

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 29 June 2023 at the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 11.30 am

Committee

Members Present:

Cllr W Fredericks (Deputy Chair)	Cllr L Shires
Cllr T Adams (Chair)	Cllr A Brown
Cllr H Blathwayt	Cllr A Varley
Cllr L Withington	

Members also attending:

Cllr C Cushing
Cllr J Boyle
Cllr N Dixon

Officers in Attendance:

Director for Place & Climate Change, Director for Communities, Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer, Health and Communities Team Leader, Housing Strategy & Community Support, Director for Resources / S151 Officer and Policy and Performance Management Officer

Apologies for Absence:

Cllr P Heinrich
Cllr C Ringer

15 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th June were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

18 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

19 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Chairman advised members that they could ask questions throughout the meeting as matters arose.

20 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cllr N Dixon, confirmed that

there were no recommendations made to Cabinet at the last meeting of the committee.

21 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PLANNING POLICY & BUILT HERITAGE WORKING PARTY

The Chairman invited Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Chairman of the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party, to introduce this item.

Cllr Brown began by explaining that there was currently a Health Protocol in place but changes were required to bring it up to date in light of recent planning policies. The Working Party did have some concerns and it was agreed that there was further work to do.

It was proposed by Cllr A Brown, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED

To endorse the update to the Health Protocol (in so far as it relates to contact details, factual changes, and reference systems) but to not endorse the content of the protocol in its entirety.

To request that the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework reconsiders the scope of the Protocol including mental health, dentistry and public health in the broader sense, and addresses the issues around practical implementation.

22 CORPORATE PLAN 2023 - 2027

The Chairman and Leader of the Council, Cllr T Adams, introduced this item. He began by thanking officers for their hard work and support in preparing the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027. He said that many of the key issues campaigned for by the Administration during the District Council elections, were reflected as key themes in the Corporate Plan. An Annual Action Plan would be developed to cover the next two years and would outline those projects and interventions the Council would seek to implement to address the challenges faced by the District under each of the priority themes. Once the Action Plan was finalised, it would inform a revision of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the 2024/25 budget process.

The Chairman said that the Council would have to respond to a great deal of change in the next four years, including the impact of inflationary pressures on finances, the outcome of the standardisation of waste consultation and the potential agreement of County Deals.

He explained that the Corporate Plan had the following five key themes;

- Our greener future
- Developing our communities
- Meeting our local housing need
- Investing in our Local Economy and Infrastructure
- A strong, responsible and accountable council

He added that work would continue to support important work-streams, such as continued investment in public toilet facilities, the provision of temporary accommodation and addressing the challenges of the cost of living crisis.

Cllr A Brown welcomed the progress that had been made on developing the new Corporate Plan so quickly.

Cllr L Shires said that she welcomed the reduction in jargon and as Portfolio Holder for Finance she was looking forward to the challenge of achieving financial stability.

The Chairman thanked them for their comments and said there was still some detail to include such as additional information on affordable homes.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED:

1. To agree the content of the draft Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 as a statement of the Council's intent and ambition for the term of this Council administration.
2. To authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree any minor revisions and changes to the final draft of the Corporate Plan document and thereafter the format / design of the document for publication, following adoption by Full Council.
3. That Cabinet publishes a Delivery Plan detailing how the objectives detailed in the Corporate Plan will be delivered / achieved to its November 2023 meeting.

That Cabinet recommends to Full Council:-

4. That Full Council adopts the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027.

Reason for the Decision:

The Corporate Plan details the Council's ambitions and intent for the next four years. It will provide the framework and context for the Council's service provision, project interventions and resource allocation (financial and staffing) for the period through to 2027.

The Plan will be subject to annual review to ensure that it continues to reflect the Council's priorities and objectives throughout the next four years in response to emerging trends, policy developments and legislation.

23 2022/2023 OUTTURN REPORT

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates and Property Services, introduced this item. She began by saying that the Council's financial position was much better than anticipated and she thanked officers for their hard work in preparing the report. The surplus for the 2021/22 financial year was transferred to the General Reserve as there was a deficit forecast and the outturn position in November 2022 was forecast to be £900k. The forecast at period 10 was lower and this was to be welcomed. She concluded by saying that the Council's finances continued to be in a much stronger position than most local authorities and she thanked officers across the organisation for their help in achieving this.

The Director for Resources added that expenditure had been managed very carefully and acknowledged that the receipt of several grants had helped. There had been savings on capital costs due to delays in the capital programme, which had

been largely unavoidable. She explained that £500k had been allocated to a reserve for Net Zero, to support investment in reducing carbon emissions. Regarding temporary accommodation, two years capital budget would be brought forward to 2023/24 from 2024/25 and 2025/2026 so that properties could be purchase now rather than waiting two to three years.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr C Cushing said that he was surprised that Cllr Shires was satisfied with the report given that this was the first time that an overspend had been forecast at the outturn stage. However, he noted that this was based on provisional figures and sought clarification when the finalised position would be available and why was it not ready now. The Director for Resources replied that the 2020/2021 accounts were still outstanding and the auditors were currently assessing them and it was hoped that they would be signed off within the next two weeks. The 2021/2022 accounts would then be finalised. There was a knock-on effect that each year's accounts needed to be finalised before the balances could be brought forward into the next financial year. It was hoped that the 2021/22 accounts would be audited in late July / early August and the final balances for 2021/22 could then be carried forward as the opening balances for 2022/2023. She added that the final position with any required audit adjustments, could be signed off at the December meeting of the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee (GRAC).

The Director for Resources went onto say that the issue with not having completed the accounts which was affecting the outturn position for 2022/2023 and meant that the Council was not fully assured of the financial outturn, was due to an ongoing lack of resource in the Finance team. This was currently being addressed, with several posts out to recruitment. On top of this there was the national issue regarding lack of resource within external audit providers.

Cllr L Shires said that in response to Cllr Cushing's comment about her being pleased with the current financial position, it was because it was significantly lower than the anticipated amount. She referred back to the decision taken by Full Council in October 2022 to transfer £216k into the General Fund because a deficit was forecast due to financial volatility across the country. However, when the position was reassessed, she was pleased to see that the deficit had come down and that was why she was pleased with the current position.

Cllr Cushing thanked Cllr Shires for her response and said that he looked forward to hearing about the Administration's plans to close the budget gap in years to come. He then asked the Director for Resources about GRAC's request for a timeline for the publication of the Final Accounts and asked if this could be shared with any interested members. He then referred to the retained business rates which was currently showing a deficit of £0.5m. He asked about the risks that the numbers could move significantly. She replied that, on the basis of work that had been done on this, officers were happy with the projections. She added that there was nothing outstanding in terms of the collection fund for 2020/21. Volatility was mainly due to external factors such as businesses closing or applying for rate relief. There was also a retained business rates reserve which was set aside to deal with such fluctuations.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED

To recommend the following to Full Council:

- a) The provisional outturn position for the General Fund revenue account for 2022/23;
- b) The transfers to and from reserves as detailed within the report (and appendix C) along with the corresponding updates to the 2023/24 budget;
- c) The deficit of £0.261m relating to service overspends be funded from the General Reserve;
- d) The deficit of £0.561m relating to retained business rates be funded from the Business Rates Reserve;
- e) The financing of the 2022/23 capital programme as detailed within the report and at Appendix D.
- f) The balance on the General Reserve of £2.649m;
- g) The updated capital programme for 2023/24 to 2025/26 and scheme financing as outlined within the report and detailed at Appendix E
- h) The roll-forward requests as outlined in Appendix F
- i) The transfer of £0.5m from the Delivery Plan Reserve to a new reserve – ‘Net Zero Initiatives’ set up specifically to fund projects, initiatives and works to achieve Net Zero.
- j) The provision of a Temporary Accommodation capital budget for 2024/25 and 2025/26 of £0.25m per year be moved into 2023/24 giving a total budget of £0.75m in 2023/24 and that this be funded by temporary borrowing until it can be replaced by preserved right to buy capital receipts.

Reasons for the decision:

To approve the draft outturn position on the revenue and capital accounts used to produce the statutory accounts for 2022/2023.

24 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2022 - 2023

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services, introduced this item. She explained that it was an annual report which showed the Council's current treasury position against the cost of delivering the capital programme. She referred members to pages 106 – 107 which set out the impact of interest rates on the Council's investments.

The Director for Resources agreed with Cllr Shires observation that increases in interest rates were having a positive impact on the Council's investments but acknowledged that they had a negative effect on residents.

Cllr N Dixon

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED

To recommend to Full Council that the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2022 – 2023 be approved.

Reason for the decision:

To ensure compliance with the CIPFA Treasury Management and Prudential Codes.

25 PURCHASE OF AFFORDABLE HOME - LAHF GRANT

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr W Fredericks, introduced this item. She explained that this followed on from Cabinet's agreement on 6th March 2023, to accept a grant from the Local Authority Housing Fund programme. It was proposed that the Council purchased a four bedroom property that would initially be used to meet the resettlement needs of Afghan households. In the longer term the home would be available to the Council to use to meet its statutory homeless duties.

Cllr C Cushing asked where the property was located. Cllr Fredericks replied that this could not be disclosed due to the sensitive nature of the circumstances. She said she could advise Cllr Cushing outside of the meeting.

It was proposed by Cllr W Fredericks, seconded by Cllr L Shires and

RESOLVED

To approve the purchase of a 4-bed home, partly supported by funding from the government's Local Authority Housing Fund grant

Reason for the decision:

To give authority for spend over £100k

26 COUNCIL LOAN TO HOMES FOR WELLS TO ENABLE PURCHASE OF TWO PROPERTIES

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr W Fredericks, introduced this item. She explained that this was an opportunity to support the delivery of two affordable homes in Wells and to support the work of a partner community-led housing organisation. The homes would be allocated to local, low-income households.

Cllr L Withington asked why a social housing rent and an affordable rent had been chosen rather than two social housing rents. The Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager (GC) replied that it was difficult for Homes for Wells to make both rents affordable rents, so they were proposing one social rent and one affordable. Both were significantly below the market rent level.

It was proposed by Cllr W Fredericks, seconded by Cllr L Shires and

RESOLVED

to approve a loan of £110,000 to Homes for Wells to help with the purchase of two properties.

Reason for the decision:

The two homes will provide affordable housing for low-income households from the Homes for Wells waiting list

27 DISCRETIONARY DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT POLICY

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr W Fredericks, introduced this item. She explained that demand for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) was increasing due to an ageing population and the desire by many people with disabilities and long-term health conditions to remain in their own home rather than opt for residential or nursing care.

A discretionary DFG policy was needed to widen the scope and services available through the DFG process. It would offer an early intervention service and contribute to the resolution of cases that required work outside of the scope of the current DFG fund.

Cllr A Brown said that any scheme aimed at supporting people to stay in their own homes should be welcomed.

It was proposed by Cllr W Fredericks, seconded by Cllr A Brown and

RESOLVED

To adopt the Discretionary DFG Policy

Reasons for the decision:

To enhance and improve DFG provision with the aim of promoting independent living and wellbeing.

To increase the range of DFG Services that are available and to enhance the existing services offered to meet unmet need.

28 INFORMATION, ADVICE & ADVOCACY

Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Benefits, introduced this item. She explained that the Council gave a grant to the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) supporting people in North Norfolk. Norfolk Citizens Advice (Norfolk CA) have worked in partnership with NNDC, the County Council and Town and Parish councils for at least ten years providing a range of generic and specialist IAA services across North Norfolk. They were also a government approved debt advisor organisation.

Cllr Fredericks informed members that over the last year, there had been a 22% increase in people approaching the CAB for support and assistance.

Cllr Shires said that she would like to see some additional data in future reports about face to face contact. The Early Help and Prevention Manager said that she would circulate additional, detailed information to members.

It was proposed by Cllr W Fredericks, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED

To award a grant of £66,323 to Norfolk CA towards for the provision of generic IAA services in North Norfolk and a Specialist Debt Relief Order Advisor to take direct referrals from NNDC and to be based at NNDC at least one day a week.

Reason for the decision:

To recognise and respond to the ongoing and increasing demand for generic and specialist IAA services in North Norfolk.

29 CROMER - MARRAM'S BOWLS CLUB, PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates and Assets, introduced this item. She said that the report related to a much loved asset which was owned by the Council and currently leased and occupied by Marrams Bowls Club, Cromer. The external elements of the premises were in dis-repair and required major capital expenditure by NNDC to consolidate the building structure and ongoing revenue cost to then maintain. Cllr Shires said that she felt that more exploratory work could be undertaken regarding what could be achieved on the site.

The Estates and Asset Strategy Manager said that several options were possible and implementable, with the recommended option providing an opportunity to create a newly refurbished clubhouse and a new bespoke area for up to 3 separate income producing concessions. The proposals would also comply with the Council's Net Zero policy.

The Chairman said that he felt Cabinet would like to see more explanation regarding the reasons why a bigger, more profitable scheme was not being pursued and he asked whether there were any planning constraints preventing this. He also said that there was some anxiety around how footfall into the concessions would be captured and ensure that they were successful, thus mitigating any costs incurred by the Council. He felt that this additional information would be helpful in informing members ahead of reaching a decision.

Cllr A Varley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, said that the preferred scheme did have merit but he had concerns that the proposed redevelopment could have an impact on the reduction of the Council's carbon footprint. He said that he was supportive of Cllr Shire's suggestion that more exploratory work should be undertaken.

Cllr L Withington said that this was a significant site as well as a community asset and it was important that any work did not impact negatively on the Bowls Club. The Chairman added that there was a water supply issue that affected both sites and this needed to be considered. He said that it was hoped that a way forward that respected the importance of the site to the community, whilst maximising revenue could be found.

Cllr W Fredericks said that if the works were undertaken, then consideration should be given to other community groups having access to the facilities. The Chairman replied that there were a lot of community facilities in Cromer but it was possible that the Clubhouse could be used by other groups.

Cllr Shires said that she would like more information on the following;

- How the concessions would be promoted in terms of footfall and directing visitors to the site
- Assurance that revenue was being maximised on the site
- Clarification regarding planning constraints

On this basis, she said that she would propose deferral until the above information could be provided. Cllr L Withington seconded the proposal.

Cllr N Dixon referred to the recommendation on page 146 and the proposal to proceed with Option 4 in the report. He said that this option proposed a 'reduced scale of repairs such as roof and windows' and was discounted as not being compliant with Net Zero priorities. He asked how this could therefore be recommended as the preferred option. Cllr Shires agreed and said that it must be an error. Cllr Dixon replied that if something as straightforward as this was incorrect, then he had concerns about the rest of the report.

Cllr Dixon said that for a building that had been known to be in a poor condition for several years, he wondered what forward funding provisions had been made in the Property Services budget and maintenance plan. Cllr Adams said that the issues with this particular structure had been known for some time and work had been ongoing to address the various assets and concessions along the seafront. Some had been empty for some time and it had been challenging to find tenants. He added that the building was in a very exposed location.

Cllr Shires said that the Council's estate had largely been under-invested in prior to 2019. Repairs were prioritised according to need.

Cllr Dixon said that it was key to plan ahead and the report didn't seem to have the hallmarks of forward planning about it. It was about anticipating any issues so that requests for additional funding were not sprung on members at a late stage. He went on to say that he welcomed the build-up sheets that were included in the report. They were very informative and it would be helpful to have them included in future reports, adding that this level of detail would have been very helpful when the proposals relating to the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone came forward for consideration.

The Chairman said that he also welcomed the inclusion of the build up costs in the report. He went on to say that planning constraints on the site had been raised before but he would like to ensure that its full potential was explored.

Cllr Cushing said that he could not see any internal costs set out in the report – such as legal fees, planning charges etc. The Estates and Asset Manager replied that £50k had been allocated for planning and legal costs and £350k would cover the cost of the refurbishment.

Cllr Cushing said that the report mentioned a rent review for the Bowls Club and income streams from the concessions but there were no forecasts included. He asked for more information on this. The Chief Executive replied that this information was included in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the exempt appendix. This was because any concessions would be let on a commercial basis, following bids made to the Council. He added that many of the Council's seafront assets had limited commercial potential due to limited seasonality. In Cromer, Sheringham and Mundesley there was therefore a limit in terms of the rental income that could be generated which in turn had an impact on the amount of money that the Council could invest in refurbishment.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr L Withington to defer a decision pending the provision of further information on planning constraints and the ability to deliver sustainable concession opportunities on the site.

RESOLVED

To defer a decision pending the provision of further information on planning

constraints, footfall figures and potential concession opportunities

Reason for the decision

It was considered that more information was required before members felt able to reach a decision on the future of the site.

30 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

31 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 12.37 pm.

Chairman