

## OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 13 December 2023 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am

<b>Committee</b>	Cllr N Dixon (Chairman)	Cllr S Penfold (Vice-Chairman)
<b>Members Present:</b>	Cllr V Holliday Cllr P Fisher Cllr M Batey Cllr R Macdonald	Cllr N Housden Cllr L Vickers Cllr J Boyle Cllr M Hankins
<b>Members also attending:</b>	Cllr A Brown Cllr L Shires Cllr J Toyne Cllr L Withington	
<b>Officers in Attendance:</b>	Chief Executive, Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer and Director for Resources / S151 Officer	
<b>Apologies:</b>	Cllr G Bull and Cllr C Cushing	

### 87 SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutes.

### 88 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

### 89 MINUTES

Minutes – there was one amendment to the minutes. During the Waste and Related Services Update (Minute 78) Cllr N Housden had asked Serco about the pesticide used to kill weeds and they had confirmed that it was glyphosate. This had been omitted from the minutes and Cllr Housden requested that it was included.

Cllr J Toyne, Chairman of the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee (GRAC) referred to Minute 83, Coastwise – The North Norfolk Accelerator Programme and the following recommendation from Overview & Scrutiny Committee to GRAC:

*'To request that Governance, Risk & Audit Committee reviews the risks presented by the Coastwise Project in respect of the likelihood and impact elements of the risk scores (pre and post the mitigation actions) so that there is clarity about how those actions will work and thus provide greater reassurance that they are being managed effectively and who owns them'.*

Cllr Toyne said that the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee reviewed the risks and having clarified several key points, was satisfied that the additional evidence presented to them demonstrated that the proposed mitigation actions will work and therefore provide assurance that they are being managed effectively, with clear evidence of ownership for each action. During the discussion, the Committee emphasised the importance of ensuring that specialist knowledge was available to all in the Coastwise team to guard against any potential loss of key individuals. It

was established that there were systems in place and members were satisfied that this was being carefully monitored.

The Committee made the following recommendations:

To help members understand and quantify the risks, the risk register for the Coastwise project should include the following:

- Additional information setting out the consequences of the risks.
- Additional information setting out the impact of the mitigation actions.

**90 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None received.

**91 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None received.

**92 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

None.

**93 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A MEMBER**

None received.

**94 RESPONSES OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CABINET TO THE COMMITTEE'S REPORTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were no responses from Cabinet to recommendations made by the Committee.

**95 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2024-2025 (INCLUDING MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr L Shires, introduced this item. She began by explaining that it was going to the committee for pre-scrutiny and had not been seen elsewhere yet. Overview & Scrutiny Committee was being asked to recommend to Cabinet any areas where it felt savings could be achieved. Cllr Shires then drew members' attention to the following key areas of the report;

- Section 2.3 highlighted the rapid rise in temporary accommodation costs
- Section 3.3 referred to the delayed introduction of the second homes premium which meant it could not be implemented for 2024/2025
- Section 3.5 set out the impact of a proposed increase in council tax for 2024/2025.

Cllr Shires asked the Committee to consider how to balance the budget whilst minimising the impact on the residents of North Norfolk. Their needs must be considered as part of the challenging process to make savings.

The Chairman asked the Director for Resources (DFR) if she wished to speak. The DFR said that she would like to highlight section 3.4 of the report which outlined the

impact of pay inflation on the budget for the next few years. She reminded members that the budget for 2024/25 was not balanced and the Council needed to achieve this by the February meeting of Full Council. This meant that the Council would need to look at service delivery and managers had been asked to put forward proposals for savings. Cabinet and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) would then consider these and report back to Cabinet in February. Overview & Scrutiny Committee would be able to review the savings proposals prior to that meeting if they wished.

The Chairman referred to section 3.3 of the report and the forecast deficit of £1.810m. He said that the predicted £600k overspend for 2023/24 was not included in the overall deficit and he asked whether it should actually be £2.4m. Cllr L Shires replied that it was hoped that the forecast £600k overspend would be covered by the end of the year so it would not be carried over, however, temporary accommodation costs would continue to rise in the coming years unless government funding was provided.

Cllr S Penfold referred to the increase in homelessness and the rise in temporary accommodation costs. He suggested that there might be a role for the committee to look at some of the drivers for this problem and possibly invite the Police & Crime Commissioner to attend a meeting to respond to questions, particularly regarding the rise in domestic abuse cases.

Cllr V Holliday said that it wasn't clear why the £600k overspend for 2023/2024 was not included in the forecast deficit. She then referred to the General Fund summary (Appendix A) and said that there were significant projected increases in the budget for the Communities and Resources service areas and she wondered whether there may be a possibility for savings there. The DFR replied that the rises related to increases in inflation and contract costs.

The Chief Executive (CE) explained that the reason for the budget gap in 2024/2025 was partly due to the delayed implementation of the second homes council tax. This had left a £550k gap to close which had not been previously anticipated. He said that the cost for the Communities service area was in relation to homelessness. There were a number of key drivers that were impacting on local government finances at this time and for District councils one of the main ones was homelessness and the duty to provide temporary accommodation. He added that the committee may wish to have a future review of the reasons behind the rise in homelessness but reminded members that it was due to local issues not refugees. He explained that the ability to source suitable accommodation outside the district was restricted and costs for short-term accommodation in hotels was being driven up by pressure nationally on that sector. In conclusion, he said that the rise in costs for the Communities service area over the coming years reflected this.

Cllr L Vickers supported Cllr Penfold's proposal to have an in-depth look at the causes of homelessness in the local area.

Cllr V Holliday asked about the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). She said that it seemed very light and not a full strategy document. She asked if it would be coming back to the committee as a single document. The DFR confirmed that she could provide a separate MTFS if members requested one. The Chairman said that the MTFS and the Draft Budget had always previously been presented separately but now seemed to be conflated. Cllr Shires said that there was an intention to provide more detail in a separate MTFS ahead of setting the Budget. The DFR added that she could take an MTFS to the February meeting of Cabinet and then onto Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Cllr N Housden queried the £0.5m allocated for the delivery of Net Zero Initiatives and asked if this was a one off. The DFR replied that £0.5m had been set aside from the Delivery Plan Reserve for Net Zero initiatives and this would be monitored carefully. If sufficient funds were available more money would be set aside.

Cllr Housden then asked about the projected figure for retained business rates in 2025/2026 which appeared to drop sharply by £2.2m. He asked for the reasoning behind this. The DFR replied this was an area that needed to be looked at more closely. It was possible that the income could increase but a cautious approach was being taken as it hadn't been assessed closely yet. She said that two models were used for business rates and this was the current figure that was predicted.

The Chief Executive said that the figures reflected a degree of caution as the Government had been promising a review of business rates for some time and this had not been progressed. He added that there was concern about the strength of high streets versus the online sector but it was still hoped that the figure would not be as low as indicated.

Cllr Housden replied that many businesses were closing due to high business rates and it was a serious concern for both the high street and the Council.

Cllr A Brown spoke about the delay in the election of a directly-elected Leader for Norfolk County Council, which was now likely to take place in May 2025. He said that this could impact on two potential revenue streams – the second homes council tax premium and the funding through the County Deal. He asked whether the County deal would have any impact on the negotiations that NNDC would have with Norfolk County Council (NCC) about the majority of second homes council tax income being spent on affordable housing in the district. The Chief Executive replied that there was a significant stock of second homes in the district and it was possible that owners may choose to switch to a business rates charge instead. He explained that only 8 pence of every pound generated by council tax income came to NNDC and 74 pence went to NCC. It had always been suggested that there would be discussions between the Leader of the Council and the Leader of NCC regarding an aspiration to see the bulk of the second homes council tax income being spent on affordable housing supply in the district. For now, conversations would continue with the NNDC Leader and the current Leader of NCC.

In terms of the wider county deal, there were some additional monies that would come to the wider county and NNDC could make bids to access some of these funds. He said that for now, members should focus on the figures in from of them as they could influence them, which may not be the case with funding via the county deal. The Chairman agreed, saying that funding for the County Deal was for the whole county of Norfolk not just NCC and there was a willingness to involve second tier authorities in the running of affairs in relation to the County Deal. He said that he supported the CE's view that it was unlikely to be a problem solver for NNDC. There were a lot of unknowns and it wouldn't be confirmed that there would be a directly elected leader until July 2024.

Cllr V Holliday asked whether the second homes premium would be earmarked for affordable housing and not applied against the deficit. The CE replied that it was a political decision. There would be approximately £550k in income and there would have to be a choice about how to allocate it. He added that the Council provided a wide range of discretionary services and hard choices would have to be made about some of these.

Cllr S Penfold said that Cllr Housden had raised an important point about the allocated funding for Net Zero initiatives. He asked if there was a risk regarding delivery of the project if it was not sufficiently funded. The DFR replied that in 2023/2024 a reserve of £0.5m was established to support the delivery of Net Zero initiatives. It was a decision for members if they wanted to set more aside. Cllr Penfold said that he was concerned that the Administration had made the commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2030 and that there may not be sufficient funding in place to deliver it.

The Chief Executive explained that the previous administration had agreed to set aside the funding so that Net Zero could be delivered at pace. Some other capital budgets also included allocations for Net Zero in addition to the £0.5m. He added that there would be a requirement to offset carbon emissions after 2030 and the Council was trying to minimise the cost impact of this. In addition, the LGA Peer Review had recommended that the Council established a strategic route for decarbonisation so this would be progressed in the coming months. Cllr Shires reiterated that several service areas had budgets for decarbonisation as well as ongoing day to day activities that were working towards achieving Net Zero by 2030. Cllr N Housden asked about the figures for the building control service and why they varied so much. He also asked for more information on the coast protection budget. The DFR replied that the figures in this table related to the planned use of reserves, not the cost of the service. Cllr Housden said that it would be helpful for members to have more information regarding the earmarked reserves so they could understand what they were for. He asked whether the coastal protection budget was being spent on NNDC coastal assets or more widely. He also queried why there was nothing allocated from 2025/2026 onwards. The DFR replied that there was more detail regarding earmarked reserves in the Annual Statement of Accounts. She said that this could be included in the Budget papers if members required it. In response to the query on coastal protection, she said she understood that the budget was relating to NNDC coastal assets. Cllr Housden said that if this was the case, it would be prudent to include figures for future years. The DFR replied that the coast protection budget was in addition to the Coastwise scheme which would be the main focus for coastal work going forward.

Cllr L Withington commented that planning revenue was forecast to decrease in future years and she asked if this was due to Land Registry charge changes. The DFR replied that the Land Registry changes were reflected in the 'net cost of services' category in the table. Any transitional funding from the Government would also be included here, once it was confirmed.

Cllr Penfold referred to his earlier proposal for the Committee to undertake a 'deep dive' into the drivers for homelessness in the district. The Chairman replied that the focus of the current discussion should be on making recommendations to Cabinet on the draft revenue budget. As he saw it, the options were limited to reducing costs, raising income or taking money from reserves, which would come with caveats. He said that reducing costs would have to focus on creating efficiencies and service redesign and a possible review of the Corporate Plan delivery budget. Looking at raising income, this could include increasing charges for some existing services as well as suggesting new income streams. Finally, there was the possibility of using reserves on an 'invest to save' basis. This could also be an opportunity to look at the homelessness issue and whether more could be done. The Chairman added that there was limited time now to make suggestions for the 2024/2025 budget but the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was included within it and in previous years members had taken an optimistic view as to whether forecast deficits were

real or apparent and it was clearer now that it was becoming a real issue. A longer lead-in time would be needed to look at the gaps that were highlighted in the MTF5. He suggested that the Committee would want to look at work done along these lines and this could be undertaken on a broad front, involving all councillors possibly via workshops. This would be an inclusive approach and help all councillors understand the financial challenges that the Council faced. He suggested that recommendations to Cabinet could be based on these options.

Cllr Penfold said that a high-level, inclusive approach made sense, if the Portfolio Holder, Cllr Shires, was supportive. Cllr Shires said that it might be more beneficial to run workshops once Cabinet had agreed on the savings and income proposals that had been put forward by managers. This may work better rather than just inviting suggestions as this approach had not worked very well at the corporate planning workshops. Overview & Scrutiny Committee could then review the outcomes of the workshops. The Chairman replied that it was a matter for Cabinet to decide which proposals it would like to focus on and how they were delivered. It was not the role of Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be prescriptive on how the process was done.

Cllr Shires said that Cabinet wanted everyone to feel included in the process, including officers and this would require conversations with the Corporate Directors on the best way to move forward. She said that Cabinet wanted to be as open and inclusive as possible.

The CE said that he appreciated that the figures were stark and that the Council was entering into a financial position that it had not been in before. He outlined the process for setting the budget, which would take place over the next 8 weeks. Assistant Directors had asked their managers to identify savings of at least 10% in their service areas. Cabinet had a workshop planned within the next few days to consider the proposals. He said that he was supportive of the principle of all-member workshops but given the timescales, members needed to be realistic about how much could be achieved during January so that a balanced budget could be set in February. The CE went on to say that quite a high number of NNDC employees were on fixed term contracts – with almost 25% of the People Services team on such contracts. Hard choices would need to be made about some of the discretionary services that the Council currently provided and it was therefore important that officers were given a clear steer as to where the focus should be.

The Chairman said that the difference between the Corporate Plan workshops which Cllr Shires had referred to was that they were on broad themes and there were no restraints on what could be discussed. The budget discussion were much more focussed on closing the financial gap and members' focus should stay on that. He concluded by saying that the MTF5 was always focussed on savings and the lead time was now very short. In previous years this report had been presented to the committee in the Autumn. If this had happened then members could have intervened earlier.

Cllr M Hankins said that there was always more that could be done. He felt that a workshop or 'brainstorming' session would be very helpful.

Cllr N Housden commented that there was an unstable political situation nationally for at least the next 12 months and although he accepted the point made by the CE regarding timing, he felt that members just needed a synthesis of the key internal elements where savings could be made. The synthesis of external elements, including the impact of central government, would also be necessary, ideally looking

ahead to the next 12 – 24 months.

Cllr V Holliday suggested a two phase approach. Firstly, Cabinet should consider the savings proposals and then Overview & Scrutiny Committee could review Cabinet's recommendations at their next meeting. Secondly, starting in January, there should be some brainstorming sessions to look at the following years' budget. This would allow sufficient time for members to focus on what was required to make significant savings for 2025/2026 onwards.

Cllr L Withington commented that it was unfair to imply the financial situation had suddenly happened, members and officers had been preparing for the approaching deficit for some time. Every council faced similar challenges and a short lead in time to take decisions around where savings should be made was not unusual.

Cllr J Toye said that the financial reports were not presented very clearly. If the information stated which services the Council had a statutory duty to provide and which services were discretionary, then it would enable members to make decisions regarding savings. He felt that this was a key issue that should be addressed as soon as possible. Cllr Vickers agreed and said that it was important that members understood financial issues fully.

The CE reminded members that that they did not need to wait until the next meeting to make suggestions regarding savings. There were choices to be made around the services and facilities that the Council provided and this should be driven by members. The Chairman agreed, saying that members and officers needed to converse to ensure the best outcomes were achieved. He concluded by saying that members should focus on how savings could be achieved, how income could be increased and in the longer term, invest to save projects.

Cllr Penfold said that he was supportive of Cllr Holliday's two stage approach. It was proposed by Cllr V Holliday, seconded by Cllr S Penfold and

**RESOLVED to recommend to Cabinet**

The following two stage process for scrutiny of the draft Budget and MTFS:

1. Cabinet to identify areas for cost reductions from: efficiencies, service redesign, CP delivery plan budget, etc; and, income generation from: raising discretionary charges, new income streams, Council Tax, etc. This should include opportunities for invest to save schemes. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee to review Cabinet proposals at their next meeting in January.
2. Preparations for the 2025-2026 Budget and MTFS gap closure proposals to commence in early 2024 to ensure early engagement and input from Members and more implementation lead time.

**96 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT 2023/24**

The Chairman began by seeking clarification from the statutory officers about the requirements needed to scrutinise this document, in terms of skills, knowledge and competence. He referred to section 1.4 of the strategy document which set out the expectation that scrutiny committee members would be adequately trained in treasury management.

The Monitoring Officer (MO) advised that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) Treasury Management Code required members undertaking

scrutiny of the strategy to have an adequate understanding of treasury management. In her view, this meant that specific treasury management training should be provided to members of Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Governance, Audit & Risk Committee (GRAC). She said that she understood that this training was being arranged through the Council's treasury management advisers in the new year.

The DFR said that the committee was required to review the treasury management outturn report and members would receive the required training prior to that. Training could be provided for all members on treasury management in the new year.

The Chairman sought clarification regarding whether a formal record of members who had attended training was required. The DFR said she didn't think it needed to be a formal record as such but attendance could be logged. The Chairman referred to page 45 of the agenda and the reference to a formal record of the treasury management / finance training received by members. The DFR said that the level of training required related to the complexity of the treasury management strategy and in her view, NNDC's strategy was relatively straightforward with the majority of investments being held in either the money market funds or externally as managed investments, with no borrowing at the current time.

The Chairman asked members of the committee whether they felt knowledgeable enough to continue with scrutiny of this item. He said that it was linked closely to the Budget and MTFs and it may be necessary to make changes to the treasury management strategy to accommodate the future financing needs of the Council.

Cllr Housden said that he felt training was essential. It was likely that treasury management was a matter that would come up time and time again, given the severity of the Council's financial situation that had been highlighted in the draft budget report.

Cllr Holliday said that she would like training. It was a complex subject and the terminology was difficult to understand.

Cllr L Vickers referred to paragraph 1.4 on page 8 of the report and said it clearly stated that members must be trained in treasury management, especially members responsible for scrutiny.

Cllr J Toye asked how much influence members could have on the strategy and the impact on the 'bottom line'. The CE replied that the Council had a simple risk around financial exposure. It was debt free with reserves at approximately £22m and there were externally appointed advisers which managed the portfolio on the Council's behalf. There were no investments in commercial retail or any property where there might be significant risks. He acknowledged that the committee had a statutory duty to scrutinise the Council's investments but said that any training needed to be proportionate.

The Chairman asked about the options for the future, particularly invest to save opportunities. He gave the example of the current homelessness issue and asked whether some of the money currently in reserves could be used to invest in housing. The DFR replied that this was not an option as to finance any capital expenditure it had to be funded from capital receipts usually through the sale of assets or via grant funding. The Council could not use the cash that was currently invested. In response to a further question regarding the possibilities of investing in property, the DFR replied that this would have to be funded through borrowing as the Council did not have a high level of capital receipts. She added that it was not a good time to borrow



as interest rates were very high.

The Chairman said that it was a lengthy report with a lot of detail included and he assumed it was there because the DFR felt members needed to know it. The DFR said that the report layout was in line with the CIPFA standard template and although it may look complex, she was confident that the current treasury management strategy was straightforward and sustainable. The Chairman sought clarification regarding the timing of the training and whether it was possible to defer this item to the next meeting and have the training in advance of that. The DFR confirmed that this could occur and it may be helpful to push the next meeting back by a week to allow additional time to arrange training.

Cllr Penfold said that he did not feel that it was good practice to have a report on the agenda with clear recommendations and then for members to potentially defer it because they decided they wanted more training. He felt this should have been requested earlier. He said that he was happy to proceed with scrutiny of the report. The Chairman said that Cllr Penfold raised a good point. At the Overview & Scrutiny pre-agenda meeting there were no reports available. If they had been provided in good time then this issue could have been identified at that point.

The Democratic Services Manager (DSM) confirmed that treasury management training was last provided to members in early 2020 just prior to the start of the pandemic. It had not taken place since then.

The Chairman asked members to indicate if they were happy to proceed with consideration of the report. One member voted in favour. The Chairman said that as members had expressed concern that they hadn't received the necessary training to competently scrutinise the strategy and explore options to closing the future widening budget gaps, he proposed that it was deferred. This was seconded by Cllr Housden.

## **RESOLVED**

To defer this item until the next meeting to allow the required training to be given.

## **97 FEES & CHARGES 2024/2025**

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, introduced this item. She explained that the fees and charges were broken down by service area and the tables set out whether charges were statutory or discretionary and if they were set by Government or NNDC. She asked members to suggest services where additional income could be generated.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr R Macdonald referred to page 93 and the section on commercial services. He asked why the fee for officers' time per hour was projected to be £4 less an hour in 2024/2025. The DFR said that she would look into this and provide a written response.

Cllr N Housden referred to page 83 and the fees for filming on Cromer Pier. He said that as someone with experience of working in the film industry, the Council could charge considerably more, adding that local wildlife parks charged three times the amount. The Chief Executive provided a brief history of the use of the pier for television programmes and filming. He said on those occasions the publicity and

interest in Cromer and the wider district outweighed any income that would have been received from charging a fee. That said, he agreed it was a good example of where there was a competitive market and he would ask the Communications team to check that the charges were high enough. Cllr Housden asked about copyrighting images so that the Council could retain the rights to screen anything that was shot within the district. The CE confirmed that there were some licences in place for this. He added that there were several locations for filming and television production in the district and any demand had to be weighed against the loss of car park income and the impact on access for residents and tourists. The Chairman asked how advertising revenue came back to the Council and whether any 'latent' value from a production could be quantified in any way. The CE replied that it depended on whether it was a long-term series which was repeated over a period of time then it could have an impact in encouraging people to visit the district. Everything had to be weighed up and balanced. He added that there had been consideration at county level around operating a film office as it was felt that Norfolk locations could be a source of income stream. However, that was not what the current market indicated as many film companies were actually seeking payments to film in certain locations as they realised it had considerable benefits for the area.

Cllr Housden suggested that hosting a stage of the Tour de France could be a very lucrative way to bring money into the district. Any opportunity to host a race should be taken as the economic benefits, television revenue and spin offs could be huge. Cllr Penfold said that the charges for filming on the pier did seem low and he asked whether the Council was proactive in promoting the pier as a location or whether it waited to be approached. He also asked whether any benchmarking had been undertaken. The CE replied that the district was the largest recipient of film and television enquiries in the county but the idea of having a shared film office was to promote Norfolk more widely as a filming destination and pool resources to actively engage and promote locations.

Cllr A Brown referred to page 77, paragraph 3.9 of the agenda and the reference to planning fees. He said that he could inform members that the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act had allowed the Planning Service to increase fees for major applications by 35% and for domestic applications by 25% from 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023. From 1 April 2025 they would be index-linked subject to a 10% cap and reviewed every 3 years. He concluded by saying that no increase in fees would cover the cost of service provision.

Cllr J Boyle referred to car parking charges at Holt Country Park (page 87) were low, compared to the nearby National Trust properties, Sheringham Park and Felbrigg Hall. She felt that there was scope to increase this. The DFR informed members that car parking fees and charges had not been fully reviewed yet and this was a larger piece of work that would be done separately in the coming months.

Cllr L Withington commented on the 8% increase in charges to cover the additional costs in staffing inflation and she was satisfied that additional resourcing costs were being taken into account. She then referred to page 101, which set out statutory charges set by Government for licensing fees and said that although the Council was increasing charges to cover costs where possible, this was not an option for these statutory charges and she asked if there was any indication of these being likely to increase in other sectors of the Council or was there anything NNDC could do to try and push for this. The DFR replied that where fees and charges were set by the Government they either prescribed how much should be charged for a service or provided guidance as to how the Council should calculate that amount. For certain services the Council could only charge an amount that covered the cost of the

service or a set amount. Cllr Withington asked for those services where it was a prescribed amount whether the Council was covering its costs. The DFR replied that in the cases where the Council was able to cover its costs it always ensured that it never undercharged by setting the fee at the maximum level it could.

Cllr V Holliday sought clarification that members were agreeing to the fees and charges for 2024/2025 minus the car parking charges. Cllr L Shires replied that members could make any recommendations now regarding the fees and charges as they had not been agreed by Cabinet and Full Council yet. Cllr Holliday then asked about planning fees and said where they were being increased in line with inflation whether there was scope to increase by more than this. She referred to page 108, which covered additional meetings and plans and said that there was no proposed increase in future years and suggested that this could be considered. The DFR replied that for some discretionary charges, they were rounded up to the nearest pound and had in fact been gradually increasing over the years, although this was not always apparent. She added that officers also considered the market that they were operating in and whether it was a competitive arena or if the Council was the only service provider and who it was provided to and whether an increase would be affordable to the end user. She concluded by saying that officers would review the fees and charges again at the end of the budget process to ensure that the Council was maximising income through the level of fees that were being charged.

Cllr N Housden referred to page 97 and the fees for betting premises. He asked whether the annual fees were based on the industry standard or whether there was any room for manoeuvre. The DFR replied that these fees and charges could be set by the district but there may be some restrictions linked to size of premises and location. She said that she would look into this and seek clarification from the Licensing team.

The Chairman thanked members for their input. In summary, he said that members had discussed a commercial approach, benchmarking and market forces. He said that the committee would like assurance that all of the above were being applied where the Council had the discretion to set fees and charges.

It was proposed by Cllr P Fisher, seconded by Cllr M Hankins and

## **RESOLVED**

To recommend that Cabinet supports the following recommendations to Full Council

1. The Fees & Charges from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 as included in Appendix A
2. That delegated authority be given to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and relevant Directors/Assistant Director to agree the fees and charges not included within Appendix A as required (outlined within the report).

In addition, the Committee **resolved** to recommend that for those charges where the Council has the discretion to vary fees, Cabinet ensures they are reviewed with the following three key issues in mind -

- a commercial approach
- benchmarking
- market forces

## **98 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

The DSM provided an update on the Cabinet Work Programme. She explained that as the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 4<sup>th</sup> December had been cancelled, the programme for January was relatively full. The Housing Allocation Policy review would be coming to the March meeting of Cabinet and the two property transactions listed for the January meeting of Cabinet would now be coming to the February meeting instead.

## **99 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE**

The DSM outlined the upcoming Overview & Scrutiny Committee work programme, reminding members that the Treasury Management Strategy would be coming back for consideration once the requested training had been provided.

The Chairman informed members that himself and the Vice-Chairman, Cllr Penfold, had discussed the LGA Peer Review recommendations relating to Scrutiny and how they could be addressed. They had agreed that it could be beneficial to engage an external facilitator, possibly from the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS) to lead members through a constructive workshop-based process to consider the key observations highlighted by the Peer Review report. He asked members to indicate if they were supportive of such an approach. It was agreed that arrangements would be put in place to proceed on this basis, once the new Scrutiny Officer had started in post in early January. In response to a question from the CE regarding the scope of any work, the Chairman clarified that the intention was to focus on the Peer Review recommendations relating to scrutiny specifically, rather than the report as a whole.

Cllr J Toye, Chairman of the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee (GRAC) commented on the Peer Review and the references in the final report on the need for clarification on the division of the roles and responsibilities between Overview & Scrutiny Committee, GRAC and Cabinet. The Chairman replied that this was one of the wider aspects of the Peer Review that would be picked up as work progressed. The DSM advised that the ongoing review of the Council's constitution would include a review of the terms of reference for each of the main committees, ensuring that the functions were set out clearly and that there was no duplication.

Cllr J Boyle said that as the Council's appointed representative to the Norfolk Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC), she felt it would be beneficial for regular updates on the work of NHOSC to be provided to Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The DSM advised that minutes from the NHOSC meetings had been circulated to Overview & Scrutiny Committee members in the past and this was one option. The Chairman said that he didn't feel it would always be appropriate for the committee to receive an update. A lot of the work undertaken by NHOSC was at county level and not always relevant to NNDC. He suggested that information should be circulated to members on relevant topics, as they arose. He proposed that Cllr Boyle sent any NHOSC information to the DSM who would then assess it and share it with members, as appropriate.

The Committee then considered a request from the DFR to move the next meeting back by a week to allow more time for the finance reports to be prepared. An additional week would also allow time for treasury management training to be arranged. Members supported this request and it was agreed to cancel the January meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny scheduled for 17<sup>th</sup> January and reschedule it for Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January.

Cllr M Hankins asked about adding an item to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee work programme. He had noticed in the budget papers that the Council made a significant financial contribution to the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) and given the recent issues with flooding in various parts of the District, he felt that it would be beneficial for a representative from the IDBs to attend a meeting of the committee and provide an update to members on the work that they were doing and future plans. The Chairman said that the IDBs were on the Council's list of outside bodies and there were several NNDC representatives appointed to each IDB. One of the responsibilities of being appointed as a representative to an outside body was providing updates to members. He suggested that Full Council was the appropriate forum for this. Cllr N Housden said that he was an appointed representative to the Rivers Internal Drainage Board and it was challenging to scrutinise the flooding issues. Although the rivers operated under the wider auspices of the farming community, the main drainage responsibilities sat with the Environment Agency and Anglian Water. He offered to provide members with the minutes from the last meeting of the IDB but said that it was a very complex issue and it would be difficult for any committee to effectively question the IDB as they were dependent on the work and subsequent reporting of the EA and AW. In conclusion, he said it was not a straightforward situation. The Chairman reiterated his earlier comment that it may be more appropriate for appointed representatives to both IDBs to provide an update to Full Council or circulate information via email to all members.

## **100 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The meeting ended at 12.31pm

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Chairman