

Cabinet

17:30 to 18:50

Wednesday, 11 September 2024

Present: Councillors Stonard (Chair), Hampton (Vice-Chair), Giles, Jones, Kendrick and Kidman

Apologies: Councillor Packer

In attendance: Councillor Galvin (Leader of the Green Group)
Councillor Wright (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group)

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

2. Public Questions and Petitions

There had been no public questions or petitions received.

3. Questions to Cabinet Members

There had been no questions received.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2024.

5. Norwich Western Link planning application consultation response

The Leader of the Council presented the report. It set out the Council's response to Norfolk County Council's planning application for the Norwich Western Link Road scheme. The City Council was not a statutory consultee as the road was outside the city boundaries but was able to comment on the application. The Council was not supportive of the planning application for a number of reasons as detailed in the report.

Councillor Wright commented that the Liberal Democrat Group were fully supportive of the report and the City Council's response to the planning application. He highlighted that the cessation of the Norwich Highways Agreement the City Council had had less influence in regard to transport matters that affected the city.

Councillor Galvin asked whether any other proposals had been considered. The Leader of the Council responded that there were several alternative solutions that could have been considered. The funding used for Norwich Western Link road could have been used on sustainable transport initiatives in Norwich.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the submission of the proposed response to Norfolk County Council's public consultation on the planning application for the Norwich Western Link (NWL) road as contained in appendix 1 to the report.

6. Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 1, 2024-2025

The Leader of the Council presented the report. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within the report had been carried over from the previous Corporate Plan whilst the business planning was in process. The existing KPIs had been mapped to the new priorities within the Community-led Plan 2024-2029 "We are Norwich". A number of areas had seen improvements in performance, these included the recycling rate, responses to complaints and the amount of contact with customers that took place through digital channels. A few KPIs were off target and therefore intervention had already begun to improve these KPIs.

The Cabinet Member for Housing highlighted that positive work was ongoing in regard to working with tenants around rent collection and she was monitoring the property that had an outstanding gas safety certificate to ensure this become complaint.

The Cabinet Member for A Fairer Norwich highlighted that the average number of days taken to process new Housing Benefit claims had reduced, this was due to a small number of complex cases which required more processing time.

In response to a question from Councillor Galvin the Cabinet Member for Housing highlighted that the re-let time of council homes fluctuated significantly. A number of the properties had been occupied for 20+ years so in order to address this in future the Council needed to understand tenants had refused upgrade works to their home that would require more significant works before the property could be re-let.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to review the progress on the key performance indicators for quarter 1 of 2024-2025.

7. Corporate Risk Register 2024-25 – Quarter 1

The Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council presented the report. The report provided an update on the corporate risk register for Quarter one in 2024/25. There had been no significant changes to the scores of the risks since quarter four of 2023/24 and risks would continue to be monitored.

Councillor Galvin asked what the weaknesses in the current risk management policy were and when a review would be completed by. In response the Interim Chief Finance Office (Section 151) confirmed that the review of the risk management policy was seeking to further develop the current process and add additional nuance on how to monitor and score risks.

In response to Councillor Wright's question the Interim Chief Finance Officer (s.151) said that the reason that some risks, including the scoring, were considered exempt was to ensure that the risk were managed in the appropriate way.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to note the identified risks and the directions of travel.

8. 2024-25 Quarter 1 – budget monitoring report

The Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council presented the report. The report detailed the budget monitoring activity of the Council for quarter 1 of 2024/25. In previous years the Council had seen returns on investments, but this was unlikely to happen in future due to market pressures.

Councillor Galvin asked what work was being undertaken to reduce the cost of interim spend. The Leader of the Council responded that there were clear issues with recruitment within the Local Government sector and significant improvements had already been made to reduce the number of interims and subsequently reduce the cost.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Note the forecast outturn for both the general fund revenue account and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was currently reflecting a breakeven position. However there were potential budget pressures across all service areas which would need to be analysed further as the financial year progressed
- 2) Note the forecast £1.083m overspend against the general fund and the £13.389m underspend against HRA capital programmes
- 3) Approve adjustments to the 2024-29 five year general fund capital programme to enable the utilisation of external funding and the re-profiling of budgets as set out in paragraphs 4.3, 4.4. and 4.6 of the report

9. Treasury Management Review and Outturn 2023-24

The Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council presented the report. The Council was required to report on its Treasury Management activities. There had been a recent change to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) code, the Council complied with the CIPFA code and other requirements. There were no breaches in the Treasury Management activities to report and the Council sought to maximise the returns on its investments. The Treasury Management Committee had reviewed the report and had endorsed it. The Treasury Management Review and Outturn 2023-24 would be approved by the Full Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Galvin the Interim Chief Finance Officer (s.151) confirmed that the Council did not currently have any investments with Building Societies. The Council had to maximise interest rates but was looking at balancing this against investing in socially responsible funds. To date 20% of the Council's investments were in socially responsible funds.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Note the report detailing the treasury activity for the year to 31 March 2024 and recommend it to Council for approval; and
- 2) Note the changes to table 5.9 in the 2024/25 Treasury Management Strategy.

10. Anti-social behaviour policy – Key Decision

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report. The report highlighted the improvements that had been made in the anti-social behaviour (ASB) service. The Council had a responsibility to respond to ASB not just as a landlord but also as Environmental Protection and as a member of the Norfolk County Community Safety Partnership. The policy set five guiding principles on how the Council would approach ASB, these put residents at the heart of any activity. The service were looking to making it clearer for residents what was considered ASB and instances where the Council could take action. She noted that there was an increasing issue with ASB in communal areas and the Council would continue to work closely with other agencies to address this.

Councillor Wright commented that it was positive that the policy was looking to close the loop and provide feedback to impacted residents. He asked for clarity on the delay in bringing this forward. The Cabinet Member for Housing said that due to the General Election in July 2024 there had been a necessary delay to ensure that the Policy had incorporated feedback and could be adopted.

In response to Councillor Galvin's question the Cabinet Member for Housing said that access to information was crucial to dealing with ASB, she would consider what could be shared on the website to ensure that information was kept up-to-date.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy 2024.

11. Norwich City Services Limited – Business Plan 2024-27 – Key Decision

The Leader of the Council presented the report. He highlighted that it had been clear that a number of challenges would need to be addressed when services had transferred to Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL). The business plan had been considered by the Shareholder Panel and by the Scrutiny Committee. The performance of NCSL had seen improvements in performance in a number of areas for both the environmental services and repairs and maintenance. There was a recognition of significant challenges that were to come including skill shortages in the sector across Norfolk and NCSL and the Council were working closely together to address these.

The Chair of the Board of Director addressed Cabinet. She thanked the Cabinet and the Shareholder Panel for their work in developing the business plan. Challenges remained but the business plan detailed how the company would address these. NCSL would continue to work in partnership with the Council.

Councillor Wright, as Chair of Scrutiny Committee, thanked the representatives from NCSL for responding to questions from the Scrutiny Committee and the responses to the recommendations. He asked whether it would be Cabinet or Full Council who would appoint the Chair of Audit Committee and Chair of Scrutiny Committee to the NCSL Shareholder Panel. The Executive Director of Resources confirmed that the appointments to the

Shareholder Panel had not been reserved to Full Council and therefore was an Executive function.

Councillor Galvin asked for clarity on when the current pay scale and grades for Council employees had been adopted, considering the recommendation on pay parity. The Leader of the Council said that discussions were ongoing between the company and the Trade Unions to address the issue of pay, and it was clear that the journey on pay was dependent on affordability for the company. The Interim Managing Director of NCSL confirmed that discussions were ongoing with the Trade Unions, including discussions on job evaluations, the company would seek to improve terms and conditions in line with affordability. The Executive Director of Resources confirmed that the current pay structure for Council employees was aligned with the National Joint Council for Local Government Services, information would be sought when the pay structure had been adopted and provided to Councillor Galvin.

12. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of item *12 (below) on the grounds that they contained exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs within Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Local Government Act 1972.

***12. Norwich City Services Limited – Business Plan 2024-27 – Exempt Appendix (Para 3)**

The Leader of the Council agreed to take this item early. The Leader of the Council presented the report.

The Chair of the Board answered Councillor Galvin's question on the timescales for recruiting senior management posts.

13. Norwich City Services Limited – Business Plan 2024-27 – Key Decision

(The Press and Public were readmitted to the meeting).

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Approve the NCSL Business plan 2024/27
- 2) Agree the responses to the Scrutiny recommendations in appendix 3 of the report
- 3) Ask that the decision on the appointment of the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee to the NCSL Shareholder Panel were brought back to Cabinet for consideration at a future meeting.

14. Supply of Enforcement Agents and Debt Collection Services to Norwich City Council – Key Decision

The Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council presented the report. The Council had a responsibility to collect the debts owed to it. The preferred supplier following the procurement exercise had a proven track record of collecting debts.

The Cabinet Member for A Fairer Norwich said that the preferred supplier added social value to residents and aligned with the Council's debt policies and Vulnerability Framework.

In response to a question from Councillor Galvin the Head of Revenues and Benefits confirmed that while the Council had not consulted with debtors directly during the tender process, suppliers were asked to provide testimonials. There were also significant regulations on the way in which debt collection agents could operate, the preferred supplier had demonstrated on the work it would undertake before adding costs and sought to refer individuals to welfare services as necessary. The Cabinet Member for A Fairer Norwich highlighted that the preferred supplier had demonstrated a clear understanding of the support landscape in Norwich.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the award of contract to both Jacobs and Marston (Holdings) Ltd to supply Enforcement Agents/Debt Collection services to the council.

15. Development Site Pipeline – Key Decision

The Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council introduced the report. The issue of affordable housing within the city was a key focus for the City Council. The Development Site Pipeline provided a pipeline of development of affordable housing.

In response to Councillor Wright's question the Development Strategy Manager confirmed that the Council was confident that the detailed work to understand the sites would mean these sites could be delivered.

Councillor Galvin asked whether any of the open spaces could be considered as part of Biodiversity Net Gain sites. The Development Strategy Manager confirmed that the Council would explore this as part of the planning process and looking to use available land where appropriate.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to:

- 1) Note the progress the development site pipeline work
- 2) Delegate the disposal of the six assets listed within paragraph 20a of the exempt appendix to the Executive Director of Resources, in consultation with the Section 151 officer and Cabinet Member for An Open and Modern Council
- 3) Recommend to Council, the adjustment to the 2024/25 capital programme, to fund further design, feasibility and infrastructure works to the four sites detailed in paragraph 20d of the exempt appendix.

16. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of items *17 to *21 (below) on the grounds that they contained exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs within Part 1 of Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Local Government Act 1972.

***17. Corporate Risk Register 2024-25 – Quarter 1 – Exempt Appendix (Para 3)**

This item was noted under item 7 above.

***18. Treasury Management Review and Outturn 2023-24 – Exempt Appendix (Para 3)**

This item was noted under item 8 above.

***19. Development Site Pipeline – Exempt Appendix (Para 3)**

This item was noted under item 15 above.

***20. Managing Assets (Housing) (Para 3)**

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented the report and highlighted that land detailed within the report would be used to build affordable housing within the city by a housing association.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the disposal of the named site to enable new affordable housing for the city.

***21. Proposed Investment Partnership (Paras 3 and 5)**

The Leader of the Council presented the report. The report was an in principle decision and a further report would be brought to Cabinet once the appropriate due diligence had been completed.

Councillor Galvin asked for clarity on whether future reports would be considered in public. The Executive Director of Resources confirmed that the Council would aim for as much of the report to be public as possible but future reports would also contain commercial information that would need to be considered in an exempt meeting.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve in principle to form a strategic investment partnership with the organisation named in the report.

CHAIR