

MANAGING DIRECTOR'S COLUMN MERCURY - MARCH

Taking a look back through my diary over the last few weeks has reminded me how diverse many of the meetings I have attended have been.

The first was the launch of the Norfolk Climate Strategy in Norwich. While it is a worthy document which does command support across the county, it only provides a basic framework and will need more detail in due course.

I can't help feeling that we all have a long way to go in a very short time if we are going to avoid bequeathing the next generation a real crisis.

Although not an organisation with the snappiest title, the Norfolk Learning for Life Partnership does important work in promoting a wide range of informal learning opportunities for adults.

It is delivered in Great Yarmouth through organisations such as the Priory Centre, Community Connections and Great Yarmouth College. It offers a range of courses aimed at encouraging people's talents or giving them a useful step back into employment after a long break.

Courses range from the artistic such as flower arranging to improving communication skills. Like all projects not falling into the mainstream of funding they often struggle for finance, but their demise would leave a big gap in many people's lives.

A visit to London to attend a conference entitled Public Sector Transformation saw me delivering a 20 minute talk on an area the Council has a strong reputation for nationally.

Over the years we have developed a good system which helps to identify future workforce requirements. Interest was shown by delegates from across the country on how we have a formal annual forecast covering the 35 service units in the authority.

It is based on how we see the service developing and gauging what training will be required for teams or individuals, looking at possible restructuring of departments and other areas including flexible working and the well being of employees.

But none of these things will work effectively if there isn't a good basic culture based on core values that make employees want to do well and help people. If you work in an organisation that experiences bullying, a blame culture and is patronising to the people it deals with, you will find it hard to achieve anything.

Over the years we have tackled any issues that touched on those points, and that is why today we are in a good position to identify people's potential and build on those strengths.

Back in Great Yarmouth a real pleasure was a recent visit to Smart Kids OK on Gapton Hall Road. I came across the organisation through my position on the board of the Norfolk Community Foundation. The trustees of the organisation raise funding and disperse it to smaller organisations - Smart Kids OK being a local example.

The group provides youngsters on the autistic spectrum with lots of activities and facilities in a safe, colourful and friendly environment - while parents and families also gain support.

Smarts Kids OK are among the most dedicated and enthusiastic group of people I have ever met. Like most charities they are constantly struggling to find the funding to maintain their activities - particularly for staffing, premises and utilities.

I do feel there can't be many more deserving causes around, but I also suspect that there are many other groups around the borough who give excellent care and support to numerous families, and we owe them all a debt of gratitude.