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COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 22 September 2021 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 6.00 pm

Members Present:

Ms P Bevan Jones	Mr D Birch
Mr H Blathwayt	Mr A Brown
Dr P Bütikofer	Mrs S Bütikofer
Mr C Cushing	Mr N Dixon
Mr P Fisher	Mr T FitzPatrick
Mr V FitzPatrick	Mrs W Fredericks
Ms V Gay	Mrs P Grove-Jones
Mr G Hayman	Mr C Heinink
Mr P Heinrich	Mr N Housden
Mr N Lloyd	Mr G Mancini-Boyle
Mr N Pearce	Mr S Penfold
Mrs G Perry-Warnes	Mr J Punchard
Mr J Rest	Mr E Seward
Mrs J Stenton	Mr J Toye
Mr E Vardy	Mr A Varley
Ms L Withington	Mr A Yiasimi

Also in attendance: The Chief Executive, the Director of Resources, the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) the HR Manager

81 PRESENTATION ON THE CHAIRMAN'S CHARITY

The Chairman opened the meeting with the sad news of the death of the former elected member, Robin Combe. He asked the Leader to say a few words before commencing a minutes silence in memory of Mr Combe.

The Leader began by saying that Robin Combe had a huge heart. He stood up for what he believed in and cared passionately about his community. He was full of wisdom, advice and humour. He had served on the Council for 12 years as an elected member and was Chairman of the Liberal Democrat Group for several years. Duty had always been more important than his ego and he was extremely well respected by staff – particularly those in housing and planning. She concluded by saying that he had always been extremely supportive to her personally, always offering words of support and advice. The World would be a poorer place for his passing.

Members observed one minutes silence in memory of Mr Combe.

The Chairman then invited two representatives from his nominated charity, Norfolk & Waveney MIND, to speak about the charity and its work. Louise Jordan-Hall, Chairman of the Trustee Board began by thanking the Chairman for choosing to support MIND during his year in office. She said that he was looking forward to building a relationship with the Council. She then spoke about the work of the charity and how it focussed on the journey that individuals faced – not just the recovery, explaining that MIND was now busier than ever following the pandemic, with 60% of people seeking help, having no previous mental health issues. Calls to Norfolk & Waveney MIND had increased by 47% and requests for counselling by 203%.

Ms Jordan-Hall explained that the charity was working to the 'super connector' model – bringing services together and basing key services in the community. There were three main planks to their strategy – prevention, community resilience and crisis intervention.

Mr Jimi Matthews, Director of Performance & Assurance then outlined the services offered by MIND. He said that there were over 30 services, supporting the community as a whole. There was still a huge stigma around mental health. One in five people took time off work for stress but 90% of those people would cite a different reason on the sickness absence report. Very few managers had received support or training in how to deal with mental health issues at work, yet it was known that 1 in 7 people live with depression and 84% of people would experience a mental health issue during their lifetime. He said that Norfolk & Waveney MIND had supported 105 people in July 2021 alone.

Mr Matthews explained that recovery services were vital. There had been 89 suicides in Norfolk in the previous year and 5% of people were known to have had suicidal thoughts. He said that mental health affected everyone and he thanked members for their support and for helping to raise awareness for the people that needed it most.

82 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs T Adams, A Fitch-Tillett, V Holliday, R Kershaw, M Millership, L Shires and E Spagnola.

Cllr G Hayman referred to the attendance of two elected members at a Leadership course. He asked whether it had been paid for by the Council. The Chairman said that there was no opportunity to raise questions as this item was for the receipt of apologies only. He said any questions should be directed to the Monitoring Officer outside of the meeting.

83 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st July were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

Minute 69: Portfolio Holder Reports - Cllr G Hayman said that he did not regard attendance at parish council meetings as useful management information.

Cllr Hayman asked when the Administration would deliver on their election promises, as set out in the Corporate Plan.

84 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None

85 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

None

86 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman spoke about recent civic events that he had attended: 3rd September – Breckland District Council Civic Reception

4th September – Norfolk County Council Summer Reception at How Hill
6th September – High Sheriff's Reception
9th September – Royal British Legion President's Reception at the Great Hospital, Norwich
15 September – Battle of Britain Remembrance Service
19 September – Royal British Legion centenary ceremony – parade of standards

The Chairman concluded by reminding Members that his civic reception was taking place on 6th October at Fakenham race course.

Cllr G Perry- Warnes asked when prayers would be returning to Full Council meetings. The Chairman replied that the current situation with the pandemic meant that many religious leaders did not feel able to attend a busy, physical meeting at this time. It was hoped that prayers would resume soon.

87 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader updated members on the following issues:

Community Renewal Fund – Councils were still awaiting news on this. A response had been expected at the end of July. The Council had asked local MPs to pursue the matter.

The Ministry of Communities, Housing & Local Government (MCHLG) had been replaced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. She said that she was disappointed that local government was no longer reflected in the title. She added that she was currently involved in the early stages of discussions with other Leaders regarding a future County deal.

The Leader then spoke about the concern felt by many regarding support for Afghan refugees. She said that the Council had pledged support but that a resettlement programme must be done collaboratively. She outlined the lengthy and frustrating attempts by the Council to provide support and accommodation, resulting in the Home Office rejecting the proposal the previous week. She said that Afghans deserved better and she wanted to work with colleagues across the political groups to provide a solution to an obvious and immediate need. She invited the other group leaders to sign a joint letter to the Government.

88 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

89 REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE OF THE COUNCIL AND THE ALLOCATION OF SEATS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND PANELS

The Chairman explained that this was a statutory report that was required following a change in the Council's political balance. He said that the report had been shared with Group Leaders prior to publication.

It was proposed by Cllr J Punchard, seconded by Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED

1. That Council approves the revised political balance calculation as per section

2.6 of this report

2. That Council approves the allocation of seats to political groups as shown at Appendix A, taking into consideration any arrangements agreed by the Group Leaders
3. That delegation is given to the Group Leaders to make any appointments to committees, sub-committees, working parties & panels.

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

The Chairman asked the Group Leaders in turn whether they wished to announce any appointments (noting that that they had delegation from Council to make appointments at any time). No appointments were made.

Cllr S Penfold asked whether the full title of the North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund could be reflected in future reports.

91 PORTFOLIO REPORTS

The Chairman invite Portfolio Holders to present their reports:

Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Benefits, referenced residents' concerns regarding rising energy costs and the upcoming winter and said that the Customer Services team would be able to provide advice and signpost to support and assistance. She asked Members to consider donating to the Cromer Food Bank as they also had a fuel bank that could assist with top ups of oil and electricity tokens.

Cllr C Heinink thanked officers for the new format of the report, saying that the housing needs section in particular was very helpful. He asked whether there was a way to feed this information to Town & Parish Councils to help them better understand the need for community-led housing. Cllr Fredericks replied that she was working with Cllr Toye, Portfolio Holder for Planning, on preparing a presentation for town and parish councils to show the opportunities for accommodating affordable housing in their communities. She added that the Community Liaison Officer within the Housing Team was happy to go out with the Local Member and talk to town and parish councils about the opportunities and funding options.

Cllr V Gay, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture & Wellbeing, said that she wanted to update Members on the new Reef Leisure Centre in Sheringham. She said that huge progress was being made (slides were displayed). Several members had visited the site on 7th September and at that time the signage was installed, thermal panels had just been tested and it was clear that a lot had happened since the previous visit in July. Cllr Gay said that she had visited again on 22 September and the skate park was now complete, the car park was finished and a fully equipped spinning studio was in place as well as a changing places bathroom. In conclusion she said that she was particularly pleased to see the swimming pool filled with water. She said that there had been some issues with the supply chain but that the final stages of the project were nearing and it would soon be complete. She thanked the officers for their continued hard work in pushing the project forward.

Cllr Gay then spoke about the introduction of beach wheelchairs during the summer season. They had been received very positively indeed and several people had been in contact to thank the Council for introducing them.

Cllr A Varley referenced the beach wheelchairs and asked whether they would be rolled out further across the District – including Bacton. Cllr Gay replied that this was being explored as there had been expressions of interest from several places.

Cllr N Housden asked whether the Reef would be open in time for the half-term holidays. Cllr Gay said that she could not commit to that as it was fast approaching.

Cllr G Hayman commented on the steep fall in ticket sales for the theatre at Cromer Pier. He asked what the Council was doing regarding provision of support and what would happen if the theatre went out of business. Cllr Gay replied that she would provide a more detailed response in writing but confirmed that support had been provided. She said that it had been very difficult for entertainment venues during the pandemic and many customers were still reluctant to go out. She said that she would like to compare how the Pier Theatre was faring in relation to other venues.

Cllr R Kershaw presented his report as written and invited questions. Cllr N Pearce commented on a likely Covid surge in the winter and asked whether the Council had set funds aside to help combat any issues. Cllr Seward, Portfolio Holder for Finance, replied that the Delivery Plan Reserve and the General Reserve would both cover any emergency issues should they arise. Covid was included in the Council's risk register and preparations were in place should a quick response be required.

Cllr N Lloyd, Portfolio Holder for Environment, introduced his report. He drew members' attention to National Recycling week and the Council was running a series of promotions to support the campaign.

Cllr E Withington asked about Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP). She welcomed the news that Bank Loke was now coming on-stream and asked whether the Council would continue the roll-out of EVCPs across the District. She referred to issues with the power supply network and asked whether there was an opportunity to work with the County Council and lobby on this issue. She also asked about exploring opportunities for off-road charging points, which were proving problematic for many communities. Cllr Lloyd acknowledged the issue regarding the power networks but said that the Council had applied for a grant to support upgrading the system at the Reef to help with installation there. He said that the Council want to continue the rollout of EVCPs but wanted to focus on the completion of the initial projects in the market towns first. He said that he would look into working collaboratively with the County Council, as suggested. Regarding off-road charging, he said that the initial rollout had centred on installation in car parks with a large number of homes nearby with no drive-way. Other options were being explored, including installation on lamp-posts.

Cllr V FitzPatrick referred to the recent release of an animation highlighting the pledges made within the Council's Environmental Charter. He said that the reference to 17k views was one-dimensional and asked what the original target was. Cllr Lloyd replied that no target was set as this had not been done before. He said that it was well received and had achieved its function by having so many views. Cllr FitzPatrick asked how Cllr Lloyd could be pleased with the outcome if no target was set. He also asked whether it was not standard practice to measure how successful uptake was. Cllr Lloyd said that it was a new initiative and that he would have been happy with 1000 views.

Cllr S Penfold said he was pleased to see that Greenbuild was back. He asked whether the good practice generated by Greenbuild was shared by inviting members and officers from other authorities across Norfolk to attend. Cllr Lloyd said that he

was happy to follow up on this suggestion.

Cllr E Seward, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Assets, presented his written report. He added that he had recently been notified that the Fair Funding Review was now delayed until 2025/26.

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Organisational Resources, was not present. Cllr T FitzPatrick commented on the detail within the written report but queried the absence of information regarding telephone calls to the Council offices. He referred to a recent briefing to Group Leaders which suggested that between 80-90k calls a year were made to the Council but that 21,166 went unanswered. He said that he was surprised that this was not mentioned at all, despite being one of the biggest complaints that members received from residents. He said that he wanted to see the customer satisfaction rate of people phoning the Council included in future reports and an explanation as to why, given the technology now available, these figures were so bad. The Leader replied that she shared his concerns. She said that a full written answer would be provided. She added that the figures were provided in a meeting and not substantiated. Since then, they had been looked at and did not seem to be as high as suggested. Cllr FitzPatrick said this was a very important matter. If the Leader had been given incorrect information then that was appalling. However, of even more importance, was the fact that for many months now, the Council had been lauded for the assistance it had provided to residents during the pandemic. If the figures were anywhere near those suggested, then there was a real possibility that a lot of people had failed to get the help that they needed. He asked that Cllr Shires' written response provided information on the number of people who had tried but then failed to get the support that they were seeking.

Cllr J Toye, Portfolio Holder for Planning, introduced his report. He said that he had some additional information regarding the number of long term empty homes, with the number falling from 704 to 460 for properties empty for over 6 months. Those properties empty for two years or more had come down from 179 to 156. Cllr Toye referenced the delay of the new Planning Bill and he said he was hopeful it was being reviewed.

Cllr C Cushing referred to the Council meeting on 23rd September 2020, which included a motion on second homes. He said that the Government was now taking action on this and he was surprised to see a cautious response from the Leader on this and wondered why there was not a consistent approach from the Administration on this. Cllr Toye said that he had been in touch with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on looking at options on addressing the issue of second homes. In addition, he was working with the Democratic Services Team to set up a forum for the Town and Parish Councils to feed in their views. He wanted to find the right solution for North Norfolk. Cllr Cushing said taking part in the debate was a crucial start to taking positive action. Cllr Butikofer replied that the press did not always fully reflect comments. She said that North Norfolk was hugely impacted by this problem. All options should be thoroughly explored and it must be done in the right way.

Cllr Cushing said that he wished to raise a process issue with the Chairman regarding Portfolio Holder reports. He said that the session during this meeting was a good example of how the current process did not work. Cabinet members gave wordy updates and responses and soaked up the allocated time, removing the opportunity for members to hold Cabinet members to account. The Leader replied that the Constitution Working Party was reviewing the matter but she wanted to remind members that they could contact portfolio holders at any time and ask a question. They did not have to wait until Full Council. Cllr Gay confirmed that the

Constitution Working Party would consider this matter at the next meeting.

The Chairman advised Cllr Hayman that the session was now out of time and whether his question could be submitted in writing. Cllr Hayman said that it related to the matter that he had raised during 'Apologies for Absence' which had been ruled out. The Leader replied that if Cllr Hayman was referring to the attendance of two members on a training course, then she could confirm that the Council had not paid for their places on the course.

Cllr J Stenton asked about section 106 monies and whether members could get access to the data relating to this. Cllr Toye replied that he was happy to share this.

92 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET 06 SEPTEMBER 2021

1. Outturn Report 2020/21 (Period 12 Budget Monitoring report)

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr S Butikofer and

RESOLVED to approve

- a) The provisional outturn position for the General Fund revenue account for 2020/21;
- b) The transfers to and from reserves as detailed within the report (and appendix C) along with the corresponding updates to the 2021/22 budget;
- c) Allocate the surplus of £752,223 to the Delivery Plan Reserve;
- d) The financing of the 2020/21 capital programme as detailed within the report and at Appendix D;
- e) The balance on the General Reserve of £2.326 million;
- f) The updated capital programme for 2021/22 to 2024/25 and scheme financing as outlined within the report and detailed at Appendix E;
- g) The outturn position in respect of the Prudential Indicators for 2020/21 as detailed in Appendix F and;
- h) The roll-forward requests as outline in Appendix H are approved.

2. Treasury Management Annual Report and Prudential Indicators for 2020/21

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr S Butikofer and

RESOLVED to approve

The Treasury Management Annual report and Prudential Indicators for 2020/21.

3. Debt Recovery 2020/2021

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr S Butikofer and

RESOLVED to approve

The Debt Recovery Annual Report 2020/2021

93 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cllr N Dixon, said that the committee had no further recommendations to Council.

94 EMPLOYMENT AND APPEALS COMMITTEE - MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chairman invited the Chief Executive to introduce this item. He began by saying that the report set out how the Council's governance arrangements regarding the appointment and discipline of statutory officers would be strengthened. He explained that the Employment & Appeals Committee was a formal committee that reported direct to Council. Guidance regarding new procedures had been issued in 2019 and the Chief Executive had reviewed the Council's arrangements with the HR Manager and the Monitoring Officer to ensure that they were fully compliant. He said that he wished to propose a slight change to recommendation 2 – in that the reference to 'pool' would be replaced with 'substitutes'. He emphasised that by appointing additional substitutes, any issues regarding conflicts of interest and the need to establish a separate appeals panel, would be addressed.

Cllr T FitzPatrick referred to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee as set out in Appendix 2. He queried what would happen if the Chairman or Vice-Chairman were not present at a meeting of the Employment & Appeals Committee what would happen. The Chief Executive replied that Cllr Seward was appointed as Chairman of the Committee at the Annual meeting of Council on 26th May. There was not a Vice-Chairman at present. He said that he would address the issue raised by Cllr FitzPatrick, suggesting if the Chairman was not present or had a conflict of interest then the Vice-Chairman could chair the meeting. If they were not present then the committee could elect from the floor.

It was proposed by Cllr S Butikofer, seconded by Cllr P Heinrich and

RESOLVED

1. To agree the revised terms of reference for the Employment & Appeals Committee
2. To nominate 5 members to be appointed to the committee and 10 substitute members, and all those appointed to undertake appropriate training.

95 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

96 OPPOSITION BUSINESS

97 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION

98 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

99 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 7.28 pm.

Chairman

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