

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 20 January 2025 at the Council Offices, Holt Road, Cromer, NR27 9EN at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

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

Members also attending:

Cllr C Cushing
Cllr N Dixon
Cllr A Fitch-Tillett

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive, Director for Resources / S151 Officer and Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer, The Coastal Transition Manager

Apologies for Absence:

Cllr A Varley

1 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

3 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Chairman informed members that they could ask questions as matters arose during the meeting.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no recommendations from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICE

Cllr L Withington, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, introduced this item. She said that she was supportive of the recommendations and wanted to highlight the following key issues; it was a savings proposal and did not include the closure of the public toilets on the site. It did not indicate in any way that the Council was no longer committed to tourism in the district and the partnership with Visit North Norfolk reflected this. She said that it was important to move the process forward quickly now so that the use of the building could be considered and focus on how tourism would be promoted and supported ahead of the upcoming season.

Cllr Withington proposed the following amendment (in italics) to recommendation 4:

- The relocation of the Deep History Coast display to another location in the town being explored with a preference for this to be accommodated in Cromer Museum recognising the partnership nature of the development of the Deep History Coast initiative with the Norfolk Museums Service. *If this cannot be accommodated, then to consider alternative options across wider museum locations.*

The Chairman supported the amendment. He said that there had been considerable interest in the building which was reassuring.

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

RESOLVED

To agree to the Council withdrawing from the provision of a physical Visitor Information Service from the North Norfolk Information Centre building at The Meadow Car Park, Cromer (these proposals do not involve the closure of the public toilets also provided from the building) to deliver a financial saving of approx. £93,000 for the 2025/26 budget.

To agree to: -

- Advertise the premises occupied by the Visitor Information Centre service as available for let with expressions of interest invited by Friday 28 March 2025.
- Officers considering alternative means of providing visitor information within the town and wider district – including strengthening an online presence, a commercial arrangement with providers of electronic information boards and poster sites / leaflet stands in prominent locations
- The relocation of the Deep History Coast display to another location in the town being explored with a preference for this to be accommodated in Cromer Museum recognising the partnership nature of the development of the Deep History Coast initiative with the Norfolk Museums Service. If this cannot be accommodated, then to consider alternative options across wider museum locations.

Reason for the decision:

To make financial savings from a service that is discretionary, considered to no longer to present value for money due to the changing way in which visitors access information and to generate additional income from the asset that would be vacated due to the termination of the service.

8 DELEGATED DECISIONS

The Chairman explained that this was a statutory report and members were required to note the record of delegated decisions.

RESOLVED

To receive and note the report and the register of decisions taken under delegated powers

9 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2025-26

Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Benefits, introduced this item. She began by thanking the Council Tax Support Working Party for their work in reviewing the proposed options for a council tax support (CTS) scheme for 2025/2026.

She explained that the proposed scheme was largely a continuation of the 2024/25 CTS scheme for working-age people, with changes proposed to align the scheme with Universal Credit, simplifying the process of claiming, and to bring efficiencies in the administration of these CTS claims. She added that CTS Scheme rules would also continue to reflect any relevant welfare benefit changes made to the working-age Housing Benefit scheme or Pension Age CTS scheme.

Cllr Fredericks explained that by choosing option 2, which introduced a flat rate, claimants would receive more money and the administration of the scheme would be simplified.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their work on the new scheme and commended it for continuing to protect vulnerable residents whilst providing flexibility to accommodate a change in circumstances.

Cllr Withington sought clarification that the new scheme would put North Norfolk residents in a better position than before. She also asked how it compared to the schemes provided at neighbouring Norfolk authorities. Cllr Fredericks confirmed that it would ensure residents were in a better position financially and that by aligning the scheme with Universal Credit, claims would be processed much more quickly.

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

RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council:

That the proposed Council Tax Support scheme (CTS) for 2025/26 is implemented as the final working-age CTS Scheme for 2025/26.

Reason for the decision:

To ensure a CTS scheme for working-age people for 2025/26 is agreed by full Council by 19th February 2025

10 FUTURE COASTAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Portfolio Holder for Coast, Cllr H Blathwayt, introduced this item. He explained that NNDC has entered into a Partnership agreement (under Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972) in 2016 with Suffolk Coastal District Council, Waveney

District Council (now East Suffolk Council) and Great Yarmouth Borough Council to share resources and prioritise activities relating to coastal matters. This created "Coastal Partnership East". However, in the intervening years each Council had faced significant demands relating to coastal change, climate change and competing pressures of project delivery and bidding for funding. As a result, it was believed that it was a prudent time for each partner Council to consider its future coastal management resourcing requirements and approach to ensure that local priorities were met. Cllr Blathwayt said that his coastal colleague on East Suffolk District Council, Cllr Kay Yule, had sadly passed away in December and he wished to send his condolences to her family and friends.

Cllr Blathwayt said that the only option was to dissolve the partnership as it required all parties to commit to its future. He added that he was confident that they would continue to work together on matters that affected them all.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett said that she was sad to hear of the proposals as Coastal Partnership East had been established when she was Portfolio Holder for Coast. However, she understood the reasons behind the proposals. Cllr Fitch-Tillett referred to the Cromer to Mundesley coastal project which was not yet complete and asked if the Portfolio Holder was confident that there were enough qualified engineers to undertake the remaining work and sign it off. Cllr Blathwayt said that he was confident that the work would be completed. The Chairman agreed, adding that NNDC's coastal team was exceptional and this was recognised nationally. He said that he had raised coastal matters at Government level as they were not mentioned in the Devolution White Paper.

Cllr Blathwayt said that the amount of time spent by officers would remain the same and the Council would continue to provide an outstanding coastal service.

It was proposed by Cllr H Blathwayt, seconded by Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the dissolution of the Coastal Partnership known as Coastal Partnership East with effect from 20th January 2025 (taking into account the appropriate notice period to end the Section 113 agreement).
2. Continue to support partnership working and retain/explore service level agreements with other Local Authorities as appropriate.

Reason for the decision:

To ensure that the Council has effective coastal management arrangements in place

11 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2025/26

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced this item. She began by saying that she was pleased to present a balanced budget and thanked officers for their hard work in achieving this. She also thanked members for their input, specifically Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Cllr Shires referred members to section 2.2 of the report, specifically the following: *'There were 133 out of the 164 District Councils that received a zero per cent increase, with NNDC being allocated £805,000 to bring its increase up to 0.0% i.e. without this the Council would have seen a reduction in funding of this £805,000'.* With that in mind, Cllr Shires said that it was very clear that Government ministers

did not understand North Norfolk. There was no mention of the coast and everything was focused on 'working age' residents which did not reflect the demographic of the district. She said that given the move towards devolution, it was unlikely that this approach would change.

Cllr Shires went on to refer page 250, line 5, and reassured members that there were no savings to be identified. She then confirmed that deficit projections were significantly reduced compared to this time last year. Regarding savings. She said that she had asked officers to ensure that any future reports clearly set out the savings against the criteria listed in section 8.

In conclusion, Cllr Shires said that she could provide more information on the temporary accommodation borrowing proposals if required.

The Chairman agreed with Cllr Shires' comments regarding the financial settlement, explaining that it effectively meant 1 pence of additional spending per head of the district's population. This meant that north Norfolk residents paid considerably more for services than those in northern urban areas. Consequently, the council had had to work really hard to achieve a balanced budget and this was against additional pressures such as the demand for temporary accommodation, with over 80 children in such housing on some nights.

Cllr C Cushing said that he endorsed the comments made by the Chairman and the Portfolio Holder regarding the Government's approach to rural districts. He said that ministers represented urban areas and had no understanding of countryside matters.

Cllr Cushing referred to the final page of the report and references to public conveniences, specifically the lack of reference to the toilets in Stalham which had previously been put forward as a potential saving. He sought clarification as to whether this meant that it was no longer a savings proposal. Cllr Shires confirmed that this was correct.

Cllr N Dixon referred to the chart on page 249 and said that there should be an additional column stating 'zero' for NNDC. This would clearly set out the current position and send a strong message to residents about the Government's approach to district councils.

He went onto refer to page 255 and the table of reserves. He asked whether the statement at section 3.16 included the reserves used to cover revenue spends on services which was unplanned. Cllr Shires replied that there was no unplanned spend projected for 2025/2026 so clarified whether Cllr Dixon was referring to unplanned spend for 2024/2025. The Director for Finance confirmed that the table on page 255 set out the planned spend for future years and it did include revenue expenditure where money had been set aside for planned use – such as grant funding for specific projects.

Cllr Dixon sought confirmation that no money had been spent from the reserves on services that were not planned. The Director of Finance replied that there was no unplanned expenditure included in the table, it was all planned. In response to a further question from Cllr Dixon as to whether any money from the reserves had been spent on service delivery, the Director for Finance confirmed that it had. Cllr Dixon asked whether the amount could be identified and shared at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Cllr Dixon asked for an update on the latest overspend forecast figure as referred to

on page 251. He asked whether the figure stated in section 3.2 was still the same. The Director for Finance replied that it was currently being worked on and the period 10 Budget Monitoring report would cover this. She did not anticipate much variation though.

Cllr J Toye spoke in support of Cllr Shires and the work that officers and members had done to produce a balanced budget.

Cllr L Shires drew members' attention to page 247 and the reference to the budget consultation taking place. She said that it hadn't opened for consultation yet and this was likely to happen in early February.

The Monitoring Officer advised Cabinet members to clarify which of the proposed savings and which of the proposed capital bids they wished to recommend to Full Council. The Chairman confirmed that they supported the proposals as set out in the report.

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

RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council:

1. That the list of proposed savings as set out in the report are agreed so that a balanced budget can be recommended to full Council.
2. That an alternative option for balancing the budget should be agreed to replace savings not taken if there are any.
3. That any additional funding announced as part of the final Local Government Settlement announcement be transferred to reserves.
4. That new capital bids, as set out in the report, be recommended to full Council for inclusion in the Capital Programme

Reasons for the decision:

To enable the Council to set a balanced budget.

12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

13 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 11.01 am.

Chairman