

County Councillor for Necton & Launditch

Annual Report 2020/21

The whole year has been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the introduction of measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Virtual meetings have been the norm using either MS Teams or Zoom. In the whole year from April '20 to April '21 I have attended only 4 parish council meetings in person which were conducted with strict social distancing measures in place. No committee meetings of the County Council have been held other than by MS Teams during the year.

The majority of NCC staff (around 98%) and all members have been working from home for the entire year. All members of staff were allowed £250 to set up a home office and the laptops provided allowed phone calls to be made via the internet. Staff whose service were necessarily shot down such as libraries, catering, museums etc were redeployed to help with the delivery of the Covid response. Members were allocated a support role to vulnerable residents who were contacted by telephone.

In October 2019, the Council carried out an exercise to test the resilience of the Council to a major incident, all staff were told to work from home for the day to test the IT system and its ability to support remote working. This was mainly to try out the new IT software and hardware but proved to be fortuitous as by the time of the first lockdown any lessons from the exercise had been learned and the transition to working from home in March 2020 was seamless.

Governance: In May 2019, the Council moved from a committee system to an executive form of governance. The Cabinet (Executive) is responsible for the day-to-day decisions in the Council and is made up of the Leader of the Council and 9 other elected members.

The Cabinet is held to account by a Scrutiny Committee, which can review decisions that member wish to debate or question by "calling in" a Cabinet decision that has not yet been implemented. There are 3 Select Committees which were originally formed to recommend policy to Cabinet but recently have had their remit expanded to include a wider scrutiny role. The 3 Select Committees are the Corporate Select Committee, the People and Communities

Select Committee and the Infrastructure and Development Select Committee. All committees are politically balanced (in proportion to the number of seats held by each party) with the Scrutiny Committee chaired by a member of the main opposition group. The following is a brief overview of the work of the Committees.

Scrutiny Committee: the events of the Covid 19 pandemic have brought into focus the important role that the Committee could have in supporting emergency and recovery planning in the Council, feeding into current and future planning regarding lessons learnt. In May 2020, the Committee considered a revised work programme identifying several areas of priority and focus within the Council relating to the pandemic.

Children's Services – return to school; the response from Children's Services has been far reaching and scrutiny has been focussed on the key challenges facing the service.

- Support for education settings
- Children's social care
- Children with special educational needs and disabilities
- School attendance and vulnerable children

Support for shielded and vulnerable people; this has been a key area of scrutiny for the Committee considering a wide range of areas such as:

- Social care
- Safeguarding
- Delivering essential support and supplies to those to those in need
- Hospital discharges
- Residential care

Norfolk Economy and support for businesses; the economy of Norfolk, as with the rest of the country, has been severely affected by the pandemic. The Committee focused on the immediate impact of the support offered by the Council and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) put in place to support the economy and local employment.

Councils' internal processes: The Committee considered the Councils own internal support processes particularly around IT support for staff working remotely and ensuring the Council maintained open and transparent decision making in virtual committee meetings.

Wider Scrutiny Activities:

Strategic and Financial Planning; the Committee has an important role in holding the executive to account especially in financial and strategic planning. The Committee has had regular updates throughout the year recognising that financial scrutiny needs to be ongoing rather than happening late in the budget setting process.

Early Childhood and Family Service (ECFS): in January 2019, the County Council decided to transform Norfolk's offer for families with children aged 0-5 with as significant amount of work undertaken to secure the new ECFS. The ECFS was launched in October 2019 and the Committee have monitored the impact of the new service and will continue to do so through its Children's Services Scrutiny Sub Committee.

Response to the December 2020 Flooding Event; in 2020 Norfolk was hit by a major flooding event in December. The Committee were keen to ensure that those residents who had suffered hardship were made aware of sources of support and information that was available to them. Investigation of the December flooding is still ongoing. A previous event in August was investigated and report issued. As a result of the 2 events causing widespread damage the Council have formed Norfolk Flood Alliance to coordinate the response of stakeholders to flooding events and to formulate measures to prevent further major occurrences.

Corporate Select Committee: The Committee usually meets 6 times a year but the meeting for May 2020 was missed due to pandemic restrictions.

Strategies and Policies: the Committee has the key role of developing and reviewing the Councils strategies and policies. The following major policies and strategies were shaped by the Committee during the year.

- **Norfolk Digital Strategy:** The strategy roadmap explains how the Council will continue to build on past and current successes to improve connectivity in Norfolk. The Council were awarded Connected Britain digital council of the Year 2020.
- **NCC Customer Experience Strategy 2021-26:** The Committee supported and shaped the strategy and on 15th March 2021 recommended the Strategy and a Customer Charter to Cabinet
- **NCC Performance Management Framework:** The Committee shaped the new framework which aligns Cabinet outcomes and departmental objectives with the corporate plan "Together, for Norfolk".
- **NCC Recruitment:** The Committee has agreed the key priorities for recruitment to Council posts including a targeted approach with campaigns, reaching out to underrepresented groups, reducing the time to hire and improving the internal recruitment process.
- **Review of the Councils Constitution:** The Committee has been overseeing a fundamental review of the Councils constitution including the Members Code of Conduct. The revised constitution was presented to Council in April '21.
- **The business and Smarter Working:** this programme was established to drive forward a range of plans and activities to modernise the Council, drive efficiencies and implement new ways of working making the best use of technology. Covid accelerated some of these changes with the roll-out of remote working to over 6000 staff by March 2020.

Infrastructure and Development Committee: the Select Committee contributed to the development of the following new and existing policies and strategies.

- **Enforcement Policy:** the enforcement policy has been developed into a framework for a number of services to ensure that when

undertaking regulatory activities and law enforcement the work is carried out in an equitable and consistent manner across all departments.

- **Environmental Policy:** This policy set out sets out the areas that the Council sees as key to protecting and maintaining the health of Norfolk's distinctive environment and its occupants. One year after it was approved by Council the Committee reviewed the progress to date in delivering the objectives of the policy.
- **Local Flood Risk Strategy:** since this strategy was first written 5 years ago Norfolk has experienced some extreme weather events, there has been significant growth and development and the legislative landscape has changed. A review of the policy was carried out to ensure it remained consistent and relevant.

Additionally, the Committee a number of discussion and update papers were brought to the Committee including: -

- The Norfolk Economy
- Performance of key highway contracts
- Performance of the highway network
- Waste disposal
- Library and Information Service
- Rights of Way Improvement
- Budget planning
- Policy and Strategy Framework annual review

People and Communities Committee: The Select Committee played a role in the development and shaping of the following new strategies and policies: -

- **Adult Social Services Winter Resilience Planning:** The Committee supported the emerging winter planning by asking for focus on the work of unpaid carers, ensuring mechanisms were in place to accept feedback from frontline staff about lessons learnt during the first wave of the pandemic and raised concern around the testing of home carers.
- **SEND Educational Needs Improvement Planning:** The Committee provided oversight to the development of specific action planning

following the inspection of services for children with Special Educational Needs in early 2020.

The Select Committee also reviewed the following existing strategy to ensure it remained fit for purpose:

- Children's Services Transformation Programme: The Committee commented on the specific new ways of working and changes of approach highlighted to help steer the direction of the work. This included particular focus on emerging proposals for support for children with disabilities.

To support the Select Committee in carrying out its activities, and to support all Select Committee Members with a good background of the relevant services a number of discussion and update papers were also brought to Committee, including: -

- Educational achievement of boys – Report
- Children and young people's mental health transformation
- Special educational needs performance framework report
- Quarterly children's services report
- Cares charter progress report
- Post 16 education
- Covid 19 experience in care homes

Your County Councillor: During the year I have continued to attend meetings of the 18 parish councils in my division of Necton and Launditch, although between March 2020 and this March I have only attended 4 in person parish council meetings the remainder being held virtually under the coronavirus regulations.

The absence of a highway engineer and other staff shortages in the local highways office over the winter severely hampered any but the most urgent highway defects being addressed. I am happy to say that the new engineer is doing a sterling job in reducing the backlog of work.

There were 2 major flooding events in the division one in August and the other in Christmas Eve. At my request both have been investigated by the Local Lead Flood Authority. The County Council has set up a Norfolk Flood Alliance chaired by Lord Dannatt. The priority will be to set up a single point of contact for the reporting of serious flooding events. The forum will coordinate the responses of the 36 flood risk management authorities in Norfolk.

Of the committees mentioned above I am member of the Infrastructure and Development Committee and have sat as a substitute on the Corporate Select Committee.

I am chairman of the Council's Standard Committee and have recently reviewed the members Code of Conduct and other parts of the Councils constitution relevant to members conduct. This will implement the recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the new LGA model code of conduct.

I have also been elected to chair the Norfolk Community Safety Scrutiny Sub Panel which was set up to be a critical friend on the progress of the Community Safety Partnership Plan. The sub-committee meets regularly and reports directly to the main Scrutiny Committee.

Mark Kiddle-Morris

Member for Necton and Launditch

Norfolk County Council.

May 1st 2021