

Annual Parish Report South Norfolk Council - Annual Review

In a year that has been dominated by the Coronavirus it is perhaps inevitable that my annual report focuses primarily on how this has impacted on the work of South Norfolk Council.

"I believe that the mark of a good Council is not just what it does when times are good, when the sun is shining and all is good with the world. The mark of a good Council is how it steps up when the chips are down. It's how it responds to unexpected events. How it keeps on an even keel when buffeted by squalls all around."

"Nobody could have foreseen the nature or extent of the Coronavirus Pandemic. But lack of foresight provides no excuse for a lack of response. Our public demands and expects more than that. The truth is that, whilst nobody could have predicted a pandemic, South Norfolk Council has been best prepared to provide the help our residents and businesses desperately needed."
John Fuller, Leader South Norfolk Council.

Having a strong financial foundation built up by shrewd financial management has left your District Council best placed to deal with the present and future challenges. Although South Norfolk has suffered significant loss of income due to the closure of leisure centres and other income generating services during the periods of lockdown, our strong financial foundations have enabled us to weather the storm in the current year by drawing upon our healthy reserves. In fact, this Council now has shrewdly marshalled millions in revenue reserves to weather the storm having increased council tax by less than half the inflation rate over 15 years.

Delivering Council services during this crisis has been particularly demanding. Yet despite the obvious difficulties faced our Council staff have gone above and beyond their normal duties to ensure the services that we all rely on have been delivered largely as normal.

In addition to the day to day running of Council services South Norfolk Council have contributed to the massive effort to keep our communities safe and protected. The help hub has served as the focal point for delivering help to very large numbers of families and individuals who have required special assistance for our District Council, in providing housing and hardship payments. Our Covid Support Officers have provided reassurance and advice to ensure our communities have been protected.

Local business, particularly in the hospitality sector, has been very badly impacted by this pandemic and sadly there have been some inevitable job losses. However, thanks to an unprecedented financial package from Government some of the worst effects have been avoided. The District Council has been very proactive in distributing grant assistance to help alleviate the financial pressures caused by lack of business opportunity and the extra financial burdens of operating during this Covid-19 crisis. In total nearly £45m has been distributed by South Norfolk Council to local businesses since April last year, which represents one of the highest percentage levels of grant distributions by any Council locally.

Lockdown and other restrictions have led the Council to explore new ways of working. For our staff this has led to widespread home working and an increased reliance on technology. For Councillors the chance to meet in the Council Chamber for meetings has been replaced by

virtual meetings of the Council using Zoom. To allow public participation these meetings have also been live streamed by YouTube. This has led to some interesting challenges particularly for meetings like Planning and Licensing.

South Norfolk Council and Broadland District Council now have a fully operational 'single officer team' serving both Councils. Working more closely together offers both councils increased capacity and resilience, together with greater financial stability whilst taking advantage of commercial opportunities to deliver better value for our residents. Our taxpayers expect a local government that moves with the times and innovates, while retaining and attracting the most talented staff, offering them positive futures and career development opportunities.

Finally, although all these things work on a district-wide basis we're delivering locally too. We still offer community grants and everything we do aims to make Better Lives and Stronger Economies for everyone whilst keeping the cost down with a dedicated team of staff members and Councillors working with the other parts of Government to improve lives one family at a time, one street at a time and one place at a time.

Cllr Richard Elliott
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South Norfolk Council