

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich, on Tuesday 14 June 2022 at 6.00pm.

Cabinet Members Present:	Councillors: S Vincent (Chairman), T Mancini-Boyle (Vice-Chairman), J Copplestone, J Emsell, J Leggett, I Moncur.
Apologies	Councillor: F Whymark.
Other Members in Attendance:	Councillor: M Murrell
Officers in Attendance:	The Director of Place, the Director of Resources, the Director of People and Communities, the Chief of Staff (Monitoring Officer), the Assistant Director for Finance, the Assistant Director for Planning, the Assistant Director for ICT/Digital and Transformation, the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families, the Assistant Director Economic Growth, the Assistant Director for Regulatory, the Strategy and Intelligence Manager, the Food Safety and Licensing Team Manager, the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager, the Housing and Benefits Manager, the Programme Manager – Economic Growth and the Democratic Services Officer (LA).

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr F Whymark.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on the 26 April and 12 May were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 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 7 June 2022, as each item was considered.

5 ECONOMIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Cabinet received the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 25 April 2022.

6 WELLBEING POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Cabinet received the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 27 April 2022.

7 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE

Cabinet received the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 May 2022.

8 STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 4 2021/22

The report provided an overview of the performance of the Council in Quarter 4 against the key outcomes set out in the Delivery Plan for 2021/22.

The Strategy and Intelligence Manager introduced the Performance section of the report. Members noted that 15 areas were currently at a green status having met the performance measure criteria for 2021/22. Nine were at an amber status, including Council tax collection, where it was noted that improvement had been seen from the previous review and was forecast to continue. Lastly, there were two areas currently at a red status. Members were advised that these related to the Planning service area with a focus on the timeframe for making decisions. It was noted that an improvement had been seen from Q3 to Q4 with the service level currently at 91 percent.

The Assistant Director for Finance introduced the Finance section of the report. It was noted that the figures listed in the report were provisional and were not finalised until the final accounts were formally approved. Members noted that overall, the Council was in a strong position going forward.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance acknowledged the amber markers regarding the collection and Business Rates and Council Tax and the work committed to by the teams to increase the rate of collection from previous reports. She raised a query regarding the outstanding housing benefits overpayments figure and asked whether Covid funding could be used to offset the difference. The Assistant Director for Finance confirmed that this was an acceptable use of the underspent Covid funding, and he would make the necessary amendments before the draft statements of accounts were presented to the Audit Committee.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development acknowledged that during Q4, the Council had been awarded £50,000 to support growth at the Roar Dinosaur Adventure Park and the Blickling Estate. The funding was centred around adapting the venues' facilities to enable more people with disabilities to visit.

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence drew members' attention to the key performance standards which had been met in the current quarter and the Food Hygiene rate, which was currently sitting at 98 percent alongside measure 28, which saw residual waste reduced.

The Leader sought clarification on the offsetting of car parking savings in the budget. The Assistant Director for Finance explained that the budget for cleaning costs was in the waste team, whereas the actual contractual costs were in the public conveniences cost centre. Thus an overspend was being shown in public conveniences but a compensating underspend in waste.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning noted that the red indicators within the Planning area were starting to improve and would continue overtime. He added that a report detailing proposed improvements to the service area was on the agenda.

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development noted the positive measures regarding staff. Measures two and three had created a baseline for the customer satisfaction area of work. This would provide key data going forward.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing, the Leader highlighted the work of officers across the district regarding the Empty Homes Policy and thanked officers for all their work.

Following a show of hands it was unanimously:

RESOLVED to

1. Receive the revenue and capital position for Quarter 4 (variance details in Appendix 1)
2. agree to add the IT and waste revenue budget underspends to the existing IT / Waste reserves (as detailed in para 3.15)
3. agree to recommend to Full Council the slippage requests for capital (as detailed in para 3.16).
4. Receive the 2021/22 performance for Quarter 4 and the year end position (detail in Appendix 2).
5. Receive the year end update of the 21/22 Delivery Plan (detail in appendix 3).

Reasons for Decision

The report was a factual account.

9 LICENSING SERVICES – SERVICE ENHANCEMENT OPTIONS

The Assistant Director for Regulatory presented the report which outlined the options for the introduction of paid licensing related advice and support to businesses. Free support and advice was currently offered to businesses, mainly via the new Business Regulatory Support Hub.

The proposed full cost recovery basis for discretionary advice and support reflected the Commercialisation Strategy and enabled support to be offered more widely to businesses in the district to grow and this proposal, if agreed by members, would deliver the concept of commercial licensing services as agreed in the Delivery Plan.

The Food, Safety and Licensing Manager reminded members that the existing availability of free advice would not be eroded. Members also noted that all the fees collected would be reinvested in the service to support the regulatory function.

Cabinet noted that the service had offered 30-minute trial slots to some customers, but this could not be sustained for all customers if required. The proposal laid out in the report would allow the opportunity for all licensing services to have access to additional help if required.

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence noted the opportunity for businesses to access an enhanced service if required, giving further support to businesses in the district.

In response to a question raised by the Portfolio Holder for Finance on whether the service could operate on a profit basis, officers confirmed that the Council could not make a profit from the service but could invest the revenue received from charging for the service into the service area. In order for the Council to make a profit on the enhanced service, a limited company would need to be set up. The Portfolio Holders for Policy and Finance agreed to explore this approach further outside with officers.

A further question was raised about how the payments for the enhanced service would work. Officers confirmed that the team were currently looking at systems which would make the process streamlined, but currently customers could call in and pay in advance of the meetings.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee informed Cabinet that, during the pre-cabinet review of the agenda, an amendment had been put forward to ensure that the current free advice offered to customers was upheld. The Leader of the Council reaffirmed that the proposals in the report were in addition to the current set up and therefore the proposed amendment was not needed.

Following a query raised by the Leader, it was confirmed that the fee structure listed in appendix two was correct. Therefore, the first recommendation was amended to read: To

authorise the piloting of enhancements to Licensing services at full cost recovery proposed at appendix two, for a 12-month period starting in 2022/23. Following a show of hands, the recommendations were unanimously agreed with the inclusion of the above amendment.

RESOLVED

1. To authorise the piloting of enhancements to Licensing services at full cost recovery proposed at appendix two, for a 12-month period starting in 2022/23.
2. To agree the reinvestment of income generated from service enhancements to licensing activity into the Council's regulatory licensing service, so as not to impact on regulatory service capacity.

Reasons for Decision

By offering businesses the opportunity to 'buy-in' enhanced support and advice services from the licensing authority, the service enhancement proposals supported both the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan 2022-2024, around growing the economy and protecting the public. It also supported the recovery of the hospitality and entertainment sector, which had been badly impacted during Covid-19 lockdowns and Government/Public Health restrictions.

10 FOOD SAFETY SERVICES – SERVICE ENHANCEMENT OPTIONS

The Assistant Director for Regulatory introduced the report which followed the same format as the previous item but related to the Food Safety Service. The proposed option allowed food businesses access to bespoke advice alongside the opportunity for regular food hygiene inspections if required.

Cabinet noted the small amendment to recommendation one with the additional wording of *proposed at appendix two* as seen with the previous item also.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development asked if the proposed training workshops would be held at Carrowbreck House. The Licencing and Food Safety Manager confirmed that officers were looking to hold training sessions at the venue utilising external funding.

Following a show of hands, the recommendations were unanimously agreed with the inclusion of the above amendment.

RESOLVED

1. To authorise the piloting of enhancements to Food Safety services at full cost recovery proposed at appendix two, for a 12-month period starting in 2022/23.
2. To agree the reinvestment of income generated from service enhancements to food safety activity into the Council's regulatory food safety service, so as not to impact on regulatory service capacity.

Reason for Decision

By offering businesses the opportunity to 'buy-in' enhanced support and advice services from the regulator, the service enhancement proposals supported both the Strategic Plan and the Delivery Plan 2022-2024, around growing the economy and protecting the public.

11 ENERGY REBATE SCHEME

The Housing and Benefits Manager presented the report which outlined the details of the £150 Energy Rebate Scheme which was to be administered by Council Tax billing authorities and sought approval for the Discretionary Payment Scheme.

On 3 February 2022, the Government had announced a package of support for the rising energy costs, which included a £150 non-repayable rebate to all households who permanently resided in a property in Council Tax bands A-D. A discretionary fund was also available for households who were either ineligible under the main scheme or who required additional support.

Officers explained that the Council was working with an external company to make the process easy and quick when sending out payments to residents. In terms of how the payment would be made, members were advised that customers who paid their Council Tax bill by Direct Debit would receive a payment directly into their bank account once verification checks had been made. Where bank account details were not held, the customer would be contacted by letter and advised how to apply for the payment.

Following the recent announcement from Government, it was likely that further grants would be available to residents, and officers were seeking delegated permission for future schemes in order to efficiently organise further payments.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance endorsed the recommendation recognising the need for a decision to be made retrospectively to allow the payments to be sent out efficiently.

The Leader asked how the credited payments on residents' Council Tax accounts would work for occasions where no correspondence was received regarding the £150 payments. Officers confirmed that the credit could be offset on the future bill or residents could request for a refund if the bill had been paid in full.

A small amendment was made to the wording of the recommendation to add the Portfolio Holder for Finance to oversee future discretionary schemes. Following a show of hands, it was unanimously;

RESOLVED

To agree to delegate permission for this and future discretionary schemes to be determined by the appropriate Assistant Director and the Section 151 officer in collaboration with the appropriate Portfolio Holder and the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

Reason for Decision

By administering the main and discretionary elements in the Energy Rebate Scheme the Council was providing assistance to residents at a time of increased Energy Costs.

Delegated permission would allow for funds to be delivered to vulnerable residents in a timely manner.

12 PLANNING BUSINESS CASE – APPOINTMENT TO NEW VACANCIES AND UPDATES TO STRUCTURE

The Assistant Director for Planning introduced the report and outlined the results of the recent full review of the Development Management service. The review saw that more resources were needed in order to create additional capacity and be able to adequately deal with large-scale developments.

The Council had received a number of large developments at present including the proposed development at Rackheath for which more resources would be needed to effectively and properly consult with parishes, members and the public. In addition, the next iteration of the Local Plan was due with more sites coming forward, planning applications were still increasing, as well as dealing with Development Consent Orders, Nutrient Neutrality and many other issues.

The proposal was to create eight new posts, which would be the equivalent of an additional 6.4 FTE at a total extra cost of £146,491, but this would be split (45/55) between the two Councils. Some existing posts would be re-profiled to assist in the funding of the new posts and the remainder would be funded by an increase in income.

During discussion, the Portfolio Holder for Finance raised concerns about the guarantee of extra income from future applications in relation to the extra position. The Assistant Director for Planning reassured Cabinet that the position would be monitored continually alongside the projected income and baseline budget for the department. Following a show of hands, it was unanimously:

RESOLVED

To approve the proposed changes to the Planning team and the intention to fill the current and new vacancies.

Reasons for Decision

To future proof the team ensuring that they are resourced appropriately to deliver the growth ambitions of the Council.

13 FORWARD PLAN

The Portfolio Holder for Finance queried why the Temporary Accommodation paper had been moved from July's meeting to September. The Director of People and Communities advised Cabinet that they had recently entered a contract with Campbell and Bell to review the service. He further reassured members that team would look to present the report as soon as possible.

14 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business because otherwise, information which is exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 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.

15 REVIEW OF TRAINING SERVICES & CARROWBRECK HOUSE

Cabinet considered the exempt report regarding a review of training services at Carrowbreck House, which set out potential options for generating additional income to offset running costs, proposed a commitment to continuous review of the Council's training offering and proposed a revised fee structure for 2022/23.

The Programme Manager – Economic Growth stated that the facility had been running since 2015 and she gave details of the running costs and income generated. She explained that, as part of the review of training services offered, the opportunity had been taken to engage a commercial agent to undertake a valuation of the facilities to understand the opportunities for the site.

Following a show of hands, it was unanimously:

RESOLVED

To agree the recommendations laid out in the exempt report.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the ongoing viability of training services & Carrowbreck House.

(The meeting concluded at 6.55pm)

Chairman