

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Cabinet** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, on **Tuesday 4 October 2022 at 6:30 pm**

Members of the Cabinet present:

Councillor Norman Brooks, Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Councillor Maurice Cook, Councillor Steve Gallant, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Letitia Smith

Other Members present:

Councillor Paul Ashdown, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Mark Jepson

Officers present:

Stephen Baker (Chief Executive), Jason Beck (Principal Planner (Policy & Delivery)), Karen Cook (Democratic Services Manager), Stephanie Duff (Housing Maintenance Manager), Nathan Hodges (Housing Estates Surveyor), Andrew Jarvis (Strategic Director), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Bridget Law (Development Programme Manager), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer (Regulatory)), Andrea McMillan (Planning Manager (Policy, Delivery and Specialist Services)), Sue Meeken (Labour Political Group Support Officer), Laura Mundy (Principal Planner (Policy & Delivery)), Agnes Ogundiran (Conservative Political Group Support Officer), Lorraine Rogers (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), Anthony Taylor (Senior Planner (Policy & Delivery)), Heather Tucker (Head of Housing)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from the following Cabinet Members: Councillor Kerry, Councillor Mallinder, Councillor Ritchie and Councillor Rudd.

Apologies for absence were also received from the following Assistant Cabinet Members: Councillor Cackett; Councillor Cloke and Councillor Cooper.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Announcements

There were no announcements.

4 Minutes

It was by consensus

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 September 2022 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy

Cabinet received report **ES/1291** by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, the purpose of this report being to recommend the adoption of the East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy (the Strategy).

The Leader introduced the report on behalf of Councillor Ritchie, outlining its links to the Council's Strategic Plan and reporting that the purpose of the Strategy was to create safe, coherent, direct, comfortable, and attractive cycling, walking and wheeling environments that would lead to improvements in health and wellbeing, facilitate greater social interaction and play, encourage more environmentally sustainable lifestyles, reduce road congestion, and support economic growth. In order to create these environments, the Strategy identified cycling and walking infrastructure recommendations across East Suffolk including in the Broads Authority Area. The Leader advised that the recommendations were supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Framework that aligned with the Infrastructure Delivery Frameworks appended to the Suffolk Coastal and the Waveney Local Plans.

The Leader outlined the production stages of the Strategy by both an Officer Steering Group and the Local Plan Working Group and detailed the influence on the Strategy's development of comments received from consultations conducted in 2020 and 2021. The Leader confirmed that, if adopted, the Strategy would become a material consideration when determining planning applications.

Cabinet gave its full support to the proposals; the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources commented on the high quality of the Strategy.

Councillor Ashdown praised the Strategy but raised concerns for proposed changes to traffic permitted across the Bascule Bridge in Lowestoft, citing concerns from residents and businesses about the impact this would have. The Leader drew attention to the precise wording in the Strategy regarding these proposed changes and considered it was apparent that these changes would not be implemented should the anticipated improvement in traffic resulting from the completion of the Gull Wing Bridge not be seen. Councillor Gallant was assured that the wording in the Strategy meant this change would not be brought in without this data nor without consultation with residents and businesses in the area.

Councillor Byatt queried the cost implications of the Strategy, should it be adopted, been assessed. The Leader advised that the implementation of proposals in the Strategy would be achieved through a variety of methods and funding, such as Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 contributions, and that the

Strategy set out the Council's ambitions regarding cycling and walking provision in the district.

Councillor Gooch considered the Strategy to be comprehensive and complimented the team of officers that had put it together. Councillor Gooch said that the Council needed to communicate its ambitions to the public, suggesting adding a dedicated section to its website, and should promote schemes such as Easy Bike Fixers and do more to educate citizens on safe cycle riding. The Leader welcomed Councillor Gooch's points and encouraged Members to liaise with town and parish councils in their Wards and to consider funding cycling and walking projects from the Enabling Communities budgets.

The Leader noted that the report also recommended that, should the Strategy be adopted, a presentation be given to Full Council on the Strategy.

On the proposition of Councillor Gallant, seconded by Councillor Smith, it was by unanimous vote

RESOLVED

1. That the East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy, attached as Appendix A to report ES/1291, be adopted.
2. That the Head of Planning and Coastal Management, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management, be authorised to make any presentational or typographical amendments to the East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy prior to it being published.
3. That the East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy be presented to Full Council for its information and to ensure Full Council is informed of the Strategy's importance to the district.

6 Budget Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2022/23

Cabinet received report **ES/1292** by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Resources, who stated that the report provided Cabinet with an overview of the Council's projected financial performance for the current financial year as at Quarter 2, in respect of the General Fund, Reserves, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the Capital Programme.

The figures presented in the report, Councillor Cook advised, were published ahead of the Government's 'mini budget' on 23 September and Appendix B was a subsequent addition to the report, to provide a brief update on the announcements and measures that were directly relevant to the Council. In summary, no measures were announced in respect of the Council's key income streams of council tax and business rates, nor any specific details regarding Government departmental spending. One announcement affecting the Council for the remainder of this financial year, was the reversal of the National Insurance Increase of 1.25% from 6 November. For the General Fund this would be a saving in the region of £0.080m for direct staffing costs in the current year. Taking this into account, the General Fund net budget for the current year was projecting a net increase of £1.217m which was primarily due to inflation

estimates and the pending pay award. Both items were presenting financial challenges and uncertainties for the Council, with no indication at this time of additional funding from Government.

Indoor Leisure, Councillor Cook reported, had the greatest exposure to utility price increases. The Council worked closely with its Leisure Partners to monitor performance and presently cost pressures were being managed within existing budgets. This was an area of continued concern and the Council's Leisure operators were awaiting proposed details from Government on support for the industry. The financial implications of the Energy Bill Relief Scheme were being worked on and would be reflected in future budget update reports. Exposure to rising fuel costs was via the Council's Operations Partnership. Presently this cost pressure was mitigated by savings on waste disposal costs.

Staff cost budget pressures, Cabinet was advised, were calculated on the current pay offer. The Council continued to face recruitment difficulties, particularly in areas of specialism, and some agency/contractor support was required. This was giving rise to a £1m underspend on staff costs which would offset the estimated £1.4m cost pressure from the pending pay award.

Overall, income from Fees and Charges was on track, although income from car parking was below budget to date. Subject to further analysis in this area, a reduction to the annual baseline income of £0.200m was currently projected.

There were some positive items to highlight, Councillor Cook reported, which were forecast to alleviate identified budget pressures. This included additional interest rate income of £0.500m and Business Rates income of £0.280m.

Earmarked reserves intended to balance year-to-year fluctuations, such as the In-Year Savings Reserve and the Business Rates Equalisation Reserve, would be utilised if necessary to mitigate any further financial risks arising in the second half of the year, and to ensure that the outturn position was balanced.

Councillor Cook reported that the HRA was currently projecting a reduction on the movement from the HRA Working Balance by £0.961m, which was mainly due to re-phasing of the capital programme works. The budget projections were yet to be updated to reflect ongoing compliance work.

In conclusion, Councillor Cook advised that this financial update continued to show the Council in a strong position in respect of its reserves and balances, and able to manage short-term budget fluctuations over this period of uncertainty. For future years and next year's budget, the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023/24 – 2026/27 would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 1 November.

The Leader commented on how, at the moment, it was very difficult to say with any certainty what would happen in the future. The Leader congratulated Councillor Cook and officers on their excellent work trying to forecast the future; he added that the forecasting gave an assurance that ESC could continue to deliver the things that it wanted to deliver with some degree of certainty.

Councillor Beavan referred to parking income having fallen and asked why this was. It was confirmed that parking income was substantially down compared to pre-Covid levels. Work was ongoing considering parking and infrastructure within East Suffolk and a report would come to Cabinet in the future addressing the situation. The Leader referred to the way that people chose to use high streets now being different to before, and he referred to the growth in on-line shopping. The reality was that some town centre car parks were not as busy as before.

Councillor Beavan referred to savings on wages being made due to the level of vacancies but expressed concern that this was putting added pressure on existing staff where agency staff were not being used. The Leader gave an assurance that senior management team continued to monitor the situation and provide support for all staff.

A number of questions were asked by Councillor Byatt, and answers were provided; these were not directly related to the report.

On the proposition of Councillor Cook, seconded by Councillor Burroughes, it was by unanimous vote

RESOLVED

1. That the Council's financial position for the period April to September 2022 together with projections of the full year outturn and reserve balances be noted.
2. That the areas of financial risk identified, the impact of which will be reflected in the Draft Medium-Term Financial Strategy due to be considered by Cabinet in November, be noted.
3. That the additional financial commitments approved in the first half of the year and their impact on the General Fund and reserve levels be noted.

7 Exempt/Confidential Items

The Leader reported that, in exceptional circumstances, the Council may, by law, exclude members of the public from all, or part of, an executive decision-making meeting. The Council should, unless there were urgent circumstances, give notice of its intention to do so via the Forward Plan, which was updated and published on its website 28 clear days prior to the meeting.

There were various reasons that the Council, on occasions, had to do this and examples were because a report contained information relating to an individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person, or information relating to any consultations or negotiations.

Tonight, the Leader advised, Cabinet had three substantive exempt matters to consider as outlined on the published agenda.

Firstly, agenda item 9 related to debt write-off and recommendations within the report supported the debt write off process within East Suffolk Council's Constitution and meant that the Council could act to reclaim VAT already paid in relation to the debt.

Secondly, the Leader reported, agenda item 10 related to a proposed housing development in Ilketshall. This was an opportunity to deliver seven new homes utilising an area of undeveloped land. The report outlined the options for the future development of the site and made recommendation for the appointment of a main contractor to design and build the new homes.

The Leader concluded that agenda item 11 related to a programme of fire safety works for social housing and the procurement of works for specialist contractors. East Suffolk Council (ESC) was undertaking a programme of essential inspections which was required for properties within the Housing Revenue Account portfolio.

On the proposition of Councillor Gallant, seconded by Councillor Rivett, it was by unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

8 Exempt Minutes

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
- Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.

9 Debt Write Off

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

10 Halesworth Road, Ilketshall Proposed Housing Development

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

11 Programme of Fire Safety Works for Social Housing: Procurement of Works from Specialist Contractors

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The meeting concluded at 7.45 pm.

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Chairman