

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 18 December 2024 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 D Birch	Cllr H Blathwayt
Cllr J Boyle	Cllr A Brown
Cllr C Cushing	Cllr A Fitch-Tillett
Cllr T FitzPatrick	Cllr A Fletcher
Cllr W Fredericks	Cllr M Gray
Cllr M Hankins	Cllr C Heinink
Cllr P Heinrich	Cllr V Holliday
Cllr R Macdonald	Cllr G Mancini-Boyle
Cllr P Neatherway	Cllr L Paterson
Cllr P Porter	Cllr C Ringer
Cllr L Shires	Cllr E Spagnola
Cllr M Taylor	Cllr E Vardy
Cllr A Varley	Cllr L Withington

Also in attendance: Steve Blatch, Chief Executive
Cara Jordan, Assistant Director Legal and Governance / Monitoring Officer
Emma Childs, PA to the Corporate Leadership Team

70 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Butikofer, Cllr N Dixon, Cllr N Housden, Cllr K Leith, Cllr S Penfold, Cllr J Toye, Cllr K Toye, Cllr L Vickers.

71 MINUTES

The minutes of the Council held on 20 November 2024 were approved as a true and accurate record, and these were signed by the Chair.

Proposed by Cllr Shires and seconded by Cllr Brown

72 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None Received

73 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

None Received

74 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman updated members on the following Civic events she had attended: Royal British Legion Blakeney and Cley Branch Centenary Celebration – 05 December 2024 – The Harbour Rooms Blakeney. Very notable since the Royal British Legion was not established until 1923.

Christmas Carols in the Foyer – 18 December 2024 – NNDC. Thanks to all who

attended. Over £160 was raised for the Salvation Army Christmas Appeal.

Season's Greetings from the Chairman

The Chairman offered Season's Greetings and Happy "Hollidays".

As we approach the conclusion of another year, she wished to extend her heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all the staff and councillors for their dedication and hard work. This year presented NNDC with both challenges and triumphs, and it is the steadfast commitment and resilience of everyone that ensures the residents and visitors to North Norfolk are served in the exemplary manner they deserve.

The holiday season offers a moment for reflection and appreciation. As we celebrate this festive season, she encouraged everyone to take the time to relax, rejuvenate, and cherish the company of loved ones.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their continued dedication and for being an integral part of the community. She looked forward to the achievements that will be accomplished in the coming year.

Thanks, were also given to everyone who purchased raffle tickets or a Pick your Patch square, a massive £555 has been raised for the Chairman's Dementia Charities.

The Chairman ended by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

75 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader, Cllr T Adams began by discussing the attention brought to devolution and potential for local government reorganisation, which has required a shift in focus to allow for meetings with other local and District Councils.

The white paper published earlier this week presented lots of questions, many of which remain unanswered at the present time.

The leader took the opportunity to reassure all staff, that there is still going to be a requirement for services moving forward and asked that everyone continues to do the fantastic job currently being done.

He also confirmed that Councillors' objectives would not change due to the considerations taking place at a national level. It will continue to be busy as usual.

The Leader expressed that he had various concerns around the Government agenda, which had been hardened following the publication of the white paper.

Reassurance is needed that small towns won't be left behind, tourism and offer to visitors is not at risk, and that defences and adaptations to change along the coastline will continue. No mention was given to the coast in the white paper and a very narrow understanding of the role of district councils was portrayed.

He explained that we are yet to see a clear vision on social care and children's services and while Police reform is coming at a later date, it is hard to see at present how the services we currently offer sit alongside these changing demands.

The Leader confirmed that he will be looking to seek reassurances needed in the coming weeks and months. There is a good common understanding between leaders across Norfolk and Suffolk and a good potential around a mayoral combined authority in terms of improving transport, housing and development of the economy

in North Norfolk.

However, there is a lot of detail to emerge and members will be kept informed as discussion progress.

The Leader advised that efforts must be redoubled to secure the local economy and prosperity of our communities and infrastructure.

The Leader wished everyone a Merry Christmas and thanked them for their achievements and contributions over the past year.

The Chairman invited Cllr W Fredericks to speak.

Cllr Fredericks spoke about her delight in being able to attend the celebration of 130 years of women being allowed to stand for District Council. The event commemorated all the women who fought to give women the vote and to allow women to stand in local Government. Currently however only 37% of district councillors of women and it is thought that a woman has to be asked at least 5 times before their name is put on a ballot paper. This demonstrates that women do not put themselves forward as candidates and we need to be asking why this is.

Cllr Fredericks asked what the barriers are that prevent women from standing, are these family commitments, money, caring responsibilities, or a belief only a certain gender or area of society should stand. We need local and national government to reflect our local communities and represent local demographics.

Cllr Fredericks asked that over the coming year, if you know of someone who would be great at representing local communities that you ask them to stand for election. Everyone in this chamber stands on the shoulder of giants, those who have come before us and made a difference to our residents and communities. At this Christmas time, think of the person who persuaded or inspired you to stand and thank them for their belief in you.

76 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None Received

77 PORTFOLIO REPORTS

Cllr FitzPatrick asked the Leader what alternative savings are being proposed to prevent the closure of the public toilets at Walsingham, as this would affect 320,000 visitors annually, many of whom are elderly and disabled.

Cllr Adams responded that it was never the intention to close the facilities at Walsingham. Walsingham is a wonderful and interesting village, and the provision of public toilets is important. However, we currently have over 60 families in temporary accommodation, with the number of children reaching over 80 at one-point last week which is putting great strain on budgets.

With regard to the toilets at Walsingham, we are in discussion with a number of organisations, to try and find another way to find savings that will cover the cost of the facilities. Members will be kept informed as discussions progress.

Similar discussions are taking place with regards to other toilets, with discussion due to commence in Stalham, Potter Heigham and West Runton. We have also recently completed the transfer to the freehold owners of the toilets at Hickling staithe.

The Council don't want to be in the position of removing discretionary services or

reducing the level of statutory services we are able to offer but the financial pressures are such that difficult decisions have to be made.

Cllr Fitzpatrick responded that there is currently a large element of borrowing within the budget and these repayments which will be needed year on year are falling disproportionately across the district.

Cllr Adams replied that all capital investments are considered very carefully particularly in light of current considerations. Conversations will continue to be had with the aim to prevent the facilities closing.

Cllr Fitch-Tillett asked Cllr Blathwayt why the leader has been reporting on coastal issues and whether his appointment as Chair of the Broads Authority meant he no longer has time to focus on the Coast.

Cllr Blathwayt responded that he was still able to do his job for coast as well as being Chair of the Broads Authority. This is clearly demonstrated through the work being done through Coastwise, the Cromer and Mundsley schemes and other works that are on stream to go ahead in the near future.

Cllr Fitch-Tillett asked why Cllr Blathwayt had not attended the Trimingham sub-committee meetings that have been held twice monthly.

Cllr Adams stated that it was not up to members of the Council to be casting judgements in terms of members diaries and workloads. Cllr Blathwayt has the busiest diary of any of the members of Cabinet and if he was not at Trimingham, he was most likely at a meeting related to water somewhere else. Apologies that my colleague cannot be everywhere.

Cllr Blathwayt responded that the Trimingham meeting was the only Coastwise meeting that he didn't attend as he was at another meeting relating to water.

Cllr Heinrich asked Cllr Varley if he was able to provide details of the benefits to the Victory Swim and Fitness Centre since the completion of the solar array.

Cllr Varley replied that it had been a fantastic project, and it was great that it had now been completed. Thanks go to all the officers involved and the Contractor Core Energy. This project shows that we are committed to still tackling our assets and our net zero target of 2030. Leisure centres are one of the biggest carbon emitters so it is right that we tackle these.

The solar panels are different from the original specification and offer increased energy creation from the predicted 188,000 kilowatts of energy. This Council has not just completed the project on budget and on time but also above specification.

Cllr Bayes spoke on behalf of himself and Cllr Taylor to enquire why when Stalham Baptist church applied for planning for solar panels on its roof that the greatest objections came from the Council's Conservation Officer and whether applications of this nature should have greater weighting given to the net zero aspect of the project.

Cllr Adams answered the questions as Cllr Varley was not aware of the application. The Leader stated his support for the application but explained that every statutory consultee has a right and responsibility to respond to the planning applications. In this case there were constraints over conservation and heritage. Not up to councillors to prevent professional observations being made. It is hoped that there will be a successful outcome in this case.

Cllr Varley agreed with the Leader and explained that it is important that all planning applications go through the planning process. If the local members have concerns, Cllr Varley offered his support to look into this.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the application was approved on 12 November 2024.

Cllr Taylor directed his question to Cllr Adams, in Cllr Toye's absence. He asked that in light of the Labour budget and increased National Insurance contributions for businesses, was the Leader concerned that economic growth and resilience in North Norfolk would suffer and if so, is there plans to unlock additional support for local businesses.

Cllr Adams shared Cllr Taylor's concerns. He confirmed that he has been in touch with a number of different sectors in light of the details that are emerging. The impacts of the increases in National Insurance are very concerning and we don't want employment hours and businesses to reduce.

He stated that in recent times North Norfolk has bucked the trend, the evidence of this is the increase in retained business rates. The Council want to do everything we can to retain business growth. It has been good to see planning applications for new businesses and we need to do everything we can to foster relationships with key accounts and help them expand.

The Council has a role to play at a wider strategic level, but it is an ever changing picture.

Cllr Boyle asked Cllr Fredericks if the housing strategy team will continue to find ways to increase the supply of temporary accommodation.

Cllr Fredericks replied that yes, the team will continue to find new sources of temporary accommodation. She said that currently the Council have 81 children in temporary accommodation, none of the children are in nightly paid bed and breakfast, they are all in our own or self-contained accommodation. The team are currently looking at three alternatives to dramatically increase temporary accommodation. The Council is bringing forward a number of affordable homes in the coming years.

Cllr Fredericks thanked communities as there are currently a lot less objections from communities for social houses. We are striving to make sure we have enough temporary accommodation and affordable homes before any local government reorganisation occurs.

Cllr Cushing questioned Cllr Adams on the effects he thought devolution would have on the budget and systems procurement moving forward.

Cllr Adams responded that it was great to be having positive conversations about the local government reorganisation. Good discussions are being had with the other District, Borough and City leaders across Norfolk and Suffolk.

He stated that he is concerned about three core elements – the coast, small towns, tourism infrastructure. It is necessary to consider our plans moving forward.

It is of vital importance that we see the delivery of the Fakenham leisure centre. We also need to be shoring up our assets - towns, communities and infrastructure. 2026 the Pier will be 125 years old, and we need to secure the Pier for tourism in North Norfolk. Look east to Stalham and Hoveton, to shore up assets and hand over the chance of prosperity and longevity as best as we can with the resources that we have. We will need to be agile and would welcome the opportunity to collaborate across the chamber

Cllr Vardy applauded the project to plant 110,000 trees across the District and stated that Norfolk County Council having planted 700,000 trees has a policy to inspect, review and replace where appropriate. He therefore asked if NNDC had a similar policy and budget for replacement.

Cllr Varley questioned whether the figure stated for the County Council was correct and explained that within the 110,000-tree planting project, it was for those people who planted the trees, to facilitate the planting, maintenance and the aftercare of the trees.

78 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET 02 DECEMBER 2024

Council approved the following recommendations made by Cabinet at the meeting held on 02 December 2024:

Cabinet Agenda Item 10: Housing Allocations Scheme Proposals 2024

Cabinet RESOLVED to recommend that Full Council approve:

- The proposed allocations scheme.

Cabinet Agenda Item 13: Budget Monitoring P6 2024/25

Cabinet RESOLVED to seek approval from Full Council in respect of the following:

1. to include an addition to the revenue budget of £13,000 for an addition to existing Exacom software as laid out in paragraph 4.8.1
2. to include a permanent increase to the revenue budget of £34,000 for an additional member of staff in the Licensing Team as detailed in paragraphs 4.8.2 to 4.8.5. This will be funded from the ring-fenced licencing income.
3. to include an additional capital budget of £22,000 to complete the Cromer Offices LED lighting project. This is to be funded from the Net Zero Initiatives reserve as detailed in paragraph 5.4.2
4. to include an additional capital budget of £5,600 to pay the retention sum for the Crinkle Crankle Wall and that this is funded from the Major Projects Reserve as detailed in paragraph 5.4.3
5. to include an additional capital budget of £30,000 to rethatch the Collector's Cabin roof and that this is to be funded from the Asset Management reserve as detailed in paragraph 5.4.4
6. to include an additional capital budget of £23,400 to develop the customer services C3 software and is to be funded from the Development Plan reserve. as detailed in paragraph 5.4

Cabinet Ageda Item15: Fees & Charges 2025/26

Cabinet RESOLVED to recommend to full Council:

- The fees and charges from 1 April 2025 as included in Appendix A.

That delegated authority be given to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and relevant Directors/Assistant Director to agree the Decision List Monday, 2 December 2024 fees and charges not included within Appendix A as required (outlined within the report).

79 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 11 DECEMBER 2024

The recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee were deferred to the

next meeting as neither the Chair or Vice Chair of the Committee were in attendance.

80 PROGRAMME OF MEETING 2025-26

Cllr Adams proposed that the recommended programme of meetings be approved. Seconded by Cllr Fredericks.

Members unanimously agreed to adopt the Programme of Meetings for 2025-26

81 BUDGET MONITORING P6 2024/25

Cllr Shires explained that the budget monitoring paper had been to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny committee.

Cllr Shires drew members attention to recommendation four which related to an increase to the staffing in the licensing team due to an increase in the licensing work and recommendation seven which related to the Collectors cabin roof. Cllr Shires assured members money would not be spent until best value for money has been achieved.

Cllr Taylor asked Cllr Varley what the revenue savings and carbon savings would be created each year as a result of the LED lighting works and how these would be evidence and audited moving forward.

Cllr Varley explained that he did not have the information to hand and would provide Cllr Taylor with a written response.

Cllr Taylor expressed his dissatisfaction at this response and stated that he expected some more information to be available given that Councillors need to ensure residents are getting the best possible deal.

Cllr Shires replied that the question was asked at Overview and Scrutiny and Officer Stankley was going to provide a written response.

Cllr Taylor confirmed that he did not feel comfortable voting unless he knew the full information.

Cllr Shires explained she understood Cllr Taylor's discomfort. Could caveat the recommendation, but the Council has a net zero commitment to meet for which this work is required.

Cllr Taylor stated that he could not vote on something unless he understood the ramifications. It cannot be net zero at any cost.

Cllr Cushing asked Cllr Shires to confirm that the Council has so far internally borrowed £8 million and how much the Council will have internally borrowed by the end of 2024/25.

Cllr Shires asked that she be able to provide a written response to the question so the correct details are presented.

Cllr Cushing went on to ask about the reserve positions for both the general and earmarked funds.

Cllr Shires was unable to find the information so said she would provide Cllr Cushing with a written response following the meeting. She also stated that should Cllr Cushing have any questions; she was happy to provide information if given an understanding of the information required.

Cllr FitzPatrick asked if Cabinet had a sufficient grip on the Councils income and expenditure.

Cllr Shires explained that Cabinet were fully aware of the reasons agency staff have been required to meet the shortfall of staff within finance. Staff are working within a very difficult situation and have risen to the challenges time and time again and for that we thank them. With the announcement of the local government settlement, it cannot be said that Government understand the pressures felt within local government finance.

Cllr Fitzpatrick responded to say that maternity leave, sick leave, compassionate leave should all be built into the budget. The officers are all doing a very good job, it is the administration that does not have a grip on the finances. The administration is failing to lead the officers and that is no reflection on the officers of this Council.

Cllr Adams replied that the significant financial pressure for this Council is temporary accommodation, a factor that is shared by district, city and borough councils alike.

Cllr Bayes asked if a robust business case had been produced for item 4 to show the cost benefit analysis of this post and is this post a temporary post.

Cllr Ringer responded that revenue that comes in for licensing can only be used to fund the processing of licensing applications. Licensing is not profit making, extra demand needs to be adequately staffed.

Cllr Bayes asked how much will the applications bring in to justify the post.

Cllr Ringmer replied that he was happy to send Cllr Bayes the figures, but assured members that the Council would not be employing additional staff unless we were recouping costs.

Cllr Cushing asked if quotes had been received for the Collectors Cabin roof.

Cllr Shires confirmed that quotes had not been received for alternatives to a thatched roof.

The Chair moved to a vote.

Vote on recommendation 1 and 2

Proposed by Cllr Shires and seconded by Cllr Admas

Councillors voted unanimously in favour of these two recommendations.

Vote on recommendations 3,6 and 8.

Proposed by Cllr Shires and seconded by Cllr Withington

Councillors voted unanimously in favour of these three recommendations.

Vote on recommendations 4,5 and 7

Proposed by Cllr Shires and seconded by Cllr Admas

Favour – 20

Against – 11

Abstain – 0

All recommendations were approved

Full Council:

1. Noted the contents of the report and the current forecast year end position.
2. Noted that officers will work together to take action to reduce the overall projected General Fund deficit for 2024/25.

Full Council approved:

3. to include an addition to the revenue budget of £13,000 for an addition to existing Exacom software as laid out in paragraph 4.8.1
4. to include a permanent increase to the revenue budget of £34,000 for an additional member of staff in the Licensing Team as detailed in paragraphs 4.8.2 to 4.8.5. This will be funded from the ring-fenced licencing income.
5. to include an additional capital budget of £22,000 to complete the Cromer Offices LED lighting project. This is to be funded from the Net Zero Initiatives reserve as detailed in paragraph 5.4.2
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7. to include an additional capital budget of £30,000 to rethatch the Collector's Cabin roof and that this is to be funded from the Asset Management reserve as detailed in paragraph 5.4.4
8. to include an additional capital budget of £23,400 to develop the customer services C3 software and is to be funded from the Development Plan reserve. as detailed in paragraph 5.4.5

82 FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26

Cllr Shires explained that the fees and charges omitted in the original Full Council papers have been rectified and these have not changed since they were presented to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny.

The only addition is the

Provision of legal advice and services to third-party public-sector organisations. This will be at Solicitor's hourly rate and is discretionary, set by district.

Cllr Shires proposed, Cllr Adams seconded.

Full Council unanimously agreed that:

- The fees and charges from 1 April 2025 as included in Appendix A.
- That delegated authority be given to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and relevant Directors/Assistant Director to agree the fees and charges not included within Appendix A as required (outlined within the report).

83 POLLING DISTRICT AND PLACES REVIEW

Cllr Adams proposed the recommendations for polling places considered to be the best locations within local communities to be designated as polling places which will provide for electors the most convenient and accessible polling arrangements.

Seconded by Cllr Fredericks

Full Council unanimously recommended the:

- Approval of the list of Polling Districts and Polling Places within the North Norfolk District following this periodic review as detailed in Appendix 1 to this report.
- Council should note that in exceptional circumstances (such as a polling place becoming unavailable) changes can be made to polling place designations between periodic reviews

84 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

None

85 OPPOSITION BUSINESS

None

86 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION

None

87 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

None

88 PRIVATE BUSINESS

None

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm.

Chairman