

## CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

20 December 2022

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

For the period November to December 2022

#### **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.**

##### **Finance**

The Council has appointed the Director of Resources whose role includes acting as the Council's Chief Financial Officer.

**Budget** - Work has been undertaken with budget holders to produce a base budget for 2023/24 and a forecast for 2024/25 onwards, this will be taken to Cabinet in February.

**Finance System upgrade** – work continues on testing and migrating data ready for the go live this month. There will be minimal disruption to the public, suppliers and customers with only one week's payments being affected.

**Final Accounts 2020/21** – the audit work for 2020/21 was restarted with the finance team working hard to provide information to Ernst Young.

##### **Assets**

Planning application for the enabling land at Sheringham is progressing through the due process with determination anticipated in the new year.

Vacant Property– leases are progressing and expect to complete in the new year for Melbourne Slope site, Former Tennis Courts and Collectors Cabin at North Lodge Park.

Awaiting the levelling up bid outcome in relation to the former playgroup building and café at North Lodge Park, Cromer

Proposals relating to the future use of The Cedars are being considered with reports to Cabinet due early 2023.

Cornish Way, North Walsham – A review of the proposed roof works has resulted in an alternative solution that will improve the overall condition and energy performance of the industrial units within the existing capital budget.

## **Legal**

**Information Requests** -FOI request figures show that the Council's current performance at responding to requests within the statutory 20 working days is at 93%. 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 and support the corporate responsibilities.

**Litigation** - Recovery action is being taken concerning a large sum of unpaid business rates.

After a trial, the council secured guilty pleas in a prosecution relating to the operating of an unlicensed pet shop and for possession of a dangerous wild animal without the appropriate licence. Sentencing will take place early next year.

### **Property matters:**

- Freehold Transfer play area Church Road, West Beckham- dealing with solicitors contract enquires and negotiations on terms on the transfer Deed – progressing
- Freehold sale Gunning Placements, Mundesley- received comments back on draft documentation – to reply to contract enquiries – progressing
- Freehold sale land at Nelson Road/Fairview, North Walsham – Draft Transfer approved by NWTC – completion due soon
- Lease Art Deco block, Cromer – Trustees had meeting, further drafting to Lease due to Tenant's works- with Tenant solicitors to approve
- Lease Oddfellows Hall, Sheringham- Lease signed ready for completion – waiting for Tenant to confirm committee members
- Lease Collectors Cabin, Cromer- Draft Lease with Tenant solicitor to approve. Due to Tenant alterations a Licence for alterations will also be required – Tenant has provided draft internal plan for Licence
- Licence to underlet the lease of 80 Grove Lane, Holt - completed

## **Democratic Services**

The team continues to be very busy supporting committee meetings and preparing for the induction process for new members in 2023.

The Youth Council steering group has been working on a recruitment campaign with the Council's Communications Team and they are holding a launch event at the Council Offices on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> January.

The Domestic Abuse Forum met at the start of November and agreed to theme their meetings in future. The next meeting in January will focus on support for families going through the court process, following a domestic abuse situation.

The Coast Forum met on 2<sup>nd</sup> November. Attendance continues to rise and the forum has expanded to include representatives from across the Norfolk

coastline. A review of the terms of reference to reflect its changing remit, will be presented to Cabinet in early 2023.

The interviews for the Independent Person role to support the Standards Committee will be held in mid-December. We received a high number of applications for this position and it is hoped that we can appoint to Independent Persons to support the Committee.

## **Revenues**

### **Collection as of 30 November 2022.**

Council Tax collection was 73.08% against target of 73.00% with an excess in collection of £66k.

NNDR collection is 77.86% against target of 73.75%, an excess in collection of £1.021M. This is partly caused by the remaining Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) awards that were applied in September 2022 for the 2021/22 year and carried forward as a credit to the NDR 2022/23 charge.

### **Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme.**

The national CT Energy Rebate Scheme originally closed on 30 September 2022 to extended by the government to match the end date of the discretionary scheme.

Payment was made to the remaining eligible customers who hadn't received their payment before the original scheme end date of 30 September 2022.

The total rebate amount awarded to NNDC council tax customers is £6,114,900.

### **Non-Domestic (Business) Rates Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF)**

The total relief amount awarded to NNDC business customers was increased from £1,231,879 to £1,562,395.

This was the remaining funds that had not been paid which would have been claimed back by government by the end date of the scheme date of 30 September 2022.

NNDC was in the top quartile for paying out Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) as a percentage of allocation previously in governmental statistics ie NNDC were 70 out of 310 authorities which is in the top 22% (quartile being within top 25%).

### **Government Returns:**

- **Business Grants** – continuing work to reconcile these and report data to government on a regular basis.
- **CT Energy Rebate Scheme** – continuing work to reconcile these and report data to government each month. The extended scheme ended on 30 November 2022 and a request has been made to complete a government return with 38 questions (some questions being split between 8 and 16 sub questions).

- **CARF & Retail Relief Return** – work to continue to reconcile these and report data to government each month.

**Risk and Performance Audit being undertaken.**

Joined the national pilot to help work out the new burdens calculations required by Local Authorities for new NDR Reliefs. Previously there has been little take up by councils.

VOA Draft NDR Revaluation 2023 List has been released as announced by the chancellor. There are some working issues which have been reported to Civica.

## **2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.**

### **Finance**

**Budget** – the team will continue to work towards producing a balanced budget to present to cabinet in the new year.

**Finance System Upgrade** - Go Live on the new Civica finance system on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022,

**Final Accounts 2020/21** – The intention is that these accounts will be signed off by the end of the financial year.

### **Assets**

Asset Management Plan to be updated and to strengthen policy around climate change and the Councils assets.

### **Legal**

The Legal Service has recently had an internal audit undertaken and the result of this is that we have received a substantial assurance.

### **Democratic Services**

The Town & Parish Council Engagement Forum will meet on 9<sup>th</sup> January. It is anticipated that the agenda will focus on the cost of living crisis and the local elections in 2023.

### **Revenues**

Ongoing internal training of two Level 3 Business Certificated apprentices.

Online forms - reviewing and improving most commonly used customer paper forms.

Implementation of Civica's AutoSpars to improve efficiency and help customers make arrangements whilst reducing calls into NNDC.

Enforcement workshop – reviewing and improving the process going forward. This involves building on the softer approach set up during the pandemic.

Council Tax and Non-Domestic (Business) Rates Annual Billing.

**Government Returns:**

CT Energy Rebate Scheme

NNDR1

**Webinar**

Government 'alternative funding support for energy bills'

**3 Meetings attended**

Estates and Assets issues briefing 29 November 2022 and diarised Finance issues briefing 14 December 2022.