

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

-27 July 2022-

COUNCILLOR SEWARD - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, ASSETS, LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND REVENUES

For the period June to July 2022

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Finance

Audit 2019/20 – This audit is largely complete but has not been signed off due to late issues regarding the treatment of Infrastructure assets. This is a national issue and is receiving attention from the finance department to work towards sign off.

Audit 2020/21 – A huge amount of resource has been required to provide EY with all the necessary working papers ahead of the commencement of the Audit in July. This has caused pressure in the department which has been short of officers.

Year-end & SOA 2021/22 – Work is still being undertaken to complete all the necessary year end entries.

Civica Finance System Upgrade - the project team has started providing Civica with all the necessary information to build a system for NNDC to test. Progress meetings are held on a weekly basis, so far there are no major issues however we are all mindful of the tight time scales and enormous scope of the project.

New starters – following vacancies in the team, we have had two new group accountants joining the finance team and an interim s.151 officer has stepped into this statutory role.

Estates

Disposal of assets. Solicitors have been instructed to progress the sale of Parklands. Officers attended a meeting with residents and the Parish Council (14th July) to give an update and to respond to queries. Cabinet approved the sale of Beeston Putting Green, Sheringham. Planning application has been submitted by the purchaser of the enabling land adjacent to the Reef.

Vacant Property –Former playgroup building and café at North Lodge Park, Cromer are being advertised to establish interest as part of the Levelling up application. Lease proposals for the collectors cabin, North Lodge Park and

The Cedars, North Walsham, are being considered. The Cedars barns are also being advertised seeking proposals.

Leases - Fakenham Connect lease to physio and Oddfellows Hall nearing completion. Licences for concession sites are due to be completed shortly.

Ground lease approved for Mundesley Inshore lifeboat

Carbon reduction – seeking to establish a priority shortlist of properties that will be assessed in detail to identify carbon reduction measures.

Legal

Demand on service:

The legal service continues to see a year on year increase in requests for advice and assistance (both internal and external) in the form of new instructions. During the first quarter of this year (up to 30 June 2022) the team has been instructed and opened 522 case files. See below for previous years 1st quarters. The team has continued its efforts to provide a good service to its clients despite the loss of several posts and staff during the last couple of years.

2021/22 – 424 cases

2020/21 – 336 cases

Information Requests:

FOI request figures show that the Council's current performance at responding to requests within the statutory 20 working days is at 87.5%. The national target is set at 90%. The legal service continues to provide advice and assistance to the wider Council in order to assist in this area, as well as with data protection, to support the corporate responsibilities.

Democratic Services

The Town & Parish Council Engagement Forum met virtually on 4th July. Attendees engaged well with the topics and feedback subsequently has been very positive.

Work has started, with support from the British Youth Council, on the establishment of the NNDC Youth Council. A steering group of interested young people will be recruited over the summer period and they will work together on the format and membership of the youth council. It is anticipated that it will launch formally in October. The Communications team is providing support to promote and encourage participation from young people across the District.

Revenues

Collection as at 30 June 2022

Council Tax collection was 28.76% against target of 29.15%, shortfall of collection of £324k.

NNDR collection is 35.39% against target of 27.00%, an excess in collection of £2.08M. This is likely to be partly caused by the Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF)

awards that were applied at the close of 2021/22 and carried forward as a credit to the new NDR 2022/23 annual bills.

Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme.

We closed our CT Energy Rebate Scheme on 30 June 2022 for those applying online, with final payments made on Friday 1 July 2022.

Out of 40,912 eligible customers, we have paid approx. 95% of our customers entitled to the £150.

The remaining customers have had the £150 transferred against their council tax account on 4 July 2022 with revised demand notices and letters issued.

The total rebate amount awarded to NNDC council tax customers is £6,114,450.

Papers

- Revenues has contributed to the second homes paper.
- Revenues has contributed to the empty homes paper.

Government Returns:

- **Business Grants** – continuing to reconcile these and report data to government on a regular basis.
- **CT Energy Rebate Scheme** - continuing to reconcile these and report data to government each month.
- **CARF & Retail Relief Return** - continuing to reconcile these and report data to government each month.

The QRC1 Return – this has been reconciled and reported to government.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Finance

Audit 2020-21 – The audit is due to commence on the 11th July.

Year end 2021/22 – We continue to review and complete all the entries required to close down the 2021/22 accounts and prepare the SOA.

Budget Monitoring P4 2022/23 – the team will look to prepare a position as at the end of July 2022 to inform members of the current year's financial position.

Civica Finance System Upgrade – work will continue to build a test system after which work will commence on testing and training.

Estates

Investigating a possible purchase of land for tree planting.

Legal

The team is carrying a vacant post at present and will look to fill this. The legal team has taken on a Legal Services Apprentice to support the National Apprenticeship Scheme Programme. The trainee solicitors in the team will soon be undertaking the Professional Skills Course aspect of their training contract with the Council, with qualification expected in 2022/23.

Democratic Services

Two 'Prospective Candidates' events are being held in September and October – one virtual, one in person. Member Development Group is working with the team to arrange these and the Communications Team will promote them via various media channels.

Revenues

Government Returns:

NNDR3
Business Grants
CT Energy Rebate Scheme
The CARF & Retail Relief Return

Papers

Debt Report for 2021/22 outturn figures

Consultations

Consultation on the statutory debt plan
Business Rates Revaluation 2023: Consultation on the transitional arrangements

3 Meetings attended