

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 7 July 2025 at the Council Offices, Holt Road, Cromer, NR27 9EN at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

Cllr L Shires
Cllr A Brown
Cllr C Ringer
Cllr A Varley

Cllr T Adams (Chair)
Cllr H Blathwayt
Cllr J Toye
Cllr L Withington

Members also attending:

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive, Democratic Services Manager and Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer

Also in attendance:

Press and Public

Apologies for Absence:

Cllr W Fredericks (Deputy Chair)

22 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 2nd June were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

24 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

26 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Chair advised members that they could ask questions as matters arose during the meeting.

27 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Cllr Dr V Holliday, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, confirmed that there were no recommendations to Cabinet.

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services, introduced this item. She began by highlighting the significant improvements that had been made to the financial management and monitoring processes in the last year and said that the year end position was now projected every time budget performance was monitored and this provided clearer visibility and control over outcomes. It also allowed for decisive action to be taken to address any issues as they arose.

Cllr Shires said that the Period 4 Budget Monitoring report last year had forecast a large deficit and through a combination of financial planning and cost control throughout the Council, the gap had been closed and the year had ended with a General Fund surplus of just over £600k. She thanked everyone for their hard work in achieving this, including the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Cllr Shires then outlined the 'standout' figures, including an underspend on employee-related costs, tight controls on supplies and services and the generation of £2m in income due to planning, car parking and housing related grants.

She paid tribute to staff for their continued hard work, financial discipline and professionalism.

Cllr Shires said that the initial plan had been to draw down approximately £4m from reserves and this had now been significantly reduced due to the surplus to just over £2m. This left £24m in reserves which would help with managing future pressures.

Investment in local communities had continued through the last financial year, including capital projects such as coastal protection, public conveniences, solar panel installation at Victory leisure centre and supporting affordable housing.

Cllr Shires referred to the bin underspend of £28k, outlined on page 23 of the report. This would be put into a reserve for the provision of free food waste caddies.

In conclusion, Cllr Shires said that the next budget would be extremely challenging. Early indications from central government regarding funding were not positive. However, this outturn report showed that the choices that been made had been effective and service delivery had been maintained and the reliance on the use of reserves reduced.

The Chair commented on the positive position regarding car parking income and was a good indication of how well the Council interacted with the tourism offer. He also welcomed the increase in planning related income. That said, uncertainty about the future remained, particularly regarding the Government's continued focus on urban areas to the detriment of rural coastal ones. He highlighted the additional grant that had been received for the learning centre at Holt Country Park. This was a very positive outcome and contributed towards the country park's status.

Members were invited to speak:

Cllr N Dixon commented on the paucity of capital projects east of North Walsham. He then referred to s5.8 (page 26) and the repaid Egmere bond. He asked for more detail on this. The Chief Executive explained that at the point when the Council was looking to take forward a capital project at Egmere to service some employment land, there was a requirement to pay Norfolk County Council a bond for related highway enabling works. As the project had not been delivered, this money had

been repaid with interest.

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

RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council:

- a) The provisional outturn position for the General Fund revenue account for 2024/25 (as shown in Appendix A);
- b) The transfers to and from reserves as detailed within the report (and Appendix C);
- c) The surplus of £0.622m be transferred to the General reserve to mitigate future funding shortfalls.
- d) The balance on the General Reserve of £2.825m following the transfer outlined above.
- e) The surplus of £0.384m relating to retained business rates be transferred to the Business Rates reserve.
- f) The financing of the 2024/25 capital programme as detailed within the report and at Appendix D.
- g) The updated capital programme for 2025/26 to 2030/31 and scheme financing as outlined within the report and detailed at Appendix E;
- h) Approval of additional funding to cover capital project overspends of £10,816 as detailed in paragraph 5.7.
- i) The roll-forward of existing capital project funding from 2024/25 into 2025/26 as detailed in paragraph 5.9.
- j). To note the addition of £55,000 towards the New Play Area (Sheringham, The Lees) to be funded from the Asset Management Reserve in 2025/26 for a total project budget of £120,000
- k) The addition of £6,081 towards the Cromer Offices LED Lighting in the Capital Programme to be funded from Capital Receipts in 2025/26 for a total project budget of £178,796.
- l) The addition of £20,000 towards the Public Conveniences (Sheringham & North Walsham) project in the Capital Programme to be funded from Capital Receipts in 2025/26 for a total project budget of £565,514.
- m) The addition of the Holt Eco Learning Space scheme for £100,000 into the 2025/26 Capital Programme to be funded by an external contribution.

Reasons for the decision:

To provide a draft outturn position for the General Fund, Capital Accounts and Reserves which will form the basis to produce statutory accounts for 2024/25. Also to provide a draft opening position for the financial year 2025/26

29 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2024/2025

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services, introduced this item. She said that the report had been considered by the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee and they had recommended its approval.

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

RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council

The Treasury Management outturn position to Full Council for approval.

Reason for decision:

The Treasury Management activity for the year requires approval by Full Council for the Council to comply with the CIPFA Treasury Management and Prudential Codes

30 DEBT RECOVERY 2024/2025

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services, introduced this item. She said that the level of Council Tax and Non-Domestic (Business) Rates debts written off had increased since the previous year. The main reason for debts being written off were due to insolvency or where the debtor had absconded or was deceased. The collection rate for Council tax arrears had reached 98.37% and for business rates it was 99.45% - both higher than previous years. She added that the collection rate for business rates was the highest for 18 years.

Cllr Shires said that the outstanding arrears for council tax as at 31st March 2025 was £4.19m, which was slightly lower than the previous year. In terms of business rates, the total of all years' business rates arrears was £253k as at 31st March 2025. The picture overall was looking quite positive and she said that she wanted to reassure residents facing financial difficulty that they should contact the Council for advice and support.

Finally, Cllr Shires congratulated the team for their recent award from the Empty Homes Network. They were highly commended for the best use of media linking to long term empty homes work.

RESOLVED to recommend that Full Council:

1. approves the annual report which details the Council's write-offs, in accordance with the Council's Debt Write-Off Policy and performance in relation to revenues collection.
2. approves the continued delegated authority as shown in appendix 2 for write offs.

Reason for the decision:

The recommendations ensure the Council makes best use of its staff resources and manages its finances to ensure best value for money.

31 HOUSING BENEFIT DEBT RECOVERY REPORT - 1ST APRIL 2024 TO 31ST MARCH 2025

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr Fredericks, the Chair, Cllr T Adams, introduced this item. He said that the report provided an update on Housing Benefit debt recovery, detailing the Councils' collection performance and debt management arrangements for 2024 –2025.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED to

- a) Note the performance of the debt management function carried out by the Benefits service.
- b) Note the debt write-offs for the year.

- c) Note the emerging impact of Universal Credit on collection levels.
- d) To support the implementation of future recovery strategies.
- e) To approve the annual report giving details of Housing Benefit Overpayment debt recovery in accordance with the Council's Debt Recovery Policy, Write-Off Policy, and Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy.

32 ROCKET HOUSE CAFÉ/RESTAURANT LEASE RENEWAL

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services, introduced this item. She reminded members that there was an exempt appendix and said that if they wished to discuss any of the information in that, the meeting would need to go into private session.

Cllr Shires proposed option 1 – the agreement of a new lease and rent increase with the existing tenant.

The Chair said that there had been some concern locally about the reference to an option to sell the property and explained that all available options had to be considered and it was agreed that it was not the best option. He said that Option 1 was the best option for the Council and current tenant. The current business was very successful and a valued local employer and it would be hard to replicate given the pressures on the hospitality industry.

Members were invited to speak:

Cllr N Dixon said that one of his questions may need to be raised in private session, including costs.

The Chair said that he would deal with comments and questions that could be dealt with in public session and then move into private session.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett spoke about the building in general. She said that the last few months had been exceptionally dry and she asked whether there were still signs of damp in the building. The Chair replied that this matter was not being considered today. The report related to the lease of the upper part of the building only. However, he did confirm that the damp situation was still being monitored. The space being discussed was not affected by the damp issue.

He added that a decision regarding the tenancy for the ground floor would come to a future Cabinet meeting for decision. Cllr Fitch-Tillett was concerned that the damp issues could impact on the saleability of the building in the future. The Chair replied that this was not a true reflection of the status of the building and expressed concern that the situation was being exaggerated.

Cllr V Holliday asked if there was a business case underpinning the proposals. The Chair replied that this was a standard process for the renewal of a lease. The Chief Executive added that the matter before members was for the renewal of a lease for the upper part of the building and as it was let under the Landlord & Tenant Act, the tenant had the right of renewal subject to agreeing a revised rent.

The Chair suggested that the rest of the discussion took place in private session.

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

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the

press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act.

The meeting went into private session at 10.27am.

At 10.50am members resolved to return to public session.

The Chair said that members had considered issues relating to the proposals in a closed session.

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

RESOLVED to approve

- The renewal of the lease with the existing tenant as per Option 1 detailed in the exempt appendix.
- Delegate approval to the Asset Strategy Manager to agree the exact terms of the above legal agreement.

Reason for the decision:

- Granting a new lease at the property will secure the Council's revenue income from the property at a market rent ensuring best value is achieved in line with the Council obligation under the Section 26 of the Local Government Act.
- Granting a new lease at the property will provide security to the tenant's business and secure jobs in the district.

33 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

34 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 10.52 am.

Chairman