

## CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

9 February 2022

### **COUNCILLOR E SEWARD - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, ASSETS, LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND REVENUES**

For the period November to December 2021

#### **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.**

##### ESTATES

Disposal of assets – The sale of Fair Meadow House, Itteringham has completed for £770,000. 7-9 Bridewell Street, Walsingham sale has fallen through and is being remarketed. The first phase of bidders due diligence for Parklands sale has been undertaken with an interview process as the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase.

With regard to acquisitions, there is completion of a 4-bedroom property for temporary accommodation on behalf of the Housing team. Two public open space transfers are in progress.

Vacant Properties: Marketing of The Cedars, North Walsham, Industrial units at North Walsham has generated a number of enquiries that are being considered. Proposals at North Lodge Park for use of the tennis courts are supported.

Marrams, Cromer – work being undertaken to consider additional options alongside a review of bowls provision.

The Estates Team is now supporting the Housing Strategy team with managing shared equity transactions, (sale, acquisitions and stair casing).

Lease – Oddfellows Hall, Sheringham support to move forward with regularising the current arrangements.

##### REVENUES SERVICE UPDATES

Grants – Revenues continue to do reconciliation returns to government for each grant scheme and monthly grant returns for the Additional Restrictions Grant (“ARG”) Scheme.

Council Tax collection on 23 November is 72.71% against 30 November target of 72.35%, excess collection over target of £296k.

Council tax cash collected on 23 November is £59.956m compared to last year £56.804m which is an increase of £3.152m.

Non-Domestic (Business) Rates (NDR) collection on 23 November is 72.98% against 30 November target of 75.25%, a shortfall in collection of £461k. This deficit is due to the NDR debit raise caused by post Budget changes and these figures not being at end of the month.

Non-Domestic (Business) Rates (NDR) cash collected on 23 November is £15.141m compared to last year £10.179m which is an increase of £4.962m.

## LEGAL

Eastlaw continue to provide legal services to the Council and to some external clients from the public sector.

Lease of The Reef, Sheringham – with Everyone Active solicitor for final comments. Considering grant for a Licence for occupation if Lease not completed shortly.

Lease of Sheringham Little Theatre – comments back from Tenant, Estates reviewing these.

Blue Sky Café, Cromer – draft new Lease with Tenant's solicitor to review.

Public Open Space Transfer, Market Lane, Wells (Hopkins Homes) – Draft Transfer and enquiries with Hopkins solicitors for reply.

Rectory Farm, Aldborough, pig unit re-development – Secretary of State has screened the application out as not being Environmental Impact Assessment ("EIA") development, position regarding Habitat Regulation Assessment ("HRA") under review together with potential enforcement action for current activities.

## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES:

A new member of the team started on 13<sup>th</sup> December whose main role is to support the regulatory committees – Licensing and Planning.

Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee visited the new Reef Leisure Centre on 10<sup>th</sup> November. This was a project that they had scrutinised in the preceding months and they welcomed the opportunity to see it as it neared completion.

The North Norfolk District Council Town and Parish Council Forum was held remotely on 29<sup>th</sup> November, with clerks from several councils attending.

An initial meeting has been held with the new County Officer at NALC to explore ways of working together to improve support to town and parish councils across the District and address any recurring issues.

## FINANCE

The finance team are drawing together the information with regard to the Zero Based Budgeting project, and has undertaken a public consultation in relation to the draft proposals ahead of pre-Scrutiny in January and ultimately the final budget agreement and council tax setting in February.

Work is also ongoing in relation to the audit of the Council's statement of accounts and also the cyclical internal audit review of the finance function.

The finance team is finalising the budget papers and Medium Term Financial Strategy, which are on Committee agendas for February. The public consultation on the proposals closed on 14<sup>th</sup> January.

Work is also ongoing in relation to the audit of the Council's statement of accounts and also the cyclical internal audit review of the finance function.

## **2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.**

### ESTATES

Negotiations with the Felbeck Trust to manage some surveyors pits which will result in up to 2,000 trees being planted.

Advertising and sponsorship report being prepared with a number of opportunities that the Council could take forward.

### REVENUES

Following the successful presentation to Cabinet members for two level 3 Business Administration Apprentices, there has been shortlisting for the two positions.

Working on improvements to automate part of the processing of council tax valuation officer schedules.

Improving the 14-day notice (post court letter) to make it clearer for customers and changing the process following a business process review to help improve collection and reduce staff hours.

Creating a list of online forms for IT to create that would improve speed of application for customers and efficiencies within revenues.

Updating the Non-Domestic (Business) Rates (NDR) Discretionary Rate Relief Policy. Preparing for year-end/annual billing and the latest announcements to reliefs by the chancellor.

Starting to prepare for the NNDR1 government return.

## LEGAL

North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) draft offer letter to owners being reviewed together with procedure for securing grant monies.

## DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Upcoming training sessions for members will include Licensing and induction training for the newly elected District member for Stalham ward.

## FINANCE

A project is to commence with a view to updating the finance software system.

A number of reports are due to be considered over the following months as follows:

- Budget Monitoring Report Period 10
- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/2023 onwards and 2022/23 Budget/Council Tax setting
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Capital Strategy
- Investment Strategy