

**Brandon Parva, Coston, Runhall and Welborne Parish Council
Annual Parish Report 2022**

South Norfolk District Council by Councillor Richard Elliott

2021/22 has been another unusual year, dominated once again by the ongoing Covid crisis and more recently the consequences of the illegal occupation of Ukraine, so it's only right that I start this annual report highlighting how the Council has responded.

First with the resettlement of refugee families from Ukraine, South Norfolk Council is at the forefront of ensuring the sponsoring households are fit for purpose and suitable welfare and other facilities are in place to receive mostly mothers and children forced to flee the fighting in Ukraine.

South Norfolk Council has also been fully involved in providing help throughout this pandemic to individuals, families, and businesses. During the year our help Hub has dealt with over 20,000 calls for help, our staff have made over 500 home calls to shielding residents and as part of the enhanced contact tracing to support self-isolation, 4373 individuals have been visited.

Council support for people in need has also extended to financial help with nearly 6000 claims received for benefits and council tax support and over £73000 paid through the Covid-19 hardship fund. These are just some of the ways individuals in the greatest need have been supported by your local District Council.

But it's not just about families and individuals, businesses too have been supported throughout this Covid crisis with £84 million in grants distributed to local businesses. South Norfolk was one of the first Councils nationally to distribute £1million to businesses forced to close and continued to distribute £1 million every week of lockdown.

As we begin to see the Covid restrictions eased for our staff members there has been a gradual return to working from the office, but staff still retain some hybrid working. The Council has invested in the appropriate technology and other facilities to allow this. In the last year a new website has been rolled out and much improved online services to allow residents speedy access when they need it most.

Council meetings have resumed face to face at the Council offices although much of the business between Councillors and officers can still be conducted virtually. The Council has new state of the art communications to ensure our hard-working staff can offer the best possible response to our local communities.

The Council's financial situation remains strong. South Norfolk continues to take prudent steps to manage its budget and took sensible precautions to ensure services could be delivered through the Covid crisis. In practice those income generating areas of Council services like the Leisure Centres that were shut for long periods due to health restrictions have bounced back solidly and have been less of a financial burden than we planned for. All credit must go to the very enthusiastic and committed leisure staff and managers who have

risen to the challenge and brought back many people to our leisure centres. The Council's development and property companies, Big Sky Living and Big Sky Property Management, also continue to give a very healthy return on the investments made. South Norfolk and Broadland share a single officer/staff team which has resulted in major efficiencies, better ways of working, also delivering significant annual savings currently over £1 million annually. Good sustained financial management and healthy reserves has enabled the Council to remain financially strong in an uncertain world, while easing the burden to residents of Council Tax, maintaining just a £5 annual increase for band D properties.

Looking to the year ahead the Council has ambitious plans to invest even more in communities, the economy and positive planning for a post carbon economy. We have recently agreed a major capital programme to ensure that infrastructure is maintained and improved. The Council recently announced a number of bold new plans to support the environment, including the potential to increase electric vehicle charging points in rural areas and to become more self-sufficient in energy production.

Despite the obvious difficulties the delivery of Council services has continued over this last year largely without interruption, save those occasions when leisure services were closed. The planning department has seen a significant increase in planning applications and as reported earlier the housing and benefits teams have significantly increased their workloads. Throughout all the disruption refuse collection has continued without pause and our in-house team have ensured that bins have been collected weekly as normal. Of course, these are some of the most obvious services delivered by your Council, but South Norfolk Council provides dozens of other services.

Community Funding and Grants - The Community Action Fund has been trebled for the coming financial year and this offers significant opportunities for rural communities such as ours to continue to benefit from this type of Council support.

The year ahead has many uncertainties not least the ongoing rises in the cost of living and the continuing conflict in Ukraine. Residents can be assured that South Norfolk Council by its careful and prudent financial management and innovative delivery of its services has the capacity to weather this storm and continue providing the very necessary and essential services to the people of these parishes and surrounding communities.

Richard Elliott
10 April 2022