APPENDIX 1

SEPTEMBER THOUGHTS CHRIS MORLEY

FINANCE 2025/26

The final cost revenue outturn was nearly £0.5m below budget. This sum has been transferred to supplement our earmarked reserves to fund future organisational changes. This headroom was secured through a savings programme of £4.2m which countered the effect of higher than planned inflation in many areas and higher than forecast staff and maintenance costs in areas, such as our sports and entertainment facilities.

This means that the Council has delivered a turnround in our revenue budget of £14m from the 1st April 2026 position forecast in the February 2023 Medium Term Financial Plan which this Administration faced when taking over the reins.

FINANCE 2026/27

We are currently on a steady course to meet our balanced revenue budget forecast this year but there are significant pressures on our service costs which, again, we trust will be offset by our savings and efficiencies programme to provide a positive outturn. A savings programme of £3.05m has been planned to not only act as a safety net but also to deliver our value for money and sustainability obligation.

However, with the headroom we have achieved we decided to increase our Grants Programme by £650K for this year, taking our community benefits package to over £1m

£450K is being allocated to those causes that we consider to be essential to support year on year, such as the Kings Lynn Festival, Festival Too, Citizens Advice and Community Transport, Ferry Service; these and similar causes all have a **Service Level Agreement** with the Borough such that we can regularly measure their service and benefit.

£55K has been allocated for the **Councillor Community Grant Scheme**.

£15K revenue and £50K capital for our **Small Grants Scheme** which is managed for us by The Norfolk Community Foundation, and for this year only, an additional opportunity for Rural and Coastal Communities to secure revenue or capital grants of up to £10K from a supplementary community fund of £50K.

A new scheme for 26-28 has also been introduced. A **Councillor endorsed grant scheme** offering grants of up to £25K revenue or capital from a pot of £500k

CAPITAL FINANCE PROGRAMME

There is, however, one dark cloud hovering over our capital investment programme and that is house deliveries to our residents. We are managing the build of over 1000 modern homes in the Borough, predominantly in Kings Lynn where developers are reluctant to commit due to the issues connected with the town's low lying situation.

Many houses have been built or nearing completion but await sales in a flat market. We are reallocating as many houses as appropriate to affordable rentals and social housing but this takes a little time to arrange. Meanwhile our builders are being paid and our net debt has risen to a little over £30m. The debt on this borrowing is catered for within our revenue budget and it is well within our "credit card limit" or more precisely the regulated financial boundary under local government financial rules.

This debt but more importantly the need to get affordable housing to families or single people, is under constant scrutiny and the signs are hopeful that progress will be made in good time for investment in further developments and our eagerly awaited town centre improvements including a world renown Guildhall.

As an aside, it is often overlooked that the Guildhall complex also includes a refurbished building for new business or start ups (similar to KLIC) which will bring further investment and value into the town.

SOCIAL VALUE

All of our investments have an intrinsic benefit for the purpose intended, such as housing, leisure, tourism, however, there very construction and existence provides "hidden" value through aspects such as employment, training, citizen wellbeing. We have a social value policy to measure this benefit and are currently in the throes of bringing all these factors together to provide a further indication of the value for money we are delivering to our residents and communities. I will be reporting to all Council and Parish Members on this when we are further ahead.

INTERESTING PROJECTS IN PIOPEINE

1. Council has agreed to have an integrated Racket and Community Sports Hub built at Lynnsport. We have to commit to contract but expect the hub will cost within £2.2m and the Lawn Tennis Association are supportive to the extent of providing a £1m grant. The hub will include 3 covered padel courts, weatherproofed tennis coots and a flexible multi-use activity area.
2. When we realised that building a swimming pool within and around the Lynnspot building was not operationally viable and much too expensive we looked for alternatives. We are currently recommending a complex on Council land adjacent to the main Lyynsport building, with an 8 lane pool, a trainer pool with a moveable depth facility plus a "splash" pool. This has yet to be fully designed and costed but the recommendation is going to Cabinet shortly.
3. The Hunstanton promenade is shifting and needs some urgent reinforcement before further work can be done on the prom. Itself. This will cost a considerable amount and we have made a significant provision in our capital account. Unfortunately, real progress on an Oasis replacement will stall amongst other promenade propositions.
4. Garden Wildlife Project. Some readers may have taken part in this growing (excuse pun) competition. It is one where involvement has many benefit not just for wildlife but for participants, young and old. The adjudication is taking place with an awards ceremony later this month.

5. Borough Film Project. With the advent of Local Government Reorganisation we have decided to produce (at minimum cost) a professionally directed film and voice over, to capture the history of this Borough and it's forebears. More anon.

PLANNING

There is so much going on that I will wait for a council report from the Portfolio holder. However, a couple of points occur to me. CIL allocations this year totalled £750K (no submissions from this Ward). The calendar for the next round of community projects has yet to be set, so keep your eyes out for that.

New Local Plan – the Call for Sites produced over 750 options which are now in the process of being assessed. There will shortly be an interactive map for Parish Members to examine any in their Parish and comment accordingly.

You will have read that the Licencing of vape products has strengthened the rules and more smoke free areas will be introduced. Councils will have to implement changes in the New Year but I await more specific detail.

OPEN SPACE EXCELLENCE

Just a note, in case it was missed, that our Public Space team were awarded 5 Green Flags for gardens in Hunstanton, Kings Lynn and the Crematorium.

They also do an incredible job clearing up after events. There are many free events within the Borough and the cost of clearing up is one we all have to bear. If only people would take their rubbish with them!

All for now, I will report on LGR when I hear of some further positive action. I'm afraid it's all negative from the County but we want to control our actions and costs to support communities in the West from Kings Lynn and not be far away country cousins to Norwich

Cllr Chris Morley

Bircham with Rudhams