



**Cabinet**

**17:30 to 18:30**

**13 September 2023**

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair), Jones (vice chair), Giles, Hampton, Kenrick and Oliver.

Also present: Councillor Galvin, Green group leader

**1. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2. Public questions/ petitions**

One public question had been received from Mr John Cena.

Mr Hawketts asked the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“Over the past few years many people have been dumping their unwanted items in and around the communal bins in the area around my home and throughout the estate where I live. As Chair of the local community group, many of my neighbours approach me upset about the mess around the bin areas which impacts pride in our area and the city. I have reported this issue many times to the council.

Some items are removed but I have had to make numerous reports when items are not removed. I have provided details and registration plate details of fly-tipping I have witnessed in the hope that the council will prosecute. However this does not seem to be happening as one of the fly-tippers does it on a weekly basis. I have now been told that we do not qualify as a LOVE Norwich area. When can we see action?”

Councillor Stonard responded:

“Over the autumn the Council is looking to ramp up the LOVE Norwich campaign city wide to make a real positive impact on streets across the city. We are working through the details of the programme at the moment and no decisions have been taken on priority areas or approaches at present. We will look to learn from experience to benefit the entire city.

All reports of fly tipping are responded to, and where sufficient evidence is available we will pursue those committing the offence. However, as part of the LOVE Norwich campaign we are looking at reviewing our approach to enforcement, learning from the best practice nationally and rolling out CCTV coverage where appropriate. This is likely to result in an increased level of enforcement activity over the autumn and winter.

Additionally, I am aware that officers from the housing service are actively looking at the suitability of the type of enclosed bin stores for a number of parts of the city, including West Pottergate and Duoro Place. This is an ongoing process and decisions should be made shortly about how to proceed irrespective of where the LOVE Norwich campaign stands.”

In response to Mr Cena’s supplementary question, Councillor Stonard advised that the LOVE Norwich priority areas were yet to be determined with the campaign due to ramp up in autumn.

### **3. Questions to cabinet members**

Councillor Stonard, the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development advised that two questions had been received from members of the council to cabinet members, for which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of the council’s constitution.

(Full details of the questions and responses were available on the council’s website prior to the meeting. A revised version is attached to these minutes at Appendix A and includes a minute of any supplementary questions and responses.)

The questions are summarised as follows:

Question 1 Councillor Hoechner to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on digital billboards.

Question 2 Councillor Osborn to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on Norwich airport.

### **4. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023.

### **5. Q1 2023-24 Corporate Performance Report**

Councillor Stonard, leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development presented the report and highlighted areas of good performance and noted areas which were below target.

Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety praised the work of the housing options team and highlighted that whilst there were increasing demands on the team they were still offering a good service. Councillor Giles, cabinet member for communities and social inclusion commended

the work of the revenues and benefits team who had exceeded processing targets for housing benefit and council tax reduction scheme claims.

Councillor Oliver, cabinet member for wellbeing and culture referred to the figures for the customer contact centre and noted that work was ongoing and improved figures were expected next quarter. She recognised that it could be difficult for customers to get through to the team on the phone and that not everyone was able to complete online forms. She had recently spent a morning with the customer service team and advised they offered an excellent bespoke service and would be supported with the necessary measures to do the job as they wanted.

Councillor Galvin asked in regard to the increase in the number of complaints received what the underlying cause was and how the increase could be explained. The chief executive officer advised that trends in complaints and the details behind them were analysed. She didn't have the detail to hand but could provide after the meeting.

**RESOLVED** to review progress on the key performance indicators for this quarter.

## **6. Scrutiny Committee Recommendations**

Councillor Kendrick cabinet member for resources introduced the report and noted that he would present the recommendations on the Election Acts and Councillor Giles would present the recommendations on the Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to Norwich item.

Councillor Kendrick referred to the recommendation in relation to conducting research in Norwich on disenfranchised voters and commented that this research would be conducted nationally by the Electoral Commission. He considered they would provide guidance on how to modify the legislation to assist people and the council would follow this advice. In reference to the recommendation in relation to the postal vote registration programme he advised that this was supported by cabinet but noted that there would have to be negotiation with the chief executive officer as the Council's Returning Officer.

The Monitoring Officer advised that in reference to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee it was ultimately the decision of the Returning Officer to accept the recommendations or not. In regard to the recommendation to run a postal vote registration programme she noted that in the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, officers had reflected on the potential costs of running such a programme. She now emphasised the risk associated with running a registration programme relying on Royal Mail and referred to the situation at Brighton and Hove Council where 1,400 postal votes were not received by voters. She noted that as the Returning Officer reviewed the recommendations from Scrutiny Committee endorsed by cabinet she would need to consider these factors. Councillor Kendrick concurred that further consultation between cabinet and the senior management team would need to take place.

Councillor Giles cabinet member for communities and social inclusion turned to the recommendations on the welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to Norwich item. He thanked the scrutiny committee for their work and the third sector advice agencies for their contribution to the meeting.

Councillor Galvin thanked the agencies that had taken part in the scrutiny committee on welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to Norwich and asked if the recommendations would be agreed and if there was a timeline for their delivery.

In relation to the recommendations on the Elections Act 2022, it was:

**RESOLVED** to request that the Returning Officer:

- 1) As part of a future council consultation process, investigate sources of funding to trial and potentially Commission demographically balanced participatory democracy methods including citizens assemblies based on the model of theories of change to ensure widescale representation is achieved;
- 2) Review research from the Electoral Commission relevant to those in Norwich who may be disenfranchised as a result of the introduction of voter ID and assess how the Council can promote uptake amongst those disenfranchised;
- 3) Ensure that communications planning for future elections includes:
- 4) Promote the Voter Authority Certificate and Proof of Age passes as an avenue for securing voter ID and engage with local communities to raise awareness;
- 5) Promote that acceptable Voter ID includes expired ID and, where relevant, EU passports and identity cards;
- 6) Promote the concept of Voter ID to younger groups, including those able to vote for the first time, and the different communication methodologies that may be more relevant for younger groups such as alternative social media channels;
- 7) Re-run the postal vote registration programme as previously undertaken in 2020 to raise awareness amongst non-postal voters, requesting funding if available to do so;
- 8) Thank the Returning Officer and her team for the work undertaken to support the implementation of Voter ID and the successful undertaking of the May 2023 election in Norwich;
- 9) To write to all party leaders to request that if called on to form a government, they should prioritise the abolition of the Election Act 2022, and if not, to include the poll card as an acceptable form of ID.

In relation to the recommendations on welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to Norwich it was:

**RESOLVED** to:

- 1) We will examine the need to update the website in consultation with representative organisations to ensure it is inclusive alongside the production of the EDI Development Plan.

- 2) To build on our City of Sanctuary status and remain committed in the medium-term to becoming an accredited Council of Sanctuary through cross-team working to ensure our services meet the necessary criteria.
- 3) To recognise the critical importance of delivering equality for all our residents through our EDI Strategy and Development Plan, including asylum seekers and refugees.
- 4) To collate information relating to free activities taking part at our community centres for sending to representative organisations. To support community associations to apply for grant funds to support their charitable objectives as and when they become available.
- 5) To continue engaging with the Norwich BID and BITC through City Vision partnerships to support possibilities for asylum seekers and refugees to access training, work experience and employment.
- 6) To advertise INTRAN training sessions to councillors.
- 7) To ensure communications with residents (benefits letters etc) are as accessible as possible within the constraints of what we are legally obliged to incorporate.
- 8) To build on the relationships established since the Scrutiny Committee meeting between our neighbourhoods and community enabling team and the Serco housing officers at the asylum hotels in Norwich.
- 9) To fund a two year specialist housing officer role in Home Options to work with asylum seekers and refugees.
- 10) To seek to delegate some of the Government funding secured to work with asylum seekers and refugees to third sector organisations to address their gaps in capacity, working with such organisations and our partners at Norfolk County

## **7. Q1 2023-24 Budget monitoring report**

Councillor Kendrick cabinet member for resources presented the report. He noted that the item had previously been included in the corporate assurance report but was now being presented separately. The report presented the revenue and capital monitoring position for the first quarter of the financial year. Some more recent information had been included where it had a material impact.

Councillor Kendrick advised that the council continued to maintain a strong financial position with the general fund indicating an underspend of £2.4m. He noted that the savings proposals agreed for the financial year were on track including those agreed for the increased levels of income from treasury management activity. The council's strong financial position meant that the previously budgeted contribution to reserves was now not required.

He highlighted that there were still risks and in line with principles of prudence appropriate provision had been made to cover these. However, other risks such as

the as yet unagreed staff pay award would have to be factored in when the position became clear.

Councillor Galvin referred to the constant underspend on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget which stood at £4m and asked what could be done to remedy this and ensure that vital stock upgrades were delivered. In response Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety advised that the tendering and procurement process was well managed but that work didn't always neatly fit into a yearly budget cycle. She emphasised that the council was commitment to delivering high quality standards for all residents.

The interim executive director of housing and community safety advised that the property services director was looking at moving the HRA budget to a five year one to recognise the ebb and flow of major works which might run over a one year cycle.

**RESOLVED** to note:

- 1) the forecast *£2.4m underspend* on the general fund revenue account and the *£0.4m overspend* on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- 2) the forecast *£13.9m underspend* against the general fund and the *£4.6m underspend* against the HRA capital programmes.
- 3) the areas of significant variances contained within report.
- 4) the detailed breakdown of capital programme variances.

## **8. Update to capital programme**

Councillor Kendrick cabinet member for resources presented the report. He advised the report proposed an increase to the council's capital programme which would have to be agreed at full council. The additional funds would be used to upgrade technology in the Mancroft Room in order that it be suitable for hybrid working and to support phase 2 development of the system which would replace the current finance and human resources sytems.

The report also incorporated a number of carry forwards for cabinet to note.

In response to Councillor Galvin's question the interim chief finance officer advised he had reviewed all carry forwards detailed in the report and these represented projects which were in progress and spend was expected in this financial year.

**RESOLVED** to:

Recommend to Council that:

- 1) An additional £20,000 be added to the 2023/24 capital programme to meet the additional costs of implementing an audio system in the Mancroft Room;
- 2) An additional £200,000 be added to the 2023/24 and 2024/25 capital programme to support phase 2 of the Enterprise Resource Planning system; and

Note:

- 3) The approved carry forwards from 2022/23 into the 2023/24 capital programmes be noted

## **9. Q1 2023-24 Risk register update**

Councillor Kendrick cabinet member for resources presented the report. The risk register had previously been included in the larger corporate assurance report but was now a stand alone item. He confirmed that all the risks presented had been reviewed by risk owners across the council. He noted that the Audit Committee would review the management of risks and make any relevant recommendations to cabinet.

He highlighted the majority of risks remained static but that significant risks in relation to nutrient neutrality were rescinding following the government's recent U turn on the matter.

**RESOLVED** to note the identified risks and the direction of travel.

## **10. Exclusion of the public**

**RESOLVED** to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of items \*11 to \*13 (below) on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

### **\*11. Q1 2023-24 Risk register update - exempt appendix (para 3)**

Councillor Galvin asked was it of concern that risks in relation to repairs and maintenance and the company's governance had remained static for the last two quarters. The interim executive director of housing and community safety advised that the governance of NCSL had been improved and there had been a change to the function of the Managing Director. He noted that in terms of compliance activities there had been an improvement overall. He advised that the process was to ask the Social Housing Regulator for permission to be removed from supervision and conversations in relation to this were in progress.

**RESOLVED** to note the identified exempt risks and the direction of travel.

### **\*12. Exempt minutes - (para 3)**

**RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the exempt minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023.

### **\*13. Disposal of assets (housing) – exempt (para 3)**

(The chair referred to the supplementary agenda which had been circulated).

Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety presented the report. She noted that properties were evaluated when they became empty and measured against the need to be brought up to a good standard to let. It was not cost effect to bring these properties up to standard for the HRA and they were recommended for disposal.

In response to Councillor Galvin's question the interim executive director for housing and community safety advised that an issue with the water course was isolated to a particular property and not the wider area.

**RESOLVED** to approve the disposal of the freehold interest in the property assets as identified in the report on the open market via a public property auction.

CHAIR