

CABINET

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 18 May 2020 at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

Mrs S Bütikofer (Chair)	Mrs A Fitch-Tillett
Ms V Gay	Mr G Hayman
Mr R Kershaw	Mr N Lloyd
Mr E Seward	Mr J Rest

Members also attending:

Mr C Cushing
Mr N Dixon
Dr C Stockton

Officers in Attendance:

The Chief Executive, the Democratic Services Manager, the Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer, the Head of Finance and Asset Management/Section 151 Officer and the Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny)

Apologies for Absence:

Mr A Brown

77 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of Cabinet held on 2nd March 2020 and 30th March 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

78 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

79 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

80 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

81 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The Chairman reminded Members that they could ask questions during the meeting as issues arose.

82 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MATTERS

Nothing to report.

83 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET WORKING PARTIES

The Leader introduced this item in the Portfolio Holder's absence. She explained that it was a recommendation from the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party meeting from 16th March 2020.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett said that she was pleased to second the recommendations.

It was proposed by Cllr S Butikofer, seconded by Cllr A Fitch-Tillett and

RESOLVED

- 1. That the changes proposed to the list of Small Growth Villages be endorsed.**
- 2. That the revised approach and policy wording be endorsed, subject to policies SD2 and SD3 (small growth villages criterion) being amended to reflect the additional consideration of substantial infrastructure / service improvements as a requirement for support, and that responsibility for drafting such an approach, including finalising the associated policies, be delegated to the Acting Planning Policy Manager.**

84 LOCAL PLAN - PROJECT UPDATE - TIMELINE

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder, the Chairman invited the Acting Planning Policy Manager to introduce this item. He explained that the report focussed on the revised project time line of the Local Development Scheme. A detailed review had been undertaken by officers and a comprehensive work programme had been produced. This had been informed by the schedule of responses and the statutory requirements of Plan making together with the decision making framework of the Council and legislative changes, emerging evidence and team resources. The result was a new project time line which was required to be published as part of the Local Development Scheme update.

The Head of Planning explained that due to the pandemic, meetings of the Planning Policy and Built Heritage Working Party were currently suspended and that is why the decision was being taken by Cabinet. He added that meetings of the Working Party would start again in June.

Cllr N Lloyd said that he was concerned about the timetable slipping and suggested that there should be increased scrutiny of the process. He said this could take the form of regular updates to either Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Cabinet. The Chairman agreed and proposed that this was a recommendation. She said she would discuss with the Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee whether that was the best avenue or if Cabinet would be more appropriate. The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that oversight of the Local Plan was a Cabinet function. Cllr J Rest seconded the proposal, reiterating the importance that the timeline did not slip as it was such an important piece of work that would have significant ramifications if it was not delivered.

It was proposed by Cllr S Butikofer, seconded by Cllr J Rest and

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the revised timeline for the Local Development Scheme is published.**
- 2. That Cabinet receives quarterly updates on the progress of the Local Development Plan.**

Reasons for the decision:

The publication of a new project time line is required as part of the Local Development Scheme update.

85 NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The Chairman began by thanking the staff for all their work. She said that they had shown outstanding commitment and effort and the Council had done everything possible in its response to the crisis, however, there were always lessons to be learned. She asked Members to join her in recording a vote of thanks to all staff for their efforts during such a difficult time.

The Chairman then highlighted key points of information regarding the Council's response to the pandemic. She said that the 10 local coordination centres (LCCs) were being consolidated with 4 continuing to operate at Fakenham, Stalham, Sheringham and North Walsham. This would streamline the services offered and enable staff who were currently redeployed at the LCCs to come back into their Council roles. The emergency helpline would continue to stay open until after the Bank Holiday weekend.

The Chairman then informed Members that there was a new Board had been established to oversee the move from the operational response to the recovery phase. It would be called the Norfolk Public Services Leaders Board and would consist of Council Leaders, Chief Executives as well as representatives from the police and other public bodies. It would be up and running as soon as the terms of reference were agreed. She went onto say that Council facilities such as car parks and public conveniences were being kept under review. She added that if any member received any representations from their town or parish council then they should feed those back as it was important to work in partnership with local communities. The car parks at Pretty Corner woods and Holt country park had been re-opened to allow local residents to drive there and access the facilities.

The Chairman then spoke about beaches in the District. She said there were issues regarding RNLI cover and without a lifeguard, the Council would not be able to fly blue flags at some of the beaches this summer. She had asked officers to look urgently into options for alternative provisions as the flying of the blue flags was very important indicator for visitors to the district as well as being something that tourist related businesses used for promotion. At the moment cover had only been confirmed for Sea Palling, Cromer and one other location (to be advised).

She then began to speak about the recovery process. Many of the District's towns and villages had very narrow streets and pavements which would make social distancing very difficult. Consequently, those most likely to be affected had been identified and the Interim Chief Executive had written to them suggesting that measures may need to be put in place to ensure the flow of pedestrians was safe and in compliance with Government guidance. In addition, the Communications Team was working on messaging and signage to help people understand how to access towns and villages and move around safely.

The Chairman invited Members to speak:

1. Cllr V Gay, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Wellbeing commended the report, saying it was clearly set out. She said that she wanted to express her thanks to everyone involved in supporting the homeless and rough sleepers and to officers and volunteers working at the LCCs. She said that she had come across some very challenging situations when making calls on behalf of the telephone companion scheme and she had been extremely impressed by how quickly support was offered and then put into place. She added that she had also received a very prompt response when she had raised concerns regarding the lack of RNLI cover on some beaches.
2. Cllr R Kershaw, Portfolio Holder for Economic & Career Development, said that he also wanted to thank staff for all their hard work. He referred to section 5.3 of the report and said that it was very important that when the aspirations set out in the Corporate Plan were reviewed, it was important that consideration was given as to how to support local businesses which had been so affected by the crisis. The Chairman agreed. She said that several working groups had been set up to look at different aspects of the crisis and how recovery could be implemented. She added that longer term and hidden impacts should not be forgotten, for example, the Council had housed several homeless people and consideration needed to be given as to how to support them going forwards. She concluded by saying that no changes planned to the Corporate Plan just yet. It would be reviewed in time and updated would be provided to Members.

The Interim Chief Executive said that he wished to update Members on a couple of key points. Referring to section 3.2.1 of the report, he said that the Government was currently reviewing the funding provision for homeless people and rough sleepers. He then referred to section 3.4.3 and said that £49m of Small Business Grants had now been paid out to 4,449 businesses. There was also work ongoing on the launch of a discretionary grants scheme on 1st June. He went on to say that consideration was being given as to how the Council offices could be re-opened – to some staff returning and at some point to public callers, although this would initially be on an appointment-only basis. He said that the Building Control service was up and running, following Government guidance on the construction industry re-starting. Other key service areas, such as Planning were continuing to operate and approximately 150 on-site notices had been erected in the last few weeks.

RESOLVED:

To note and comment upon the preparations being made for Recovery – to include:

The short term actions in respect of:

Opening up the Council's services and facilities

- transition for the stepping down of the Community Support Programme;
- planning the return of staff to their main roles from working at home and redeployment into other roles;
- re-establishing formal meetings of the Council and
- critically considering the implications of lockdown and phased lifting of social distancing restrictions, possibly over a number of months, on local businesses, particularly tourism businesses which face having a severely curtailed summer season.

the longer term need to review the Council's Medium-Term Financial strategy in light of the changing financial situation of the Council and as a result undertake a review of the Council's proposed programme of activity as previously detailed in the Corporate Plan and Delivery Plan.

Reasons for the decision:

To inform corporate learning from experience gained through the Response phase and inform decisions moving forward through the Recovery phase.

86 COVID 19 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr Seward, introduced this item. He began by saying that it was only 12 weeks ago since he had made his speech to Council, proposing the Budget for 2020/21. The impact of the pandemic on the Council's finances since then was significant and this report provided an update on the key issues.

Cllr Seward referred to earlier comments regarding the Corporate Plan. He said that there was much that remained valid and he hoped that the Administration would be able to push on with its implementation. He welcomed the recommencement of construction on the Sheringham Leisure centre project and was keen to see completion of the scheme to install electric vehicle charging points. He acknowledged that as the situation progressed then the Corporate Plan and all key projects would need to be reviewed.

Cllr Seward explained that at the current time, the Council had suffered a financial hit of £2m. He reiterated that the figures highlighted in the report were estimates and that the Council was in uncharted territory. Cllr Seward reminded Members that before the pandemic, there was a forecast deficit of £1.8m. This was due to a review of income streams and a reduction in Government funding support. In early May, the Government had indicated that the fair funding review and business rates retention scheme would be put on hold until Councils were in a position to respond appropriately. Cllr Seward said that this indicated that there would at least be certainty around this aspect and this would be helpful when preparing the Medium Term Financial Strategy in the Autumn, although it was likely that different scenarios would need to be included.

Cllr Seward then spoke about the Council's reserves. He said that the Budget report for 2020/21 had outlined a reserve level of £17.6m, which was forecast to reduce to £9.3m by 2023. A reserve of £2.4m had also been earmarked for the delivery of the Corporate Plan. He said that going forward, the reserves would have to be reviewed in light of the financial impact of the pandemic. Cllr Seward said that the capital reserves remained unchanged from the Budget report presented in February. He reminded Members that the capital programme was funded through a combination of government grants, borrowing and council funding. It was important that the Council was able to fund key projects and this would need to be monitored, particularly where the Council had borrowed money.

Moving forward, Cllr Seward said that it was important that the Council was not put into a position where it had to make cuts to frontline services. It was also vital that it was able to maintain facilities which were key to the provision of the tourist, hospitality and leisure sectors. He went on to say that savings would need to be made and the Council would also continue to put pressure on the Government for more funding.

Cllr Seward concluded by saying that the Council faced a very challenging financial situation. It wasn't clear what the full impact of the pandemic would be yet and it was possible that reserves may have to be used to maintain key services. He said that following on from the Interim Chief Executive's comments regarding business grants, he was pleased to inform members that 89% of eligible customers had been contacted and a total of £49m had been paid out. This had been a huge effort by officers and was in addition to the changes to business rate relief that had been implemented.

The Head of Finance offered to give a short presentation outlining the key points of the report. The Chairman asked whether it was different to the briefing that Members had received recently. The Head of Finance confirmed that it was a summary version of this. The Monitoring Officer advised Members that as the Cabinet meeting was being livestreamed to the Press and the public it might be helpful to share a high level summary of the key points. On being asked whether they were supportive of proceeding with a presentation, Cabinet members indicated that they were not. The Chairman requested that a copy of the presentation was appended to the minutes.

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr R Kershaw and

Agreed to note:

- 1. The current package of financial support being provided to the Council by the government to support its response to COVID-19;**
- 2. Continues to lobby central government for further additional financial support;**
- 3. The forecast cost and income pressures being faced by the Council and the extent to which they exceed the available government funding and therefore the requirement for any deficit to be funded from other Council resources;**
- 4. The various caveats and risks associated with the current forecasts;**
- 5. The proposals in respect of updating the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the financial planning framework for the 2021/22 budget;**
- 6. The proposals for a fundamental review of the capital programme to ensure that the schemes still reflect the Council's changing priorities and to ensure that the Council can still afford them given the rapidly changing financial landscape;**
- 7. The proposal for a further financial update to come forward to Cabinet in July, by which time there will hopefully be more clarity regarding any continuing restrictions to include;**
 - Opportunities for re-prioritising and re-focusing currently approved 2020/21 budgets;**
 - Opportunities for savings, efficiencies and income generation this year;**
 - A review of the current reserves position with recommendations**

for re-allocation where appropriate and;

- 8. The progress to date in respect of the application of the various new business rates reliefs announced along with progress towards the government funded Small Business Grant programme which local authorities are being asked to administer (Appendix D).**

Reason for the decision:

To make Members aware of the current COVID-19 position in respect of the Council's budget and resource position for 2020/21 and indeed future years.

87 OFFICER DELEGATED DECISIONS (MARCH TO MAY 2020)

The Chairman and Leader, Cllr S Butikofer, introduced this item. She explained that the report outlined the key decisions taken by senior officers under delegated powers from 1st March to 1st May 2020. Due to the extra demand placed on the Council during the pandemic, several key decisions had to be taken urgently. These were reported through to Cabinet and then published on the Council's website.

Cllr N Dixon referred to page 83 of the report and asked whether the decision to support the Council's leisure contractor with its immediate and longer term cashflow issues following closure of the leisure centres, was in the form of a grant or a loan and whether there was a contractual requirement to do that or whether it was discretionary. Cllr Gay, Portfolio Holder for Culture & Wellbeing replied that it was a 'necessary adjustment to the contract'. She said that it was not a loan. The Head of Economic and Community Growth added that the contract required that the contractor was 'no better or worse position' as a result of the pandemic. He said that contractually the Council was required to make a payment and an analysis was currently being undertaken to understand the full extent of the impact. In the interim a payment had been made to support their staff during the crisis and avoid having to lay people off. He confirmed that it was a discretionary payment and not a loan. The Chairman added that this approach was in line with other local authorities which had Everyone Active as their leisure contractor. Cllr Gay said that there would be a report coming forwards on the leisure contract.

Cllr J Rest asked whether the decisions that had been taken could only be reversed by the person who had originally taken them. The Monitoring Officer replied that the officer exercising the power was the person who had delegation to make the decision. The expectation was, that as the responsible officer, they would make any subsequent decisions in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder. The Interim Chief Executive added that all of the delegated decisions listed in the report had been taken following advice and guidance from the Government and the Norfolk Resilience Forum. Decisions regarding the re-opening of would also be taken following guidance and advice from national and local bodies and by working together with key partners.

AGREED

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

Reason for the decision:

The Constitution: Chapter 6, Part 5, sections 5.1 and 5.2. details the exercise of any power or function of the Council where waiting until a meeting of Council or a committee would disadvantage the Council. The Constitution requires that any exercise of such powers should be reported to the next meeting of Council, Cabinet or working party (as appropriate)

88 PURCHASE OF FURTHER PROPERTY FOR USE AS TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

The Chairman and Leader, Cllr S Butikofer, introduced this item in the absence of the Portfolio Holder. She explained that the Council had a duty to provide temporary accommodation for homeless households. Purchase of this property would provide a quality, flexible home for temporary accommodation and there was budget provision available for the purchase of such housing. The property in question was available for immediate occupation, in a good central location with easy access to facilities and in good condition with a modern heating system.

It was proposed by Cllr S Butikofer, seconded by Cllr R Kershaw and

RESOLVED

To purchase of the identified property (subject to an independent valuation and survey) using the budget provision.

Reason for the decision:

The cost is above the key decision threshold of £100,000.

The meeting ended at 10.54am

Chairman