



COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Council of Broadland District Council, held on Thursday 22 July 2021 at 7pm at the Council Offices

Committee Members Present: Councillors: A D Adams, S C Beadle, N J Brennan, D J Britcher, S M Clancy, J K Copplestone, A D Crotch, J J Emsell, R R Foulger, N J Harpley, D Harrison, N C Karimi-Ghovanlou, K S Kelly, S Lawn, K E Lawrence, J Leggett, K G Leggett, T M Mancini-Boyle, I N Moncur, G K Nurden, S M Prutton, S Riley, N C Shaw, L A Starling, D M Thomas, J L Thomas, S A Vincent, S C Walker, J M Ward, F Whymark

Officers in Attendance: The Managing Director, the Director Resources, the Director People & Communities, the Assistant Director Planning, the Chief of Staff (Monitoring Officer), the Assistant Director Finance (Section 151 Officer) and the Democratic Services Officers (DM/JH)

25 PERSONAL TRIBUTE

The Chairman invited members to pay tribute to Mr George Debbage former Councillor for Blofield with South Walsham from 1991 to 2011 who had passed away recently. Members stood for a minutes' silence and reflection.

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Member/Officer	Minute No & Heading	Nature of Interest
Cllr Karimi-Ghovanlou	38 – Adoption of the Taverham Neighbourhood Plan	Other Interest – chairman of the Parish Council
Cllr Adams	38 – Adoption of the Taverham Neighbourhood Plan	Other Interest – member of the Parish Council

Cllr S Vincent	39 – Adoption of the Spixworth Neighbourhood Plan	Pecuniary Interest - his Company was involved in supporting the parish council in the preparation of the Plan – left the meeting whilst the matter was considered and determined.
The Monitoring Officer on behalf of all Members	41 - Review of the Broadland District Council Members' Allowances Scheme	Pecuniary Interest - In accordance with the Constitution, Part 4 Rules of Procedure, Section 8 – Interests to be declared at meetings – the Monitoring Officer granted a dispensation to all Members of the Council to enable discussion and voting on this item.

27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: P E Bulman, S J Catchpole, J F Fisher, R M Grattan, L H Hemsall, S I Holland, D King, I J Mackie, M L Murrell, J A Neesam, D Roper, M D Snowling and K A Vincent.

28 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2021 were agreed as a correct record save for the following correction:

Minute no 24 - After the first paragraph on page 20 insert “An amendment was proposed by Cllr Harpley, duly seconded, that the motion be amended to reflect additional concerns raised. Upon being put to the vote, however, the amendment was lost”.

29 MATTERS ARISING

No matters were raised.

30 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members noted the civic engagements undertaken by the Chairman of the Council since the last meeting. The Chairman drew attention in particular to the steel signing event at the new independent community living scheme in Acle which would see the provision of 58 affordable units of accommodation for the over 55 year age group to facilitate independent but supported living.

The Leader announced that the Council had been awarded Gold Status in the 2021 Armed Forces Covenants. He welcomed the accolade which reinforced the excellent work being undertaken.

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence reminded members they were invited to the all member briefing event on the waste procurement contract being held on 27 July 2021.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development commented that work on the Food Innovation Centre was progressing with contractors due on site on 26 July 2021.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing advised members that youth mental health workers were now working with the Council through the Help Hub and a number of Community Connectors had been appointed to work for the Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development thanked all members for attending the recent briefing on the accommodation review and that the session would be repeated again the following week for those unable to attend.

The Head of Paid Service stated he was pleased to welcome to the organisation the new Assistant Director for Transformation and Digital - Corinne Lawrie.

31 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

It was noted that there had been no questions from the public.

32 PUBLIC SPEAKING

It was noted that there had been no requests for public speaking.

33 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 8 June, 15 June and 29 June 2021 were received.

34 CABINET

The minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 15 June and 6 July 2021 were received.

15 June 2021

Minute no: 9 – Quarter 4 Strategic Performance and Finance

The Leader invited members to support the recommendations from Cabinet. On being put to the vote, with the majority of members voting for, it was

RESOLVED

to agree the slippage requests for both revenue and capital and the creation of the new earmarked reserve: Environmental Projects Reserve.

6 July 2021

Minute no: 19 – Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP)

The Portfolio Holder for Planning introduced the item and invited Council to endorse the recommendation from Cabinet.

A concern was raised about the arrangements for delegation of authority to officers to make modifications to the GNLP. The Leader reiterated the provisions in the report for any necessary minor/main modifications to be agreed/ negotiated by the Assistant Director for Planning in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning.

A member raised a concern that they felt the Plan was not sound as additional consultations on additional sites had not been carried out and it posed a risk to the Council. They would therefore not be able to support the recommendation.

The Leader confirmed that the Plan had been through due process and considered by the Place Shaping Policy Development Panel, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. Whilst there was always an element of risk associated with the submission of the Plan, particularly with the current ongoing government changes to the Planning regime, he was satisfied at this time that the Plan was suitable for submission. On being put to the vote, with the majority of members voting for, it was

RESOLVED to

- (1) Agree that the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) is sound and to submit the Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination subject to reaching an agreement in principle with Natural England, in the form of a signed statement of common ground in relation to the mitigation necessary to protect sites protected under the Habitat Regulations.
- (2) Commit to proactively identify and bring forward sufficient Gypsy and Traveller sites to meet identified needs in accordance with the criteria based policies of the current and emerging Development Plans.
- (3) Agree to request that the appointed independent inspector make any Main Modifications necessary to make the plan sound and legally compliant;
- (4) Delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Planning in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, and in conjunction with Norwich City and South Norfolk Councils, to:

- a. agree minor modifications to the GNLP prior to its submission.
- b. negotiate any main modifications necessary to make the GNLP Sound as part of the Independent Examination.

Minute no: 20 – Capital Budget

The Portfolio Holder for Finance reported that, during the procurement process, it had become clear that local authority funding of refuse vehicles was the most cost effective and she invited members to support the recommendation from Cabinet to increase the Capital budget for Refuse Services to allow for this. On being put to the vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED

that the 20/21 Capital Budget for Refuse Services be increased from £3m to £5.7m.

Minute no: 23 – Moving Towards a First Class Customer Service

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development stated that the Council had always offered excellent services to its residents and customers but also looked to improve these. Cabinet had adopted the new Customer Strategy and Customer Charter and, as part of this, he invited members of Council to support the recommendation of Cabinet, to adopt the Complaints Handling Policy and the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints Policy.

Some members commented that, whilst the proposed Policies were sound in principle, in practice they were a little weak in that they lacked performance indicators and monitoring proposals and there was a need for mechanisms for ensuring that compliments and complaints were acted on.

The Portfolio Holder responded that these issues had been raised at the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee when this matter had been considered. Proposals for performance monitoring would be shaped as part of a separate process and further work would be undertaken on this. The Leader reassured members that these concerns had been taken on board and added that baseline data was included in Strategic Performance Reports and would be used to inform performance review.

A member asked if there was a proposal to carry out a customer satisfaction survey of the new website as they had received complaints that there were no contact details on the website. Members were advised that the website was currently at “beta phase”, it had been launched but was still subject to appropriate changes which customers were helping to identify. This was a well-used practice in developing software systems and customer feedback and engagement was welcomed to help shape the software to meet the needs of customers.

It was suggested that contact details needed to be added.

RESOLVED to agree

- (1) the adoption of the proposed Complaints Handling Policy;
- (2) the adoption of the proposed Unreasonably Persistent Complainants Policy.

35 PLANNING COMMITTEE

The decisions of the Planning Committee meeting held on 3 June 2021 were received.

A concern was raised about the length of time it appeared customers were having to wait for advice from the Planning team as to whether they needed to submit a planning application for development proposals. The Portfolio Holder for Planning invited the Assistant Director of Planning to respond. The Assistant Director commented that there had been delays in responding to inquiries due to high work volumes but it was anticipated this would improve as soon as possible. In response to a request for further clarity on the timeframe involved, the Portfolio Holder referred members to the item later in the agenda when Council would be receiving a member's question on this matter (minutes no: 43 refers).

36 AUDIT COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 24 June 2021 were received.

Minute no: 7 – Review of Contract Procedure Rules

The Chairman of the Committee drew attention to the recommendation to Council detailed at minute no: 7 and he invited members to support the recommendation and to endorse the amended Contract Procedure Rules subject to the retention of the current contract award levels.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance advised members that she was encouraging officers to bring forward a further report on this matter. On being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED

to endorse the amended Contract Procedure Rules, attached at appendix 1 to the signed copy of these minutes, subject to the retention of the current contract award levels.

37 LICENSING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The non-exempt minutes of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee meeting held on 23 June 2021 were received.

38 ADOPTION OF THE TAVERHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Members considered the report of the Senior Community Planning Officer.

Following a successful result at the referendum on 6 May 2021, the Portfolio Holder for Planning invited Council to endorse the Plan which would form part of the District Council's Development Plan. On being put to the vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED to adopt the Taverham Neighbourhood Plan.

39 ADOPTION OF THE SPIXWORTH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Members considered the report of the Senior Community Planning Officer.

Following a successful result at the referendum on 6 May 2021, the Portfolio Holder for Planning invited Council to endorse the Plan which would form part of the District Council's Development Plan. On being put to the vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED to adopt the Spixworth Neighbourhood Plan.

Arising from consideration of this and the previous item, a member raised concerns about the length of time it was taking to process Neighbourhood Plans and that this needed to be improved. Members acknowledged the formal procedure and timeframe which needed to be followed in relation to the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan and the impact of COVID in causing delays.

40 MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

Members considered the report of the Monitoring Officer. The Leader of the Council invited members to consider the report and to support the recommendations contained therein. He raised an additional recommendation to Council on the following matter:

Suspension of 6 month rule

For reasons of ill health, Cllr Snowling had been unable to attend Council meetings for a number of weeks. It was not certain when he would be able to return and a dispensation was needed to excuse Cllr Snowling from attending

meetings of the Council until further notice, pursuant to Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972. The Leader invited Council to agree to grant the dispensation. In response to a question, the Leader advised that he and the Monitoring Officer would monitor the situation going forward. A suggestion was made and agreed that the situation be reviewed formally by Council in 6 months' time.

On being put to the vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED to approve

- (1) the appointment of Cllr Sue Prutton as Vice Chairman of the Appeals Panel;
- (2) the updated Staff Code of Conduct (attached at appendix 2 to the signed copy of these minutes);
- (3) the Monitoring Officer making the consequential changes to the Constitution as a result of the changes at (1) and (2);
- (4) for the reason of ill health, the granting of a dispensation, to excuse Cllr Snowling from attending meetings of the Council, pursuant to Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972, until further notice, and that the situation be reviewed formally by Council in 6 months' time.

41 REVIEW OF THE BROADLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

Members received the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel on their review of the Broadland Members' Allowances Scheme.

The Monitoring Officer reported apologies from the Chairman of the Panel who was unable to attend the meeting to present the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel. She reminded members that the Panel had last carried out a review in 2017 when a number of minor changes had been made. An early review had also taken place in 2019 (due in 2021) as the scheme was evidenced to be below the Norfolk average. This interim review had led to a number of recommendations regarding remuneration only which were considered by Council in February 2021. The current review had been a full review looking at the whole scheme.

The Monitoring Officer then took members through the recommendations and the rationale for each of them as set out in the report.

The Chairman then proposed that the Council support the recommendations contained in the report.

In seconding the recommendation, Cllr Crotch invited members to consider four minor amendments to the recommendations as follows:

Paragraph 4.2 – Special Responsibility Allowances:

- (a) the allowance for deputy leader should be retained at 70% of the Leaders allowance (not 65% as recommended by the Panel);
- (b) the allowance for the Chairmen of Policy Development Panels should be retained at the current level (£1150) (not set at 50% of the basic allowance as recommended by the Panel);

Paragraph 4.3.2 - Travel Expenses

The recommendation of the Panel to only pay travel expenses for up to 12 ward journeys per month including those to town and parish council meetings be deleted and the current unlimited arrangement continue;

Paragraph 4.3.10 – Travel between sites

The scheme of members allowances relate to “any location in line with approved duties” (not restricted to both council sites as recommended by the Panel).

Members then voted on the four amendments and, on being put to the vote, it was unanimously agreed to support the amendments.

Members then voted on the recommendations as set out in the report, subject to the agreed amendments and, on being put to the vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED

that the recommendations proposed by the Panel, as amended above, and as set out below, be supported and incorporated into the members’ allowances scheme:

4.1 Basic Allowance

No change is made to the current Basic Allowance.

4.2 Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

- a) The allowance for the Deputy Leader be retained at 70% of the Leader’s allowance.
- b) The allowance for the Chairmen of Policy Development Panels should be retained at the current allowance of £1150.

4.3 Other Allowances

4.3.1 Expenses Claims

Wording be added to the Scheme to document that claims must be submitted within three months.

4.3.2 Travel Expenses

Travel expenses for ward journeys, including those to town and parish council meetings, remain unlimited as at present;

4.3.3 Motorbike/Bicycle Rates

Expenses be paid, at current HMRC rates for members using motorbikes or bicycles for Council duties.

4.3.4 Public Transport

For travel by public transport, the presumption be that members will travel standard class. Members may travel by first class where this is the same cost, or cheaper, than standard class travel.

4.3.5 Subsistence - meals

Reimbursement of expenses will be on the actual cost incurred up to the maximum, subject to the production of a receipt indicating the actual cost of the meal. Non-alcoholic beverages may be claimed within the overall cost. Maximums as set by HMRC are:

- Breakfast rate £5
- One meal (5 hour) rate £5
- Two meal (10 hour) rate £10
- Late evening meal rate £15

4.3.6 Subsistence – overnight

Wording be added to the Scheme to clarify that, in the event of a member requiring an overnight stay where they were required to find their own accommodation, advice should be sought, in advance, from the Monitoring Officer.

4.3.7 Dependent / Carer's allowance

Expenses will be paid for daytime and evening meetings, at the rate for National Living Wage for age 25+.

4.3.8 Attendance at the Offices

The following wording be used to replace those parts in the Scheme where attending the offices is mentioned: *Approved duties include in-person meetings and events arranged by officers for pre-meetings, briefings, informal meetings, organised training, hearings or similar. The reimbursement of expenses in relation to other visits should be agreed, in advance, by the Monitoring Officer.*

4.3.9 Outside Bodies

Wording be added to state: *A meeting of a body to which the Authority makes appointments or nominations will be treated as an Approved Duty so travel expenses can be paid to the appointed representative on such bodies, where these expenses are not already covered by that body.*

4.3.10 Travel between sites

The following wording be added: *The Scheme of Members Allowances relate to “any location in line with approved duties”.*

4.3.11 External training / seminars

The following wording be added: *Where members wish to claim expenses for attending or participating in external events which have not been arranged by officers, they should seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer beforehand.*

4.3.12 Delegation of Approval

The Scheme be amended to direct such queries to the Monitoring Officer.

42 OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS – FEEDBACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES

Members received and noted the feedback from members on Outside Organisations Bodies. The Leader thanked members for their reports.

43 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

The following questions and answers were considered:

Question 1 from Cllr Karimi-Ghovanlou

It has come to councillors attention that the current backlog on planning applications is in the region of 230 for Broadland, and over 100 for South Norfolk; with two senior planners resigning recently, individual caseloads increasing by a third from approx. 30 to 50+, and officers having to work on two different planning systems – what is the council doing to rectify this backlog and retain the remaining experienced staff we have?

Response by the Portfolio Holder for Planning:

The Portfolio Holder welcomed the opportunity to address the Council and clear up any misinformation circulating. She confirmed that there had not been a back log of 330 applications and she was not sure how that information had been brought to the Councillor’s attention. She confirmed that as of 21/7/2021

there was a back log of 110 applications for Broadland District Council and 102 applications for South Norfolk District Council - a total of 212 applications. The focus of the admin support team had that week been on Broadland District Council's applications due to the impact of the IT system being down and they had been processing the backlog alongside dealing with a higher capacity of applications being submitted. The capacity had increased by over 300 applications across both Councils so far this year compared to 2019.

There were a number of vacancies within the admin support team but these had now been filled and a further 6 month post was in place to help with the backlog. Staff who had left had been very experienced and it had taken time to train new officers with some doing overtime and working across two IT systems did take longer.

The planning officer team had also been carrying a few vacancies and currently adverts were out for 3 principal planning officers, a planning officer and 2 post graduate apprenticeship roles, plus a compliance apprenticeship role for the enforcement team. A new heritage officer was due to start work the following week and two agency/consultants were working with the team currently.

Workloads in the team had increased and were at the highest they had been for a number of years; this was a national issue and other local authorities in Norfolk were also struggling to recruit and had backlogs. The caseloads for officers were being managed weekly and varied across different levels of officer but at present all were at acceptable levels.

The Portfolio Holder stated that it had been more challenging for the team working from home and some task were taking longer. Officers were still working on two systems but this was not the reason for the backlog or the pressure they were under. Two national lockdowns had resulted in the need to work in exceptional circumstances and it had taken some time to get everyone up and running to work from home. Most importantly, the capacity had increased to figures higher than the 2019 figures.

Following in house promotions, and with vacancies currently advertised, the backlog was being lowered whilst dealing with new applications coming in daily. Senior planning officers leaving the team had been wished well on their new career paths.

It could not be denied that planning officers were under pressure, but this was circumstantial and would not be a permanent pressure; once the new staff had been recruited and fully trained on the systems, the pressure would be eased.

The Portfolio Holder gave assurances that measures were being taken to ease the pressures for the team and she thanked everyone for all their work over the past 18 months.

Supplementary Question from Cllr Karimi-Ghovanlou

The backlog of 212 was still quite high, was there an estimate of when this would be cleared?

Response by the Portfolio Holder for Planning

The backlog was continuing to reduce. The backlog had been exacerbated by the recent issues with the IT system but every effort was being made to continue to reduce the backlog.

Question 2 from Cllr Karimi-Ghovanlou

With reference to the government's proposals to reform the planning system – Does the Leader agree with the motion passed in the House of Commons last month by Steve Reed MP, to protect the rights of local communities to object to individual planning applications in their area?

Response by the Leader

The Leader stressed that the Council was keen to continue to see local participation in planning matters and drew attention to paragraph 40 of the National Planning Policy Framework which stated that local planning authorities had a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. Whilst they could not require that a developer engage with them before submitting a planning application, they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services offered and encourage any applicants to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting applications.

The outcome of the latest white paper was still awaited and it was uncertain what the arrangements for public engagement would be.

As far as this Council's efforts to promote local engagement was concerned, the Leader made reference to some of the Council's responses to the white paper consultation which had been considered by the Place Shaping Policy Development Panel, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. These included a number of responses supporting and encouraging continued/simplified/easy access to documentation and plans and consultation with local communities including options for those without internet access.

The Leader re-affirmed the Council's view that it firmly believed in local involvement and engagement.

Question to the Leader from Cllr S Riley

“The Joint Informal Cabinet meeting on 10th June 2021 considered a nine page document under the agenda item “accommodation review”. The document was referred to extensively in discussion and it was raised that there would be value in it being shared more widely with elected members. However, to date this document has not been circulated to all elected members, what are the reasons for this?”

Cllr Riley commented that following submission of his question, members had been supplied with copies of the document referred to in his question and there was therefore no need for a response to his question.

44 MOTIONS

It was noted that no motions had been received.

Chairman

(meeting closed at 8:30 pm)