

Minutes of a meeting of **Cabinet** held by video link on **Tuesday 8 December 2020** at **6.00pm** when there were present:

Cllr S A Vincent – Policy (Chairman)

Portfolio holders:

Cllr J K Copplestone	Economic Development
Cllr J J Emsell	Transformation and Organisational Development
Cllr L H Hempsall	Planning
Cllr J Leggett	Environmental Excellence
Cllr T M Mancini-Boyle	Finance
Cllr F Whymark	Housing and Wellbeing

Cllr T Adams, Cllr N Brennan and Cllr S Riley also attended the meeting.

Also in attendance were the Managing Director, Director Place, Director Resources, Director People and Communities, Chief of Staff, Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer), Assistant Director Individuals and Families, Senior Finance Business Partner and the Democratic Services Officers (LA and JO).

#### **167 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Minute No &amp; Heading</b>	<b>Nature of Interest</b>
Cllr J Copplestone	204 – Budget Update 2 <sup>nd</sup> Wave Covid Funding.	Owner of a business in receipt of a Local Restriction Support Grant.

#### **168 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

#### **169 REPRESENTATIONS FROM NON CABINET MEMBERS**

The Chairman agreed that, at his discretion, all non-Cabinet Members in attendance be allowed to join the debate at the relevant point of the proceedings on request.

**170 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Cabinet received the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 November 2020.

Minute No: 200 – Future of Community Grants – Call-In of Cabinet Decision

**Referred back to Cabinet by the Committee**

*To reconsider introducing changes to the member-led ward grant system to utilise underspend in February each year.*

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development advised the meeting that the request by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been considered, but it had been determined that it would be too difficult to administer and adjudicate a mechanism for the allocation of any remaining underspend.

Instead it was proposed that from 1 March each year any underspend in the Member Grant Scheme should be donated to the Community Group Start-up Grant Scheme.

In response, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee acknowledged that this would be a means of utilising any underspend, but he still felt that allocating it to Members would mean that it could be used in a more targeted way.

**RESOLVED**

That from the 1 March each year any unspent funding from the Member Grant Scheme would be donated to the Community Group Start-up Grant Scheme.

**171 BUDGET UPDATE – 2ND WAVE COVID FUNDING**

The Director Resources outlined the report, which requested that additional contingency funding be released to support the continuing response to Covid-19, whilst maintaining existing Council services.

In preparation for the potential increase in demand on service in the next few months Officers had undertaken a review of the Council's state of readiness and had identified that a number of additional staff would be required to meet this challenge.

The Director People and Communities advised the meeting that the additional demand on the Housing Department and the increase in the complexity of

cases caused by the economic downturn resulting from Covid-19 could require two additional full time Housing Solution Officers for up to 18 months to maintain services.

Similarly, to meet a potential surge in call volumes to the Community Hub five full time officers could be required for up to six months.

Two additional full time Community Connectors to support community capacity in response to the pandemic could also be required for 18 months. These Officers would be supporting isolated and shielding individuals who might not know how to access assistance and would also reduce pressure on the Housing Department, whilst forging relationships with partner organisations to provide support to vulnerable residents.

The Chairman suggested that some of the proposals seemed to resemble a redesign of service, which appeared to be beyond what Cabinet were being asked to agree.

In response, the Managing Director confirmed that the proposals were not a redesign of service, but aimed to ensure it was a service that was fit for purpose under the current circumstances. The proposal was for a budget provision that would only be used if needed. For example, if the Christmas easing of restrictions led to an upsurge in infection rates and a subsequent increase in demand on Council services. It would also give the Council the ability to stimulate the local economy and bounce back from Covid-19 more strongly.

Members were asked to note that a significant amount of the proposals could be delivered through existing Government Grant, but it had been decided to bring them to Members in advance of any second wave so they would have a clear picture of where would be the areas of greatest demand on the Council going forward and to have the means in place to make a rapid response to the address this demand.

Concerns were expressed that the report needed more work to explain how the additional resource fitted in with the requirements of the Council more clearly. Further concerns were raised about the possible impact it could have upon the savings that could be generated by collaboration and if short term contracts could turn into full time employment.

Members confirmed that they were comfortable with recommendations 1 and 2, but would prefer to have more information brought back to Cabinet before determining recommendations 3 and 4.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commended the decision to defer recommendations 3 and 4, which was broadly in line with the views of the Committee, who also had concerns regarding governance of

the Council Chamber IT project and that other IT projects could be delayed by it.

In response, the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer) advised Members that the current legislation for remote Council meetings was in place until 7 May and this had proved to be very successful with much better attended meetings and greater public awareness of Council activities, so it was hoped that this would be extended. She also reassured Members that the Council Chamber IT project would not delay any of the major IT projects from being delivered on time.

## **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL**

### **To agree:**

- (1) To increase the general 20/21 Covid 19 emergency budgets by £250,000 to provide additional resource to support the Council's response to Covid 19. To be funded by the Government's Covid grant.
- (2) To increase the housing 20/21 Covid 19 emergency budget by £50,000 to meet the ongoing need for homelessness support. To be funded by the Government's Covid grant.

### **To defer a decision on the following:**

- (3) That £350,000 should be including in the 21/22 budgets to help cover the cost of responding to the Covid 19 pandemic, to be funded from the Council's general reserve.
- (4) To increase the BDC 20/21 Information Technology Capital Budget by £50,000, to improve the technology in the council chamber.

### **Reasons for decision**

To maintain services and support residents and businesses in the District and to seek more information before making a final decision on some elements of the proposals.

## **172 BUSINESS RATES POOLING**

The Director Resources introduced the report, which sought agreement to continue with Business Rates Pooling for 2021/22.

The best estimate for the Norfolk wide pool in 2021/22 suggested that an additional £3,873 could be generated by pooling, although there was some

uncertainty and some local authorities would only need a slight negative impact before they fell into a 'safety net' position, which would adversely affect the gain generated by pooling.

There was also the risk from the NHS legal appeal for Business Rates relief, which could have a significant impact on local authority finances, if successful.

The Leader noted that pooling would only have to be agreed in principle at this stage and a more informed decision could be made once the provisional local government finance settlement was known.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance noted that this was usually a Portfolio Holder decision, but was brought to Cabinet because of the increase risk created by the pandemic.

## **RESOLVED**

to agree:

- (1) In principle to continue with Business Rates Pooling for 2021/22.
- (2) That the Assistant Director Finance, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance, is authorised to withdraw BDC from the Norfolk pool, if latest modelling undertaken by the Norfolk authorities no longer demonstrates a financial benefit from pooling.

## **Reasons for decision**

To continue with the Business Rates Pooling, whilst monitoring it closely to assess if it remained of benefit to the District.

## **173 REVIEW OF EARMARKED RESERVES**

The Senior Finance Business Partner introduced the report which recommended a number of changes to the Council's earmarked reserves.

It was proposed that the Bridge Maintenance Reserve be separated into the following two reserves, to make it easier to identify the monies attributed to each element:

- Marriott's Way Reserve with an allocation of £60,000
- Bure Valley Railway Reserve with an allocation of £270,000.

The additions to the following Reserves were proposed:

- IT Reserve – an additional £1.3m.
- Broadland Growth Reserve – an additional £5m.

The creation of the following Reserves was proposed:

- Refuse Services – £3m.
- Food Innovation Centre Reserve – £1.86m.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance informed Members that this was the report that had been brought to the November Cabinet with the additional information requested and the separation of the Bridge Maintenance Reserve, to make it easier to identify each element.

The Leader noted the increase in the Reserve for Broadland Growth, which would help with the housing shortage in the District, much of which would be affordable housing. He also welcomed the new Reserve for the Food Innovation Centre, which would be a very exciting project for the Norfolk economy.

Members were advised that there were a number of projects that had been agreed on, but not yet completed and that the recommendation sought to allow the Assistant Director Economic Growth, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development to agree additional economic growth projects using the funding not yet allocated to projects.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development advised Cabinet that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recommended that the Economic Success Panel should be informed of any upcoming projects funded in this way, but that she considered that these sums were too small to be considered by the Panel.

The Leader noted that there were other means of keeping Members informed about how this money was spent.

### **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL**

The following changes to the Council's Reserves:

- (1) To separate the Bridge Maintenance Reserve into two reserves.
  - a. One to be named Marriott's way with an allocation of £60,000
  - b. One to be named Bure Valley Railway with an allocation of £270,000.

- (2) The addition to the following Reserves:
  - a. IT Reserve - £1.3m.
  - b. Broadland Growth Reserve - £5m.
- (3) The creation of the following Reserves:
  - a. Refuse Services - £3m.
  - b. Food Innovation Centre Reserve - £1.86m.

Cabinet to confirm that:

The Assistant Director Economic Growth, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, has the authority to agree additional economic growth projects to be funded from the Economic Success Fund.

**Reasons for decision**

The report was a factual account.

*The meeting closed at 7.02pm.*