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CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 7 November 2022 at the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

Cllr W Fredericks
Cllr V Gay
Cllr L Shires
Cllr A Brown

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett
Cllr N Lloyd
Cllr T Adams (Chair)

Members also attending:

Cllr C Cushing
Cllr N Dixon
Cllr J Rest

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive, Director for Communities, Assistant Director For Legal and Finance, Policy & Performance Management Officer and Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for Absence:

Mr R Kershaw
Mr E Seward

62 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd October were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

64 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

65 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

66 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Cllr J Rest referred to the Cost of Living Summit that had been hosted by the Council on 6th November. He said that there had been a lot of confusion amongst elected members as to how to join the meeting and it had not been clear which platform it was being hosted on. He added that he was not aware that there was an audience within the Council Chamber and although he understood that it was not feasible to have all members physically present, he asked for clarification as to which members were invited. It was a very important topic and he was disappointed that there had

been a problem accessing the session. He asked if a recording of the session was available. The Chairman said that he was sorry to hear this. It had been a very good event and very informative and had been arranged in a short period of time. There were representatives from local organisations and community groups in the Chamber. There were learning points for the Council and it was hard to plan a response as events were fast moving.

Cllr V Gay commented that she had requested a recording of the session but had been advised that none had been made. The Chairman replied that this approach may have been taken so that people could speak freely. Cllr J Rest said that this was extremely disappointing. He asked which members were invited to join people in the Chamber. The Chief Executive added that there were only 4 members of Cabinet in the Chamber and several members joined virtually.

67 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman invited Cllr N Dixon, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to speak. He began by saying that there were no recommendations made to Cabinet at the October meeting of the Committee. At the meeting on 28th September, the Committee had recommended that, in relation to the Performance Management Framework, consideration was given to the inclusion of limited contextual information to support performance data, subject to further discussion with Cllr T Adams and Cllr V Holliday. He wondered whether such discussions had taken place yet. The Chairman replied that they had not taken place yet and he would be happy to open up such discussions to all members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Cllr Dixon said that he would anticipate further discussion of this matter when the Performance Framework was considered later in the agenda. He added that he hoped that there would be a mechanism in place to facilitate changes to the Framework.

The Policy & Performance Management Officer said that arrangements were underway discuss the Framework further. She added that there was already a lot of contextual information on the website but further input was needed from members as to what information should go forwards to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for discussion.

68 PURCHASE OF FURTHER TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION UNIT

Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing, introduced this item. She welcomed the purchase of another property for use by a homeless household and said it would bring the total to 18 properties purchased by the Council. She added that she really wished that temporary accommodation wasn't needed but there was an ongoing housing crisis and it was an impossible task to provide a safe, affordable home for everyone who needed it.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Cllr Fredericks confirmed that there were currently 51 households in temporary accommodation.

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

RESOLVED

To note the purchase

Reason for the Decision:

Expenditure over £100,000.

69 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2022/23 - PERIOD 6

Cllr L Shires presented the report in Cllr E Seward's absence. She explained that it covered the period up until the end of September and reflected the increases in inflationary costs that has not been envisaged when the Budget was set in February. Higher interest rates were also an issue. However, it was a forecast and could change. She said that the Council's strong finances ensured that it was in a good position to deal with such financial pressures, unlike many local authorities. She concluded by saying that the Administration was not complacent about the challenges ahead and there would be regular reports and updates to Members outlining how the situation could be mitigated.

The Chairman said that the forecast deficit was significantly higher than anticipated as a result of inflationary pressures and it was likely to get worse in the coming months.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr N Dixon commented that if the outturn figure was as forecast, it would be an unusual outcome and if this was the case, he would be looking to understand why and whether it was a one-off reason or an indication of a more challenging trend. He added that it was the outturn figure that would be relevant.

The Chairman replied that it was set out in the report where inflationary pressures were impacting. The figures showed that staffing costs, fuel prices and energy costs had all increased substantially. There was a risk that inflation strain would continue to increase and although he shared Cllr Dixon's concerns, it was clear what the cause was.

Cllr Shires said that no-one could have predicted this in February when the Budget was agreed. The financial situation across the country was so volatile that it was almost impossible to deal with. The only possible solution at the current time, was for the Government to step in and bring stability at local level. It must be acknowledged that it was unlikely that this was a short-term issue. It was nationwide and could go on for some time.

Cllr C Cushing referred to page 25 and the projected overspend of £909k. The reasons for this were listed and he wondered how solid these estimates were and if there was anything else that could come into play that had not been anticipated. The Chairman replied that as far as energy costs were concerned, the Council was working hard to address this and limit any further increase. Employee costs were considered to be pretty accurate, however, other areas such as the waste contract, were less clear and costs could rise. He added that this was why members would receive regular updates on the financial situation going forwards.

Cllr J Rest commented that all service areas were under pressure, budget wise. He asked if there were any priority areas that must be focussed on and whether other areas could be dropped if necessary. The Chairman replied that the Council was not yet in that situation. Other local authorities had been forced to close leisure centres and NNDC was certainly not at that point, adding that they brought in income for the Council. He added that some operational services took priority over others – such as housing and People Services.

Cllr L Shires said that the Administration was not looking at any service cuts for the current year at least. Staff were used to working to achieve the best value for money for residents. The Chairman added that job vacancies were being reviewed as they arose, to ascertain whether they needed to be filled.

Cllr J Toye commented that he would like some assurance that the Council was taking a holistic approach as making cuts in one service area could impact elsewhere. The Chairman agreed.

Cllr N Dixon referred to his earlier question and said that it was accepted that the wider national financial situation was impacting on all local authorities. What was different, however, was that NNDC had been in a comfortable financial position for many years compared to other district councils, which is why the forecast overspend could be considered to be a matter of concern. He said that this should prompt the Council to look more carefully at factors that could be peculiar to North Norfolk. The Chairman said that he shared Cllr Dixon's concerns but it must be acknowledged that the Council did not have any debt which contrasted to other authorities.

Cllr V Gay agreed that the Council had a reputation for sound finances and its lack of debt meant that it was not having to pay rising interest costs. In response to Cllr Toye's concerns about the impact of cuts on non-statutory services, she said that health was a new responsibility for the District Council and the provision of discretionary services was key to supporting wider health objectives. The Council must not lose sight of the benefit of such services to residents.

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

RESOLVED to

- 1) Note the contents of the report and the current budget monitoring position.
- 2) Recommend to Council that any outturn deficit is funded from a contribution from the use of the General Reserve
- 3) Agree that a regular update should be provided to Members on the measures being undertaken to mitigate and reduce the current forecast deficit

Reason for the Decision:

To update Members on the current budget monitoring position for the Council.

70 PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2021-22

Cllr L Shires introduced this item. She explained that it was a statutory report, which was required to show compliance with the CIPFA Prudential Code.

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

RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council

That the out-turn position in respect of the 2021-22 Prudential Indicators are approved

Reason for decision:

To meet the requirements of the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management code of Practice

71 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Chairman introduced this item. He said that it been considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee – as mentioned by Cllr Dixon earlier in the meeting. He thanked the Policy & Performance Management Officer for her work in pulling it together.

Cllr N Dixon referred to page 69 and the second box from the bottom of the page. He queried the reference to Development Management Committee. The Policy & Performance Management Officer replied that this was an error and she would correct it to state Development Committee.

Cllr C Cushing referred to page 75 and queried why there were no performance measures in place for the coast. The Chief Executive replied that the Council was the authority for coast protection and management and was responsible for coastal defences. It was limited to strategic oversight and this was hard to measure. He went onto say that the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme (CTAP) and a series of framework performance measures would be put in place for that scheme. Cllr A Fitch-Tillett, Portfolio Holder for Coast, commented that she wished it was possible to put performance measures in place for the coast as it was so unpredictable. She agreed with the Chief Executive that indicators would be put in place for the CTAP scheme and she welcomed this.

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

RESOLVED

To approve the Performance Management Framework and delegate authority to the Chief Executive to approve any amendments to the framework prior to the full review in four years' time.

Reason for the decision:

To ensure the Council has a Performance Management Framework that is fit for purpose.

72 NORTH NORFOLK CORPORATE PLAN - REVIEW OF DELIVERY FEBRUARY 2020 - OCTOBER 2022 AND AGREEMENT OF PRIORITY OBJECTIVES FOR THE PERIOD TO MAY 2023

The Chairman introduced this item. He thanked officers for their hard work, they had faced significant challenges due to Covid, yet they had continued to deliver. There had been some decisions taken as to what should be prioritised and there were some exciting projects coming forwards that would be delivered by May 2023.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr N Dixon referred to the theme of business growth and page 86, section 3.3 which stated the objective of publishing an Economic Growth Strategy. He commented that this should have been done much earlier. He went onto say that he

was concerned that the Local Plan was now in its closing stages and he was struggling to understand how the Council could have a new Local Plan which did not include a current strategy for economic growth as it was a key strand of the local plan. He said that for many years he had been raising the importance of infrastructure sitting alongside residential development. He referred to page 94 and said that he was concerned that there were not sufficient suitable locations for economic growth, or the use of mixed site allocations in the draft local plan, or that the Council had thought through the infrastructure that would go alongside this. He said that the Council had considerable ground to make up on economic growth and he did not see how this could be achieved on the back of a strategy that was several years out of date. The new Local Plan was looking ahead for the next 15 years and the Economic Growth Strategy was one of the key planks, in the same way that the Housing Strategy was. The Chairman agreed that there was considerable ground to make up and the impact of Covid had meant that the Council had to respond quickly to the needs of businesses and the focus on strategic matters had slipped. He confirmed that it would be delivered, adding that the Local Plan had been delayed due to the impact of nutrient neutrality. He concluded by referring Cllr Dixon to the timescales provided in the Delivery Plan and said that he was confident that the Economic Growth Strategy would come to Cabinet in December, as stated.

Cllr Dixon said that he understood the impact of Covid and the effect on timescales. His concern was that the Local Plan and the Economic Growth Strategy were not aligned. The latter should have been in place to inform the Local Plan and growth of the economy and implications for infrastructure. He said that he was struggling to understand how a strategy approved in December, could inform the Local Plan that was almost ready for submission.

Cllr J Toye agreed that the Local Plan and the Economic Growth Strategy should be joined up, however, in the past there had been issues with other providers and partners not delivering effectively – for infrastructure, power water etc. So, although he supported better connectivity, it must be acknowledged that there were external factors that could affect this. He concluded by seeking assurance that the Economic Growth Strategy would be brought forward before the Local Plan was submitted.

Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning, said that there were measure within the Local Plan for the allocation of economically productive land. He added that the District had very little brownfield land available, yet this was a Government priority. The intention was to take the Local Plan to the February meeting of Cabinet, to agree submission. There were two more meetings of the Planning, Policy & Built Heritage Working Party before then, so there further opportunities for input and comment. He was happy that it was compliant and sound. He agreed that it would be nice to marry up economic policy with the Local Plan but the demands on the Council to provide allocated sites meant that it needed to be in place as soon as possible.

Cllr V Gay said that she had been through the local plan process twice and she said that although there may not be an economic growth strategy in place, it should not be assumed that the Local Plan was not founded in economic research.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their comments and said that work would continue on all of the Council's key projects and work-streams.

Cllr N Dixon referred to page 86, section 3.3, which mentioned the High Street Task Force in Stalham. He asked for more information on this as it was not a project that he was aware of. The Chairman replied that the Council secured funding for this scheme. It was currently in the early stages and work was under way to engage with

the local community and businesses about what they would like to see happen. The Chief Executive added that the High Street Task Force was a Government sponsored organisation which had worked with a number of local authorities in terms of the Future High Street funds and Town Deal proposals. In March 2022, they identified a longer list of authorities with whom they would like to work in the next 24 months and North Norfolk was in the second tranche for delivery in quarter one of 2023. The Council was asked to nominate a town and Stalham was put forward. As yet no update had been provided regarding when it would be progressed. Cllr Dixon replied that this was good news but he had not seen the initiative referenced anywhere else at all. The Chairman said that it had been discussed informally with Cllr Dixon and that it had been on the cards for some time. Cllr Dixon commented that it was now a firm proposal and that it should be shared in the public domain now to help the town prepare for the scheme and garner support.

Cllr V Gay commented that it had never been her impression that the Council was overstaffed, yet in recent years many officers had stepped up to respond to Covid, the Ukraine crisis and now the challenges posed by the cost of living crisis. She said that she wanted to express her thanks to all the staff for their hard work.

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

RESOLVED

To review and comment on the progress made against the original and revised Delivery Plan objectives and agree those objectives where they would wish focus to be directed over the period to May 2023.

Reason for the decision:

To reflect the changed circumstances in which the Council has operated over the period since March 2020 in seeking to balance its Corporate Plan priorities against unforeseen developments such as COVID and the war in Ukraine.

73 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

74 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 11.06 am.

Chairman

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