

## District Councillor Report – James Eddy – January 2025

Happy New Year to you all. I hope you had an enjoyable end to 2024 and beginning of 2025. Obviously, this can be a particularly difficult time of year for many people in our community and that makes the need to look out for the vulnerable all the more important. Just as I did last year, I will recommend the service of South Norfolk Council's Help Hub which offers wide ranging help and support for addressing issues like money worries, loneliness and isolation, health and wellbeing problems, housing issues, bereavement, and general community support. So, if you or anyone you know can make use of this service please contact the Help Hub by calling 01508 533933 or emailing [helphub@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk](mailto:helphub@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk).

On a similar note, I have recently been collaborating on some work that focuses on the damaging and often unacknowledged effects of loneliness and isolation. Unfortunately, this is something that unites people of all ages throughout the country and is likely to have profound consequences for mental health, social cohesion and even democracy itself. What surprised me most was that according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) "young people aged 16-24 consistently report the highest levels of loneliness in the UK." On the surface, this may feel like it makes little sense but unfortunately social media has, over the years, replaced significant amounts of social connection and now increasingly amplifies isolation and disconnection. Given that these young people are the future of our community and our country, I found this deeply troubling.

Now, you may be wondering why I would be sharing something so bleak with you all. The reason is that there is actually hope and positivity on this issue on our own doorstep. I'm sure that many of you know about Exchange 2, which is based at the cabin on Harleston's Recreation Ground. However, you might not be aware of what they actually do for local young people aged 12-19. Every Tuesday and Thursday evening, the cabin offers a mix of themed events like music, pizza and movie nights and in general provides a safe and welcoming space for young people to relax, socialise, learn and grow. More than this, Exchange 2 also invites professionals to deliver workshops in areas like sports coaching and bicycle safety, ensuring that young people not only have a place to unwind but also to acquire valuable skills. They also offer free fitness classes at the Harleston Gym thanks to funding from Adnams Community Trust. The classes run every Thursday from 4–5pm and provide a valuable opportunity for young people to stay active, build confidence and improve their overall wellbeing.

It seems to me that giving our local young people something they can enjoy and appreciate can only be positive for them on an individual and collective level. Above all, Exchange 2's work seems like an ideal antidote to the loneliness epidemic that causes so many problems for so many young people by creating a sense of belonging and actually empowering the next generation. For more information, visit their website at [www.exchange2.co.uk](http://www.exchange2.co.uk) or email them at [contact@exchange2.co.uk](mailto:contact@exchange2.co.uk).

On a side note, I recently had to seek emergency dental treatment and I can now attest firsthand to the difficult and expense involved in getting treatment for something that can be extremely painful and unpleasant. While clearly a problem nationwide, there can be little doubt that Norfolk like other rural areas is increasingly a 'dental desert.' Even before my own tooth problems, I was looking for potential solutions to this as the only solutions I had seen put forward were longer term like the establishment of a dental school at the UEA.

It occurred to me that this was a perfectly good idea but that it would take years to have any tangible effect and by then the problem would likely be worse than it currently is.

As always, if there is anything I can do to help or if you have any queries regarding South Norfolk Council then please get in contact by emailing me at [james.eddy@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk](mailto:james.eddy@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk) or pop in to see me at my councillor surgery at Harleston Information Plus on the last Saturday of the month between 10am and 12.

All the best,

James