County Councillor Eric Vardy Report to Gresham Parish Council Meeting March 2022

 Dear members,

This month’s report is diverse to say the least. As someone who has suffered the impact of Covid, I can only implore you to continue to be as vigilant and careful as possible. We will all have to learn to live with Covid is the simple message.

**Norfolk and Waveney COVID-19 booster and vaccinations**

**Vaccinations for all healthy 5–11year-olds to launch from April 2022**

Following a government announcement, which confirmed that all healthy 5–11-year-olds will soon be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination, health leaders are asking that parents and carers be patient and do not contact the NHS to request a vaccine. The guidance indicates that healthy children will be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination sometime in April 2022. At the moment, the Norfolk and Waveney health and care system is continuing to vaccinate clinically extremely vulnerable 5–11-year olds and will continue to do so in th weeks ahead.

**Norfolk County Council Budget**

**Budget to “build back better” agreed**. The 2022-23 budget proposes significant investment, while addressing continuing severe pressure on services. Plans for a balanced budget and a 2.99 per cent Council Tax rise were agreed by Norfolk County Council. The full council agreed:

A 2.99 per cent rise in the county council’s share of Council Tax, in April – not the maximum permissible 3.99 per cent To give a little perspective on this a Band D dwelling will be paying less than a £1 per week extra.·

An increase in the 2022/23 net budget by £25 million compared to this year, to £464.123m ·

A review of the Council and how it operates, to bridge a £60m budget gap predicted for 2023/24

**New roles created to improve the link between county and local councils**

A significant investment has been made into the relationship between Norfolk County Council and the rest of the county with £160,000 committed over the next 2 years.

The county council have funded the Norfolk Association of Local Councils (Norfolk ALC) to employ two members of staff who will be dedicated to improving the link between the county council and Norfolk’s town and parish councils.The new roles will help local councils stay up to date on key initiatives and policies that affect them, while ensuring that local voices are heard at a county level.They will also work to raise the profile of Parish Councils across Norfolk and the work they do for their communities. The funding will also aim to help local councils build their skills and get access to the right information. That might include help with developing a parish plan, writing a funding bid, or reaching a wider demographic in their area.This help will be in addition to the support the Norfolk ALC already provides which has seen a range of initiatives co-ordinating the Parish and Town Councils in Norfolk. Anyone interested in knowing more about the support available via the Norfolk Association of Local Councils can visit their website which holds information, advice and training on a wide range of subjects.

**Hundreds of free activities available for children and young people this Easter**

Bookings are now open for The Big Norfolk Holiday Fun, a programme of free activities that will run over the Easter holidays for 5–16-year-olds across Norfolk. The scheme is provided as part of the government’s Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme and is being delivered by Norfolk County Council in partnership with Active Norfolk. There will be a range of activities available all over the county, aimed at various ages. These could include football, basketball, circus skills, arts and crafts, dance, music, cookery, film-making and much more. The sessions offer children the chance to learn and develop new skills, alongside receiving a free healthy lunch each day. Booking is on a first-come-first-served basis,with limited spaces for many activities, so families should book soon to avoid disappointment.

Those who claim means-tested free school meals can claim free spaces on the activities, whilst paid spots are available on many activities for those who don’t**.**