

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 9 September 2024 at the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

Cllr W Fredericks (Deputy Chair)	Cllr L Shires
Cllr T Adams (Chair)	Cllr A Brown
Cllr H Blathwayt	Cllr C Ringer
Cllr J Toyne	Cllr A Varley
Cllr L Withington	

Members also attending:

Cllr K Bayes, Cllr C Cushing, Cllr N Dixon, Cllr Dr V Holliday, Cllr M Taylor

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive, Director for Resources / S151 Officer and Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Officer (Regulatory)

21 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 8th July were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr L Shires declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 – Recommendations from Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party - North Walsham West Development Brief. She said she was a resident of North Walsham and a member of North Walsham Town Council.

24 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

25 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Chairman advised members that they could ask questions during the meeting as matters arose.

26 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman invited Cllr N Dixon, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to speak. He outlined the recommendations in detail.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED to support the following recommendations:

1. East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust

Recommended that the Council –

(A) Request the East of England Ambulance Trust to provide

(1) the mapping of CFRs in North Norfolk to establish where any gaps in the numbers of volunteers are

(2) communication materials for members of the council to use when talking to their respective Parish and Town Councils about the co-responding and the role of CFRs

(B) the Council

(1) works with the Norfolk Ambulance Trust to help promote its Campaign on Community First Responders and co responding by signposting members of the public towards the Ambulance Trust's Community First Responders <https://www.eastamb.nhs.uk/join-the-team/volunteering-and-volunteers/community-first-responders>

(2) encourages the members of the council to talk to their respective Parish and Town Councils on the importance of the work being done by Community First Responders with the aim of increasing the understanding of these roles and seeking to achieve more volunteers to apply for these roles

2. North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone

'To update the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in 12 months time on the impact of the North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone initiative and learning from this, to establish a set of evaluation criteria, including baselines, that can then be used for similar projects in other towns in North Norfolk.'

27 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PLANNING POLICY & BUILT HERITAGE WORKING PARTY

Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enforcement introduced this item. He said that he welcomed the completion of the Wells Neighbourhood Plan. Regarding the North Walsham Development brief had been modified to reflect the Inspector's comments.

The Chairman requested that a link to the Development brief could be published alongside the minutes.

It was proposed by Cllr A Brown, seconded by J Toye and

RESOLVED to approve

1. Wells Neighbourhood Plan:

In order to comply with the statutory timeframe, the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party recommends to the Leader to make a delegated decision on behalf of Cabinet, that having been subject to successful local referendum;

a. The Wells-Next-The-Sea Neighbourhood Plan be made (brought into force) as part of the statutory Development Plan for North Norfolk in accordance with section 38A(4) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) as soon as practical and within the 8 week statutory time frame and no later than 30th August 2024;

b. The issuing of the Decision Statement

2. **NW West Development Brief** (updated report attached)

Members are asked to recommend to Cabinet that:

a. The Development Brief is endorsed as a material consideration in order to assist in the development and determination of applications in relation to the emerging site allocation, Land West of North Walsham (NW62/A)

and

b. Prior to Cabinet, authority to make further minor changes to the Development Brief is delegated to the acting Planning Policy Manager.

28 DELEGATED DECISIONS FEBRUARY TO AUGUST 2024

The Chairman introduced this item. He explained that it was a statutory report.

It was proposed by Cllr T Adams, seconded by Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED

To receive and note the report and the register of decisions taken under delegated powers.

29 REPORTING PROGRESS IMPLEMENTING CORPORATE PLAN 2023-27 DELIVERY AGAINST ACTION PLAN 2023-24 AND ACTION PLAN 2024-25 - TO END OF QUARTER 1 - 30 JUNE 2024

The Chairman said that there was an error for point 38 (page 50). It should state 'the Customer Services Manager is reviewing current provisions and continues to look at opportunities to deliver more efficient customer interactions for both the customer and the Council. A fuller review process will be delivered across the summer months as part of the ongoing service reviews.'

He then explained that the retention of the second homes council tax premium remained 'red' due to the delay in the legislation being passed.

Other areas where actions were out of the Council's control included the waste strategy and bank hubs.

Moving through to 2024/2025, he highlighted key actions which were currently 'amber' such as the Local Plan, increasing biodiversity in open spaces, the preparation of an Active Environment and Play Park Strategy and the provision of

3G pitches in several towns.

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

RESOLVED

To note the report

30 BUDGET MONITORING P\$ 2024 - 2025

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced this item. She said that the forecast deficit was set out on page 55, together with the reasons for it. She then referred to Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Benefits as a lot of the additional financial burden related to the increased cost of providing temporary accommodation to homeless families across North Norfolk. She went on to say that savings were being monitored closely – particularly the £250k that were yet to be identified.

She thanked officers for their hard work in achieving savings and grappling with the additional pressures.

Finally, the drop in interest rates would impact on income generation and this was set out in the report.

Cllr Fredericks then spoke about the impact of homelessness and the rise in costs for providing temporary accommodation. She said that the greatest financial challenge was the temporary accommodation bill. Homeing households was a statutory duty and there was not set budget for this. Several factors had increased the number of homeless households, including a reduction in the supply of private rental properties available, domestic abuse and overcrowding. A lot of work had been undertaken trying to assist people before they became homeless but the reality was that it was an increasing problem. She added that she was speaking about North Norfolk residents. Work continued with housing associations and developers to provide homes in the long-term. In conclusion, Cllr Fredericks said that the district council had to fund the bulk of this support and savings were being made across non-statutory services to try and meet the rising costs.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their hard work in supporting struggling households. He added that councils across the country were facing similar pressures. He then said that he wanted to propose the following amendment to recommendation 4 (in italics) rather than identifying a specific location:

4. Seek approval of full Council to include an addition to the capital programme in 2024/25 to *the extension and enhancement of the car parking offer in the District, at a location to be identified* and that this is funded from revenue (car park income) (as explained in paragraph 5.6).

Cllr C Cushing said that it was good news that the savings that were yet to be identified were on track to be achieved. He referred to the forecast £1m deficit and he asked what work was underway to identify further savings and when members may be updated on this. Cllr Shires said that officers were working on savings and income generation and there were service reviews underway. She said that her aim was to report this in the next Budget Monitoring report.

The Director for Resources was invited to speak. She said that service reviews were being carried out. Some were already underway, including a review of the car park management contract. The budget position was being closely monitored and every step was being taken to reduce the level of deficit and vacant posts were being reviewed to see if they needed to be retained – particularly where they had been unfilled for some time. A lot of the pressure on the Council's finances was due to demand led factors such as temporary accommodation but everything was being done to look at ways of increasing income to mitigate this. All savings being put forward by managers were being considered.

Cllr Cushing asked when the next Budget Monitoring report would be presented to members as this was likely to have crucial information. The Director for Resources said it would be presented to the November cycle of committee meetings.

The Chairman said that local government had reached a critical point and the Government's budget announcement in October was awaited.

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

RESOLVED to recommend the following to Full Council:

- 1) Seek approval of full Council to include a budget of £300k for borrowing costs in 2024/25 and that this be funded by using the Treasury Management Reserve (as explained in paragraph 4.8).
- 2) Seek approval of full Council to include an addition to the capital programme in 2024/25 to *the extension and enhancement of the car parking offer in the District, at a location to be identified* and that this is funded from revenue (car park income) (as explained in paragraph 5.6).

31 SAVINGS - PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

The Chairman introduced this item. He said that the Budget Monitoring report had set out the context regarding financial pressures and there were now a number of considerations regarding the Council's estate and the public conveniences were part of this wider review. He said for some of the sites, the decision was straightforward regarding future ownership. In some cases, the Council did not own the building but operated the facilities on behalf of the community or local businesses. In others, the usage was a factor, especially where it had dropped to a very low level, particularly during the winter months. There were also examples of the facilities no longer suiting the needs of the location.

The Chairman then spoke about Weybourne, where there was no sewage connection to the public conveniences and it was very hard to maintain to a suitable standard and the cost of upgrading it was very high. Regarding Stalham, he said that the intention was to replace this in the future. The location no longer worked for the town and it was hoped to relocate it to the car park at some point. He went on to say that some sites were in locations where there was no income stream for the Council and it made sense to look into the option of transferring them to a partner to operate if possible. He then said that it was not the case that they were not needed but that the best approach would be for another party to operate them. He assured members that there was no intention to immediately start closing toilets but said that the Council was keen to start discussing options with interested stakeholders and representatives from the affected communities, with the aim of keeping them open.

He then spoke about the winter closures, mainly in coastal locations but also the Broads. For some, such as Wells, Cromer and Sheringham there was nearby provision that would meet the wintertime demand. Overall, it was hoped to realise about £100k of savings, although there were some contract considerations regarding the Serco cleansing contract.

In conclusion, the Chairman said he hoped he had explained the situation fully. He invited the Portfolio Holder for Finance to comment. Cllr Shires said that the Council was looking to work with partners to ensure that the facilities remained open. The financial pressures which were impacting on housing provision for homeless families in the district meant that all options needed to be considered. She added that the review was in the very early stages and it would be coming back for further consideration later in the year. She acknowledged that it could adversely affect some areas in the district but all options would be considered to ensure that the impact was minimal and where possible, a smooth transition to a partner was put in place.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr M Taylor, Local member for Stalham, said that he and Cllr Bayes both understood the budgetary pressures that the council was facing and his comments took these into account. That said, as local members for Stalham, they were both disappointed to see the proposals come forward, as the community had been campaigning for years to see more investment in the town and this sought to remove an asset. He added that no proper progress had been made towards putting replacement facilities in place. If it had, then as local members, they may feel more comfortable with what was being proposed. He commented on the lack of consultation to date and said that he hoped that there would be engagement with local businesses. He went on to say that there may be an opportunity for the town council to take on the facility but there had not been time to speak to them or local business owners yet. In conclusion, Cllr Taylor said that he would like to see more progress on the proposals for a replacement facility before a decision to close the current site was taken as he would not want Stalham to be the only town in North Norfolk without a public toilet.

Cllr K Bayes, local member for Stalham, said that he agreed with Cllr Taylor's comments and he shared his concerns regarding the lack of consultation and he hoped to see more engagement with business owners in the coming weeks.

Cllr Dr V Holliday spoke as the local member for Weybourne. She said that she also accepted the need to address the budget deficit but felt that there were less punitive ways to achieve this. She added that it was understood that the facilities at Weybourne beach would be removed at the end of September and she asked for clarification on this. She also asked if enough had been done to address the vandalism that had taken place on the site. Even in Winter, people continued to walk the coastal path and with no facilities at Weybourne, it would present real challenges. She concluded by saying that local residents would welcome discussions with the Council to find a way forward.

Cllr P Fisher, local member for Wells, said that the number of visitors to the town and beach did not really drop off in the winter months. In addition, there was a children's play area behind the Beach Road toilets and it would be a disappointment to see them being closed. He asked if any toilets were closed that clear signage was erected directing people to the nearest alternative. The Chairman agreed that clear signage was important. He said that there were some challenges regarding

dilapidated signs in various locations but it was not always provided by the District Council. He said that in the long term, the Council would wish to invest in improving some of the key locations, particularly where there was a bus interchange such as at Wells and Hoveton. The Council would continue to seek to access national funding where possible.

Regarding Weybourne, the level of vandalism and abuse of the facility was so high that staff were having to work very hard to ensure that they could remain open. In addition, the cost of building a service connection was just too high and the impact of coastal erosion remained a concern. That said, discussions with the parish and town councils for both Weybourne and Stalham were welcomed and they had been contacted.

He went on to say that public consultation was not being carried out but this was the start of the engagement process with local stakeholders and it was hoped that no facilities would be closed.

Cllr N Dixon said that he welcomed the indication from the Leader that this was in the early stages in the process. He endorsed the comments made by the local members for Stalham and was encouraged by the promise of investment in the future but would like to see much more supporting evidence about what that may look like. Cllr Dixon said that option 3 – the transfer of all sites to parish and town councils, needed a lot more work before it was a realistic proposition. Some of the toilets on the list were in strategic positions, albeit remote, on the Broads and he would like to see time invested in terms of option 3 to see how it might progress in terms of viability. The Chairman replied that Cabinet were not supportive of either transferring or closing all of the toilet facilities. He added that he sympathised with the views of the members for Stalham and said that it was very much hoped that a new facility could be provided there.

Regarding Walsingham, he said that he had spoken to the local member and discussed the demands placed on the toilet facilities during peak pilgrimage times. However, it was an example of a location where there was no adjacent facility to provide an income stream to support the toilet provision.

Cllr W Fredericks, Deputy Leader, said that she wanted to comment on the wider budget situation. She said that many residents may query why council tax had been raised earlier in the year if the Council was now thinking of closing some facilities. It was important to remember that the district council only retained 8% of council tax income and it was hard to maintain everything on a relatively small income stream. Toilets were not a statutory service and hard decisions had to be made about where to focus spending – particularly when so many households were struggling. The Chairman added that the council tax increase only generated an additional £250k.

Cllr Dr V Holliday asked whether there would be a consultation with the parish council before the facility at Weybourne was closed. Closure was currently scheduled for the end of the month so time was limited. The Chairman replied that he couldn't commit to delaying the timeline but reassured Cllr Holliday that discussion with the parish council would take place as soon as possible.

Cllr Shires said that she wanted to change the recommendation slightly so that option 1 included that Cabinet was looking to work with Town and Parish councils.

The Chief Executive clarified that the preferred recommendation should set out that full and winter closures for some facilities were progressed whilst including a

reference to engaging with town and parish councils and other interested stakeholders regarding the possible transfer of some sites. This would allow for a flexible and open approach. He added that this was the first report of a number coming forward in the next few months as the Council sought to balance the budget for 2025/2026.

Cllr H Blathwayt sought advice on whether he should abstain from voting as some of the sites were in the Broads and he was Chairman of the Broads Authority.

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

RESOLVED that

Option 1 - Full and winter closures is progressed by officers, for the least well used and most aged sites in terms of management or maintenance, to include discussions with town and parish councils and other interested parties, regarding possible transfer of sites, where there is a particular context for doing so.

Cllr H Blathwayt abstained.

32 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

33 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 10.58 am.

Chairman