

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Review of Cabinet Agenda** held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on **Thursday 4 January 2018** at **10.00 am** when there were present:

	Mr D G Harrison – Chairman	
Mr A D Adams	Mr J J Emsell	Mr G K Nurden
Mrs C H Bannock	Mr G Everett	Mr V B Tapp
Mr D Buck	Mr R F Grady	
Mrs J K Copplestone	Mrs L H Hemsall	

Mr Leggett also attended the meeting for its duration.

Also in attendance were the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer, Head of Finance and Revenue Services, Head of Planning, Head of Economic Development, Head of Corporate Resources, Corporate Finance Manager, Environmental Protection Manager, Overview and Scrutiny Research Officer and the Committee Officer (JO).

### **117 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Peck, Mr Ray-Mortlock and Mrs Vincent.

### **118 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **119 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman advised Members that they had been invited to an informal gathering with Members of South Norfolk Council together with senior officers from both authorities on Monday 29 January 2018 to discuss the shared services Feasibility Study in an informal setting.

Members were also invited to a Prevention Matters Workshop on Thursday 1 February 2018.

## **CABINET REPORTS**

### **120 BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2018-2021**

The report presented a summary of Broadland's 2018/19 Budget for net

revenue and capital expenditure as well as the schedule of proposed fees and charges for the year.

The Head of Finance and Revenue Services emphasised that the figures might be subject to change prior to the February Council, but they were currently consistent with the forecasts for future years' funding.

The predicted level of New Homes Bonus reflected a prudent estimate and no amounts had been included after October 2018, as the scheme was likely to be reformed.

The budget also took account of a rise in inflation to three percent to reflect contractual costs, income and supplier price inflation.

The report proposed the following Council Tax options for consideration:

- (1) Option 1 showed a rise in Band D Council Tax of £5.00 each year from 2018/19.
- (2) Option 2 showed no rise in Band D Council Tax for the year 2019/20 only, but allowed for an increase in Special Expenses of £5.00 in that year.
- (3) Option 3 showed no rise in Band D Council Tax in 2018/19 and 2019/20 but allowed for an increase in Special Expenses of £5.00 in 2018/19.

A public consultation had taken place via the Council's website and from the 27 responses it had been found that the majority were in favour of a rise in Council Tax in order to protect the key services provided by the Council.

Members were asked to note the pressures on services throughout the Council and in particular those relating to Universal Credit and Housing Benefit changes.

The key assumptions made in drawing up budget estimates were that inflation would follow predictions made by the Bank of England and that Broadland would continue to provide the same level of services as at present with funding set at the lowest predicted amount.

The draw on the Council General Reserves was approx. £2m for Council Tax option 1, rising to £3.1m for option 2.

The Medium Term Financial Plan included provision for an average uplift of 2 percent on salary costs in respect of inflation and Performance Related Pay (PRP) rises each year.

A remuneration consultancy would provide the Council with recommended cost of living increases each year and should their recommendation for 2018 be close to the Local Government Employers offer of 2 percent this would be considered. This did not include a decision on the PRP award. An additional 1 percent salary increase for the Council's staff equated to approximately £76,500, (including pensions and National Insurance contributions). This was not reflected in the draft budget.

During 2017/18, Broadland would receive a grant of £752,000 in relation to Business Rates reliefs. This sum would be earmarked for the Business Rates reserve to address any loss of income through appeals.

There was a Bridge Maintenance Reserve, but this was not sufficient to cover the costs of the required maintenance works (see Minute 121). Cabinet would be asked to approve a proposal to provide £120,000 per annum each year from 2018/19 to 2020/21 for bridge maintenance.

In response to a query regarding the maintenance of Reedham Quay, the Head of Finance and Revenue Services confirmed that if major work was required the Council would seek external funds or partners to assist it.

Members also noted that the prospect of Internal Drainage Boards taking over management of stretches of river from the Environment Agency and increasing the levy to do so could have a detrimental effect on the finances of the Council and residents across the district as a whole. In the event this happened then any additional costs would need to be met from reserves in the first year and then budgeted for in subsequent years.

The Vice-Chairman noted that the Council had maintained substantial reserves for a long period through efficiencies and savings and was likely to continue to do so in the future.

In answer to a query about the propose increase in the Special Expenses in Council Tax options 2 and 3, it was confirmed that the increase would be for one year only.

### **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

Options (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)

- (1) amendments to be included in the Budget for 2018/19 (Appendix C);
- (2) proposed changes in discretionary fees and charges (Appendix D);
- (3) the capital programme for 2018/19 to 2020/21 (Appendix E);

- (4) to select option 1 for the provisional Band D Council Tax level for 2018/19;
- (5) General Reserves draw for 2017 to 2021 (Paragraph 5.3 of the report).

### **121 COUNCIL OWNED BRIDGES ON THE BURE VALLEY AND MARRIOTT'S WAY ROUTES**

The Council owned sections of two former railway lines: the Bure Valley Railway and a section of Marriott's Way, which was used as a long distance permissive footpath, bridleway and cycle route.

The Council owned 24 bridges and five culverts along these routes and a number of the bridges were in need of major repair. The report sought an increase in the capital budget for bridge repairs for this purpose.

Legal advice had been taken and it had been confirmed that the Council had a contractual liability to maintain the bridges.

There was an annual budget of £7,900 to carry out inspections and £10,000 to carry out minor repairs. In addition there was an annual budget of £20,000 for major repairs which was automatically carried forward to fund larger schemes. Funds currently set aside for this purpose totalled £40,000.

Inspection reports received within the last few years had reported serious defects and major repairs had been identified in order to safeguard the bridges into the future.

It was therefore proposed to increase the budget for major bridge works to £120,000 pa from April 2018 for a period of five years. After this period the budget would be reappraised.

It was noted that one of the bridges was in North Norfolk, but had been built by Broadland, so there was unlikely to be any money forthcoming from North Norfolk to maintain it.

Concerns were expressed that the Council was maintaining bridges mainly for the benefit of the Bure Valley Railway. Members were also advised that any money from the eventual sale of the railway by the Council could be used to offset the cost for the maintenance of the bridges.

A Member observed that maintenance costs required from the Council on the Bure Valley Railway bridges would far exceed the proceeds of the railway sale, which suggested that the Bure Valley Railway had obtained a very good deal from the Council.

A Member also commented that tourism was important for the district and the Bure Valley Railway was a major tourist attraction to Broadland.

### **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

Option (1)

to increase the budget for major bridge repairs to £120,000 pa for a period of 5 years from April 2018.

### **122 BROADLAND AND SOUTH NORFOLK – COLLABORATIVE WORKING OPPORTUNITIES**

Broadland and South Norfolk Councils had agreed to develop a Feasibility Study to explore sharing services. The paper outlined the opportunity for the early adoption of a shared Planning Management Team to support the delivery of a planning service at both councils.

The rationale for undertaking the Feasibility Study was to drive forward economic growth in Broadland and South Norfolk and strengthen the profile of Greater Norwich as a place in which to invest; to provide the capacity and resilience within the organisations and to address the challenges around financial sustainability given the uncertainty around local government funding.

Whilst the Feasibility Study was being developed it had been agreed to explore any potential shared arrangements as they presented themselves. South Norfolk would shortly have a vacancy in a senior planning post, which presented an opportunity for a shared Planning Management Team.

The two councils already had similar structures for the planning service and a collaborative history around strategic planning, a 'shared planning service' would therefore appear to present a natural 'fit' to the rationale for undertaking the collaborative working project and provide an early indicator as to the potential success of the wider project.

It was proposed to combine the planning teams from Broadland and South Norfolk together, under a joint management team comprising the following three posts: Head of Planning; Development Manager and Spatial Planning Manager.

It was suggested that the proposal be an interim arrangement lasting initially for up to 12 months.

The next stage would be for the Head of Planning and the managers to review team structures and identify if there were any opportunities for expanding service delivery, driving efficiencies and delivering further savings.

The service would continue to be delivered from the respective council offices. The autonomy of the respective Planning Committees would remain as at present.

South Norfolk Council's Scrutiny Committee had looked at the report yesterday and endorsed all four recommendations subject to the following amendments:

Recommendation 3 should include reference to a six month review by the Scrutiny Committee and in recommendation 4 that the delegation to officers should be limited to opportunities regarding shared posts where vacancies occur and other contract opportunities.

It was confirmed that the reviews of the interim arrangement could be fed into Broadland's Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well.

Concerns were expressed over a possible dilution of the planning service due to these arrangements as well as additional costs to Broadland's Council Tax Payers. However the Head of Planning reassured Members that there would be a planned transition period as the new arrangements were put in place and no reduction in the level of service would be accepted.

It was also confirmed that the proposed planning collaboration tied in well with the overall focus of the Feasibility Study for a strategic emphasis on housing and economic growth in both districts.

The Chief Executive emphasised that there was only one vacancy being filled at South Norfolk by the proposal as the Planning Director had left recently. Also that the increased costs set out in the report would cease in March 2018.

In response to a suggestion that no changes should be made until the Feasibility Study was concluded it was confirmed that the proposal was an inherent part of the study from which valuable learning could be taken. It was also confirmed that even if wider collaborative opportunities did not develop from the Feasibility Study it was still possible for a permanent shared Planning Service to be approved independently.

### **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

Options (1, 2, 3 and 4)

- (1) agree the introduction of an interim shared planning management team between Broadland District Council and South Norfolk Council on the basis set out in the report;

- (2) agree that the new structure and post holders be in place by 22 January 2018; and
- (3) review the impact of the interim arrangements 3, 6, 9 and 12 months after being established. Reviews will be taken back to the informal joint member groups at each reviewing stage *and to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the 6 month stage*. After 9 months, both Councils to consider whether as a result of the wider Feasibility Study outcomes the arrangement is made permanent and a formal recruitment process is undertaken;
- (4) agree that officers be delegated authority to pursue other early opportunities *regarding shared posts where vacancies arise and other contract opportunities* without the need to go through the formal Member governance process;
- (5) *that the Head of Planning provide Members with a clear plan of the arrangements for the respective Planning Departments over the next 12 months.*

### 123 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

#### RESOLVED

to exclude the Press and public from the meeting for the remaining business because otherwise, information which was exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 would be disclosed to them.

### 124 UPDATE REPORT ON NEWS JOINT VENTURE COMPANY

The report provided information on the financial performance of the NEWS Joint Venture Company.

Following discussion; (as detailed in the exempt Minutes).

#### RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

Options (1, 2 and 3)

- (1) to note the contents of the report; and
- (2) to endorse the continuing progress made by NEWS to provide a cost effective way for this Council to process recycling it collects;

- (3) *to consider options for providing a more constructive challenge through the District Council Board Member and the Officer Liaison Board.*

### **125 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – EXEMPT MINUTES**

A letter from the Managing Director of NORSE in response to the two main issues raised by the NEWS Time and Task Limited Panel was received.

Following discussion; (as detailed in the exempt Minutes).

#### **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

to note the response.

*The meeting closed at 12.10 pm.*