

Councillor Joshua Osborne: Report for Downham Old Town December 2023

Council Work and Upcoming Budget

The Corporate Plan proposed by the current administration was passed by the Council in November. I and other Labour councillors voted for it alongside the administration because it sets out a positive framework around which progress can be achieved. We will of course be looking closely at the more detailed elements that will begin to come out.

Looking ahead to the beginning of 2024, Council business will be dominated by the Budget in February and the accompanying scrutiny. As the first Budget of the new administration this will be an important moment, and it takes place in a very difficult financial context nationally. Many councils are in the process of issuing Section 114s or fear that they might have to in the future, and the Local Government Association estimates a £4 billion funding gap over the next two years for local authorities across the UK. Increasing demand is not being met by revenue from Westminster to local government, and local authorities have limited means of raising their own revenue. In King's Lynn and West Norfolk the Internal Drainage Boards require significant investment for instance.

However, the Budget can be a positive one as choices are made. Coming into the New Year the Council will be looking at some of the impacts of recently changed legislation, such as the ability to increase council tax premiums for second homes in the Borough. We will work to pass a balanced budget that still progresses the priorities of the Corporate Plan.

Big Beat Your Bills Events in Downham Market

As part of the Borough Council's support to help people struggling with living costs, these events are a way to signpost support and check that benefits and grants that exist are being utilised by those who need them. They will be held 10:00-14:00 in the Clock Room, Town Hall on December 19th and January 23rd.

Councillor's Community Grant Scheme and Pledged Donations

I have over £600 left out of my £1,000 of this scheme after supporting Melody Allsorts Drama Group and a West Norfolk Young Carers Event. Those groups who are interested in applying need to do so by March 31st 2024.

During my election campaign I pledged to give a quarter of my gross councillor's allowance to local causes. That currently represents £1,880. Since May I have donated £1,400 to various organisations: Downham Market Christmas lights; supporting footpath work on Low Road by Wimbotsham Parish Council; Downham Market Word Fest; Downham Market Foodbank; King's Lynn and West Norfolk Pride.

Devolution Deal

Norfolk County Council will decide on the devolution deal on 12th December 2023. It is expected based on the Cabinet decision that they will approve it with an elected leader to be first elected in May 2025 in order to coincide with the elections to the County Council in that month.