

Norfolk County Council Annual Report 2021

Last year I wrote my annual report in April and finished it by saying 'dealing with the Coronavirus has completely disrupted the council's work and budget plans. We have responded to current needs and, like everyone else, we have no idea how long this will continue or when we will be able to get back on track.'

I don't think any of us imagined that we would not be emerging from this for a full year. We will be balancing the budget this year because the Government has assisted with the financial demands of the pandemic but it has been a very different and difficult year. For the last year staff have been working from home and many who had face to face roles, which had to cease, have been helping our other services, or the NHS with whatever needed to be done to help local people and businesses. They have delivered medicines and groceries, helped with testing and vaccinations and answered phone calls for assistance. The Fire Service has driven ambulances, taught others to drive ambulances and set up and run a new mortuary when there were not sufficient to cope.

Museums, libraries, Records Office were closed but they set up and ran virtual visits, activities, etc to assist with the wellbeing of children and adults sitting at home. Adult Learning put their courses on line and developed many new ones, to help people who had lost their jobs develop new skills and acquire qualifications as well as provide activities to support peoples' mental health and wellbeing.

The council funded and distributed 5,000 laptops and tablets for children who needed them to do school work at home and art packs were also supplied to keep them occupied and interested. Libraries set up a phone line to support families who were struggling with home learning and how to use the new digital devices.

Customer Services has assisted with the test and tracing to warn people who have unknowingly been in contact with people with COVID and we believe this service will need to continue for at least another year.

The council's usual work continued maintaining roads, supporting vulnerable adults and children and responding to emergencies such as the flooding during the winter. The Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance has been set up to identify the causes of some of the flooding and help rectify them.

Libraries are about to open again. Recently they have assisted people to complete the Census on line and will be stocking the lateral flow tests in libraries and on mobile libraries when they start coming round again.

A new grant scheme called 'Go Digital' was launched in December to enable micro, small and medium sized businesses to make better use of digital technology by providing funding and one to one support and advice to help support the local economy.

Work has begun on two new recycling centres one to the north and one to the south of Norwich and some major road schemes are about to start in Gt Yarmouth, Downham Market and Stalham. The Long Stratton bypass has also been agreed.

The Member's Highways grant of £6,000 will be increased by £4,000 this year and extended to include environmental projects. The council has also agreed to plant one million trees over the next five years to reduce our environmental impact and meet our target of zero carbon by 2030. Parishes are asked to help identify areas where trees are required.

This is just a brief overview of some of the work of the council. I am always around to answer questions or help with any problems that arise and I endeavour to attend all Parish Council meetings but occasionally I have two or more meetings on one evening and cannot attend everything. The Parish clerks know they can contact me anytime and I am happy to help.

Cllr Margaret Dewsbury