

BROADLAND CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Broadland Cabinet of Broadland District Council, held on Tuesday, 13 February 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: N Harpley (Chair), S Beadle, J Davis, S Riley and D Roper

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: S Holland and M Booth

Officers in Attendance: T Holden (Managing Director), D Lorimer (Director of Resources), P Courtier (Director of Place), J Sutterby (Director of People and Communities), E Hodds (Chief of Staff), G Denton (Assistant Director of Economic Growth), N Howard (Assistant Director for Regulatory), C Lawrie (Assistant Director of ICT/Digital and Transformation), H Mellors (Assistant Director of Planning), S Phelan (Assistant Director of Community Services), M Pursehouse (Assistant Director of Individuals and Families), J Nichols (Capital & Treasury Accountant), G Pell (Corporate Accountant), S Pontin (Planning Business Improvement Team Manager), J Pyle (PR Manager), S Carey (Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer), V Parsons (People from Abroad Programme Manager) and J Overy (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in Attendance: Councillors: S Clancy, K Kelly, M Murrell, N Starling and F Whymark

80. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In respect of agenda item 12 (Local Authority Housing Fund Rounds 1 and 2 - Further Opportunities), Cllr N Harpley and the Director for People and Communities (J Sutterby) declared other registerable interests as Directors of Broadland Living Ltd, Cllr Harpley confirmed that she would not take part in the debate or vote on this matter.

81. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs M Booth and S Holland.

82. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

83. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised Cabinet that at the 6 February 2024 meeting he had used his casting vote to recommend the proposals in the Revenue Budget and Council Tax 2024/25, the Capital Strategy, and the Council Plan items. Some points had been made by members that the Council Plan lacked sufficient ambition, as well as some queries about individual elements of funding.

All the other items were recommended to Cabinet unanimously, with members supporting the proposals for increasing pre-application planning fees to recover costs and welcoming the pro-active approach being taken by the Council to access funding for temporary accommodation through the Local Authority Housing Fund.

84. REVENUE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2024/25

The Director for Resources introduced the report, which presented the revenue budget for approval by Council.

The report set out the various steps involved in setting the budget, which comprised of the assessment of the cost of services, budgeting for other types of income and expenditure and taking account of Government funding, which had increased by £466,000 since last year. The report also assessed Business Rates income and identified the income that needed to be collected from Council Taxpayers.

Overall, this work had resulted in a balanced budget with no need to draw on General Reserves and a recommendation to increase Council tax for a Band D property by £5 to £134.91, which equated to a 3.85 percent increase. Members were advised that most responses to the budget consultation indicated support for a rise in the level of Council Tax.

It was also proposed to increase fees and charges in line with the September 2023 Retail Price Index figure of 8.9 percent, as well as a £6 reduction in Special Expenses for maintaining the streetlights in Great Witchingham and Hellesdon, following a review.

Attention was drawn to the advice of the Section 151 Officer which confirmed that the budget was robust, and the level of reserves were adequate.

Cabinet was also advised that the final Government Finance Settlement had now been received and that this had not led to any significant change in the provisional figures as set out in the report. Recommendation 1 could, therefore, be amended to delete the delegation of any final adjustment in the budget.

Cllr Riley, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, advised the meeting that the budget had been very challenging given the severe financial pressures faced by the Council and the need to review the Capital Programme to avoid the Council's reserves being depleted.

He drew attention to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy which showed that the funding gap had been reduced to £200,000 down from the figure of £1m reported to Cabinet in October 2023 and he thanked officers for their hard work in helping to reduce the gap significantly.

In response to a query about the reduction in Special Expenses, the Assistant Director for Economic Growth advised the meeting that this had been possible because of an extensive upgrade of street lighting to LED bulbs together with a new management system that had reduced operating costs.

Cllr Roper, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development, noted the gap in the Medium-Term Financial Plan had been reduced by 80 percent and congratulated officers and the Portfolio Holder for Finance on bringing this figure down and placing the Council in a very strong position. He also noted the contribution of revenue to the Capital Programme and that the increase in Council Tax would help deliver the Council's transformation programme, which would save money for Broadland residents in the long-term.

The Chair concurred with the above comments and added her congratulations to officers who had worked tirelessly to produce the budget.

It was unanimously,

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

1. The approval of the 2024/25 base budget.
2. That the Council's demand on the Collection Fund for 2024/25 for General Expenditure shall be £6,610,050, and for Special Expenditure shall be £98,931.
3. That the Band D level of Council Tax be increased by £5 to £134.91 for General Expenditure.
4. That the Band D level of Council Tax be £2.02 for Special Expenditure.
5. Changes to the proposed fees and charges as set out in section 6.

RESOLVED

To note

1. The advice of the Section 151 Officer with regard to section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, contained in section 12 of this report.

2. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy projections.

Reasons for Decision

The report was a factual account.

85. CAPITAL STRATEGY AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 24/25 TO 28/29

The Director for Resources introduced the report, which set out the Council's approach to the use of its capital assets and resources for determining the Capital Programme.

The five-year Capital Programme came to a total of £21.044m. Expenditure for the Programme would be funded from reserves, grant funding and capital receipts. There would be no requirement to borrow to fund the Programme.

The Capital Programme included £5m for investment in Broadland Growth Limited to enable the company to deliver housing development and generate an investment return to the Council.

It also included repairs and maintenance, Disabled Facilities Grants and refurbishment of the Waste Depot. A full breakdown of the Programme was set out in Appendix B to the report.

The funding analysis at paragraph 9.4 showed that £4.270m of General Revenue Reserves was required to fund the Programme and that the S151 Officer advice confirmed that there was a need to review the Medium-Term Capital Programme during the forthcoming financial year to reduce the potential draw on the General Revenue Reserve. It was noted that Cabinet remained fully aware of this issue and was committed to continually reviewing the Programme moving forward, to ensure that the Council obtained value for money and that the Programme was affordable.

Cllr Riley, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, emphasised the importance of reviewing the Capital Programme, as the decision at the February 2023 Cabinet to use £5.5m of General Reserves to fund capital spending was clearly unsustainable. He noted that the report had made progress in this, with three reserves totalling £1.1m being repurposed and £250,000 from the revenue budget going towards the Capital Programme. If it proved to be affordable, it was intended continue to provide this sum from the revenue budget in future years.

Cllr Roper, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development, endorsed the report and emphasised that although the Broadland Growth Reserve was not allocated for any specific project at this time, a number of schemes and external funding sources were being looked at and could be expected to come forward in due course.

Cllr Davis, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence, added his support for the Capital Programme and noted that the Council was embedding measures to reduce the carbon footprint of its services and across the district generally, for example as lead authority in Norfolk for the delivery of the Warm Homes

Programme, as well as being in a good position to take advantage of opportunities of further Government funding going forward

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

To approve the Capital Strategy (Appendix A) and the Capital Programme for 2024/25 to 2028/29 (Appendix B).

RESOLVED

To note the advice of the Section 151 Officer in section 12 of the Capital Strategy.

Reasons for Decision

The report was a factual account.

86. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2024/25

The Corporate Accountant introduced the report, which set out the Council's approach to the management of its investments and cash flows.

Members were advised that there had been no significant changes to the Strategy for 2024/25

The Strategy adhered to the following three key treasury management principles:

1. Security – To ensure monies were not placed at undue risk, by ensuring all monies were invested in appropriate counterparties or instruments commensurate with the organisation's risk appetite.
2. Liquidity - To ensure that cash flow was adequately planned, with cash being available when it was needed, and that sufficient funding was available to finance the organisation's capital investment plans.
3. Yield - To maximise investment returns (commensurate with risk) and minimise borrowing costs to minimise the costs to the organisation.

It was emphasised that the security of the Council's funds was the most important of these considerations.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

To approve:

1. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25
2. The Treasury Management Policy Statement 2024/25 (Appendix 1)

3. The Annual Investment Strategy 2024/25 (Appendix 2)
4. The Treasury Management Practice (TMP1) (Appendix 3)
5. The Treasury Management Scheme of Delegation (Appendix 4)
6. The Prudential Indicators (Appendix 5)
7. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement (Appendix 6).

Reasons for Decision

The report was a factual account.

87. COUNCIL PLAN 2024-2028 & DELIVERY PLAN 2024-2026

The Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which presented the new Council Plan 2024-2028 and accompanying Delivery Plan for the period covering 2024-2026.

The Council Plan set out the overarching vision and priorities for the district and the organisation for the coming four years and was divided into the following four key priority areas,

- Empowering individuals and communities
- Cleaner, greener Broadland
- Providing the right homes in the right places
- Sustainable resilient local economy

Each of these strategic objectives specified the current challenges and opportunities facing the Council and the actions that it would be taking to meet these aims.

The Delivery Plan supported this by setting out the work that would be undertaken to achieve these strategic priorities in the first two years of the Council Plan and included the key performance indicators that would be used to monitor progress and performance.

Cllr Roper, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development, commended the report, which presented an ambitious Council Plan and in particular the priority of providing the right homes in the right places, which was a significant issue for many residents in Broadland. He also noted that the Delivery Plan was very forward looking and incorporated much of the activity around collaboration as business as usual, which would allow for a clear focus on the effective delivery of services for residents. He also noted that the overarching strategic objective in the Council Plan was to be a modern, caring Council safeguarding our future.

Cllr Riley, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, added that the Plan encompassed all areas of the Council and that included the revenue and capital account for the delivery and improvement of services for residents and he noted the success of the Community Grant Fund as an example of this.

Cllr Davis, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence, noted that the Plan built on the Council's commitment to address climate change by refreshing the Environmental Strategy to reduce carbon emissions at the Council and across the district and enhance the environment by driving behavior change in a number of areas, such as waste and recycling, as well as supporting businesses and communities to reduce carbon emissions and improve energy efficiency. The Council was also being proactive in terms of biodiversity gain, as well as working with partners such as the Norfolk Climate Change Partnership on Net Zero Communities. He endorsed the Plan.

It was unanimously,

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

To approve the adoption of the Council Plan 2024-2028 and Delivery Plan 2024-2026.

Reasons for Decision

To set out the overarching vision and priorities of the Council.

88. REVIEW OF PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING FEES

The Business Improvement Manager introduced the report which reviewed the charging structure for pre-application advice for planning applications.

Members were reminded that the Council introduced a charging structure for pre-application advice in 2021.

Following a recent update of national fees for planning applications and taking account of the recently agreed Joint Commercialisation Strategy and the current consideration of the Charging Policy, it was considered appropriate to review charges for pre-application advice.

Cabinet was reminded that the service was discretionary, but it was recognised that that it was valued by customers and could result in significant savings for them when submitting planning applications.

The review of charges had taken account of the increasing complexity of advice provided in the light of issues such as nutrient neutrality, the Green Infrastructure Recreation Avoidance Mitigation Strategy and biodiversity net gain.

In an update to the report Cabinet was informed that the figures used to calculate the projected income for the 'General Enquiry' category had incorrectly included enquiry types that it was proposed to continue to be undertaken for free.

Within this category were enquiries which related to:

- Listed Building advice.
- Tree works advice.
- Compliance with conditions advice.

- Follow up enquiries.
- Notifications under permitted development rights.

The proposed charges would relate to approximately ten percent of enquiries submitted in this category and lead to a revised predicted income of £86,000 per year against the current income £22,000 per year.

In a further amendment to the report, it was proposed that, in line with the usual practice when updating fees, they be rounded to the nearest £5.

In summary, it was proposed to continue providing initial high-level advice and permitted development advice to customers free of charge, but for a more comprehensive response that involved research or input from a range of officers / consultees, it was proposed to review the range of charges for the pre-application advice. The fee would include follow up discussions / meetings as appropriate, without a further fee.

It was considered that the proposed increases were proportionate and were on a cost recovery basis and would result in being able to better meet demand and improve the service offered.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

To agree the revised charging structure, as set out in Appendix 3, from 1 April 2024, with the fees being rounded up to the nearest £5.

Reasons for the Decision

To review and increase pre -application charges in order to recover costs for the service.

89. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND ROUNDS 1 AND 2 -FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES

The Assistant Director for Individuals and Families introduced the report, which sought pre-emptive agreement for the financing and purchase of further general use Temporary Accommodation properties under the Government's Local Authority Housing Fund (2) scheme. In accordance with the existing terms of the Fund the completion of properties purchased would need to take place by 29 March 2024.

Members were advised that Broadland had submitted an expression of interest to access this Fund on the 19 January 2024, subject to formal Council acceptance of any subsequent offer.

The Government had yet to respond with a formal allocation offer, however given the timescales for completion officers were seeking pre-emptive approval from Cabinet.

The expression of interest had requested £240,000 of capital to purchase two homes with £40,000 for refurbishment.

The Fund would subsidise 40 percent of the value of the properties and would

also benefit the Council by reducing the significant cost of bed and breakfast accommodation.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Cllr Riley, noted the demand on the temporary accommodation service and the subsequent financial burden on the Council if using bed and breakfast to meet this demand. He further noted that if the bid was successful the Council would match fund the purchase of the properties via the Broadland Growth General Reserve and that this would lead to savings of approximately £180,000.

It was,

RESOLVED

Should an allocation of LAHF be made available to the Council:

To delegate to the Director of People and Communities to accept the Government offer to the Council of LAHF funding for the purchase and refurbishment of further properties to be used as general needs temporary accommodation.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

To delegate to the s151 officer the addition of up to £235,000 to the LAHF capital budget to enable the provision of matched funding, to be funded via Broadland Growth general reserves monies.

Reasons for the Decision

To increase the Council's stock of temporary accommodation and address urgent housing need.

90. FORWARD PLAN

Cabinet noted the latest version of the Council's Forward Plan.

(The meeting concluded at 6.48 pm)

Chairman