

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cabinet** held by video link on **Tuesday 16 June 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 S Catchpole, Cllr G Nurden, Cllr S Riley and Cllr K Vincent also attended the meeting for its duration.

Also in attendance were the Managing Director, Director Place, Director Resources, Chief of Staff, Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer), Assistant Director Individuals and Families, PR Manager, Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager, Policy and Partnerships Officer, Committee Officer (LH) and the Committee Officer (JO).

97 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8

Member	Minute No & Heading	Nature of Interest
Cllr J Copplestone	102 - Review of 2020/21 Budgets	In receipt of Business Support Grant. Non pecuniary interest, Bure Valley Railway runs through Ward.
Cllr J Copplestone	Armed Forces Covenant	Non pecuniary interest, Armed Forces Covenant Champion.
Cllr L Hempsall Cllr S Vincent	102 - Review of 2020/21 Budgets	Non pecuniary interest, Directors of Broadland Growth Ltd.

Cllr K Vincent	102 – Review of 2020/21 Budgets	Non pecuniary interest, spouse of a Director of Broadland Growth Ltd.
Cllr F Whymark	102 – Review of 2020/21 Budgets	Non pecuniary interest, Bure Valley Railway runs through Ward.

98 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

99 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.

100 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised Members on the views expressed by the Committee when it reviewed the Cabinet Agenda on 9 June 2020, as each item was considered.

101 ECONOMIC SUCCESS PANEL

Cabinet received the Minutes of the meeting of the Economic Success Panel held on 15 May 2020.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development advised the meeting that the Panel meeting had largely been taken up by the Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan. Members received a presentation on Operation Beacon, which was a coordinated response by Broadland, South Norfolk and Breckland Councils to the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Measures to help market towns had initially started in Aylsham, but would also be rolled out in Acle and Reepham shortly.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development drew attention to the Panel's recommendations to Cabinet and it was:

RESOLVED

1. To support Operation Beacon; the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
2. To establish a bespoke Discretionary Grant Fund; and
3. To assist residents in rural poverty access full fibre broadband through the Community Infrastructure Fund.

102 REVIEW OF 2020/21 BUDGETS

The report provided financial information on the impact of Covid-19 and the measures and proposals to mitigate the pandemic.

The Assistant Director Finance advised Cabinet that it was probable that the income budget of the Council could see a 25 percent reduction in planning fees, waste charges, land charges, Housing Benefit over payment and Council Tax recovery. This would lead to a reduction in income of £431,000 for 2020/21. Some of this income would never be recovered, whereas in areas such as planning it was expected to be delayed as opposed to lost, as developers were still keen to obtain planning permission.

It was, therefore, proposed to rebase the 2020/21 income budgets to take account of these reductions.

On top of the reduction in income Covid-19 would lead to an increase in expenditure.

The main additional costs were:

- Additional communications to residents and businesses.
- The additional costs of ensuring all homeless persons were provided with safe accommodation.
- Additional IT costs to enable effective homeworking and video conferencing and software to facilitate grant payments.

It was, therefore, propose to create a new budget of £250,000 for general Covid-19 costs and also to increase the homelessness budget by £250,000.

These budgets were based on best estimates, given the additional costs incurred during March/April.

To support the recovery of the economy, Broadland was working with South Norfolk and Breckland Councils to launch Operation Beacon to provide support to businesses. Part of this project was to provide support for the high streets and adapt them to meet social distancing restrictions. To facilitate this a £50 million Government fund had been announced of which Broadland had been allocated £116,155. If additional resources over and above this sum were needed, then a further request for funding would be made at a later date.

The Council had received a 17 percent increase in claims for Council Tax support, with new claims being received daily. It was, therefore, proposed to increase the Council Tax support budget by £224,000 to £892,000. This figure took into account the possibility that some people currently furloughed might be made redundant and eligible for Council Tax support when the furlough scheme ended.

Broadland Growth Limited, the Council's jointly owned development company remained on track to deliver between 50 to 100 dwellings per year. There was uncertainty around the impact of Covid-19 on house sales. But alternatives such as renting them out for a time to allow the housing market to recover could be considered, if necessary.

The Council had received £1.352 million in additional Government funding, to help to cover the Council's additional operating costs and lost income as a result of Covid-19.

Currently the Council had a budget of £100,000, which was considered sufficient to cover direct hardship payments to residents during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Government had also provided £637,216 to cover the cost of awarding £150 Council Tax support to all working age Council Tax Support claimants. However, there were concerns that this could soon run out and it was, therefore, recommended that an additional £100,000 be set aside to cover this cost pressure.

There also remained a likelihood that pressure would increase on the £158,116 Discretionary Housing Payment grant provided by the Department of Work and Pensions, when the embargo on evictions was lifted.

If additional resources over and above the £158,116 were needed, then a further request for funding would be made at a later date.

The Bure Valley Railway (BVR) had requested that the £30,000 rent that it paid to the Council be waived for this financial year. Prior to considering any request for funding, it was recommended that the Economic Recovery Team

look to assist the BVR develop a re-opening plan.

The Director of Place informed the meeting that he had been in contact with the owners of the BVR, who had informed him that the pandemic had placed the railway in a dire financial position. Currently, there was no clear message from the Government about when they could resume operation and they had identified 1 August 2020 as the cut-off point, beyond which it might not be viable to open for the season and redundancies would have to be made. The BVR would like to re-open as soon as possible, but social distancing and an increase in staff to monitor this would lead to increased costs and reduced income.

Cabinet noted the social and tourism benefits that the BVR brought to the District and it was suggested that the rent could be deferred until later in the year. But it was also proposed that a re-opening plan should be put in place to focus the BVR on beginning to operate again.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had reinforced the importance of broadband and she confirmed that the Programme Director of Better Broadband for Norfolk would be invited to the 22 July 2020 meeting of the Economic Success Panel to discuss improving rural broadband.

Moving on through the report the Assistant Director Finance confirmed that there were no changes proposed to the Capital Budgets.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had a funding gap of approximately £1m in the years to 2024/25. The key point to note was that the updated MTFS showed that:

- The additional Government grant had helped offset the spending pressures and lost income in 2020/21.
- The longer term financial outturn had got worse by approximately £0.5m.

It should also be noted that progressing with savings from the collaboration with South Norfolk Council, still remained an important element in the MTFS.

Cabinet was recommended to request Council to note that the 2020/21 budget remained in balance and that the small surplus of £62,000 be retained, as a contingency for any additional spending pressures. Measures to address the longer term funding gap would be considered as part of the normal budget setting cycle later in the year.

A number of actions had occurred, or were proposed, to help mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances, including:

- 97 members of staff had been redeployed to directly support Covid-19 work.
- Marketing of chargeable services such as brown bins and bulky waste collections.
- Procuring goods and services locally and ensuring payment was made as soon as possible.

In year savings included:

- Holding some vacancies, which had resulted in a £242,000 salary saving.
- A saving on the training budget of £22,000, due to a temporary reduction in training taking place.

The key risks and issues highlighted in the report were:

- The possibility of a second wave of infections, which could require a second full lockdown incurring further costs and income losses to the Council.
- Uncertainty over whether the Government would provide any more funding to help deal with the financial implications of Covid-19.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance noted that a lot of the figures in the report were estimates, and that the Council was being prudent with its finances and putting aside extra in order to act as quickly as possible if necessary.

She drew attention to the Council's activity in market towns to boost confidence in the high street and the importance of rolling this out to the whole of the District. Similarly, Broadland Growth Ltd was seeking to stimulate the local economy.

Whilst, in respect of broadband, the Council was bidding for Local Enterprise Partnership funding, as well as money from the Community Infrastructure Levy.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance also noted that many town and parish councils had significant reserves and, moreover, did not have constraints on their ability to raise income through their precepts. Therefore, she recommended that the approach recommended in the report should be endorsed

Cabinet was also advised that although there was a budget surplus for 2020/21 the longer term financial outturn was down by £0.5m over the next five years and sources of income, such as the New Homes Bonus could no longer be assumed.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee drew Members' attention to the additional recommendations made by the Committee in respect of the BVR, broadband and parish and town councils.

In response, it was noted that the further deferment of the BVR rent had been proposed and that the Economic Success Panel was to look at broadband at its next meeting on 22 July 2020. As already noted by the Portfolio Holder for Finance the approach suggested in the report in respect of town and parish councils would be recommended for endorsement.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- The proposed changes to the 20/21 income budgets, as set out in the table at paragraph 2.2.
- The proposed changes to the 20/21 expenditure budgets, as set out in the tables at paragraph 3.3 and 3.11.
- The following request for additional funding - Hardship Payments (£150 Council Tax Support) (£100,000).
- The 20/21 estimated surplus of £62,000 is retained as a contingency for any additional spending pressures.
- The proposed in year savings, as set out in paragraphs 9.4 and 9.8.

RESOLVED

1. To note the following:
 - The £116,115 received by the Council from the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund and that if additional resources over and above the £116,115 are needed, then a further request for funding will be made at a later date.
 - The impact on Broadland Growth Limited.
 - The impact on the Capital Programme.

- The impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy over the longer term.
 - The proposed mitigation actions.
2. To endorse the approach proposed in the report in respect of payment to town and parish councils (paragraph 5.27).
 3. To defer any rental payments by the Bure Valley Railway up to September 2020 and for the Economic Development Team to assist in developing a re-opening plan for the railway, prior to further consideration by Cabinet.
 4. That broadband provision should be considered at the 22 July 2020 meeting of the Economic Success Panel.

Reasons for decision

To review the 2020/21 budgets in response to the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

103 INSURANCE PROCUREMENT

The Director of Resources advised Cabinet that entering a Local Government Mutual Insurance Scheme, as agreed by Cabinet on 10 March 2020, had not been possible, as the other prospective members of the mutual had withdrawn to focus their attention on dealing with Covid-19.

The Council's current insurance contract expired on the 31 May 2020 and, therefore, it was proposed to take advantage of the option to extend the existing contract by sixteen months to 30 September 2021, in order to align contract dates with South Norfolk Council.

Aligning the end dates of the individual insurance contracts for both Councils, would provide the opportunity to jointly procure in future and would also provide an opportunity to look again at a Local Government Mutual Insurance Scheme.

RESOLVED

To endorse the extension the Council's current insurance contract until the 30 September 2021.

Reasons for decision

To extend the Council's insurance cover in order to align contracts with South Norfolk Council, to allow for joint procurement in the future and subsequent savings.

104 ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The report set out the Council's current status in respect of the Armed Forces Covenant and its ambition to become the first local authority in Norfolk to achieve Gold status.

The Armed Forces Covenant scheme encompassed Bronze, Silver and Gold awards for employer organisations that pledged support to defence and the Armed Forces community and aligned their values with the Armed Forces Covenant.

In December 2019 Broadland was awarded Bronze status, which showed recognition of the Council's commitment to support the Armed Forces community through its employment practices and a pledge to the Armed Forces.

A nomination for the Silver award was submitted in May 2020 and it was expected that notification of whether the bid had been successful would be made by early August.

If successful in achieving Silver status, the Council could apply for Gold status in 2021. However, to do this there was a requirement for the provision of an additional ten days paid leave for armed forces reservists, which would need to be approved as a policy change by Cabinet.

Currently there were two members of staff that were reservists. If both were employed at the top of salary band J, there would be a maximum annual cost to the Council of £4,243.12.

The Assistant Director of People and Families advised Cabinet that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had raised concerns that costs could be prohibitive if large numbers of staff became reservists. However, he could reassure Members that it was not an irrevocable commitment and it could be reviewed if it was thought to be too costly.

RESOLVED

1. To note actions and progress towards achieving Silver and Gold status through the Armed Forces Employer Recognition Scheme; and

2. To approve the proposed policy change to offer an additional 10 days paid leave to Reservists employed by the Councils.
3. That Cabinet would receive an update on the scheme on an annual basis, within the Council's Performance Report.

Reason for decision

To reaffirm the Council's ongoing support for the armed forces.

105 TEMPORARY CHANGE TO HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICIES

The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager introduced his report, which proposed a temporary adjustment to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy to help reduce the unprecedented demand on temporary accommodation caused by Covid-19.

The pandemic had led to a sustained rise in numbers housed within temporary accommodation. Usually the number in temporary accommodation would be around 30 at any one time for both Broadland and South Norfolk combined, this number currently stood at between 60 and 70.

Key drivers for this were:

- The Government's 'Everybody in' requirement placed an accommodation duty on all councils, no matter the person's circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Presentations from sofa surfers and the hidden homelessness who experienced a reduction in accommodation options due to the restrictions on movements put into place.
- Due to their often-chaotic nature these people are often not ready to take on a property for themselves.
- The suspension of the social housing sector, which had seen the availability of housing reduced from 200-240 properties over a four month average period to two during the pandemic.

To address this situation, officers had temporarily moved to a nominations process for those in temporary accommodation and directly nominated anyone who was ready and suitable for a social tenancy.

To facilitate this process, it was suggested making a temporary change in the

allocation policy to allow those in supported accommodation to be placed in a high priority banding, which would enable the necessary throughput to reduce temporary accommodation numbers.

By increasing the priority of those in supported accommodation the Council was increasing their opportunity to move into more suitable accommodation. This in turn would ensure those in temporary accommodation get the support and skills they needed to move on to a secure a long-term tenancy.

Overall, the Housing Team had been very successful in housing an increased amount of people who had presented during the pandemic. However, the number of people currently in temporary accommodation was unsustainable and making the proposed temporary changes to the allocations policy would reduce the number of people in precarious housing situations and be a valuable opportunity to ensure sustainable outcomes for those individuals by making sure they had a strong foundation to move forwards and build better lives.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing noted that the change proposed would help clear the log-jam by unlocking further housing supply.

He added that he wished that the second recommendation be amended from a delegated decision to a Cabinet decision and that after the initial period of three months Cabinet be provided with an update on the change in policy and be given a recommendation on how to proceed further.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. Agree a temporary amendment to the criteria within the Council's Housing Policy to allow officers discretion to place eligible, and suitable, individuals currently living in supported accommodation within the 'High' category for allocation;
2. Subject to recommendation 1 being agreed that this will be in place for an initial period of 3 months, and then brought back to Cabinet with an update and recommendation on how the allocations policy should proceed.

Reasons for decision

To relieve pressure on temporary accommodation in the District.

The meeting closed at 7.37pm.