

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Cabinet** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, NG24 1BY on Tuesday, 31 October 2023 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor P Peacock (Chair)

Councillor R Cozens, Councillor S Crosby, Councillor K Melton,
Councillor M Spoons, Councillor P Taylor and Councillor R Holloway

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor L Brazier and Councillor E Oldham

43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillors K Melton, P Harris, P Rainbow and K Roberts declared other registerable interests in relation to Agenda Item No. 14 – Southwell Leisure Centre Works – as Trustees of Southwell Leisure Centre appointed by the District Council. The Director – Customer Services & Organisational Development declared an interest in the same item as a Director of Active4Today.

44 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.

45 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 12 AND 19 SEPTEMBER 2023

The minutes from the meetings held on 12 September 2023 and 19 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

46 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Leader and Chair referred to the recent flooding in the District and thanked District Council colleagues who helped with the response effort. He also welcomed the reversal of the Government's decision to close railway ticket offices and the Leader also expressed his thanks to the Customer Services Business Unit for their performance in processing housing support fund referrals.

47 COMMUNITY PLAN 2023 - 2027 (KEY DECISION)

The Chief Executive and Transformation & Improvement Officer presented a report which set out the draft Community Plan for 2023-2027 which was the key direction setting document which outlined the priorities and vision of the Council for the four-year term following the May 2023 election. The draft plan was attached as an appendix to the report and it was noted that appropriate amendments had been made following comments made by the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee which were also detailed in the report.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) review the Community Plan and the accompanying comments carried forward from the Policy & Performance Improvement Committee; and
- b) endorse and recommend the Community Plan to the meeting of Full Council to be held on 12 December 2023 for approval.

Reasons for Decision

Members of Cabinet, Chairs and Vice Chairs have worked together to reach a consensus and have developed the Community Plan over the course of a number of months. The Community Plan is the key direction setting document which sets out the priorities and vision for the Council.

Options Considered

The report details the process by which alternative options for inclusion in the plan have been considered.

48 LOCALISED COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25

The Business Manager – Revenues and Benefits presented a report in relation to the continuation of the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 with minor changes in accordance with the annual uprating amounts applied by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP). By applying the annual uprating of income and disregards to the 2024/25 scheme, the Council would continue to maintain the current level of support to all Council Tax Support claimants and ensure that the scheme continues to benefit the most vulnerable and low-income households using nationally recognised rates of DWP income rather than continuing with the 2023 rates that were being used in the current scheme.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet recommends to Full Council the uprating of the applicable amounts, premiums, state benefits and disregard criteria in accordance with the annual uprating amounts applied by the Department for Works & Pensions (DWP); whilst continuing the current Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for the 2024/25 financial year.

Reasons for Decision

To ensure the Council discharges its responsibilities to agree its Council Tax Support scheme by 31 January 2024.

Options Considered

An alternative option would be to increase the maximum award of 80% - the cost of doing this has been considered within the financial implications section in the report.

49 UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS (KEY DECISION)

The Business Manager – Regeneration & Strategic Housing presented a report which provided an update on the delivery of proposals to assist tenants, residents, local businesses and employees with the rise in the cost of living. The report set out the

progress against the cost of living action plan which captured the range of projects and activities designed to offer such cost of living support, and provided details of proposed additional activities for the remainder of 2023/24.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) note the progress against the Cost-of-Living Action Plan as outlined in section 2 of the report;
- b) approve the additional proposals set out in section 3.2 of the report funded from the existing budget previously approved; and
- c) approve that a further report be brought to the next meeting of the Cabinet in December 2023 outlining the proposed projects for 2024/25.

Reasons for Decision

To support tenants, residents, businesses and employees with the ongoing challenges of the cost of living.

Options Considered

Alternative options include not providing a cost-of-living response; however, this has not been considered viable given the pressures faced by residents, staff and business alike.

50 DIGITAL STRATEGY ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Business Manager – ICT & Digital Services presented a report which provided the Cabinet with an update on the Digital Strategy Action Plan. The digital strategy was created with the three initiatives of Place, Customer and Council, with the community at the heart of the initiatives. The progress against the Action Plan was detailed in the appendix to the report. The Cabinet welcomed the progress and made a link to the economic strategy going forward.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) acknowledges the value of digital transformation and that the Council continues with a 'no customer left behind' approach to digital initiatives, therefore not closing any communication channels to the community;
- b) endorse the positive continuation of the final phase of the 2021-2024 Digital Strategy, that has a large focus on the digital community; and
- c) approve the commencement of work towards the 2024-2028 Digital Strategy.

Reasons for Decision

To ensure that the Council provides communities with digital services and platforms that are expected, within budgets, time, and quality.

Furthermore, ensuring the Council is more efficient and effective through the use of digital technologies including cost benefits and improvements to Council services.

Options Considered

Closing of those more expensive channels including face-to-face, telephone and postal. This option is not a viable option and as a Council we work towards being inclusive for all of our residents and businesses in the District. Therefore, channel shifting that includes closure of non-digital communications channels would pose risk to those digitally excluded, including the most vulnerable in our communities.

51 TRANSFER OF SECTION 106 COMMUNITY FACILITY CONTRIBUTIONS TO FARNSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

The Business Manager – Regeneration & Strategic Housing presented a report which sought approval for the transfer of Section 106 contributions held by the District Council for community facilities in Farnsfield, to Farnsfield Parish Council. The contributions held could be used to improve community facilities in the parish of Farnsfield at the village hall, bowls, football, cricket or tennis clubs as deemed appropriate. The Cabinet considered that parish councils were best placed to determine projects in their areas in accordance with any requirements of the Section 106 agreements.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the Section 106 contributions for community facilities held by the District Council for improvements to community facilities in Farnsfield be transferred to Farnsfield Parish Council; and
- b) the Council's Capital Programme for 2023/24 is increased by £141,748.08 financed by the Section 106 receipts referenced AG977 and AG975 held for community facilities improvements in Farnsfield.

Reasons for Decision

To enable Farnsfield Parish Council to provide financial support to priority community projects in Farnsfield which will deliver positive outcomes for the local community.

Options Considered

The Section 106 receipts held under these two agreements must be spent on community infrastructure projects in Farnsfield, therefore it is appropriate that the District Council transfers the receipts held to Farnsfield Parish Council in order that it can determine which community projects should be supported and will deliver good community outcomes.

The District Council could continue to determine which projects should be supported but it does not have the local contacts and connection that the Parish Council has with its local clubs and groups, and it is felt appropriate therefore to enable the Parish Council to determine such local priorities for the benefit of its community.

52 NEWARK CASTLE GATEHOUSE PROJECT - DELIVERY PHASE APPLICATION (KEY DECISION)

The Business Manager – Heritage, Culture & Visitors presented a report which updated the Cabinet on the progress and revised costs of the Castle Gatehouse Project and sought approval to submit the delivery phase application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The report detailed the aims and objectives for the project and the timescale for delivery which needed to meet both Heritage Fund and Towns Fund requirements.

The report identified the key documents which would be commissioned as part of the development phase which would form the application to the Heritage Fund, provided some sample of designs for the project, and also included options around the charging model.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) approve the submission of the delivery phase application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund by 16 November 2023;
- b) subject to the outcome of the Heritage Fund bid and approval of the Towns Fund Full Business Case, agree that a report be brought back to Cabinet to consider the increase to the capital programme budget from the Heritage Fund and to add additional staff to the establishment, funded by the project; and
- c) approve the preferred charging model.

Reasons for Decision

The Heritage Fund is vital to securing the match funding for this project, and any delay to the delivery phase submission risks the timescales for delivery of the Towns Fund element.

This project supports the community plan objectives of enhancing and protecting the District's natural environment through a more biodiverse planting scheme and landscaping development, preserving the green space within this historic site. It will deliver sustainable economic growth through delivery of a destination attraction for the town, and will support residents and local communities through co-creation, participation activities and opportunities to support improved wellbeing.

Options Considered

No alternatives are considered appropriate at this time. Without the project, the District Council would still have the responsibility to preserve and conserve the fabric of the building which is an ancient scheduled monument and requires significant investment, but without the wider benefits this project will offer. The Gatehouse Project is significant in the redevelopment of the town's visitor offer and as a key driver for the visitor economy, and further offers residents improved access to their heritage and to the gardens, supporting improved wellbeing and health and offering numerous opportunities to participate in cultural activity. The proposed charging model reflects the best option for the economic sustainability of the project whilst providing residents with this significantly improved offer.

53 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - HOUSING OUTTURN 2022/23 AND FUTURE DELIVERY OF NEW HOMES (KEY DECISION)

The Business Manager – Regeneration & Strategic Housing presented a report which provided an update on the progress of the Council’s Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Development Programme in 2022/23 and proposals for future housing delivery. The report reflected on the HRA Development Programme which had delivered 279 properties since 2017. The report demonstrated a highly successful and value for money programme despite the challenges faced.

The report proposed the allocation of S106 affordable housing contributions to three sites which would provide additional affordable one bed bungalows, and set out plans for the future programme to build new housing, which included a smaller discreet development programme of up to 50 units being brought forward subject to capacity and affordability.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) notes the progress and expected completion of the current HRA Development Programme;
- b) allocates £234,747.64 from Section 106 contributions (as detailed in section 2.16 of the report) to development sites at South Crescent, Clipstone; Firview, Ollerton; and Gaitskell Crescent, Edwinstowe as part of Phase 5 of the HRA Development Programme therefore reducing the required borrowing by an equivalent amount;
- c) supports the creation of £10.7m budget for the development of a discreet programme of HRA Development up to 50 units within the HRA Capital Programme in 2024/25 financed by the surplus identified at paragraph 2.19 of the report of £2.445m and with the remaining £8.255m financed initially from borrowing whilst other funding is sourced; and
- d) commits the total of £1.292m from the Section 106 agreements listed at section 2.21 of the report to the new development programme within the obligations of the S106 agreements.

Reasons for Decision

To provide confidence in the ongoing delivery of the HRA Development Programme, securing value for money secured through the programme and the outcomes delivered to against the community plan objectives to create more and better-quality homes through our roles as landlord, developer and planning authority.

Options Considered

The completion of the HRA development programme, without the introduction of a future programme, was considered but discounted in recognition of the impact that a net loss of housing (through annual right to buy numbers) would have on the ongoing viability of the HRA 30 Year Business Plan.

A pause in the programme was also discounted as this would risk losing the in-house skills and experience that have been built up over the last five years.

54 DEVOLUTION RETROFIT FUNDING (KEY DECISION)

The Business Manager – Housing Maintenance & Asset Management presented a report which sought approval for government grant funding of £583,500 to be added to the housing assets capital programme to fund decarbonisation measures in 38 social housing properties. The funding had been allocated in preparation for the establishment of the East Midlands Combined Authority. The project would deliver domestic energy efficiency and low carbon retrofit activities through the Midlands Net Zero Hub.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) endorse the project plan and accept receipt of grant funding of £583,500 from the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC), which will be drawn down in arrears; and
- b) approve an increase in the Capital Programme of £583,500 in 2023/24 fully funded by DLUHC grant.

Reasons for Decision

The DLUHC grant will provide 100% funding to assist the Council in its decarbonisation programme for its own social housing stock. 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 noted in section 3 of the report, there were no viable alternatives and taking no action would mean returning grant funding back to government and make it harder for the Council to meet the government requirements on energy efficiency and move towards decarbonisation of social housing stock.

55 SOUTHWELL LEISURE CENTRE WORKS (KEY DECISION)

The Director – Resources, Section 151 Officer and Deputy Chief Executive and Business Manager – Corporate Property presented a report which advised the Cabinet of the condition of Southwell Leisure Centre and the essential works that were required to the dry side and wet side facilities, and also updated the Cabinet on the decision taken to close the main pool at the centre from 29 October 2023 to 1 December 2023 in order to carry out further investigatory works.

The report summarised the works required under fire safety and general repairs following a full feasibility of a programme of works undertaken by Lindum, and in respect of the pool, Asher Swimpool Centre Limited had been instructed to undertake a condition survey, the full details of which were contained in an exempt appendix.

The costs for the fire safety and general repairs were set out, but it was noted that in relation to the larger programme of works there was a potential for closure of the centre which would result in a loss of net income. It was also noted that there were likely to be significant costs resulting from the pool survey, details of which would be brought to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

AGREED (unanimously) that Cabinet:

- a) approves an additional transfer of £161,800 funded from the Change Management Reserve, giving a total Capital budget of £740,000 to carry out the essential works to the dry side facility as set out in this report;
- b) note that whilst every effort will be made to phase the works to keep the Leisure Centre operational at all times, there is a possibility that the Leisure Centre may have to close for a period of time in order for the works to be carried out safely, effectively and efficiently; and
- c) note that in the event of closure, Active4Today will endeavour to accommodate customers at the Newark and Dukeries facilities, and that the Leisure Centre members affected will have their direct debits reduced to a nil payment where appropriate.

Reasons for Decision

To mitigate the risk of failure of the main pool and carry out the essential fire safety and general repair works to the building.

Options Considered

An alternative option would be to do nothing. This is not a feasible option as there are significant compliance and maintenance works that need to be carried out. In addition, the condition of the main pool at the centre poses a risk of significant water leakage and impact on wider operations to the site.

(Having declared an interest, Councillor K Melton did not vote on this item).

56 REVISIONS TO THE COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME (KEY DECISION)

The Business Manager – Regeneration & Strategic Housing presented a report which proposed revised criteria for allocations against the Council's community grant scheme. In 2022/23 the Council offered a combined community grant scheme which consolidated a number of previous grant allocations and allocations under the scheme totalled £151,000, supporting 56 organisations. Given the criteria for the scheme was left relatively open, the demand on the scheme far exceeded the funds available. Therefore, this report proposed additional criteria to prioritise spend for 2023/24. The budget for 2023/24 had been set at £100,000 and a timeframe for allocations under the scheme was set out in the report, with a cross party panel being convened to consider applications.

AGREED (with 6 votes for and 1 abstention) that Cabinet approve the revised criteria for grant allocations as set out at sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the report.

Reasons for Decision

To ensure that funding can be allocated to community groups – supporting communities to be sustainable and thrive.

Options Considered

Maintaining the existing grant criteria was considered, however the changes proposed allow for greater targeting of funds in line with Community Plan priorities.

57 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 Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

58 SOUTHWELL LEISURE CENTRE WORKS - EXEMPT APPENDIX

The Cabinet considered the exempt appendix in relation to works at Southwell Leisure Centre.

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

Meeting closed at 7.40 pm.

Chairman