

BROADLAND COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Broadland Council of Broadland District Council, held on Thursday, 14 December 2023 at 7.00 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: C Karimi-Ghovanlou (Chair), P Auber, B Baby, J Bailey, S Beadle, P Berry, M Booth, F Bowe, N Brennan, P Bulman, S Catchpole, S Clancy, J Coplestone, A Crotch, J Davis, L Douglass, C Eden, J Emsell, M Goodman, S Gurney, N Harpley, J Harvey, S Holland, B Johnson, S Jones, K Kelly, E Laming, K Leggett, T Mancini-Boyle, A Miah, M Murrell, P Newstead, G Nurden, S Riley, D Roper, J Royal, L Starling, N Starling, D Thomas, E Tovell, K Vincent, S Ward, F Whymark and T Yousefian

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: A Tipple (Vice-Chair), L Hemsall and R Potter

Officers in Attendance: T Holden (Managing Director), D Lorimer (Director of Resources), P Courtier (Director of Place), E Hodds (Chief of Staff), R Fincham (Assistant Director of Finance), L Mockford (Governance Manager), C White (Democratic Services Manager) and M Pursehouse (Assistant Director of Individuals and Families)

Also in Attendance: Two members of the public

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

60. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Hemsall, Potter and Tipple.

61. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

Minute No: 51 - Questions from Cllr N Brennan

In respect of Cllr Brennan's question about meeting rooms being made available to charitable trusts, Cllr D Roper, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development, confirmed that he had discussed this matter with his counterpart at South Norfolk and they had agreed that the Starston Room could be made available at no charge on an occasional basis to charitable trusts. It was anticipated this would only be once per year for each trust in question and for no more than 12 meetings a year in total. The meetings would have to be held during business hours to ensure that no additional costs were incurred by the Council.

62. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairwoman drew members' attention to her civic engagements for the period 6 October to 14 December 2023, as well as those of the Vice-Chairman.

She highlighted a number of events including the Norfolk and Norwich Indian Association 40th Anniversary Dinner, the Koblenz Society Advent Evening and the Brooklands Care Home Christmas Lights Switch-On.

Finally, she wished to thank the partners, husbands and wives of members who worked tirelessly to support members in their duties as Councillors.

The Leader reminded members that the County Council had a meeting earlier this week where they had agreed to a level three deal for Norfolk. The County Council would be making a further decision in July about the specifics surrounding the deal.

Members were advised that Helen Mellors, the Assistant Director of Planning, was retiring. The Leader thanked Helen for the hard work she had put in for the Council over many years. A Member Panel would be interviewing applicants for the Assistant Director of Planning post the following week.

A member training event had been held on the 29 November 2023, which was well attended and had been very useful for members to meet and talk to officers from different Council departments. Further sessions like these would be arranged in due course.

The Leader congratulated Debbie Lorimer, the Director of Resources, who had recently won a national award from the LGC for her work on delivering the move to the Horizon Building.

Finally, she confirmed that publication of the *Members' Bulletin* was resuming in the New Year.

Cllr S Riley, the Portfolio Holder for Finance advised the meeting that he wished to make members aware of the funding issue that the Council would be facing when setting the budget for 2024/25.

He reminded members that the Government had not yet confirmed the Council's settlement, however there were indications that it would only provide an increase of three percent in core spending power, which was well below inflation and would

place pressure on the budget setting process.

He drew members' attention to the Medium-Term Financial Position and Reserves Update that went to Cabinet on 10 October 2023, which identified the funding gap due to inflationary pressures and that it was expected that some difficult decisions might need to be taken later in the year to address the challenge.

He noted the commitment from General Reserves to a substantial Capital Programme that had been agreed under the previous administration and that it would no longer be possible to continue with that commitment for the next budget if minimum levels of reserves were to be maintained and a balanced budget was to be presented to Council in the New Year.

63. QUESTIONS

There were no questions received from the public.

64. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no requests from the public to speak at the meeting.

65. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE - DISCOVERY PHASE BUSINESS CASE

Cllr D Roper, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development advised the meeting that he was pleased to propose the recommendations in the report, which would not only be a significant enhancement to how the Council interacted with its residents, customers, stakeholders, and businesses, but would also bring about cashable savings over a number of years.

The new Customer Experience Platform would offer a better service and at the same time save money by ensuring initial contact was right first time and would move away from a situation where different IT systems across the Council did not communicate with one another.

The new system would allow customer service records to be available to whoever was answering a query and allow officers to see their history and be able to make informed decisions to address their concerns. The new system would also ensure that timely responses to web enquiries were made.

The Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development also wished to record his thanks to the elected members and to the members of the public who took part in the workshop, which helped to inform the development of the new system.

In seconding the proposal, the Portfolio Holder for Finance advised members that extensive work had been undertaken on the business case for the new system, as it would involve a significant capital outlay as well as a commitment to ongoing revenue costs. He was pleased that as part of the business case an unallocated IT budget had been reprofiled to fund the new system instead of using reserves and as had already been stated, the savings through efficiencies would cover the

outlay in revenue by year five.

It was noted that the Customer Experience Programme had been placed on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme in order to oversee the project and periodically review progress against key milestones.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

1. That the Capital investment required of £344,250 is funded by reprofiling the uncommitted favourable variance from the IT- Systems Replacement Programme 23/24 to Customer Experience Programme 24/25 and 25/26.
2. That the revenue investment required as outlined in section 4.0. is built into the base budget from 2024/25.

66. PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER - VEHICLE RELATED ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

In proposing the recommendation Cllr J Davis, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence, advised the meeting that vehicle related anti-social behaviour was on the rise and incidents could vary from a single car being used in ways that caused nuisance, to pre-planned mass gatherings of cars causing serious antisocial behaviour and sometimes endangering members of the public.

Council officers had worked closely with the police in preparing an Order that was enforceable and appropriate to protect communities from unacceptable behaviours.

A public consultation had been strongly in favour of what had been proposed, and feedback from the consultation had led to the Order being extended district wide at all times of the week throughout the year.

It was emphasised that law abiding motorists could be reassured that the Order would not affect people socialising and enjoying car clubs etc without causing nuisance to local communities.

The Order would be in placed initially for three years and would be reviewed by officers after 12 months in operation.

It was confirmed that the Order would cover businesses, such as supermarket car parks. In respect of land owned by the vehicle owner, the Order took into account what was reasonable or unreasonable and, therefore, action could be taken if activity was taking place that was deemed unreasonable.

In response to a query about the cost of the signage for the Order, it was confirmed that the cost would be less than £5,000. It was anticipated that some of the businesses affected by anti-social behaviour would also contribute to the signage cost. The locations of the signage were still to be confirmed.

In seconding the proposal, the Leader commended the Order which she hoped would make neighbourhoods more peaceful for residents in the future.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To make the Public Spaces Protection Order as proposed in paragraph 4.6 of the report and Appendix 1 over the geographical areas identified in Appendix 2 for a period of three years.

67. COUNCIL TAX ASSISTANCE SCHEME 2024/25

In proposing the recommendation Cllr N Harpley, the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Housing commended the report, which had been considered and endorsed by the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Development Panel and Cabinet.

Members were informed that the scheme must be reviewed and agreed by Council on an annual basis. In 2022 a number of changes had been made to the scheme to ensure it remained fit for purpose and directed support to those most in need. An analysis by independent consultants had confirmed that this was still the case and that no changes were required to be made to the scheme for 2024/25.

Members noted that any changes to the scheme would require modelling to understand the cost implications and a public consultation. Moreover, to meet Government requirements work would need to start at the beginning of the new financial year. It was, therefore, planned to start the discussions for the 2025/26 scheme in April 2024.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To approve the Council Tax Assistance scheme for 2024/25.

68. DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT AND COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY RELIEF POLICIES

In proposing the recommendation, the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Housing informed the meeting that the discretionary policies set out how the Benefits Team made decisions for Housing Payment and Council Tax Relief.

The Policies had been reviewed to ensure they remained fair and addressed increasing demand, whilst coping with reduced funding from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Financial pressures on housing associations had also led to an increase in demand for rental payments in advance which had resulted in an increase in demand for Discretionary Housing benefit applications to cover the payments. As the funding from the DWP would not be sufficient to cover all these applications, the Policy had been reviewed and rent in advance would not be paid except in

exceptional circumstances.

The decision matrix used by the Benefits Team to make consistent and fair decisions had been reviewed to take into account the reduced DWP budget and the most significant change was reducing the standard length of an award but this would now be paired with extra support to assist the customer with their situation in other non-financial ways, so the Council was taking a broader, holistic, approach to helping people.

The Leader seconded the proposal and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

To approve the Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policies for implementation in April 2024.

69. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

In proposing the recommendations, the Leader advised the meeting that the report set out some staffing changes to the arrangements for elections, as well as the appointments to the new property company and a number of other changes.

In answer to a query about the governance arrangements for Norfolk Environmental Credits, the Managing Director advised the meeting that the company was constituted with the member authorities controlling the company and the directors of the company delivering the operational business within the framework of the Business Plan and Budget approved by the member authorities.

The Leader added that the key point was that nothing would go forward unless it has been first agreed by the Shareholder Representative with their Council. A similar approach was being taken with Broadland Living, the new property company which was being established by the Council.

In summing up the Leader noted the other recommendations in the report which included changes to appointments to outside bodies, and a Compulsory Purchase Order update to comply with legislative changes.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To approve

1. The appointment to outside bodies, as outlined at paragraph 2 of the report.
2. The appointments to the new Property Company, as outlined at paragraph 3 of the report.
3. The Shareholder Representative and the Director appointments for Norfolk Environmental Credits.

4. The appointment to the Community Fund Grant Panel, as outlined at paragraph 4 of the report.
5. Officers who can deputise for the Monitoring Officer, as outlined at paragraph 5 of the report.
6. The appointment of Stuart Guthrie, Linda Mockford and Emma Hodds as the Deputy Electoral Registration Officers for Broadland District Council.
7. That the constitution be updated in relation to the process for Compulsory Purchase Orders, to provide clarity.

That the consequential changes to the constitution to be delegated to the Monitoring Officer.

70. OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

There were no reports regarding outside organisations.

71. DECLARING SUPPORT FOR THE CLIMATE AND ECOLOGY BILL - MOTION MOVED BY CLLR J DAVIS AND SECONDED BY CLLR S HOLLAND

Cllr J Davis, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence, informed the meeting that human activity was causing irreversible climate change. The average global temperature had already increased by 1.2°C above pre-industrial levels and was rising.

The natural world had reached crisis point, with many plants and animals threatened with extinction. The UK was one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world.

The Climate and Ecology (CE) Bill was a private members' bill currently before the House of Commons which aimed to align current UK environmental policy with the need to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030.

The Bill also aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with the UK's share of the remaining global carbon budget to give the strongest chance of limiting global heating to 1.5°C.

The Bill was currently backed by 172 cross-party MPs and Peers, and 240 local councils. It had the support of nearly 200 eminent scientists; NGOs; businesses; and many members of the public.

The CE Bill would require the UK Government to develop a new Environmental Strategy which would include delivering a joined-up Environmental Plan that considered the deeply intertwined crises of climate and nature.

He moved that the Council should

“RESOLVE to

1. Support the Climate and Ecology Bill.
2. Inform the local press/media of this decision.
3. Write to relevant local MPs to inform them that this motion has been passed and urge them to sign up to support the CE Bill, or thank them for already doing so.
4. Write to the organisers of the cross-party campaign for the CE Bill, expressing Broadland District Council's support for it (councils@zerohour.uk)”

Cllr F Whymark informed the meeting that he considered the motion to be outside of the Council's remit, unlike the motion put forward at the 27 July 2023 Council in respect of the A47 improvements, which did directly impact residents. He also failed to see why the resolution proposed informing the local press, as surely if something was newsworthy it would be reported on.

In summary, he said that unless meaningful changes were proposed the motion was just virtue signalling and that it did not have the overwhelming support in Parliament that the proposer suggested and was very unlikely to ever be enacted, therefore he could not support the motion.

Cllr S Riley, the Portfolio Holder for Finance disagreed with Cllr Whymark's comments as there was cross party support, which was quite high for a Private Members' Bill. He added that the motion was well worth supporting and had been backed by 330 local authorities across the political spectrum. He further added that it was common for councils to issue press releases around its decisions or motions.

Cllr D Roper, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development informed the meeting that he was supporting the motion as the Bill seemed to suggest a straightforward set of proposals which sought a plan from the Government. He added that he was disappointed with the views expressed by the leader of the opposition as he seemed to be opposing the Bill without being clear about what parts he disagreed with. He added that the whole basis of the argument against the motion seemed to be due to resentment that a motion put forward by the opposition at an earlier Council meeting had not been supported, which was not the most effective way of going forward. He urged all members to think very carefully about this matter and to support the motion.

In response, Cllr Emsell stated he wished to correct Cllr Roper regarding the position of the opposition at the 27 July 2023 Council. He advised the meeting that the Conservative Group had made the point that measurable targets should be introduced to reduce carbon. However, the motion at that meeting and the one being debated today was simply words without any substance. He added that the Conservative Group had a record of introducing ambitious environmental targets and if the current administration was serious about addressing climate change, they would increase those targets to back up their rhetoric.

In seconding the motion, the Leader advised the meeting that this should not be a

political point, as climate change was a global and humanitarian issue. She emphasised that the point of the Bill was to urge the Government to establish a Strategy and set up a Plan that showed how it was going to meet targets. She commended the previous administration for its work on the environment in Broadland, but to maintain that momentum, Government help and support was required, which was what the Bill had been designed to do. She commended the motion to Council.

Cllr Davis emphasised that the Bill had cross party support and was very pertinent of Broadland as a District Council. The Council had plans for a whole range of initiatives, such as extending retrofitting, but needed the support from Government to do it, which was why the Bill was so important.

Members then voted on the motion and with 24 votes in favour, 1 against, and 19 abstentions the motion was carried.

RESOLVED

To

1. Support the Climate and Ecology Bill.
2. Inform the local press/media of this decision.
3. Write to relevant local MPs to inform them that this motion has been passed and urge them to sign up to support the CE Bill, or thank them for already doing so.

Write to the organisers of the cross-party campaign for the CE Bill, expressing Broadland District Council's support for it (councils@zerohour.uk)

(The meeting concluded at 8.09 pm)

Chairman