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COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 20 September 2023 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 6.00 pm

Members Present:

Cllr T Adams	Cllr P Bailey
Cllr K Bayes	Cllr H Blathwayt
Cllr J Boyle	Cllr A Brown
Cllr G Bull	Cllr S Bütikofer
Cllr C Cushing	Cllr N Dixon
Cllr P Fisher	Cllr T FitzPatrick
Cllr W Fredericks	Cllr C Heinink
Cllr V Holliday	Cllr N Housden
Cllr R Macdonald	Cllr G Mancini-Boyle
Cllr P Neatherway	Cllr L Paterson
Cllr S Penfold	Cllr P Porter
Cllr C Ringer	Cllr L Shires
Cllr R Sims	Cllr M Taylor
Cllr K Toye	Cllr E Vardy
Cllr L Vickers	Cllr L Withington

Also in attendance:

53 TRIBUTES TO FORMER DISTRICT COUNCILLORS PETER TERRINGTON AND JOHN LEE

The Chairman opened the meeting by saying that she had very sad news. Two former District Councillors had passed away recently, Peter Terrington and John Lee. She paid tribute to them each in turn. Peter had been an independent member for Priory Ward from 2011 – 2015. He had served on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and regularly attended the Coastal Forum. He was born in Wells and lived there with his wife, Jean until his death. There was deep sadness in Wells on learning of his death and he would be greatly missed by all who knew him.

The Chairman then spoke about former councillor, John Lee, who she had had the honour and privilege of working with. John had been both a former chairman of the Council and its Leader. His passing had been keenly felt by Council's staff and across the political divide. He was a proud ambassador of Cromer town and its fishing communities and during his time as Leader had hosted the Antiques Roadshow on the Pier. She said despite, their political differences, she had the utmost respect for him. He was a man of great integrity as well as honest and direct. The role of Chairman of the Council meant so much to John. He was always immaculately turned out and so full of pride to represent his community. She concluded by saying that the Council's thoughts and prayers were with the families of Peter and John during this difficult time.

The Chairman then asked Members to join her in observing a minutes' silence.

54 PRESENTATION ON THE CHAIRMAN'S CHARITY

The Chairman said that it had been hard to choose a charity for her year in office. She had decided to focus on young people and mental health as this linked in with

the new Youth Council and their main theme for the forthcoming year. She said it was so important to provide care and support for young people suffering with mental health issues, especially since Covid. Prior to the pandemic 1 in 6 young people struggled with their mental health, now it was 1 in 4. Her chosen charity for her civic year was the 'Sir Norman Lamb Coalition of Young People' and she invited Sir Norman's wife, Mary to give a short presentation.

Mrs Lamb began by saying that Sir Norman Lamb apologised for not being able to attend in person to speak to members. He had provided her with a written statement which she read out. She outlined the experiences that many children faced when trying to access mental health support and on leaving Parliament, Sir Norman had established a mental health fund specifically dedicated to North Norfolk. A coalition of third sector organisations and community groups sat alongside this fund, working together and providing access to key resources and services. There were now over 50 member organisations in the coalition and feedback had been extremely positive. She concluded by saying that so far, the fund had donated £200k and a further £250k had been donated by partner organisations. They were extremely grateful to the Chairman for choosing the Coalition as her nominated charity for her civic year.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Lamb for her presentation. She said that at the request of the Youth Council, Cromer Pier would be lit up in blue on 10th October to commemorate MIND's 'do it blue' campaign for mental health awareness day.

55 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs M Batey, E Coleman, A Fitch-Tillett, M Hankins, P Heinrich, J Punchard, E Spagnola, J Toye and A Varley.

56 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023 were approved as a correct record.

57 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

Cllr Dr V Holliday declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 18, as she was patient at Blakeney Surgery and supported the 'Save Blakeney Surgery' campaign. Cllr P Fisher declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 18, as he had been involved in a video for the 'Save Blakeney Surgery' campaign.

58 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

59 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

Mr Musson read out the following statement:

The North Walsham West development will have a huge impact on the quality of life of people living in villages along the B1150 corridor towards Norwich. This is broadly acknowledged and their concerns have received increasing media attention.

Local planning authorities are under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries precisely because a decision in one council area can create shockwaves across a far wider area.

It is widely acknowledged that the present Highway infrastructure is woefully inadequate to meet the needs of the North Walsham West Development Brief. Strategic policy-making authorities should collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which they need to address in their plans. They should also engage with their local communities.

As far as the people of Coltishall and Horstead are concerned, this has simply not happened. Our local Councillor raised the matter at a recent meeting with you. We submitted a Freedom of Information request in mid-July asking for evidence of any and all cross-boundary discussions about this development. The legal deadline passed without any answer from you. An internal review was requested and still no response has been received. We were then advised to raise the matter with the Information Commissioner, a sad indictment in itself.

I am here today to ask two questions:

- 1) Have you or have you not complied with your legal obligations under the National Planning Framework to consult neighbouring bodies and communities about your plan?
- 2) Why are you flouting the clearly laid out Freedom of Information deadlines in responding to this question?

If you are unable to answer these questions here and now, then we can only leave it to those neighbouring authorities and communities, our local and national media, and the Planning Inspectorate to conclude that you failed to meet your legal duties to collaborate and consult and that you have something to hide in the way you have pursued your development plan. The people affected by this plan deserve better than that.

The Chairman invited Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enforcement and Chairman of the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party to respond. Cllr Brown began by apologising for the delay in responding to Mr Musson's Freedom of Information (Fol) request. He said that 95% of such requests were responded to within the required timescale and he was disappointed to learn that this had not been the case for Mr Musson. He then explained that the North Walsham West development was a large scheme and that was why the decision was made to prepare a development brief, where the consortium involved in the development worked with elected members, planning officers and other stakeholders on producing a guide or brief to the development. He said that this was an ongoing process and not yet complete. The intention was to consult with the public once it was finalised. He went on to say that NNDC's Local Plan had been amended, following concerns raised regarding the impact of traffic flow at Coltishall. It had always been the intention that this would be resolved before the scheme could go forward. He explained that the Local Plan had always contained a requirement for a traffic impact assessment. This was underway and the result of this assessment would be published and there would be consultation with Broadland District Council on it. Following this, there would be a public meeting with the residents of Coltishall.

Mr Musson thanked him for his response. He said that the photograph that was displayed on the screen showed clearly how lorries were not able to pass on Station Road by the bridge, without mounting the pavement. He asked members if they would be prepared to let their children walk on the pavement in such circumstances.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman spoke about recent civic events that they had attended:

27th July 2023 – Cromer Lawn Tennis & Squash Club, Pimms and BBQ

10th September 2023 – Broadland District Council Harvest Festival Civic Service, St Edmund Church, Taverham

10th September 2023 – Mayor of Dereham Civic Service, St Nicholas Parish Church, Dereham followed by afternoon tea and 40s music

11th September 2023 – Opening of Battle of Britain week with the Lord Mayor and Sheriff of Norwich, City Hall, Norwich

11th September 2023 – Royal British Legion Presidents reception, Birbeck Hall, Norwich

15th September 2023 – Royal British Legion 83rd Anniversary of Battle of Britain at Halsey House, Cromer

15th September 2023 – Battle of Britain Commemoration, County Hall, Norwich

61 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader began by saying he hoped everyone had enjoyed the summer break. He said that there had been many wonderful events across the District throughout the summer months and he thanked the volunteers and community organisations that had supported them.

He thanked members and officers for contributing to the corporate peer challenge. He said that the final report would be published in the next 3 months and would set out four recommendations. He said that the review had been carried out by a very experienced team which had found that the Council had an ambitious corporate plan and a good track record of meeting targets. The Coastal Team had been singled out as being nationally significant. There were challenges ahead in maintaining this position in a challenging financial environment. He said he looked forward to working towards meeting the recommendations in the coming months.

The Leader said he was pleased to announce that the Council's Annual Accounts for 2020/2021 had been signed off on 29th September. He thanked the Finance team for their hard work. He was also pleased to inform members that the Council had been awarded the RSPCA's Gold Pawprint award for its stray dog service.

He then spoke about the recent defeat by a cross-party group of peers in the House of Lords regarding an amendment to the Levelling up Bill in respect to nutrient neutrality. He said that this strengthened the Council's commitment to the joint venture partnership that would achieve the desired outcomes more quickly than legislative changes would have done.

In conclusion, the Leader informed members of some upcoming events, including PositiviTea at Mundesley on 27th September and the Job Fair at the Council offices on 28th September.

62 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

The Leader announced the following appointments:

Member Champions:

Cllr A Varley – Youth Champion

Cllr L Withington – Dementia & Domestic Abuse Champion
Cllr L Shires – Mental Health Champion
Cllr J Toye – Armed Forces Champion
Cllr M Batey – Digital Champion

The following appointments were made to outside bodies:

Cllr A Varley – Visit the Broads
Cllr A Brown – Rail Group (substitute)
Cllr T Adams – Rural Sparse SIG (substitute)

63 PORTFOLIO REPORTS

The Chairman reminded members that this item had a time limit of 30 minutes. She invited members to ask questions.

Cllr L Vickers asked the Leader, Cllr Adams, about recent rumours regarding the introduction of a tourist tax. She said she hoped he would dispel them as it could do great harm to a lucrative revenue stream for the District. The Leader replied that it was still in the early stages of consideration at the moment and no work had been undertaken yet. He added that there was no primary legislation in place to allow the District Council to introduce anything along these lines. If anything was introduced in the future it would be a small levy for bookings on Air BnB's and holiday lets. A Business Improvement District was the only way to introduce change such as this and time would need to be allocated to exploring this. He concluded by saying that many holiday lets were not paying towards local council services – via either council tax or business rates. Cllr Vickers thanked him for his comments and said she hoped the Administration would seek to work closely with opposition members if they decided to progress with this matter.

Cllr N Dixon asked the Leader, Cllr Adams, whether the feedback session by the LGA Peer Review team had prompted a review of some of the opinions and decisions regarding several key strategic points raised during meetings in the chamber seeking to strengthen the policies and work of the Council. Cllr Adams replied that he was very pleased with the work that was undertaken by the Peer Review team. The draft report would be shared with staff and members in the next 3 weeks and published on the website within 3 months. He reiterated that the main challenge was being able to continue to meet the targets in the same way that had been done previously. Cllr Dixon replied that the essence of the question was whether the Leader was considering a review of opinions and decisions. Cllr Adams said that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would be involved in assessing the recommendations and any subsequent work that was needed to achieve them.

Cllr S Penfold asked Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Enforcement, whether the failure of the nutrient neutrality amendment to the Levelling Up bill in the House of Lords, would impact on the Council's ability to unlock development sites in the District. Cllr Brown replied that the Levelling Up Bill was essentially a planning reform act and there was clearly cross-party concern that was reflected in the amendment falling. He said that the initial measures that Natural England introduced to control the impact of nutrients in water courses had been reviewed in May 2023 and Natural England had conceded that they were very clumsy. He explained that in March 2023, the Council had set up a Joint Venture partnership to invest in land to offer up mitigation credits to developers who could not provide the necessary measures on site. He said about 25% of all local authorities nationally were affected by the nutrient neutrality issue – resulting in a 50% increase in the number of properties not being built in this year alone. He concluded by saying that the

situation now was an argument over the importance of protecting habitats against meeting housebuilding targets. It would clearly have an impact across the country. He said that the falling of the amendment meant that the 'baton' for bearing the costs had now been returned to developers rather than the taxpayer.

Cllr C Cushing asked the Leader about the recent visit by Cabinet and the Corporate Leadership Team to Fakenham. He asked why local members and the town council had not been invited to join them and if there was any outcome from that visit. The Leader replied that he had visited Fakenham with his family since then and very much enjoyed the amenities on offer. He acknowledged that the town faced several challenges, including the recent closure of three banks and a number of empty shop units. He said that the Corporate Plan priorities included the introduction of banking hubs. In addition, there was a new public convenience in Fakenham which included a 'changing places' facility. The Council also hoped to undertake some partnership working with the County Council. It had been a very valuable and informative visit and a further visit was planned soon. Cllr Cushing said that lots of people in the town would be delighted to meet with Cabinet and discuss their concerns and help them to understand the issues and challenges that the town faced. The Leader replied that a meeting with Fakenham Town Council was scheduled for the following Monday and he would ensure that local members were included in future discussions.

Cllr J Boyle asked Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing, about the reference within her written report to a 48% increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation. Cllr Fredericks replied that domestic abuse cases had risen by 30% in the last year and there was an increased demand for places of safety. There was also a significant rent rise and a lack of private accommodation available to rent in the district. The average rent for a family home had increased by £80 a week and this was in addition to a rise in food and energy bills. The good news was that by Christmas the Council's stock of temporary accommodation would have increased to 23 – 25 properties.

Cllr N Housden said he wished to follow up on Cllr Cushing's earlier question about Fakenham. He said that the town was essentially desolate at the moment. On a Saturday afternoon there was no one in the town and he said that any meetings about the future of the town should include the Town Council, local members, representatives from local businesses and also the chairmen of neighbouring parish councils. The town was 'dying on its feet' and it needed significant investment. He asked Cllr Adams to arrange a meeting with local representatives from the town to have a proper discussion about its future. The Leader replied that he recognised there was a lot to be done in the town but also that it had a lot of potential. He added that the County Council owned several assets in the town and that working with partners and stakeholders would be beneficial in the long term.

Cllr P Fisher asked Cllr H Blathwayt, Portfolio Holder for Coast, about his recent attendance at the Local Government Association (LGA) Coastal Special Interest Group meeting. He wondered which key issues Cllr Blathwayt felt had a significance for the North Norfolk coast. Cllr Blathwayt replied that there was a strong push for a separate Ministry for the Coast and he was supportive of this. Government needed a significant focus on the challenges of coastal communities and coastal erosion. He added that there was also a presentation on disposable vapes and the long-term damage caused to wildlife by these and said that this could be an issue that the Council wanted to address.

Cllr K Bayes asked the Leader, in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable

Growth, about investment across the District. He asked whether resources and support would be made available to towns such as Stalham to ensure that they could benefit from much needed investment. The Leader replied that the work of the High Street Taskforce in Stalham continued. There were highways issues that needed to be resolved by the County Council. He referred to funding from the Rural Prosperity Fund and said that there were opportunities to secure investment via this. He concluded by saying that the Council hoped to provide a Changing Places facility in Stalham but there were some challenges around this due to the Council's limited property portfolio in the town. Options were being considered around this. Play equipment was also being looked at and assessed.

Cllr R Macdonald asked Cllr Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enforcement, about the Government consultation on permitted development rights. He asked for information about the categories under review and the implications for planning decisions. Cllr Brown replied that the consultation was in relation to the Permitted Development Order 2015 and related to matters such as change of use for agricultural buildings, temporary market extensions. He said that there were two areas of concern to the Council; Class Q, conversion of barns to dwellings and Class R, buildings used for forestry and equine use. Essentially this meant that the current requirement for the building to be connected to agriculture if it was converted will be removed under the proposals. There would also be extensions up to 4m on barns and dwellings would be allowed to be built in conservation areas, national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs) up to 37 square metres.

The Chairman said that there were two questions remaining but advised members that the time limit allocated for this item had been exceeded.

64 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET 04 SEPTEMBER 2023

1. Cabinet Agenda item 9: Budget Monitoring Period 4 2023 – 2024

Cllr Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced this item. She began by explaining that the report summarised the budget monitoring position for the revenue account, capital programme and reserves statement to the end of July 2023. The overall position at the end of July 2023 showed a £3,905,574 underspend on the revenue account, however, this was expected to deliver a full year overspend of £25,000. Referring to section 3.10, she said that the final variance on business rates would not be known until the end of the financial year. In conclusion, she spoke to the recommendations 2 – 7, which outlined additions to the capital budget, explaining the reasons behind each request. She said that she wanted to direct Fakenham members to pages 91, 92 and 95 which set out funding for several schemes linked to the town, adding that she hoped this reassured Local Members that the Administration was committed to supporting growth in Fakenham. She said that she would work with the Estates and Property Services teams to ensure that the funding allocated to the town was detailed in a clearer way in future.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr N Dixon, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, said that two

queries had been raised at the last meeting of the committee. The first related to the lack of mention in the Budget Monitoring report regarding risks linked to the delays to the External audit of the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 Final Accounts and the impact on the accuracy of the reporting of the Council's finances. The second query related to the need to borrow £10m to pay off £6.2m. He added that there was an undertaking to provide written replies but these had not been issued yet.

The Chief Executive said that similar points had been raised at the recent meeting of the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee. In respect of the outstanding audit / external audit completion, he had explained that Local Government Minister, Lee Rowley, had written to local authorities advising that due to a national issue relating to the sequency and capacity of external auditors across the local government sector as a whole, this was a widespread issue. He reminded Members that the Leader had advised Full Council earlier in the meeting that the accounts for 2021/21 had now been completed. The Chief Executive went onto say that the Director for Finance had attended a Department of Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) webinar which laid out the key dates for future outstanding audits to be completed by. Regarding the short-term borrowing of £10m to cover the repayment of covid grants, he said this was due to a cashflow issue due to the short notice from the Government to repay the funds. He explained that there were cashflow issues at the time due to the payment of parish precepts, which were £6.7m. For this reason, £10m was borrowed to cover the cashflow issues. The Director for Finance confirmed this, adding that council tax income was received over a 10 month period, whereas precept payments were paid over a 12 month period, causing cashflow issues in February and March each year. This had been exacerbated this year by the request from central government to repay the Covid grant funding at short notice.

Cllr H Blathwayt, commented that the Coastwise scheme was a good example of external funding that the Council received. Cllr Shires agreed.

Cllr L Vickers referred to the earlier comments regarding investment in Fakenham and said that it seemed as though local members, Cllr Housden and the County Councillor had not been included in key discussions about the future of the town. She asked whether the Portfolio Holder for Finance would be willing to meet with them to discuss the allocation of funds to Fakenham. Cllr Shires said that she would welcome the opportunity.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr H Blathwayt and

RESOLVED

- 1) That a new capital budget of £0.050m is added to the capital programme to fund repair works to the Marrams Footpath, with funding coming from the Council's Capital Receipts.
- 2) That a new capital budget of £0.370m is added to the capital programme to demolish and rebuild the Public Conveniences at Albert Street, Holt with £0.120m to be funded from an insurance claim and £0.250m to be funded from the Council's Capital Receipts.
- 3) That a new capital budget of £1.040m is added to the capital programme in respect of the Local Authority Housing Fund.
- 4) That the current Provision of Temporary Accommodation Budget is increased by £0.178m to £0.983m for 2023/24 following receipt of the Local Authority

Housing Fund grant.

- 5) That a capital budget of £1.458m be added to the capital programme for the Rural England Prosperity Fund expenditure and £0.266m be added to the capital programme for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund expenditure as shown in paragraph 4.7 and note that this will be funded by external funding.
- 6) That a capital budget of £14.610m be added to the capital programme as shown in paragraph 4.8 and note that the project will be funded by external funding.

2. Cabinet Agenda item 10: Debt Recovery Report 2022-2023

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced this item. She explained that this was an annual report providing details of the Council's collection performance and debt management arrangements for 2022/2023. She drew Members' attention to pages 107,108 and 110 which set out the key information. She concluded by saying that the Council sat in the top 5% for business rates collection and the top 11% for council tax collection, nationally. She thanked staff for their continued hard work.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED

1. To approve the annual report giving details of the Council's write-offs in accordance with the Council's Debt Write-Off Policy and performance in relation to revenues collection.
2. To approve the suggested changes to the delegated authority as shown in appendix 2 for write offs.
3. Cabinet Agenda item 11: Cromer Phase 2 and Mundesley Coastal Management Schemes

The Portfolio Holder for Coast, Cllr H Blathwayt, introduced this item. He explained that the report provided an update on the schemes and recommended next steps.

It was proposed by Cllr H Blathwayt, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED

- 1) Confirm its continued support for the approach being taken in the delivery of the Mundesley and Cromer Phase 2 Coastal Management Schemes.
- 2) Delegate the authority to Director of Place and Climate Change, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to approve quotations, tenders, funding applications, access agreements and contractual appointments/variations. This is so the schemes can continue to progress in a timely manner.
- 3) Approve increases in the delegated financial authority for the Director of Place and Climate Change (up to £1 million), for the Assistant Director of Place and Climate Change (up to £500,000) and for the Project Manager (up to £100,000) **for these two schemes only**.
- 4) Approve an increase to the value of the Cromer and Mundesley coastal protection schemes from £6.476m (approved by full Council on 1 March

2023) to £25m within the Capital Programme. This is subject to securing the additional grant funding of £18.524m for the scheme from the Environment Agency (EA).

- 5) Approve the descoping of the schemes if the grant funding secured from the EA is less than the Council has applied for so that expenditure will be fully met by the total grant to be awarded by the EA.

65 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GOVERNANCE, RISK & AUDIT COMMITTEE 12 SEPTEMBER 2023

In the absence of the Chairman of the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee, the Vice-Chairman, Cllr J Boyle, introduced this item. Cllr Boyle began by saying that she was not on the previous committee, which this annual report covered, however, there were members present who were and who may be able to assist with any questions. She went onto speak about the second recommendation, regarding the appointment of a co-opted member to the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee (GRAC). She explained that the report had recommended the appointment of two independent members, following guidance from CIPFA. The committee had agreed that one person should be appointed initially, for a 4 year (rather than a 3 year) period, subject to any further, emerging advice.

Cllr C Cushing referred to page 147, section 2.3, where the final sentence was not completed. He understood that it should state 'Group Leaders are requested to remind their members of the importance of finding a substitute if they are unable to attend a meeting'. It was agreed to amend this. He said that he was fully supportive of the appointment of an independent member to the committee. The reports could be complex and lengthy and it would be beneficial to have an external view on key issues.

It was proposed by Cllr J Boyle, seconded by Cllr R Macdonald and

RESOLVED to

1. Note the Annual Report 2022-2023, affirm the work of the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee, and consider any concerns raised within the key issues section of the report.
2. Audit Committees and Independent Co-opted members

66 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 13 SEPTEMBER 2023

Cllr N Dixon, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, introduced this item. He said that the recommendations set out key issues that had been highlighted in the report and he drew these to members' attention. He said that the Annual Report, which was compiled by the Scrutiny Officer, was unusual this year in that it was subject to some amendments. These amendments were supported by the majority of the committee. He said that he mentioned this because there had been ongoing matters and concerns which had taken substantial officer and member time to resolve, and consequently there was much corporate learning to be carried forward

into the current year.

Cllr L Shires commented on one of the points highlighted in the recommendations. She said that the issue of delayed finance reports was down to reduced capacity in the Finance team and this was being addressed.

It was proposed by Cllr N Dixon, seconded by Cllr G Bull and

RESOLVED to

Note the report, affirm the work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and consider the following concerns raised within the key issues section of the report:

- A high number of apologies and limited substitute availability needs to be addressed by Group Leaders.
- Requested information has not been provided in a timely or satisfactory manner and needs to be addressed by officers.
- Delayed finance reports have had an ongoing impact on the work programme that needs to be addressed by officers.
- Non-attendance of the PCC at short notice impacted the Committee's crime and disorder update, and substitutes will therefore be requested in future.

67 FORMATION OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The leader, Cllr T Adams, introduced this item. He explained that it was a statutory requirement to review Members' allowances at least every 4 years and that an independent panel must be convened to undertake this work.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr A Brown and

RESOLVED to

- (1) To approve the convening of the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- (2) To approve the Terms of Reference for the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- (3) That any representations that Members wish the Independent Remuneration Panel to take into consideration should be made in writing through the Group Leaders, to the Services Manager
- (4) That Independent Remuneration Panel reports its findings and recommendations for consideration by Full Council at its meeting in December 2023.
- (5) Members resolve to delegate to the Democratic Services Manager the appointment of individual members to the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- (6) Payment for Panel members will be at the rate paid to co-opted members of council, £118.10 per meeting plus travel.

68 OPTIONS FOR FUTURE GOVERNANCE OF SLOLEY PARISH COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Adams, introduced this item. He explained that Sloley Parish Council was unable to operate as it was currently inquorate and that the report set out steps to enable them to return to operation.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr P Fisher and

RESOLVED

To approve the temporary appointment of District and County Councillor Nigel Dixon, District Councillor Gerard Mancini-Boyle, and District Councillor Saul Penfold be appointed to Sloye Parish Council for a period up to six months.

That Jane Wisson be appointed Temporary Clerk to support the Parish Council until such time that a permanent appointment can be made.

Separately, that an Order be created with respect to delegation of authority which would allow the Chief Executive or the Monitoring Officer have the powers to implement temporary appointment orders in respect of any Parish Council which find itself in a position of being inquorate in the future.

69 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

None received.

70 OPPOSITION BUSINESS

The following item of Opposition Business has been proposed by Cllr Dr V Holliday, seconded by Cllr E Vardy:

Closure of Blakeney Surgery

Blakeney Surgery, which is a branch surgery of Holt Medical Practice, serves the parishes of Blakeney, Cley, Kelling, Langham, Morston, Wiveton, Salthouse, Stiffkey & Cockthorpe, in all a population of 1954.

Holt Medical Practice proposes to close this surgery. Currently, it serves as a reception hub and a prescription drop off and medication pick up. Face to face appointments were withdrawn prior to Covid and never reinstated despite requests from parishioners.

The local and wider community strongly objects to the proposed closure. For example, a public meeting with the practice was hugely oversubscribed, almost 900 have signed a petition at time of writing, and an online survey by Duncan Baker MP had 434 responses of which 99% were opposed to the closure, The major reason for objection is the difficulty patients will face in accessing health care.

If the Surgery closes, for residents of Blakeney and surrounding villages the nearest health care is at High Kelling (a 14 mile round trip), or Melton Constable (a 20 mile round trip). Those without a car, 20% in Blakeney from 2011 census data, face a 3 ½ hour round trip by bus to High Kelling (including a half mile walk) or a 5 ½ hour round trip to Melton. The local volunteer car service is at capacity and there is no local taxi firm.

Over 40% of Blakeney residents are over 65 and over a quarter of these live alone. Over a tenth of residents say their day-to-day activities are limited a lot, and 6% say they are in bad health (all from 2011 census data). How will these residents cope with a three, four- or five-hour bus journey with multiple changes? It is not just older residents. How could a young mother manage with two children in a pushchair?

Travel is similar or worse for residents in nearby villages. For Morston, which is 3 minutes

by bus from Blakeney, it would be more than a 2 ½ hr round trip with four changes to High Kelling and it is not even possible to get to Melton.

Closure will have an impact on health inequalities. Section 149 (Public Sector Equality Duty) of the Equality Act 2010 states that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, remove or minimise disadvantages and take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic, such as age and disability.

The National Health Service Act of 2006 states in Section 13G that “The Board must, in the exercise of its functions, have regard to the need to reduce inequalities between patients with respect to their ability to access health services.”

Closure of Blakeney Surgery would also go against four of the key principles of the NHS Constitution for England, namely:

- 1. The NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all;*
- 2. The patient will be at the heart of everything the NHS does;*
- 3. It is committed to providing the most effective, fair and sustainable use of finite resources; and*
- 4. The NHS is accountable to the public, communities and patients that it serves.*

The NHS Constitution also pledges to ‘provide convenient, easy access to services.’ Finally, but equally importantly, closure of this branch surgery has a negative impact on North Norfolk District Council’s ambition of net zero. The carbon footprint of patients travelling from Blakeney and surrounding villages to High Kelling or Melton is calculated to be almost 55 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, equivalent to almost 11 return trips from London to Sydney. This carbon footprint would need to be offset by planting more than 2000 trees annually, which would require more than 2 ½ acres of land per year.

It is proposed that Full Council resolves to

- 1. Recognise the critical importance of Blakeney Surgery to the community.*
- 2. Call on the Norfolk & Waveney Integrated Care Board to provide local and equitable health care for those living in Blakeney and surrounding villages.*

The Chairman invited Cllr Dr Holliday to introduce the motion. She explained that 2000 people currently used the surgery at Blakeney and that there was overwhelming support to keep it open, with 1300 people having signed a petition against its closure so far. She said that it was a 14 mile round trip to the surgery at High Kelling and a 20 mile round trip to the surgery at Melton Constable. There had been a doctor’s surgery in Blakeney for 180 years but face to face appointments were removed 4 years and the parish council had been pushing to have these reinstated ever since. The Practice claimed the building was not fit for purpose and didn’t fit the trend towards team-based working and that resources were limited but the ‘Save Blakeney Surgery’ campaign group disagreed, stating that it was a purpose built and had been rated as appropriate for the services it delivered. Cllr Holliday went onto explain that general practices were private businesses and there had been reporting nationally that income had risen in recent years. She said that staffing at the Holt Practice seemed adequate, with 1800 patients per GP, which was lower than the national average of 2300. In addition, it should be remembered that age and disability were protected characteristics and over 40% of Blakeney residents were over 65 with a quarter of these living alone. Over a tenth of residents said their day-to-day activities were limited a lot, and 6% say they were in bad health. The closure of the

surgery would discriminate against the elderly and the disabled.

In addition, Cllr Holiday said that achieving Net Zero was a key ambition of the District Council and the additional travel required by Blakeney residents to access GP services in Holt would have a significant carbon footprint – equivalent to 55 tonnes a year. She concluded by urging all members to support the motion, in advance of a decision being made early in 2024.

Cllr E Vardy, seconder of the motion, reserved his right to speak.

Cllr T FitzPatrick commented that North Norfolk was a rural, coastal district and satellite surgeries were vital as public transport was non-existent in many places. He used a satellite surgery and they provided easy access to both young and elderly people and as well as providing support for medical issues, they were also vital to ensure that people could access services for mental health issues. He said he would be supporting the motion.

Cllr T Adams, Leader, said that the issue was symptomatic of diminishing health provision across the District. He said that he felt there was a role for the Overview & Scrutiny to look at the impact of such closures and reduced access to health facilities as part of their work programme and he encouraged the committee to do so.

Cllr L Shires said that she valued work such as this by Opposition colleagues, particularly as it outlined where members' values were aligned on shared issues and concerns. This was where rural communities were served inadequately by public transport and services which were diminishing over time. The provision of accessible health services was something that everyone would expect and want to see across the District. She said that the motion had her full support and she seconded Cllr Adams suggestion that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee could look at health inequality as part of their work programme.

Cllr C Cushing thanked Cllr Holliday for bringing the motion forward. He said that it was an issue that she felt very passionate about – both for her own ward and the wider community. He said he was very supportive of branch surgeries and knew from growing up in the area, how challenging it could be accessing the GP surgery in Melton Constable and anything that could reduce this would be beneficial.

Cllr C Ringer said that he was fully supportive of the motion. Coastal communities suffered from the impact of second homes and holiday lets and the closure of this surgery would exacerbate the existing vulnerabilities in small villages. He said it was important to speak as one of such issues as it was very unlikely that Blakeney would be the last satellite surgery to close.

The Chairman said that the issue seemed to have united the Chamber and she welcomed this.

Cllr E Vardy, seconder of the motion, thanked Cabinet for their positive comments and support. He said doctors were answerable to their patients and they needed to take into account the impact such a closure would have on residents. He said that the crux of the issue seemed to be about finances rather than public service. He commended the motion.

Cllr Holliday was invited to make her closing comments. She thanked everyone for their support. There was substantial evidence that there was coastal inequality regarding the burden of ill health and she was supportive of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee looking at this in more depth.

It was proposed by Cllr Dr V Holliday, seconded by Cllr E Vardy and

RESOLVED unanimously to

1. Recognise the critical importance of Blakeney Surgery to the community.
2. Call on the Norfolk & Waveney Integrated Care Board to provide local and equitable health care for those living in Blakeney and surrounding villages.

71 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION

72 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

73 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 7.56 pm.

Chairman

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