Annual Canvass has been started and a good number of responses have already been received. This programme will run up until publication of the Revised Register on 1st December 2024 which will include the new County Council Divisions on which next year's election to Norfolk County Council will be held.

The team have also commenced a periodic review into the polling districts and polling places within the administrative boundary. This involves two periods of consultation before the proposals of the Acting Returning Officer go to Full Council in November.

Successful delivery of North Walsham Market Cross by-election on 12th September.

Human Resources

A number of polices are due to be renewed following the change of government and some anticipated changes to legislation in the coming months.

A first draft of the People Strategy has been completed and is due to be subject of consultation with internal stakeholders. The Learning and Development Strategy has been drafted and agreed and will be implemented alongside the People Strategy.

Work is ongoing to review the new staff induction process to provide a more up to date introduction to the organisation and complement the electronic recruitment process that was introduced a couple of years ago.

Legal Services

General

Recruitment:

Eastlaw have successfully recruited into two fixed term contracts:

- an experienced Environmental Lawyer into the Climate Change and Coastal Erosion Transition (CCCET) Lawyer post, who, in addition to providing legal assistance to the Council and other organisations as part of the eastlaw team, will be instrumental in furthering the Council's coastwise project.
- an experienced Local Government Lawyer.

The CCCET Lawyer has started already, and the Local Government Lawyer should start later in September.

Expanding expertise:

Eastlaw continue to expand its areas of legal provision, including providing employment law advice and assistance to the Council and will now fully support the Coastwise project with the new CCCET lawyer post.

Freedom of Information

FOI request figures show that the Council's current performance to responding to requests within the statutory twenty working days is at 97%. After the FOI audit that was concluded in December 2023, eastlaw has worked to follow the recommendation to increase the performance target to 95% - which is in line with the ICO's best practice guidance.

Data Protection

We have just had the Data Protection Audit and am pleased to say that we achieved substantial assurance, making a hatrick with the substantial assurances we achieved with the Legal Audit and Freedom Of Information Audit.

Eastlaw have successfully represented the Council in a matter before the ICO in relation a requested under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Eastlaw have negotiated and signed up to Information Sharing Agreements with Local Authorities across the region to promote compliant and effective sharing of information.

Litigation

Focus recently has been on targeting some of the larger, longer standing debtors, via insolvency/bankruptcy proceedings and seeking orders for sale.

As part of this process, it has already seen payments in the region of £274,000, made up from just three debtors:

£223,133.55 (unpaid Council tax) (insolvency action)

£41,690 (unpaid council tax) (bankruptcy action)

£9,511.66 (unpaid Council tax) (recovered from deceased's estate)

A further £16,727.31 (plus £6000 costs) has been secured by way of a bankruptcy order, payment of which will be made to the Council once the trustees have released funds from the individual's assets.

There are five other such matters that are at various stages of being progressed which should see further payments to the Council in the region of £205,000, made up of the following approximate amounts:

- £60,000 (including unpaid Council tax and monies from works in default) (bankruptcy action)
- £25,000 (unpaid council tax) (insolvency action)
- £50,000 (insolvency action)
- £50,000 (unpaid council tax) (insolvency action)
- £20,000 (unpaid council tax) (order for sale)

This is over and above multiple charging orders which secure outstanding debts.

Property matters

Eastlaw are facilitating the release of covenants on two separate matters which will secure payments to the Council of £21,666.67 and £20,000 (approx.) respectively.

Eastlaw has now completed the purchase of a property in North Walsham, with completion on another anticipated next week, both of which will be used for temporary accommodation as part of the Council's homelessness functions.

ACV matters

Eastlaw have considered a number of ACV listings (either at first instance or upon review), with the following deemed successful:

- Wells Town Tennis Courts, Wells
- Blue Boar Inn, Great Ryburgh
- The New Inn, Roughton
- Wells Congregational Church, Wells

There are another two currently under consideration.

Planning matters

Eastlaw have worked closely with both planning and environmental health to resolve the complex issues relating to planning consents and caravan licensing at the former Council mobile home site in Fakenham, so that proper regulation of the site may be put in place.

Commercial/contract matters

Significant work has been undertaken in reviewing and rewriting the Contract Procedural Rules in pursuance of significant changes in law from the Procurement Act 2023, which come into force in October. These will be put before full Council in September to ratify.

Eastlaw have successfully negotiated and completed on a number of contentious agreements (both funding and planning agreements) relating to the proposed Fakenham roundabout ahead of the funding deadline.

Eastlaw have negotiated and completed a number of other commercial contracts, including the RNLI lifeguard provision, and work on other large projects continues, including the Council's Leisure Contracts.

Code of Conduct matters

Most matters have not warranted investigation, with words of advice being provided as part of the initial assessment process. There is one matter which is currently under investigation and may progress to a hearing before the Standards Committee.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review:

- The LGA Corporate Peer Progress Review planned for the 30th July was postponed until Thursday, 12th December due to one of the Peer Team becoming unwell immediately prior to the visit. The LGA Peer Team will monitor how the Council is progressing against our Peer Review Action Plan.

3 Meetings attended

Attended:

- Transport East Forum
- Business Planning
- Networking event with new MPs at County Hall
- FLASH Steering Group – Observed.
- Visit to Sheringham YESU

Meetings:

- EELGA
- Norfolk Museum Service
- O&S Committee for Homelessness Task & Finish Group
- Norfolk District Council leaders
- Anglian Water
- Business representatives and various officer level meetings

To occur:

- Meetings with Leaders of Kings Lynn & Great Yarmouth
- Norfolk PCC
- National Gas
- Public Sector Leaders Board
- Transport East Forum.