

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Monday, 29 November 2021 at the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

Mrs W Fredericks
Mrs A Fitch-Tillett
Mr R Kershaw
Mr E Seward

Mrs S Bütikofer (Chair)
Ms V Gay
Mr N Lloyd
Mr J Toye

Members also attending:

Mr A Brown
Mr C Cushing
Mr N Dixon
Dr V Holliday
Mrs E Withington

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive, Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services and Governance Officer - Scrutiny

Apologies for Absence:

Miss L Shires

168 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 01 November were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

169 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None received.

170 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

171 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

172 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

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

173 MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET WORKING PARTIES

RESOLVED

To receive the draft minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Working Party for Projects, held on 20th October 2021.

174 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman invited Cllr N Dixon, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, to introduce this item. He began by saying the Tree Planting Strategy had been considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 10th November. He said that the committee saw the strategy as the first step in a lengthy process, which included the ongoing maintenance of trees that were planted. The Committee had agreed that planting hedgerows was integral to the strategy and should therefore be reflected in the title.

Cllr Dixon said that the second recommendation reflected a wider discussion by the committee on building on and then broadening the ambitions of the tree planting strategy. It was felt that a biodiversity strategy could be developed in the future to reflect the importance and value of the ecosystems in the District which were dependent on peat, saltmarsh and seaweed.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Cllr N Lloyd, thanked Cllr Dixon for his comments. He said that the strategy was an overarching document under which a range of different methods and activities sat – including community orchards, mini forests and natural regeneration. He went on to say that it was unfortunate that the Climate & Environmental Policy Manager had not had the opportunity to present the strategy to the committee as she could have picked up on some of the points raised. He said that biodiversity was a key issue and that Cabinet supported its promotion but that wanted to focus on delivering the Corporate Plan objectives initially. He concluded by saying that the strategy covered all of the aspects raised by the committee, including hedgerows in some detail and he therefore did not feel that the title needed to specify this.

It was proposed by Cllr N Lloyd, seconded by Cllr R Kershaw and

RESOLVED

1. That the Strategy already reflected the key concerns raised by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and that there was no need to change the title to include hedgerows.
2. That consideration be given to developing a separate biodiversity strategy, with special reference to ecosystems dependent on peat, salt marsh and seaweed, at a future date.

175 LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Cllr J Toye, Portfolio Holder for Planning, introduced this item. He said that this was the third and final consultation on the Council's Local Plan. He explained that the process for consultation for this stage of the Plan was regulated and must also comply with an adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). He said that the report was coming straight to Cabinet for approval as officers wanted to ensure that the tight timescale was maintained. The Planning Policy & Built Heritage

Working Party would consider the proposals at their meeting on 6th December.

The Chairman of the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party, Cllr A Brown, said that this was a public consultation and it was a limited legal process which allowed comment on soundness and compliance only. It was not another opportunity for the public to comment on wider issues such as the site allocations.

It was proposed by Cllr J Toye, seconded by Cllr V Gay and

RESOLVED

That subject to Working Party endorsement of Plan content in December, Cabinet resolves to agree the Communications & Engagement Plan as the basis for conducting Regulation 19 public consultation on the Draft Local Plan and supporting documents.

Reason for the decision:

To expedite the preparation and adoption of a new Local Plan for the District.

176 PUBLIC CONVENIENCE INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Cllr E Seward, Portfolio Holder for Assets, introduced this item. He said that he wished to propose the following amendment to the third recommendation:

‘Request that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertake further work to develop and embed the draft strategy which will include evidence collection and engagement as outlined in the draft strategy. Further, that Cabinet be advised of the scope of the Committee’s work, progress and recommendations’

Cllr Seward explained that replacing ‘task’ with ‘request’ reflected that the role of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was separate to the executive functions of the Council.

Cllr Seward said that the Council was committed to providing public toilets across the District. They played an important role in supporting tourism, local businesses and residents. He said that it had been reported that up to 14m people in the UK suffered from urinary problems and access to public toilets was crucial.

Cllr Seward explained that refurbishment and remodelling work had already been completed on toilets in Sheringham, Bacton and Walcott and a changing places facility had been installed at the North Norfolk Information Centre in Cromer with further facilities scheduled for Stearman’s Yard, Wells and Queen’s Road, Fakenham. He said that the cost to the Council of providing such a key provision was substantial, with the net overall budget for 2021/22 being £730k. To ensure that the Council’s ambitious programme could be achieved, a further £500k was required to refurbish the toilets at Sheringham Leas and to replace the toilets in Victoria Street car park in North Walsham. He added that the public consultation for the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone had shown that there was demand for better toilet provision in the town.

Cllr Seward said that the Corporate Plan set out the ambition of a ‘changing places’ facility in every town in the District. This was on track to be achieved – either by NNDC or in conjunction with a partner. He added that since 2018, £1.2m had been spent on the provision of new toilets in North Norfolk. He then referred members to

sections 4.5 and 4.6 of the report which highlighted that the Council had expressed an interest in the government programme for 'changing places'. At least £40k should be forthcoming from this application process.

Cllr Seward then explained that the government had become concerned that councils were having to pay business rates on public conveniences. Something which discouraged many local authorities from retaining their toilets. For the current financial year, the cost of business rates for NNDC's public toilets was £139k. Even when business rates relief was applied, £89K (64% of the total) was still payable as relief was only received where they were the main / only building on site and most of the toilets were located on car parks. In conclusion, Cllr Seward said that the Council was bucking the national trend. Since 2010, one in seven public toilets had been closed and there were 37 local authority areas where there was no public toilet provision.

The Chairman invited members to speak:

Cllr Gay said that it should be noted that the Council did not have a statutory obligation to provide public conveniences but chose to do so. Cllr Toye agreed, saying that many people did not understand this. He said that he was pleased that the Council was making North Norfolk more accessible.

Cllr E Withington said that as local member for Sheringham, she welcomed the strategy. The toilets in the town were old and it was hard to maintain standards. IT was time for a refresh and to improve accessibility.

Cllr J Rest. Local member for Fakenham, said that the town was fortunate to have three sets of public toilets and they were well used and valued. He said residents appreciated the investment in improving the existing provision.

Cllr V Holliday referred to the £30k of funding allocated for evidence gathering and asked for more information on this. She also asked for clarification on the Serco cost. She said that when she had approached them in relation to the public toilets in Cley, the costs had been prohibitive and she wondered whether alternative contractors had been considered. Cllr Seward replied that the £30k was allocated to support Overview & Scrutiny Committee in their evidence gathering and the undertaking of a comprehensive study. He said that there had been some previous data relating to 9 of the Council's toilets but it would be necessary to undertake a much wider piece of work. It would also be beneficial if research could be undertaken regarding what was being done in other parts of the country.

Cllr C Cushing said that he endorsed the proposals. It was human right to have access to toilet facilities and generated a cost benefit to the District regarding tourism. He asked when the outcome of the bid for government funding would be known. The Director of Resources replied that he had been advised that the Government would be considering the bids in the coming months. In response to Cllr Holliday's question regarding Serco, the Director of Resources said that as an authority there was a requirement to engage with contractors who could support provision across the whole of the District. In addition, such provision was also packaged with the wider waste contract to provide continuity of service.

Cllr N Dixon said that as Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee, he welcomed the amended wording to the third recommendation as it better reflected the working relationship between the committee and the Executive. He added that the committee would want to engage in a constructive way. He then referred to the £30k of funding for evidence gathering and asked how this would be spent. Cllr Seward replied that it was up to the committee how they decided to approach this piece of work. It was to

ensure that there was financial support in place to assist, if required. As he mentioned previously, it could cover the cost of any surveys and data gathering. The Head of Resources added that there were a number of areas within the draft strategy which required additional information and officers were keen to ensure that a sound evidence base could be drawn upon. He said that the funding would enable this to be undertaken properly and support the aspirations set out in the strategy. Information that could be obtained about the Council's assets and a consultation with residents regarding what they wanted and needed from these facilities, would support better planning. Cllr Dixon thanked him for the clarification and said that he was supportive of an objective, evidence based approach.

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr J Toye and

RESOLVED to

1. Adopt the principles contained within the draft Strategy document contained within Appendix A;
2. Approve a provisional budget of £30k to support with the evidence gathering recommended within the Strategy, to be funded from the Invest to Save reserve;
3. Request that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertake further work to develop and embed the draft strategy which will include evidence collection and engagement as outlined in the draft strategy. Further, that Cabinet be advised of the scope of the Committee's work, progress and recommendations and
4. Recommend to Full Council that further capital provision of £500,000 is allocated from capital receipts (to include any potential grant funding) to undertake improvements to facilities in Sheringham and North Walsham, to include provision of Changing Places facilities. These facilities will be delivered by the end of the 2022 calendar year.

Reasons for the decision:

To provide a more strategic approach to the management and investment off these important assets whilst continuing the capital investment improvement plan.

177 MANAGING PERFORMANCE QUARTER 2 2021/2022

The Leader, Cllr S Butikofer, introduced this item. She said that strong progress had been made and that things were now moving forwards at pace. She added that additional reporting information was now available to sit alongside the performance report and made it easier for Members to see exactly where progress was being made.

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

RESOLVED

To approve the amendments to reporting as outlined in paragraph 3.3 of the report

178 TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF YEARLY REPORT 2021/2022

Cllr E Seward, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets, introduced this item. He said that this was a standard, cyclical report that would be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee before approval by Full Council. Cllr Seward said that the cost of

the Reef Leisure Centre and the waste vehicles had been paid for without long term borrowing being required. Short-term borrowing was also down too.

It was proposed by Cllr E Seward, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED

That the Council be asked to RESOLVE that The Treasury Management Half Yearly Report 2021/22 is approved

Reason for the decision

Approval by Council demonstrates compliance with the Codes.

179 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

180 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 10.35am

Chairman