

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

SEPTEMBER 2023

COUNCILLOR SHIRES - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, ASSETS AND PROPERTY SERVICES

For the period July to September 2023

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

Finance

- The accounts for 2020/21 have been audited and received an unqualified opinion from the external auditors.
- Service Managers have put forward capital bids that they would like to see included in the Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2027/25. The bids will be reviewed by CLT in the first instance and will then be presented to O&S and Cabinet for their consideration.
- Mandatory financial training is taking place in December and all officers who manage budgets will be required to attend.
- The recruitment of a Chief Technical Accountant has been unsuccessful and so the s151 Officer has decided to try and recruit an interim Head of Finance that is professionally qualified and can act as the Deputy s151 as the additional resource is necessary to enable the s151 officer to fulfil her statutory duties.

Revenues

Collection as of 31 October 2023.

- The 31 October monthly Council Tax collection was 64.60% against target of 64.30%. An excess in collection to target of £273k.
- The 31 October monthly NDR collection was 67.47% against target of 65.4%. An excess in collection to target of £504k.

Energy Schemes Update

- The Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS AF)
- This scheme is aimed at providing support to households not eligible for the automatic [Energy Bills Support Scheme GB](#) (£400 payment paid by energy suppliers).
- Alternative Fuel Payment (AFP)
- This scheme is where payments are made of £200 to support households that use fuels other than gas to heat their homes.
- The above two schemes have been reconciled and sent to government to verify.

Government Consultations

- We have received a government consultation regarding the 'Taking control of goods regulations' which we are in the process of completing.

New Legislation

- Government has granted Royal Assent to the **Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023**.

The main areas are:

From Royal Assent

- Three-yearly revaluations
- No deadline after end of financial year for determining award of discretionary relief.
- No requirement for transitional relief schemes to be self-financing and removal of years 4 and 5 of the current transitional relief scheme.
- Amendment of MCC provisions

From 2 months post-Royal Assent

- Completion notices for refurbished buildings
- Gateway for VOA to share information with Northern Ireland rating officials.
- **Effective from 1 April 2024**
- Improvement relief
- Heat networks relief
- Charitable rate relief and – subject to regulations – unoccupied rate relief available to properties on the central rating list
- Multipliers linked by default to CPI inflation.
- Non-Domestic Rating (Discretionary Relief) Regulations 1989 revoked.

Subject to future commencement regulations

- Duties on ratepayers to provide information to the VOA and HMRC
- Gateways for:
 - VOA to share information with ratepayers.
 - HMRC to share information with billing authorities.
- Powers of direction to administer central rating list.

Government has also granted Royal Assent to the **Levelling-up and Regeneration Act. 2023**

This law gives NNDC additional powers to reduce the number of months from 24 months to 12 months to apply the empty property premium. If supported by Members, this would mean council taxpayers would pay the increased 100% premium when a long-term empty property reaches the 12 months stage rather than 24 months as it is currently. If Members approve this, it would be effective from 1 April 2024. There are currently circa two hundred of these empty homes in the North Norfolk area.

The law also gives billing authorities the power to charge a 100% premium on second homes. Pursuant to this Act, a determination has to be made at least one year before the beginning of a financial year to which it relates. Therefore, the earliest date that the Council could apply this premium is 1 April 2025.

The council tax discount paper for 2024/25 has been through cabinet on 7 November 2023 and is on the agenda for overview and scrutiny plus full council this month.

Assets

Vacant properties –

- Works to The Cedars has completed with 3 proposed tenants and marketing continuing for the vacant space. Open day is planned for 7th September.
- Planning consent for the Seaview premises and the Former Tennis Courts leases have gained planning consent.
- Existing and new concession opportunities have been assessed and to be marketed through the Autumn/Winter for new licences from April 2024.

Decarbonisation – works at Catfield units has completed.

Lease terms for desk space have been negotiated for Flagship at the Cromer office is nearing completion. Rent reviews and lease renewals for approx. 300 chalet and beach huts is in progress.

Disposal – Enabling land at Sheringham, is progressing through the option agreement process.

Acquisition – 4 residential properties for the Housing Team are nearing completion.

Rocket House, technical briefing and site meeting for Members planned for November.

Property Services

- The public conveniences and bridge at the Leas Sheringham has been closed due to structural failure.
- Tender on works to promenade roofing and walkway works at various locations is due back Friday 10th November. This will include the Art Deco building and Red Lion tenanted units at Cromer and chalet roof repairs at Sheringham. Collaborative working with Estates to deliver this project.
- Replacement fire alarm system at Holt Road offices is a work in progress.
- Collaborative working with Estates to deliver Works at the Shambles North Walsham are complete.
- Evaluating and scoping repairs to the Marrams footpath from current capital fund.
- Capital bids submitted for financial year 2024 – 2025.
- Cromer Pier substructure works to Cromer Pier WIP. On time and within budget.
- Recruitment for a shared apprentice to cover PS, Housing Options, IHAT has been agreed and will start shortly. It is agreed the Asset and Property Programme Manager will line manage this post.

Finance

- With regard to catching up on the audit of the 2021/22 and 2022/23 accounts all Councils and external auditors are awaiting the announcement of decision taken by the government on how we as a sector are to bring the audit of accounts up to date so that our electorate can once again be provided with the assurance that a timely audit provides. The decision to be made is whether an approach to provide maximum assurance on all recent years should be adopted or whether the market should be reset. In either case there are two de facto underpinning theories and these are that Pension Fund audits (at County level) have to be done and that VfM audits have to be done, both to provide maximum assurance. To put this into context at 10 October 2023 there were only 5 out of 467 local government bodies' 2022/23 audit opinions that have been given.
- The first draft of the Council's budget will be going to O&S in December and then to the Cabinet meeting in January 2024. The Medium-Term Financial Plan will also be prepared.
- The Fees and Charges Report will also be coming forward to O&S in December and then Cabinet in January.

Revenues

Training/Development

- Internal training of three Level 3 Business Admin Certificated apprentices
- External training for an officer studying towards the Diploma in Institute of Revenues, Rating & Valuation (IRRV)
- Team leader studying towards the level 5 CMI management qualification.

Service Improvements

- Online forms - reviewing and improving the most used customer paper forms including the Long-term empty property review forms as part of our Business Process Review of the current process.
- Reviewing and implementing service improvements suggested by staff including a direct debit online form to save NNDC paying capita for the current form provided on our webpages.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

- Working with Love Holt on their request to be the first Business Improvement Districts (BID) in North Norfolk.

CTB1 government return - New Homes Bonus (NHB) Grant

- The CTB1 government return has been completed.

Assets

- Update of Asset Management Plan

Property Services

- Collaborate working with Estates and NW HAZ to deliver works at Black Swan Loke, North Walsham.

3 Meetings attended

25/9 Revenues Portfolio Meeting
25/9 IDB Update
27/9 Estates Portfolio Meeting
28/9 Members Finance Training
2/10 Cabinet & Business Planning
2/10 Corporate Plan Workshop
4/10 Mental Health in Schools Steering Group
5/10 Portfolio Director Meeting
9/10 Corporate Plan Discussion
11/10 O&S
16/10 Estate Visit – West
20/10 Annual Action Plan Meeting
31/10 NMA Journalism Matters Parliamentary Reception
1/11 Portfolio Director Meeting
3/11 Revenues Portfolio Meeting
6/11 Cabinet & Business Planning
7/11 NNHWP Mental Health Group
8/11 Property Services Portfolio Planning
13/11 Estates Portfolio Meeting