

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Cabinet** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, Nottinghamshire, NG24 1BY on Tuesday, 11 July 2023 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor P Peacock (Chairman)

Councillor R Cozens, Councillor S Crosby, Councillor L Brazier,
Councillor K Melton, Councillor E Oldham, Councillor M Spoor,
Councillor P Taylor and Councillor R Holloway

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no declarations of interest.

8 NOTIFICATION TO THOSE PRESENT THAT THE MEETING WILL BE RECORDED AND STREAMED ONLINE

The Leader advised that the proceedings were being audio recorded and live streamed by the Council.

9 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 27 JUNE 2023

The minutes from the meeting held on 27 June 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Leader and Chairman welcomed the new Cabinet Members to their first meeting and introduced their portfolios.

11 COMMERCIAL PLAN UPDATE

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Performance & Finance presented a report which gave an update on the Commercial Strategy and action plan which demonstrated how the Council was responding to the anticipated reduction in funding by making strategic savings and generating additional income.

The Council had identified areas where additional income could be made or savings could be achieved without impacting the quality of service delivery. The detail of the strategy to address this funding challenge was approved by Policy & Finance Committee on 27 January 2022, in the form of the Commercial Strategy 2022-2026 and its associated Action Plan.

The Cabinet noted the positive increase in revenue figures for the Newark Beacon, the Buttermarket and the Lorry Park and the ongoing significant projects

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet note the update on the Commercial Plan.

Reasons for Decision:

To share how the Council is seeking to address our forecast financial deficit.

Options Considered:

Not applicable

12 CORPORATE ANNUAL BUDGET STRATEGY FOR 2024/25

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Performance & Finance presented the Council's Annual Budget Strategy which set out the General Fund, Capital & HRA Budget Strategy for 2024/25. The Strategy was considered by the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee at their meeting held on 26 June 2023 at which they recommended approval.

It was noted that the budget process would result in setting the budget and the Council Tax for 2024/25 and the Housing Revenue Account budget and the rent setting for 2024/25.

The Strategy took into consideration agreed financial policies on Budgeting and Council Tax, Reserves and Provisions, Charging, Value for Money and also a set of budget principles which set out the approach to be taken to the budget process. These policies had been reviewed and updated as appropriate and were attached as appendices to the report.

The current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was approved on 9 March 2023. The report set out a summary of the financial forecast identified within the current MTFP assuming that Council Tax at average Band D would increase by the same rate as in the 2023/24 financial year, namely 1.94%.

The report also set out a number of underlying assumptions which would be applied in compiling the draft budget for 2024/25 including staff costs, provision for inflation and fees and charges.

It was noted that in respect of the General Fund Balances and Reserves Policy, the figure fixed for the general fund balance set aside to pay for exceptional items was £1.5m.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) approve the overall General Fund, Capital & HRA Budget Strategy for 2024/25;
- b) note the consultation process with Members;
- c) note that Budget Officers continue work on the assessment of various budget proposals affecting services for consideration in setting the Council's budget; and

- d) note that Budget Managers work with finance officers in identifying further efficiency savings, increasing income from fees and charges and in identifying new sources of income.

Reasons for Decision:

To enable the Council's budget process to proceed encompassing agreed assumptions.

Options Considered:

Not applicable. The Council's Constitution sets out the process for developing the Council's Annual Budget.

13 ANNUAL REVIEW OF EXEMPT ITEMS

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Performance & Finance presented a report which detailed the exempt items of business considered by the Cabinet for period 1 June 2022 to date. It was noted that the view of officer was that none of the reports were able to be released into the public domain, as the information contained in them remained confidential.

AGREED (unanimously) that the report be noted, with no items being released into the public domain given they were all considered as still containing exempt information.

Reasons for Decision:

To review previous exempt reports considered by the Cabinet over the previous 12 months.

Options Considered:

None, this report is a useful tool in reviewing previous exempt items of business in order to release any into the public domain if considered appropriate.

14 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY 2023-2027 (KEY DECISION)

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Performance & Finance presented a report which set out a proposed Customer Experience Strategy and the Customer Promise, which, subject to approval, would go out for public consultation before being finalised and used to shape all Council delivery.

In the 2022 residents survey, a key area identified for improvement was Council communication. As a result of this the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee set up a working group to develop a Customer Experience Strategy to improve the quality and consistency of customer experience. The working group also developed the Customer Promise which set out behaviours to follow when interacting with customers.

The proposal for the 12 week pilot was for additional opening hours (8am-9am) on a Monday which was the busiest day for customers. The Cabinet welcomed the report and the work of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee in bringing forward the Strategy.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) approve, in principle and subject to consultation, the Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Promise; and
- b) approve the proposed pilot (as detailed in Paragraph 2.3 of the report).

Reasons for Decision:

The Council does not currently have a Customer Experience Strategy, this is a document which sets out our key principles to guide all customer interactions. Whilst the Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Promise do not directly link to the Community Plan, it relates to every service, as it outlines the behaviours all Council employees and representatives will embody when interacting with customers. The Customer Experience Strategy and Customer Promise are important as they shape the quality of our customer interactions.

Options Considered:

Continue with no Council wide strategy and see no improvements.

15 OLLERTON HALL (KEY DECISION)

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Economic Development presented a report which provided an update on the progress of the proposed conversion of the Hall to 8 residential apartments by the Council's preferred developer (Severns Developments (Middleton House) Ltd) and which sought an amendment to the proposed terms of sale.

Following lengthy negotiation with Council Officers, Historic England, and the local community (notably Ollerton & Boughton Town Council and Ollerton Village Resident's Association) the developer has secured planning permission and Listed Building Consent for the conversion of the Hall to accommodate 8 apartments. The developer was ready to implement the scheme but given industry challenges regarding inflationary rises and costs has stated to the Council that it was necessary to revisit the original terms of the agreement. It was now proposed that the developer continue to operate under a lease/licence arrangement until such time as all identified necessary heritage works, as detailed at Appendix B, were completed. At that point a sale would be completed for the agreed purchase price, allowing the developer to raise funds, complete the development and then occupy the completed properties

AGREED (with 8 votes for and 1 abstention) that Cabinet:

- a) note and welcome the updates provided;
- b) approve an amendment to the proposed terms of sale to allow an earlier disposal to the Council's preferred developer (Severns Developments (Middleton House) Ltd) for the agreed purchase price as set out in the exempt Appendix A to the report, subject to completion of all identified necessary heritage works as detailed at Appendix B to the report; and

- c) any renegotiation of sale on the disposal be firstly agreed by the Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Performance & Finance in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Director – Planning & Growth.

Reasons for Decision:

To dispose of Ollerton Hall and secure the long-term future of the building.

Options Considered:

Cabinet could decide not to agree to the proposed revisions to the terms of sale and present the building back to the market for disposal. Members will be aware this building and site has a long history of failed attempts to secure a viable and acceptable re-use for the site. A return to the market would lead to delay and is unlikely, in the opinion of Officers, to find an acceptable and fundable solution given the difficult balance of reinstating heritage value and securing a deliverable scheme.

16 PLAN REVIEW PROGRESS REPORT

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Economic Development presented a report which updated Cabinet on progress on the Amended Allocations & Development Management DPD, the associated progress on the Gypsy & Traveller Pitch Delivery Strategy and which proposed an amendment to the Plan Review timetable and the Local Development Scheme.

The proposed amendments to the timetable were set out in section 3 of the report. The proposed timetable would mean that the DPD would be adopted in Autumn 2024. In order to achieve the timetable an extraordinary Full Council meeting was proposed for 20 September 2023 so that the DPD could be published that month and the plan hopefully being submitted by the end of the year.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) note and support the contents of the report;
- b) adopt the amendment to the Plan Review timetable (Local Development Scheme) as set in Section 3 of this report, to come into force on 18 July 2023; and
- c) request that the Chief Executive call an Extraordinary Full Council meeting be held on 20 September 2023 to agree publication of the Amended Allocations & Development Management DPD.

Reasons for Decision:

- a) To allow Cabinet to note progress on the Plan Review.
- b) To agree an amendment to the timetable so that the Local Development Scheme can be updated to comply with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and appropriate regulations.
- c) To allow the Council to agree to the publication of the Amended Allocations & Development Management DPD in September 2022.

Options Considered:

It is considered that delaying the plan production or starting the process of plan production afresh would deliver any benefits to the Council, as neither would more efficiently address the current planning situation with regard to GRT pitch provision.

17 NEWARK AND SHERWOOD'S HOUSING STRATEGY AND DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2028 (KEY DECISION)

The Portfolio Holder for Housing presented a report which sought approval for the new Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan for 2023 – 2028 Which set out the Council's strategic priorities for housing over the next five years including the key issues affecting housing in Newark and Sherwood and the impact they had on residents.

It was noted that the strategy had been developed in consultation with tenants and residents, officers, and key stakeholders. In presenting the strategy, the Portfolio Holder referred to specific additions in respect of the needs of care leavers or those with lived experience of the care system which would be incorporated into the final document.

The Cabinet debated the commitment to build new homes and targets around energy performance. In addition, an awareness was needed around houses being built below the minimum space standards.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet approves the Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023 – 2028, noting the addition of the incorporation into the Strategy the needs of care leavers or those with lived experience of the care system.

Reasons for Decision:

The Council does not currently have a district wide Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan (the previous strategy expired in 2016). This document sets out the key issues affecting housing in Newark and Sherwood and the impact these have on residents, sets out how the Council will work in partnership to address the issues identified and demonstrates alignment with other key strategies and plans.

Options Considered:

Continue with no formal Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan and increase the scope for a lack of co-ordination, communication, and accountability for housing services.

18 SOCIAL HOUSING DECARBONISATION FUND WAVE 2.1 (KEY DECISION)

The Portfolio Holder for Housing presented a report which provided the business case behind applying in October 2022 to the governments Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund for a grant to replace oil heating systems with air source heat pumps systems for 102 council owned properties.

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project offered the opportunity to kick start the decarbonisation of social housing stock, improve properties thermal comfort whilst also reducing the costs for tenants in heating their homes. The Council has been successful in securing just under £1.3m grant, a mixture of Revenue and Capital funding, to commence in April 2023.

The proposal targeted 102 Council owned homes with oil heating, to be upgraded to air source heating system, solar photovoltaic panels (PV) and a battery. Commercially sensitive financial figures were set out in an exempt appendix to the report.

The Cabinet welcomed the report and this acceleration of decarbonisation.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) endorse the project plan and accept receipt of grant funding of £1.306m from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, which will be drawn down in arrears; and
- b) approve an increase in the Capital Programme of £458,106 in 2023/24 and £676,235 in 2024/25 equivalent to the Capital grant due which is the match funding being provided by the Council.

Reasons for Decision:

The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund provides 50% grant funding for 102 of the Council's housing to have carbon neutral and lower cost-effective heating for tenants who currently have oil boiler heating systems. It meets both Community Plan objectives to create better homes as a landlord and improve tenants wellbeing by reducing fuel poverty and contributing to reducing carbon emissions.

Options Considered:

As detailed in the report, there were no viable alternatives and taking no action would make it harder for the Council to meet the Government requirements on Energy Performance Certificates and decarbonisation of social housing stock.

19 LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND - REQUEST FOR DELEGATED AUTHORITY (KEY DECISION)

The Portfolio Holder for Housing presented a report which sought to secure delegated authority to enable the Council to fulfil obligations of the Local Authority Housing Fund to purchase 14 market sale properties in a timely manner between April and November 2023.

It was noted that the Council had been successful in securing funding under the Local Authority Housing Fund to provide capital funding for Councils in areas facing most significant housing pressures as a result of Ukrainian arrivals. The funding was split into two elements, £1,050,400 to provide 13 homes to assist with alleviation of housing pressures from Homes for Ukraine schemes and a bridging element of £171,457 to provide a four bed or larger home to allocate to a household currently in bridging accommodation.

It was reported that a desktop exercise had been undertaken to explore house prices and stock availability within the district and the grant offered would enable the Council to purchase suitable stock with the ideal purchase price to maximise grant between £153,000 and £200,000.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet approve the following delegated authority:

- a) purchase of property with a value of £300k or less be delegated to Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing; and
- b) purchase of property with a value over £300k be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Section 151 Officer subject to Key Decision requirements.

Reasons for Decision:

To enable the Council to fulfil our obligations under the Local Authority Housing Fund Scheme to purchase 14 market sale properties in a timely manner between April and November 2023.

The delivery of this scheme aligns with our community plan to “create vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to their local area”.

Options Considered:

Continue with no delegated authority and fail to meet financial deadlines required to fulfil our obligations of the Scheme.

20 TENANT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Portfolio Holder for Housing presented a report which set out the draft Tenant Engagement Strategy which included the engagement framework, regulatory landscape and how successful engagement would be measured. The Tenant Engagement Strategy sat alongside the Council’s Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2022-2027 and set out how the Council will seek out, listen to and act on the views of tenants and leaseholders.

The Tenant and Engagement Strategy and menu of involvement were attached as appendices to the report. The Strategy had been considered by the Tenant Engagement Board and the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee who had made comments and requested an update on the take up of the menu options to a future meeting.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet approve the Tenant Engagement Strategy.

Reasons for Decision:

Effective Tenant Engagement is not optional; this strategy sets out how we will engage in order to meet our legal obligations as set out by the Regulator for Social Housing

The delivery of this scheme aligns with our community plan to “Create vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to their local area”.

Options Considered:

Continue with no Council wide strategy and fail to meet our legal obligations with regard to tenant engagement.

21 RESPONDING TO INCREASED DEMAND IN ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND SAFEGUARDING

The Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Community Relations presented a report which set out a proposal to address the increase in demand for responding to anti-social behaviour (ASB) and safeguarding issues across the District.

The report reflected on the current demands and activities within the Community Protection Team and the recommendations of the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee which had already been implemented in respect of ASB.

Given the increasing demand and complexity of cases managed by the existing team, alongside competing demand of ad hoc funding bids aimed at making further improvement, a new Senior ASB Officer post was proposed which would supervise the Community Protection Officers ensuring deployment of patrols in key locations and to assist with dealing with more complex ASB and safeguarding cases to provide more resource to manage the continuing demand.

The Cabinet referred to enforcement and the importance of working with the police to take action on ASB when appropriate CCTV images are available.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) note the current work on Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety as set out in Section 1 of the report;
- b) approve the additional one full-time post to the Council's establishment;
- c) approve the overspend in salaries 2023-24 funded by the overall predicted overall Council General Fund underspend in year; and
- d) approve the growth of salary budget set out in the report for all future years from 2024-25.

Reasons for Decision:

To note the current work the Council currently undertakes to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour within the district and to look how this can be improved and enhanced ensuring support for the team and residents.

Options Considered:

Continuing service delivery with existing resources which would not help to combat the increasing demand.

22 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

AGREED (unanimously) that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

23 LAND AT OLD HALL FARM, EDINGLEY (KEY DECISION)

The Cabinet considered the exempt report in relation to land at Old Hall Farm, Edingley.

(Summary provided in accordance with Section 100C(2) of the Local Government Act 1972).

24 OLLERTON HALL APPENDIX

25 SOCIAL HOUSING DECARBONISATION FUND WAVE 2.1 APPENDIX

Meeting closed at 7.40 pm.

Chairman