



CABINET

17:30 to 18:05

21 June 2017

Present: Councillors Waters (chair), Harris (vice chair), Herries, Kendrick, Maguire, Ryan and Stonard

Also present: Councillors Schmierer and Wright

Apologies: Councillor Davis

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions at this meeting.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2017.

The vice chair read a statement in response to the Grenfell Tower Tragedy which is appended to these minutes. A minutes silence was observed by all present at the meeting.

4. Q4 performance report

Councillor Waters, leader of the council, presented the report, and highlighted paragraph 7 of the report which detailed strong performance in key areas. He said that future challenges would come from external factors such as cuts in housing support services affecting homelessness and the impact of universal credit.

In response to a question from Councillor Schmierer the leader of the council said he was teaming up with Stuart Wright, property and facilities director at Aviva to visit large employers in the city to advise how they could become a living wage employer. This presented an opportunity to advise on the process of support available and to raise awareness in line with the living wage week which was the first week in November. Whilst the council's contractors are paying living wage in Norwich they are not across Norfolk and it was hoped that by raising awareness this would increase consciousness of the living wage.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) consider progress against the corporate plan priorities; and,

- 2) suggest future actions and / or reports to address any areas of concern.

5. Private sector housing enforcement strategy

Councillor Herries, cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods presented the report. She said that that a change in legislation made the introduction of this new financial policy possible and represented a move from costly court action to the use of financial penalties. Fines would be proportionate to scale, dependant on harm caused and culpability of landlord.

In response to Councillor Maguire, cabinet member for safe city and environment, Councillor Herries said that the policy would deter landlords from delaying property repairs to houses and gardens.

In reply to a question from Councillor Schmierer, Councillor Herries advised that the aim of the policy was to be self-financing. The head of city development services, said current enforcements were low in number due to the time they took. He welcomed the strategy as a more effective way to address the issue of rogue landlords.

RESOLVED to approve the private sector enforcement policy and financial penalty policy.

6. Revenue budget monitoring 2016-17 Final Outturn

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources, presented the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Schmierer, Councillor Harris, cabinet member for social housing, explained that the £122,000 fire prevention budget underspend was because this was a contingency fund, to be used as needed and not for planned works. Operations director, NPS, confirmed this was purely a responsive budget.

RESOLVED:

- 1) To note the revenue outturn 2016/17 (unaudited)
- 2) Approve the transfer of £0.500m of general reserves into the invest-to-save earmarked reserve to support the delivery of savings and efficiencies through the transformation programme

7. Capital budget monitoring 2016/17 Final outturn

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources, presented the report.

RESOLVED:

- 1) To note the final outturn position (unaudited) of the 2016/17 housing and non-housing capital programme budgets.

- 2) To approve the carry-forward of unspent 2016/17 capital budgets still required, to the 2017/18 capital programme.

8. Telecom line rental and call charge services– Key decision

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources, presented the report.

RESOLVED to award the contract for the provision of telecom line rental and call charge services to Adept Telecom Plc for one year with an option to extend for up to two years (one year at a time).

9. The renewal of the contract for the collection of water rates on behalf of Anglian Water – Key decision

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for social housing, presented the report.

It was noted that the references to 'Anglia water' in the report should read 'Anglian water'.

Councillor Harris, highlighted the benefits to tenants and said that income made from collection goes to Housing Revenue Account.

RESOLVED to renew the contract to collect water rates from council tenants on behalf of Anglia Water.

10. Exclusion of the public.

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration items 13 to 13 (below) on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

***11. Managing assets (general fund) – Key decision (Paragraph 3)**

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources, presented the report.

RESOLVED to confirm the disposal of the land holdings described in the report.

***12. Managing assets (housing) – Key decision (Paragraph 3)**

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for social housing, presented the report.

RESOLVED to confirm the disposal of the freehold interest of the asset on the open market and to reinvest the capital receipt from the disposal in the housing capital program for improving, repairing and maintaining our housing stock or for enabling new affordable housing.

CHAIR

Fire safety in council tower blocks – announcement at meeting of Cabinet 21 June 2017

Waking up last Wednesday morning to see the scenes of Grenfell Tower in Kensington on fire will have filled us all with horror.

Our sympathies go out to the victims and their families at this extremely difficult time. What they experienced was and continues to be unimaginable.

I am sure we will all want to acknowledge our admiration for the public servants, from the London Fire Brigade and Metropolitan Police particularly, for the work they undertook, putting their own lives at risk to respond to the disaster.

Whilst it will be some time before we fully understand the causes of the fire and how it could have been prevented, the residents living in our own tower blocks and members of the council, will expect that our own fire safety procedures and systems are reviewed to ensure they are robust.

Last week a letter was sent to all residents living in the council's eight tower blocks, to help provide reassurance about the fire safety precautions in their block. That letter also provided reassurance that no cladding had been affixed to our high rise flats since they were first built.

The Norfolk Fire Service has also visited the tower blocks to talk to residents and provide reassurance.

The letter also explained that as further details of events in London unfolded, the council would review and reassess our procedures.

The council has 8 tower blocks these are:

Normandie – 16 floors and 95 flats

Winchester – 16 floors and 95 flats

Ashbourne – 11 floors and 44 flats

Burleigh - 11 floors and 44 flats

Compass - 11 floors and 44 flats

Aylmer - 11 floors and 44 flats

Seaman – 11 floors and 44 flats

Markham - 11 floors and 44 flats

There are some key points that I do wish to highlight here:

- Each flat is 'compartmentalised' with a fire door.
- No external cladding has been added to any of our tower blocks.

- Daily safety checks are carried out at each block, including at weekends, by the caretaking staff.
- Fire safety information is provided to our residents. An important element of this is the requirement to keep communal areas clear.
- The Fire Service visit and undertake a safety check every 3 to 4 months.
- The fire service undertook an exercise at Normandie Tower on the 18 and 25 May.

Key to how we ensure the safety of our residents is the work of our caretakers who have a visible presence in the towers. As well as contributing to the blocks being safe through their day to day duties, they will be talking to residents and answering any questions they have.

This brings home to us all, the importance of a well-resourced locally relevant council. And I am going to be political here.

My colleagues around the table and beyond have long believed that the systematic reduction in public funding, coupled with an ideological desire to make public service “minimalistic”, to the point of an inability to respond to residents cannot be right.

As it may be some time before the causes of the London fire are fully known, I have already commissioned a report from officers that will review the risk assessment and fire safety plan for each of the council’s eight tower blocks. Officers will engage with the Norfolk fire and rescue service in the preparation of these reports and these will highlight whether we should make any changes now to our fire safety procedures.

The findings of these reviews will be shared with the residents in our blocks.

The council are also responding to the requests from Government for information on fire safety arrangements in tower blocks.

The approach being taken balances the immediate need to review our current arrangements based on current fire safety regulations and to make changes that may be required.

As we learn more about the causes of the London disaster or if fire safety regulations for tower blocks change, which we can expect they will, further reviews will be carried out to ensure that the homes that the council provides, particular those in the towers, remain safe and secure.

I would like you to join me in a minutes silence for the victims and families from Grenfell Tower.

Cllr Gail Harris
Deputy Leader and cabinet member for social housing