

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 15 April 2024 at the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

Cllr W Fredericks (Deputy Chair)	Cllr T Adams (Chair)
Cllr A Brown	Cllr H Blathwayt
Cllr C Ringer	Cllr J Toyne
Cllr A Varley	Cllr L Withington

Members also attending:

Cllr C Cushing
Cllr N Dixon
Cllr A Fitch-Tillett
Cllr L Vickers

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive, Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager, Estates and Asset Strategy Manager, Monitoring Officer, Director for Resources / S151 Officer and Democratic Services Officer (Regulatory)

Apologies for Absence:

Cllr L Shires

42 INTRODUCTION

The Chairman informed members that due to attendance by the public for Agenda item 11 – Rocket House, Cromer, he would be bringing this item forward for discussion.

43 MINUTES

The minutes of the 11 March 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

46 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

47 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

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

48 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The following recommendation was made to Cabinet by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 20th March:

Agenda Item 12: Progress Report on Net Zero:

All reports to the Council's decision-making bodies should include a section on net zero impact so that a change in the carbon footprint is highlighted and explained.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change & Net Zero, Cllr A Varley, said that it was something that was already being done but work was ongoing to strengthen and improve this section within committee reports.

RESOLVED

To approve the recommendation from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to ensure that all reports to the Council's decision-making bodies should include a section on net zero impact so that a change in the carbon footprint is highlighted and explained.

49 HOUSING STRATEGY - UPDATED ACTION PLAN

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr W Fredericks, introduced this item. She explained that the Council adopted the current Housing Strategy and Action Plan in 2021 and many of the original actions in the Action Plan had since been delivered. However, there remained many challenges to housing in the district; high levels of homelessness, the need to improve the energy efficiency of housing in the district and the housing needs of older residents being three of the more pressing challenges.

Now that the Council had adopted a new Corporate Plan for 2023/27, which included specific actions to help 'Meet our Housing Need', a new Action Plan for 2024- 2027 had been created and it included a number of additional actions to reflect the corporate plan priorities.

Cllr Fredericks thanked officers for their hard work and said that any recommendations coming out of the Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Group on homelessness would be considered and incorporated.

Cllr J Toye commented on the section in the report regarding homelessness and said that all members should reflect on the severity of this issue for the district. He asked that when the document went out to consultation that residents living in areas bordering North Norfolk could be included.

Cllr L Vickers said that she was grateful to Cllr Fredericks for agreeing to take the Task & Finish Group's recommendation. She said that she was very supportive of 'local homes for local people' and wondered how the two-year requirement had been reached, as Cornwall had a three-year requirement in place. The Chairman replied that this question related to the next item on the agenda and would be picked up then.

Cllr C Cushing requested an update on the situation with nutrient neutrality. Cllr A

Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning, said that an update on nutrient neutrality would be provided to members in mid-May. There was a series of meetings that needed to take place before a meaningful update could be provided.

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

RESOLVED

To agree the proposed new Housing Strategy actions set out in Appendix B of the report.

Reason for the decision:

To ensure the Council's Housing Strategy continues to provide a framework for delivery of the Corporate Plan aim "Meeting our housing need".

50 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME 2024

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr Fredericks, introduced this item. She explained that all local authorities were reviewing their housing lists and prioritising those in greatest need. The allocation scheme set out the rules, criteria and procedures that determined how the Council allocated affordable homes to households in North Norfolk. Following consultation with partner Registered Providers and feedback from customers, a proposed new Allocations Scheme had been produced. The new scheme would require statutory consultation before any changes could be implemented.

Cllr L Vickers said that in the proposed scheme, someone needed to have a two-year connection to the local area to qualify for band two housing. She asked if consideration could be given to extending this to a three-year connection. The Housing Strategy & Delivery Manager explained that the main scheme had a three year criteria, however Band 2, was a 'filter' that would come into effect if no-one was eligible under the three year connection, then a two year connection to the parish would be considered. This was to be certain that it would still go to someone with a local connection. She confirmed that for Band 1 and to get onto the housing register, a three year local connection was required.

Cllr C Ringer said that he was one of the members representing more rural wards, where some of the issues regarding local connection could be more challenging. He said that he welcomed the simplifying of the process and that was now more robust in ensuring a local connection. He referred to section 4.13 and the reference to the 'strongest local connection' and sought clarification on how competing applications would be prioritised and whether it was housing need first and then local connection. Cllr W Fredericks confirmed that this was the case. She added that each application would be considered by the Housing Team and other agencies and carefully assessed on its merits as each case was different.

Cllr L Withington asked about shared ownership and the housing need element to this. The Housing Strategy & Delivery Manager explained that all the applicants on the housing register were asked if they had an interest in shared ownership and all the partner registered providers were asked to advertise their shared-ownership properties through 'Your Choice, Your Home'. This was particularly important for exception site homes as there was an added criteria of local connections for shared

ownership. Regarding general need shared ownership, she said that many of them did not go to applicants on the housing register. Principally because the register as a route to rented social housing.

Cllr A Brown asked how the consultation responses would be collated and reported back to members. The Housing Strategy & Delivery Manager explained that some elements of the Housing Allocations Policy would not be subject to consultation as the amendments had been made in line with legislative requirements. The focus would be on the elements of discretion that the Council had – such as years of residency etc. She clarified that it was not certain how much feedback would be received. The results would be summarised but all of the information would be available if members wished to see it.

Cllr J Toye welcomed the engagement with town and parish councils. Cllr Fredericks replied that every town and parish council had been contacted regarding local housing need in their areas.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their comments. He highlighted the excellent response to the survey on 'Your Choice, Your Home'.

It was proposed by Cllr W Fredericks, seconded Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED to

- Support the proposed allocations scheme summarised in this report and attached as Appendix A
- Agree that NNDC undertake statutory consultation with key stakeholders
- Agree that, following consultation, a further report be brought back to Cabinet for consideration ahead of formal adoption of the Allocation Scheme

Reason for the decision

To ensure the Council has an effective Allocations Scheme in place – a statutory policy of the Council.

51 CABBELL PARK - FURTHER UPDATE

Cllr L Withington, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, introduced this item. She explained that this was an update following a request from members regarding an assurance that the project would be completed within the allocated budget. The report confirmed that this was the case.

The Chairman said that this was the most logical course of action. The site was under-utilised and the Youth Team were looking for a space to play. He welcomed that it could be delivered within the allocated budget.

Cllr W Fredericks sought clarification as to whether part of the funding was in trust to the Council from a charity, with a covenant. The Chairman replied that the land had been gifted to the community a long time ago and there was a covenant that it was to be used for sports purposes.

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

RESOLVED

To instruct officers to deliver this project as outlined in this report, providing the

necessary improvements and provision of additional facilities to Cabbell Park to enable Cromer Youth Football Club to lease the ground and have a home for all of their football operations.

Reason for the decision:

This is the first time in 30 years that a tangible option exists to provide a home for CYFC, a solution which will also maximise the use of Cabbell Park. A permanent home in Cromer for the club would enable them to grow and secure football in the town for a number of years to come. Football clubs for many are the heart of the community and this is an opportunity to bring this back to the town.

52 ROCKET HOUSE, CROMER

The Chairman explained that following the previous report to Cabinet on 4th September 2023, detailing the options available, a visit to the property and technical briefing was made available for members. To gain further clarity over the damp issues, at the 8th January 2024 Cabinet meeting it was agreed to commission further additional investigation into the fabric of the building to identify the cause of damp, establish remedial options and budget costings. This investigation has since been completed and officers now sought approval to use the existing capital budget and move forward with repairing the building. He added that the energy efficiency of the building needed to be improved to save costs and meet net zero goals. It was hoped to complete the works within 32 weeks and within the allocated capital budget. He said that it was hoped that a joint press release could be released with the RNLI, following discussions about the heads of terms of the lease for the museum.

The Estates & Asset Strategy Manager advised members that if approved, a 32 week programme would be commence in the autumn to remediate the damp and undertake the energy improvement works. The cost would be £828k plus some additional costs for the energy works. A capital budget of £1m had already been approved by Full Council and it was intended to keep within that budget.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr C Cushing said that he was surprised by the lack of detail included in the report. He said in district terms, this was a large project costing almost £1m and he sought clarification as to whether the funding included the cost of repairs to the lift. Cllr Cushing added that at the September meeting of Cabinet, all of the reports and accompanying appendices were exempt and not in the public domain. This caused some concern as the public were keen to see the RNLI museum retained and would want reassurance regarding discussions over the heads of terms for the lease. He then asked for some assurance regarding the future resistance of the building to storm surges, if the proposed work was undertaken. He asked what would happen if the RNLI did not choose to take on the lease for the museum.

The Chairman replied that there was another tenant in the upper part of the building operating a very successful restaurant. He reiterated that the capital budget for this project had already been approved and several options were being presented. Regarding guarantees, he said that it hard to be certain that a major storm surge would not cause damage. That said, in terms of the long-term damp issues, a guarantee that this would not reoccur would be expected. He added that there was also an intention to update the public toilet provision on the site.

Cllr Cushing said that there were several building across the district that required a substantial amount of money spending on them and he felt that there was nothing in the report that demonstrated the case for the Rocket House requiring such a spend over other premises, adding that it would have been very helpful to have a business case included in the papers which would demonstrate the need to spend so much money. The Chairman replied that the alternative option of losing the building operationally would still require a decision as to what to do with it long-term. It would

also impact on the viability of neighbouring assets as the public conveniences were integral to the services along the seafront. That said, he was pleased with the work undertaken by the Estates Team on this project and had worked very hard to identify the main challenges. In terms of the future, it would require close monitoring and members could visit the site again if they wished to.

Cllr L Withington reiterated the Chairman's comments regarding the work of the Estates Team.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett said that the decisions taken by the Administration in 2003 had left the Council in an impossible position. By supporting the construction of this unfortunate building. Even at the time the hazards of ground water intrusion were clear and concerns had been raised. She said that Cabinet was now in the unenviable position of having to support something that they knew to be a monumental mistake. If the RNLI museum did not continue at the site, then Council's reputation would be damaged nationally. In addition, disabled visitors would no longer be able to access the promenade and tourists would not be able to enjoy the excellent views from the upper floor of the building. She concluded by saying that it was an unenviable position to be put in. The Chairman said that Cabinet could not take responsibility for a decision taken 20 years ago and it wasn't helpful to focus on this. He said he acknowledged the concerns over the location of the building but the design of the building had been intended to counter these. Regarding access, he said this was one of the issues that the Council was trying to preserve. In conclusion, he said that the intention was that the RNLI Museum would continue to have a future in the town and joint press release would be issued soon.

Cllr N Dixon said that he agreed that Cabinet had been placed in a very difficult position. Any decision taken should be evidence based and devoid of party politics. He referred to the meeting of Cabinet on 4th September 2023 and the range of options considered and there was an expectation that these options would be fully explored. He therefore asked where the options appraisal was and said that members should see this before almost £1m was committed to the project. He then asked where the business case was, saying that the extensive history of the building could provide a good indication of future issues. He asked how much the building had cost the Council since its construction and what were the annual revenue costs. This information would inform the future financial viability of the project and this was particularly important as the Council was currently facing a revenue deficit and needed to find income streams or ways of doing business more efficiently.

Cllr Dixon referred to the report presented to the Cabinet meeting of 4th September, which indicated that the building would not be economically viable without external funding. He sought clarification that no external funding was available and that the Council was intending to cover the costs. He went on to say that it was important to review the history of the building and the decisions that had been made in the past, to ensure that the correct process was followed and the latest report presented to members did not provide enough information to support this. Cllr Dixon concluded by saying that the Chairman should consider his personal interests in this matter as a local member for Cromer and said that he was surprised that he had not declared a non-pecuniary interest at the start of the meeting. The Chairman replied that he did not have an interest in this matter. It was not in his ward and he had no connections at all to the building. Cllr Dixon said that the Chairman may want to consider public perception, adding that if a similar, large-scale project funded by the Council was underway in his ward, he would declare an interest as a local member.

The Chairman reiterated that he had no interest in the Rocket House building and did not need to declare an interest. He said that in terms of the current situation, he said that he was not aware of the extent of the problems before he took on the role of Leader of the Council. In terms of capital versus revenue budget, he confirmed that this was a capital funded project. Income-wise, rent had been received from both tenants and until recently, the building had been sustainable. However, as time

had moved on, the problems had become clearer and the issues caused by general wear and tear were understandable. What was less excusable was the extensive damp problem which was proving difficult to resolve. As he said previously, one of the key issues was that the Rocket House linked so closely to other Council-owned assets along the promenade and it was key to the future of the area and its economic prosperity.

The Chairman said that the building was structurally very strong and he said that this should reassure members that any investment made would be sound for the long term. He added that alternative options such as demolition, closure and relocation but none were felt to be sustainable and would have required outside funding. In conclusion, he reminded members that the capital budget had already been agreed for the project and it was anticipated it would be completed on time and under budget. Cllr Dixon asked where the options appraisal and business case for this project. He added that although there was an approved capital budget in place, a decision to progress with the project had revenue implications and it was not clear whether this had been considered. The Chairman said that he felt he had covered this already, adding that there would be an opportunity to review the rents for the building in the future. All of the options that had been considered had been covered previously. Cllr Dixon said that there should be an options appraisal report and business case that supported this.

Cllr L Vickers said that she agreed with the previous speakers that the public needed more information and an options appraisal and business case would provide this.

Cllr C Cushing commented on the Chairman's earlier assurance that members had already seen the detail supporting the options considered. He said that he had looked through all the previous reports and they had been confidential documents and the public had not been able to see the key information. The Chairman replied that any options appraisal would always be exempt and not available for the public to see. He reiterated that he had clearly set out the consequences of not undertaking the work.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr C Ringer and

RESOLVED

- 1.1 To delegate to the Asset Strategy Manager (Estates), in consultation with the s.151 officer, the existing allocated capital budget to action remedial works as soon feasibly possible to the property, as outlined in the Intrusive Inspection and Damp Investigation Report, subject to the vacation of the tenant (RNLI).
- 1.2 Delegate to the Asset Strategy Manager (Estates), in consultation with the s.151 officer, to utilise any remaining capital budget to undertake energy improvement works to the property in order to increase the energy performance rating to the required standard for leasing.
- 1.3 Delegate authority to the Asset Strategy Manager to commence negotiation of terms for a new lease, with the existing RNLI tenant, with a further report back to Cabinet in accordance with governance procedures.

Reason for the decision:

To address the ongoing issues with damp in the building and increase the energy performance of the building for leasing.

The Chairman introduced this item in the absence of the Portfolio Holder, Cllr L Shires.

He said that there had been a lot of prior discussion on this item. He explained that the proposed purchaser had obtained planning consent for a 37 room apart-hotel and it was now requested there be an extension to the legal agreement to provide time to satisfy the relevant purchase condition in the agreement.

The Estates & Asset Strategy Manager added that the area of land concerned was adjacent to the Council's leisure centre, the Reef. In 2020, Cabinet agreed to sell land to a hotel developer and they now wanted some additional time to comply with the required legal conditions.

The Chairman advised members that progress of the scheme would be monitored. It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED

- To grant a 4 month extension to the legal agreement to enable the purchaser sufficient time to satisfy the remaining offer condition.
- To monitor the progress of the party to ensure they satisfy the remaining offer condition, to be delegated to the Asset Strategy Manager, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Assets.
- To explore the previous offers submitted for this site, in parallel to the extension.

Reason for the decision:

To ensure the sound management of the Council's land holding and assets.

54 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

55 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 11.07 am.

Chairman