

Minutes of a meeting of **Cabinet** held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on **Tuesday 15 June 2021** 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 S Lawn	Planning
Cllr J Leggett	Environmental Excellence
Cllr T M Mancini-Boyle	Finance
Cllr F Whymark	Housing and Wellbeing

Cllr M Murrell 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 and Monitoring Officer, Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Individuals and Families, Strategy and Programme Manager, Housing Standards Senior Manager, Senior Finance Business Partner and the Democratic Services Officers (LA, JO).

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8

Member	Minute No & Heading	Nature of Interest
Cllr J Leggett	9 - Bid to the Community Infrastructure Fund from Sprowston Town Council	Non pecuniary, Vice Chairman of Sprowston Town Council
Cllr F Whymark	9 - Bid to the Community Infrastructure Fund from Sprowston Town Council	Non pecuniary, member of Rackheath Parish Council which had received a loan from the Community Infrastructure Fund

2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING

Minute No: 223 – Environmental Excellence Policy Development Panel

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence informed members that the Environmental Coordinator was in post and had made a good start to implementing the Environmental Strategy Action Plan.

Minute No: 225 – Social Prescribing

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing advised the meeting that the two Community Connectors who would be undertaking the social prescribing programme were now in post.

Minute No: 228 – Member IT

Cabinet was informed that all members had now been migrated to Office 365. A survey would shortly be held and a report with its findings would be drafted and reported to Cabinet in October.

Minute No: 233 St Faiths Common - Lease

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development advised Cabinet that the Broadland Country Park scheme was going very well and staff were doing an excellent job.

4 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.

5 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised Members on the views expressed by the Committee when it reviewed the Cabinet Agenda on 8 June 2021, as each item was considered.

6 WELLBEING POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Cabinet received the Minutes of the meeting of the Wellbeing Policy Development Panel held on 12 May 2021.

7 COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN

The Director for People and Communities introduced the report, which provide an update on the proposed actions contained within the new Covid-19 Recovery Plan 2021-2022.

The report explained that since the start of the pandemic the Council had received a range of funding streams to support an effective recovery for communities and businesses. The allocation of a number of projects had already been agreed and the Recovery Plan appended to the report provided more detail of these activities. The report also identified further actions that required member approval before being taken forward. Members were asked to note that allocations for these items in the report were indicative, as there remained a need to be reactive and responsive to changing circumstances. It was confirmed, however, that any joint costs would be subject to a 45/55 split.

The Leader thanked officers for putting together the report which was a useful means of understanding the many funding streams that had had been received by the Council and how they had been allocated across the District. He welcomed clarification about the 45/55 split and suggested that in future iterations of the report it would be useful to have the total number in the resources column in Appendix A, rather than just the split number, to show how much was actually being spent.

Members welcomed the report, which set out clearly a very complex range of funding streams and allocations and officers were commended for their work in bringing the actions forward.

In answer to a question about hybrid meetings the Director of Resources advised the meeting that the legal challenge to allow a continuation of remote meetings had failed and, therefore, it remained a statutory duty that formal decisions be made in person. The Council had, however, invested in technology to allow meetings to be live streamed and it might be possible to allow members to join remotely in the future, subject to a change in legislation.

In answer to a question about recruiting Mental Health staff, the Director for People and Communities advised the meeting that the Council had engaged with the YMCA to provide mental health support for young people and it was aimed to get a programme in place as soon as possible.

Following a show of hands it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

1. To consider and approve the proposed actions as set out in the attached Covid-19 Recovery Plan 2021-2022;

2. To approve the indicative sums set out in Appendix A and the table at 4.4 to provide further support to the Covid-19 recovery, and to delegate to the relevant Director, in consultation with the appropriate Portfolio Holder in order to utilise the funding flexibly and to ensure the greatest impact.

Reasons for decision

To allocate Covid-19 funding to support residents and businesses in the District.

8 BID TO THE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE FUND FROM SPROWSTON TOWN COUNCIL

The Director for Place introduced the report, which presented a bid from Sprowston Town Council for a loan of £250,000 from the Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF) to enable the renovation of the former Viking Public House into a multi-use community hub. The CIF enabled parishes to bring forward community infrastructure projects ahead of receipt of their Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

If the bid was approved it would leave £43,000 in the CIF. However, the Fund was being constantly replenished by CIL being paid off against previous loans.

It was considered that the loan was reasonable and met the criteria for the use of CIL receipts and that there was no foreseeable risk that the loan would not be repaid, as the Town Council was scheduled to receive in excess of £2m in CIL over the next two years.

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence thanked the Community Infrastructure Officer, for her help in putting this bid together for a community hub that would be an asset to the area.

The Leader welcomed the bid and emphasised that it was for such projects that the Fund had been established. He add that he would encourage further bids to come forward even if the Fund had been used up as the Council's reserves could be used to provide loans these, if necessary.

Following a show of hands it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

1. To utilise the CIF to enable STC to bring about the timely purchase of the former Viking Public House, Tills Road, Sprowston to enable

conversion into a new multi-use community hub;

2. To agree a £250,000 loan from the Community Infrastructure Fund to Sprowston Town Council;
3. To authorise the Director of Place to draft a legal agreement in accordance with the heads of terms referred to in paragraph 4.5.

Reasons for decision

To bring forward a community infrastructure project in the District.

QUARTER 4 STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE

The Director for Resources introduced the report, which provided an overview of the performance of the Council in Quarter 4 against the key outcomes set out in the Delivery Plan for 2020/21.

The detail of the financial outturn for the period was broken down into the response and impact of the pandemic on substantive services and the usual outturn with regard to Council services.

The response saw the Council providing direct financial support to individuals and businesses of over £40m. The majority of this funding had been spent, but £1.233m remained and it was proposed that this be allocated to an earmarked reserve in order to deliver an appropriate response to the pandemic in 2021/22.

The impact on the Council's services had been mixed; with some income streams being impacted negatively, such as Carrowbreck which had been forced to cease training and some income streams being impacted positively, such as recycling credits, which had increased with many more people at home during lockdown. Some projects had also slipped to 2021/22, such as staff training because they could not be delivered in year due to Covid. In total, the underspend for 2020/21 was £1.333m.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance noted the enormous amount of work that had been done to support residents and businesses in the District and that it was the right thing to do to carry forward the underspend on substantive services. She also commended the Environmental Projects Reserve, which was an exciting prospect.

The Strategy and Programme Manager introduced the Performance section of the report. She highlighted the 12 measures that had met the year-end success criteria and were rated green.

These included:

Number of working days taken to process new claims for Housing Benefit/Council Tax benefit. Throughout the year there had been a 70 percent increase in new claims however the One Team had exceeded its target of processing new claims within seven days.

Number of affordable homes delivered (including help to buy). A further 64 new build affordable homes had been completed in Q4 bringing the cumulative total for new affordable homes in the District to 165 in 20/21.

Measures that were currently not meeting the year-end target or had missed the target by a narrow margin, were rated amber and included:

Collection Rate of Council Tax. The collection rate, whilst not reaching the target, had exceeded expectations considering the challenges faced during to the Covid-19 pandemic, which was extremely positive.

Percentage of household waste recycled. Although Q3 saw a decrease of four percent, Broadland continued to have the highest total recycling rate in Norfolk at an average of 50 percent.

Light touch monitoring was in place for measures rated Amber.

Measures that had not met the year-end target by a significant amount were rated Red and would be closely monitored, these included:

Collection of Business Rates. Collection performance had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst some sectors such as retail had benefited from additional help through emergency Business Rate Relief, other sectors had not had the same form of assistance. The Team had worked proactively with businesses to offer extended and deferred payments where appropriate.

Employment rate. The fall in the employment rate reflected the first national lockdown and job losses as a result. However, the Bank of England was predicting that Britain was on track for the strongest growth since the Second World War this year, with a faster-than-expected recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. To support a fast recovery, officers were undertaking a number of measures to address the threat of increased unemployment. These include acting as a lead partner in the Government's Kickstart scheme.

There were also nine other measures that were currently being baselined to gather data and set targets.

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development noted that the report clearly demonstrated how well the Council was

performing despite the unprecedented circumstances brought about by the pandemic. He welcomed the further measures that were being baselined for the next year.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance noted that the collection rates of Council Tax and Business Rates were extremely positive considering the extreme challenges faced over the last year.

The Leader concurred with this view and noted the excellent work that had been carried out by the One Team during these difficult times. He added that the reason that it was proposed to drop Quarter 3 from the reporting schedule in March was that this was when Cabinet were looking at the year-end outrun which could be confusing, as members would be looking at an out of date report. Performance reporting had originally been made for Quarters 2 and 4 and it was felt that it would be more efficient to revert to this practice. Performance would continue to be monitored on a constant basis via consultation with Portfolio Holders.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development noted that Grant Thornton had predicted that Broadland was in the top five percent of local authority areas that were expected to bounce back strongly from the pandemic. She congratulated staff on the speed with which business grants had been allocated and the level of business support that the Council had provided. In particular she congratulated Senior Economic Development Officer: Inward Investment and the Internal Consultancy Senior Lead and their Teams for the exceptional work they had done, as well as the Business Support Team. She noted that a Business Support report would be brought to Cabinet shortly that would include business start-ups and that a Skills and Training report that was also being drafted would also help address unemployment in the District.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing commended the work of the Housing Team, who were doing a very good job under difficult circumstances. He noted that Disabled Facilities Grants had been carried over and that some new money had become available that was to be used to support people with Long Covid. He also noted that the affordable housing target had been exceeded, which was very positive.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning noted that the number of new homes delivered and planning decisions made within statutory were also on target for the District.

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence drew members' attention to the Environmental Projects Reserve, which she was sure would result in some excellent projects. The Waste Recycling figures were good, although the final figures would not be available until later, due to the way recycling was reported to Government. Fly tipping figures were also good at 3.3 per 100,000 and compared very favourably to the East of England which was 9.8 and 17.3 nationally.

The Leader noted that the report was well structured and that measures such as staff sickness and customer satisfaction were being baselined and would be reported soon. He suggested that whilst the fly tipping target was good it should be a more aspirational target.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee confirmed that the Committee had been impressed by the reported performance over such a difficult time period. Members had also commended the establishment of the Environmental Projects Reserve. The Committee had proposed two amendments to the recommendations; the first was to include long term sickness in measure 4 – staff absence levels, which might give an insight to any areas of concern. The second was to maintain the current reporting schedule for performance measures, however, the clarification that it could cause confusion when considering the year end out turn was a satisfactory explanation for making the change.

The Leader thanked the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and confirmed that long-term sickness would be looked at as part of the overall staff absence measure.

Following a show of hands it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

1. To agree the revenue and capital position for Quarter 4; and
2. To agree the 2020/21 performance measure update for Quarter 4; and
3. To agree to change the reporting schedule for performance measures, with the next updates coming to Cabinet in Quarters 2 and Quarters 4 2021/22.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

1. To agree the slippage requests for both revenue and capital; and
2. To agree the creation of the following new earmarked reserve:
 - Environmental Projects Reserve.

Reasons for decision

The report was a factual account.

9 EMPTY HOMES POLICY

The Assistant Director Individuals and Families introduced the report, which presented a revised Empty Homes Policy.

The Policy was being refreshed to bring it up to date with Government guidance and to ensure that empty homes were brought back into use as soon as possible. The Policy would continue to offer interest free loan to owners of empty homes in order to renovate them and bring them back into use and additional Council Tax charges of up to 300 percent would also remain in place to incentivise owners to do so as well. As a last resort the Council could proceed with a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) or an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO). The former would be used to buy and sell the property, the latter would be rented out by the Council.

As either procedure was a very serious step, a clear set of principles were set out in the Policy to ensure that this action was only undertaken as a last resort. These included a Community Impact Assessment and a points based assessment to determine if enforcement was appropriate, as well as a financial assessment of the viability of such action. All of these proposed actions would be brought to Cabinet for final determination.

The Assistant Director Individuals and Families confirmed that officers were now proposing that the reserve fund in recommendation 3 should be for £600,000, not £500,000 as set out in the report. This would cover the purchase cost of two homes for the average price in the District of £290,964.

The revised Policy would allow for a clear audit trail, whilst protecting the public purse and demonstrate that the Council had a proactive approach to bringing empty homes back into use.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing advise the meeting that he fully endorsed the Policy, which was a good balance of support and enforcement. He would like, however, to amend recommendation 3 to the following:

3. To approve creation within the 2021/22 financial year of:
 - A reserve fund of £650,000 in order to undertake a voluntary offer of purchase as part of a Compulsory Purchase Order procedure *and to enforce housing standards*.

The proposed amendment was supported by members.

In response to a query about members no longer receiving empty homes lists for their Wards, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing pointed out

that at paragraph 2.4 the Policy stated that empty homes data would be provided for members as part of quarterly performance reporting.

Voting was carried out by way of a roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

1. To approve adoption of the Empty Homes Policy and that this be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee after one year;
2. to agree proposal that Cabinet provides approval to seek to undertake Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) and Compulsory Purchase Order (CPOs) processes on a case by case basis;
3. To approve creation within the 2021/22 financial year of:
 - A reserve fund of £650,000 in order to undertake a voluntary offer of purchase as part of a Compulsory Purchase Order procedure and to enforce housing standards.

Reasons for decision

To allow the Council to take a robust approach to tackling housing issues and support residents.

10 HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION DISCRETIONARY ACTIVITY POLICY

The Assistant Director for Individuals and Families introduced the report, which presented the Houses in Multiple Occupation Discretionary Activity Policy for adoption. The Policy would enable the Council to take a robust approach to tackling housing issues, support wellbeing and reduce abuse and exploitation of vulnerable residents.

The report also proposed amending an existing vacancy from Band E to Band F to enable the recruitment of a full time Community Enforcement Officer post, as well as a temporary 0.5 fte Community Enforcement Officer post funded through the Covid-19 Outbreak Management Fund. These posts would allow for a more proactive approach to be taken by the Council to housing standards.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing welcomed the report, which he considered sent a clear message to landlords that the Council would not accept sub-standard accommodation for its residents. He also proposed amending recommendation 8.2 to the following:

2. To approve amending an existing vacancy from Band E to Band F enabling recruitment to 1fte Community Enforcement Officer post, *with the costs split on a 45/55 basis between Broadland and South Norfolk;*

He also proposed the following additional recommendation 8.3

3. *That a 0.5 fte Community Enforcement Officer post will be in place for two years and will be funded through the Covid-19 Outbreak Management Fund.*

The Portfolio Holder for Finance advised members that she did have some concerns about the Policy as a landlord could reduce the number of tenants to below the licensable threshold, which could in turn put pressure on the Council to provide temporary accommodation. She added that this risk should have been included in the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development welcomed the clarity provided by the amendment to recommendation 8.2, but voiced similar concerns to the Portfolio Holder for Finance regarding risks. She suggested that a lot of landlords were unaware of these regulations and that officers should place an emphasis on education before enforcement.

In response the Assistant Director for Individuals and Families confirmed that it was the intention to assist businesses to be the best they could be and that a well-run House in Multiple Occupation could be an asset for the District.

The Housing Standards Senior Manager advised the meeting that the Council would give a landlord a considerable amount of time to put their property in good order and would only take enforcement action if the property was in a dangerous condition. He added that it was unlikely that a landlord would reduce the number of tenants below the threshold and lose rental income because of the relatively minor cost of being registered.

The Leader noted that the Council had a statutory obligation to enforce decent housing standards and that it should engage and support landlords to comply with these standards.

Voting was carried out by way of a roll call and by 4 votes to 3 it was

RESOLVED:

1. To approve adoption of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Discretionary Activity Policy; and
2. To approve amending an existing vacancy from Band E to Band F enabling recruitment to 1fte Community Enforcement Officer post, with

the costs split on a 45/55 basis between Broadland and South Norfolk;
and

3. That a 0.5 fte Community Enforcement Officer post will be in place for two years and will be funded through the Covid-19 Outbreak Management Fund.

Reasons for decision

To take a proactive approach to identifying and monitoring Houses in Multiple Occupation across the District.

The meeting closed at 19.27pm

DRAFT