

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 19 July 2023 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 6.00 pm

Members Present:	Cllr T Adams	Cllr P Bailey
	Cllr M Batey	Cllr K Bayes
	Cllr H Blathwayt	Cllr J Boyle
	Cllr A Brown	Cllr C Cushing
	Cllr N Dixon	Cllr P Fisher
	Cllr A Fitch-Tillett	Cllr T FitzPatrick
	Cllr W Fredericks	Cllr C Heinink
	Cllr P Heinrich	Cllr V Holliday
	Cllr R Macdonald	Cllr P Neatherway
	Cllr L Paterson	Cllr S Penfold
	Cllr P Porter	Cllr J Punchard
	Cllr C Ringer	Cllr L Shires
	Cllr E Spagnola	Cllr J Toye
	Cllr K Toye	Cllr A Varley
	Cllr L Withington	

Also in attendance:

36 NORTH NORFOLK YOUTH COUNCIL

The Democratic Services Manager introduced the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the North Norfolk Youth Council and explained that they were going to give a short presentation to Members, outlining their vision and the issues that they would be focussing on over the next few months.

The presentation outlined the formation of the Youth Council and its current membership and set out the three key priorities of mental health awareness, education and the environment. Their first project would focus on mental health and they had recently visited the new rest hub in Aylsham to find out more ahead of a new hub opening in North Walsham. The presentation concluded with the youth councillors asking members to support them and engage with them so that the best outcomes could be achieved for all residents of North Norfolk.

Cllr L Shires, said that as mental health champion for the Council she was keen to work with them on raising awareness.

Cllr T FitzPatrick said that he welcomed the choice of mental health as an initial priority. Many young people in the district lived in rural and isolated areas and it was important that they knew they should seek help as soon as possible. He agreed that parents and other young people needed educating on spotting the signs of mental health issues.

37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following members: Cllr D Birch, Cllr G Bull, Cllr S Butikofer, Cllr E Coleman, Cllr M Hankins, Cllr N Housden, Cllr G Mancini-Boyle, Cllr R Sims, Cllr M Taylor, Cllr E Vardy and Cllr L Vickers

38 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 June were approved and signed by the Chairman.

39 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

40 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

41 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman outlined recent civic events that had been attended:

24 June 2023 – Royal British Legion Armed Forces Day – Northrepps Village Hall

24 June 2023 – Paella & Fizz with Bishop Graham, Bishop's House Garden, Norwich

8 July 2023 – Lord Mayor's Street Procession and Reception

14 July 2023 – Norfolk County Council's Summer Reception, County Hall, Norwich

16 July 2023 – Mayoral Civic Service, Kings Lynn Minster

42 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader began by saying that he had recently attended the Local Government Association Annual Conference in Bournemouth. It had been very interesting and there were 1600 councillors and officers in attendance from across the country.

The conference had provided an opportunity to discuss the levelling up agenda with other councils and talk to them about their experiences with their submissions. There had also been a discussion around devolution. Many authorities spoke about their infrastructure projects and it highlighted NNDC's achievements in this area which included the extensive public toilet refurbishment programme, the completion of the Reef Leisure centre, the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone project and award-winning works to Cromer Pier.

He then spoke about Cabinet's recent visit to Fakenham which had been very informative. It was recognised that there was more work to do in Fakenham and it was hoped that there would be opportunities in the future to work with partners on bringing projects to fruition.

The Deputy Leader, Cllr Fredericks and the Chief Executive, had recently attended a meeting convened by Duncan Baker MP to discuss the role of Bacton in providing hydrogen production and carbon capture and storage. He said that the Council was keen to develop opportunities for North Norfolk arising from this rapidly growing sector.

The Leader said that he had recently visited Fulmodeston to meet with residents and the Parish Council to hear about issues and concerns relating to Banham Poultry farm. An abatement notice had been issued and Banham Poultry was continuing to work hard to address the number of flies.

The Leader welcomed the Council's recent achievement of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver award and he thanked officers and the Armed Forces Champion for their hard work.

He said he was pleased to inform members that the Council had retained its green flags at Holt Country Park, Pretty Corner and Sadler's Wood. This was a great achievement and he thanked the Countryside team for their hard work.

Finally, the Leader said that there would be an LGA Peer Review commencing on 11th September. He wished everyone a relaxing and enjoyable summer break.

43 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

44 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

The Leader informed members that Cllr M Hankins would be appointed to the vacant seat on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

45 PORTFOLIO REPORTS

The Chairman asked Portfolio Holders if they wanted to provide any updates on their written reports before she opened the session up to questions.

Cllr H Blathwayt, Portfolio Holder for Coast, referred to page 26 of the agenda and informed members that Cllr Peter Fisher had been unable to attend the LGA Coastal Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting due to unforeseen circumstances.

Cllr A Varley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change & Net Zero, said that he wanted to express his thanks to the Climate Change Project Officer who was leaving the Council for another role. He said his dedication and commitment meant that the Council had exceeded its ambitions target of planting £110k trees, with £115k planted to date. He wished him well in his new post.

Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Enforcement, said that he wanted to express his thanks to the Assistant Director for Planning who had recently retired. He commended his commitment and professionalism and wished him well for the future.

The Chairman invited members to ask questions:

Cllr J Toye asked Cllr L Withington, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture & Wellbeing, if more could be done to promote historic and leisure activities for rural, inland parts of the District rather than just focussing on coastal areas. Cllr Withington replied that the new corporate plan included the promotion of cultural activities and also the development of a broader partnership across the whole District. She added that this linked to potential economic growth too as it would include small and medium size arts-based businesses. She referred to Visit North Norfolk (VNN), which was funded by the Council and it was intended that the promotion of inland areas would be covered by VNN too.

Cllr T FitzPatrick asked Cllr P Heinrich, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth, about the Cabinet's recent visit to Fakenham. He highlighted that Fakenham was the poor relation when it came to council spending, with North Walsham receiving £2.4m, Cromer £5m and Sheringham received £17m. Fakenham in contrast received barely £0.5m. He asked Cllr Heinrich whether he would undertake to bring forward proposals that would ensure that Fakenham received its fair share in the future, particularly given the recent closure of three banks in the town. Cllr Heinrich

replied that he would. He said that he was aware of the issues faced by the town and the visit had extended his understanding of the problems in Fakenham. He said that it was hoped that a further levelling up bid could be submitted, adding that he could not promise anything immediately as a lot rested on funding from central government.

Cllr N Dixon asked Cllr Heinrich if he could tell members what kind of tangible outcome measures would be used to demonstrate the economic benefits of the investment in the North Walsham Action Zone project. Cllr Heinrich said that he would ask officers to provide a detailed response. He said that he was aware of an increase in footfall in the town, additional use of the new bus hub and there had been a lot of positive feedback on the changes to the town centre. He said it was difficult to ascertain the benefits in pure numbers. He said a detailed breakdown would be available when the project was completed.

Cllr M Batey asked Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Benefits if any of the returned £1.8bn of Government funding for affordable housing had been allocated to North Norfolk. Cllr Fredericks replied that she had never been aware of the funding and the Council would have welcomed access to it. She said that she would follow it up but did not expect a positive outcome.

Cllr R Macdonald asked the Leader if he could assure Gimingham Parish Council that blue flag status would be regained on the beaches that had recently lost it. Cllr Adams replied that on Monday afternoon he was made aware of a combined sewage overflow at Gimingham and Mundesley following severe rainfall and the beach was closed for 24 hours. It was the 10th time that this had happened and he was extremely concerned that the blue flags would not be regained. He was also worried about the impact on local communities and the lack of engagement from both Anglian Water and the Environment Agency. Investment was desperately needed together with a better testing regime.

Cllr C Cushing asked Cllr W Fredericks about the target number of 350 affordable homes in the next four years and how many of these would be in the Broads nutrient neutrality catchment area and how many in the Wensum nutrient neutrality catchment area. Cllr Fredericks said that she would provide a written answer.

Cllr P Fisher asked Cllr H Blathwayt, Portfolio Holder for Coast about the benefits of the Coastwise scheme to the District's coastal residents. Cllr Blathwayt replied that the scheme was the greatest attractor of funding in North Norfolk District Council's history. He said it concentrated focus on the particular issues affecting the District's shores, raised the profile of North Norfolk across the country. He concluded that it also facilitated working with other coastal authorities from East Riding to Suffolk Coastal.

Cllr K Toye welcomed Holt's recent referendum result supporting their new Neighbourhood Plan. She asked Cllr A Brown how more communities could be encouraged to bring forward neighbourhood plans and also queried the process for the Council's adoption of Holt's neighbourhood plan. Cllr Brown replied that due to the statutory timescale for approval, the Leader would sign off Holt's plan under delegation and then report back to Cabinet. He added that there was currently some debate at Government level regarding the future of neighbourhood plans but he that support for them would continue and this was outlined in the new Corporate Plan. He said that Blakeney was due to hold a referendum on their proposed plan in September and then Wells was also expected to bring one forwards before the end of the year.

Cllr J Boyle asked Cllr C Ringer, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste Services about premises with low and zero rated food hygiene certificates. She asked whether zero rated premises could remain open and whether there was a requirement for them to improve. Cllr Ringer replied that there were a small number of premises which were not scoring highly. A zero rated premises closed be down but this did not happen automatically, it depended on the reasons for the poor rating. He said that there was always an emphasis on trying to support premises to improve, adding that the majority were rated well above 3 stars.

Cllr S Penfold said that following on from Cllr Withington's earlier response regarding the promotion of inland events and attractions, he would like to invite all members to attend the Worstead Festival on 29th and 30th July. Cllr Withington thanked him and said that she was looking into how Visit North Norfolk could support events such as this.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett asked the Leader who was the Council's appointed representative on the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance and if they could work to push for the responsible local flood authority (Norfolk County Council) to deal with the issue of surface water flooding. Cllr Adams replied that the Council had not been invited to appoint a representative and officers had been pursuing this. He suggested that they had a further discussion after the meeting. He acknowledged that there was a frustration regarding a lack of response from the local flood authority. Cllr Blathwayt added that he was not aware of the lack of member representation and was supportive of Cllr Fitch-Tillett's request.

46 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET 29TH JUNE 2023

Cabinet Agenda Item 8: Corporate Plan 2023 - 2027

The Leader, Cllr Adams, introduced this item. He said that the most significant change was around how the plan would be translated into delivery. There would be an Annual Action Plan (AAP) rather than the four year version produced last time. This would provide more opportunity for the Council to shape actions and respond with agility when required. He said that work was being undertaken to consider appropriate contextual measures, which would be considered and assessed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

He explained that there was continuity in the main themes as many projects were embedded and progressing well as part of the previous corporate plan.

He then spoke about the themes which included the Council's ongoing commitment to the environment and sustainability goals, housing and communities, youth and sport, businesses – ranging from Bacton Gas Terminal to bank hubs, robust governance and responsible use of resources.

Regarding the theme 'Our Greener Future' he said that the intention was to realise one ambitious carbon-busting project a year and introduce food waste collection, however, this depended on the outcome of the Government consultation on waste collection. There would also be more focus on supporting villages and towns which were struggling to cope with the impact of visitors. He added that the District had the fastest changing coastline in Western Europe and the proposed coastal schemes would help meet these challenges.

The theme 'Developing our Communities' would build on the significant level of

engagement that had been developed during the previous administration. To this end, the publication of the Council's magazine, Outlook, would continue as well as engagement across all platforms. Support for the Youth Council would continue and further work would be undertaken on improving public conveniences across the district. In addition, there would be a focus on active environments, with a childrens' play areas and facilities being improved, alongside the Council's parks. He added that there was a challenge regarding the provision of sports and leisure amenities, particularly in towns such as Fakenham where there was growing demand due to an increasing population. Cultural activities remained important and investment had been secured for Cromer Pier and Sheringham Little Theatre as well as North Walsham Heritage Action Zone. However, more could be done to support other festivals and events across the District.

The Leader then spoke about the theme 'Meeting our Local Housing Need'. He said that the Council's portfolio of temporary accommodation would continue to grow. The pressure would continue without a government led strategy on delivering affordable housing. He referred to the impact of second homes and holiday lets and spoke about the anticipated outcome of the Levelling Up Bill. Unless changes were made, however, it was likely that there would need to be a discussion around the retention of council tax income so that it could be targeted at the provision of affordable housing.

The theme of 'Investing in our Local Economy' would bring increased focus to rural businesses as well as aiming to provide additional support to some of the district's smaller towns such as Stalham. A new 'Digital Champion' role would also be introduced.

Finally, the Leader spoke about the theme of 'A Strong, Responsible and Accountable Council'. He said that the Council had already proved how resilient it was but this must be maintained whilst facing considerable challenges. There may also be a need to invest further in customer service delivery. He added that there was a commitment to reviewing car parking management to ensure that revenue expectations were met. The Estates Team had made significant progress in increasing occupation of council-owned assets and this too would continue. There would also be further exploration around the concept of introducing a tourism tax. He concluded by recommending the draft Corporate Plan 2023- 2027 to members.

The Chairman invited Cllr N Dixon, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to present the outcome of the committee's consideration of the draft Corporate Plan.

Cllr Dixon said that the Committee had made the following three suggestions;

- Cabinet to consider whether financial sustainability had been adequately addressed and whether it should form a key theme
- Cabinet to consider whether the headline objectives were ambitions enough
- Cabinet to consider whether issues of rurality had been adequately addressed

Cllr Dixon said that Cabinet had dismissed all three suggestions. He said that it was acknowledged that the Corporate Plan was at an advanced stage, it was not too late to make some amendments and he hoped that Members would consider the Committee's suggestions.

The Leader said that he did not feel that the consensus at the Overview & Scrutiny meeting was as strong as perhaps indicated. However, he did agree that rurality was a significant issue and said that there would be a lot more work on rural

sustainability. He said that the Council was in a stable financial position and the Corporate Plan emphasised the importance of maintaining this. In conclusion, the Leader said that he believed the themes were ambitious and would stretch the Council.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett said that she was disappointed that there was no mention of adaptation to coastal change in the Corporate Plan, despite the District having 43 miles of coastline. All coastal communities needed to be reassured of their status. The Leader replied that Coastwise was referenced in the Corporate Plan and it was a key priority for the Council but it must be recognised that the coastal areas were at the forefront of the impact of climate change. Cllr Fitch-Tillett said that there needed to be a recognition that there were some parts of the coast that could not be protected and it was a question of coastal management instead.

Cllr L Shires said that she was disappointed to hear Cllr Dixon's summary of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's comments and it should have been acknowledged that they were not formal recommendations. She said that financial sustainability was included in the Corporate Plan, she referred to page 75, where it was listed under every bullet point.

Cllr C Cushing said that the Corporate Plan lacked ambition. It should be a strategic plan outlining what the Administration hoped to achieve in 4 years' time and setting out the success criteria on how this could be judged. He referred the Corporate Plans of neighbouring authorities which clearly set out metrics and success criteria. He said that he also took issue with the language that was used throughout the document, with soft words such as 'ensuring', 'supporting' and 'continuing' being used rather than more ambitious, hard edged words such as 'deliver'. He went on to say that Financial Sustainability was a theme in the previous corporate plan and he said that he would expect it to front and centre in this one. Removing it as a theme suggested it was no longer a priority. He reminded members that 4 years ago he had looked at financial projections and the forecast deficits for future years and been told that this was always the case but rarely came to fruition. However, this was no longer the case, a predicted deficit was now imminent and more must be done to address this. He said there should be more focus on what the Council could do to help itself remain financially stable. He concluded by reminding Members that the former Conservative administration had created a surplus and added to the Council's reserves.

Cllr L Paterson referred to page 74 and the mention of water scarcity. He said that rural businesses were asking for more water storage reservoirs, he said that trapping excess winter water could help alleviate flooding and could be applied to growing crops in the summer. Irrigation gives better quality crops. He said that Government grants for water reservoirs had been withdrawn due to the excessive time taken by local authorities to approve applications. He asked if this could be addressed. The Leader replied that this was a valuable point and it could be included as an action priority. He said that any concerns regarding the slowness of approving planning applications should be raised with officers.

Cllr J Toye commented that the delivery plan was where the detail would sit and where the challenges would be set out. He welcomed that the Corporate Plan had come forward so early unlike many councils. Referring to Cllr Cushing's comments regarding the financial status of the previous Conservative administration, he said that a comparison could not be made as the Government funding model was now

completely different and inflationary pressures were also considerable. He added that rurality was covered throughout the Corporate Plan and he was pleased to see this.

Cllr L Shires referred to the criticisms levelled by the Opposition when the previous Corporate Plan was presented for approval and said those same issues were now reflected in the current version and yet criticism was still being levelled. She reminded members that the failure to raise council tax for several years had caused problems that were still being addressed.

Cllr A Brown responded to Cllr Paterson's earlier comment and said that NNDC was not the only planning enabling authority for water storage reservoirs. Many fell within the County Council process.

Cllr T FitzPatrick referred to page 65, section 7.1 and said that he believed the Council could be too risk averse and not being bold enough could be limiting.

Cllr S Penfold said that he commended Cllr Cushing for trying to demonstrate that the Conservatives were the party of financial responsibility. He reminded members of the former Prime Minister, Ms Truss and the impact her policies had had on the country's finances.

Cllr H Blathwayt referred Cllr A Fitch-Tillett to page 71 and said that it set out the Council's responsibilities to all coastal communities clearly and succinctly.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr A Brown and

RESOLVED

To adopt the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027.

10 members voted against.

Agenda Item 9: 2022/2023 Outturn Report

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Assets, introduced this item. She began by saying that members had indicated that these reports could be difficult to read and understand and that there would be additional training provided in the autumn to assist with understanding financial reports. She thanked officers for their hard work to manage budgets during national and global uncertainty. She said this hard work had put the council in a better financial position than previously forecast.

Additional significant challenges had been presented by the war in Ukraine which had impacted on production of commodities and supply chains. Again, staff had worked hard to limit the impact and managed to maintain service provision whilst keeping costs down.

Cllr L Shires referred to the Period 6 Monitoring Report which had forecast a £909k overspend in revenue services alone. Although by period 10 this had not significantly improved, she was pleased to say that due to the hard work and vigilance of officers, the deficit was now considerably reduced to £261k.

Cllr L Shires drew members attention to the retention of business rates. She said that the monitoring report for period 6 indicated that no variance was expected. The outturn report showed an income shortfall of £516k in returned business rates. The Business Rates Earmarked Reserve was in place to mitigate against such negative

impacts.

Cllr Shires then spoke about the need to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and for this reason £0.5m was being transferred from the Delivery Plan reserve to a newly created Net Zero reserve.

She then explained that the 2024/25 and 2025/26 budgets for temporary accommodation were being brought forward so that the needs of residents could be met now.

She concluded by saying that although many challenges had been overcome to reach the current financial position, the Administration's eyes were firmly on the year ahead.

Cllr A Varley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Net Zero and welcomed the newly created reserve to achieve these ambitions. This demonstrated that the Council was serious about focussing on specific carbon-busting projects.

Cllr C Cushing reiterated that for the first time there was a deficit of nearly £800k and this caused him considerable concern. He asked when the forecasts for future years would be available as these had not been shared for some time. He said that a summary page with all the key metrics set out would be really helpful for members and help them understand these reports better.

Cllr W Fredericks commented that the Opposition seemed to switch between saying that there was too much information provided and then not enough. She said it would be helpful if they could set out clearly exactly what they wanted. As for forecasting, she said that no one knew what would happen and this could not be provided any more.

Cllr N Dixon commented that Cllr Fredericks clearly had some knowledge that many members would like to share. She had indicated that she had a good grasp and understanding of the financial reports, unlike most members, and it would be helpful if she could share her knowledge and insights with everyone else. He added that there would always be occasions when members wanted more information as they wanted to drill down into the detail. At other times, they would be satisfied with less. Cllr Dixon said that the value of having an executive summary at the start of a report, was so it could include key metrics and important messages contained within the paper. He said that this report was looking backwards rather than forwards and members were interested in the trajectory and give an indication of what the future would look like.

Cllr Shires said that she welcomed the additional attention on finance. Cllr Cushing said that Cllr Fredericks tone had not been helpful. The Treasury Management report had a good example of an executive summary and he was just trying to make helpful suggestions that could benefit all members.

Cllr J Toye said that he was supportive of finance workshops for members and he encouraged all members to get involved, as well as using the information that was available to them too.

Cllr A Brown agreed with the suggestion that the Outturn report was aligned more closely with the presentation and style of the Treasury Management report.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED unanimously to approve:

- 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
- k) 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.

Cabinet Agenda Item 10: Treasury Management Annual Report 2022 – 2023

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Assets, introduced this item. She thanked officers for their hard work in preparing the report. She drew members’ attention to page 155 and highlighted that extra money had been earned on the Council’s investments due to an increase in interest rates.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr A Varley and

RESOLVED unanimously to approve

The Treasury Management Annual Report for 2022 – 2023

47 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 12 JULY 2023

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee confirmed that there were no further recommendations.

48 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

None received.

49 OPPOSITION BUSINESS

None received.

50 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION

None received.

51 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

52 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 7.56 pm.

Chairman