



Cabinet

16:30 to 17:55

6 March 2024

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

Apologies: Councillors Fulton-McAlister and Kidman

Also Present: Councillor Galvin (Leader of the Green Group)

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Public questions/ petitions

One public question had been received, in writing, from Mr James Hawketts. The Chair advised that a response would be published in the minutes of the meeting.

Mr Hawketts asked:

“In November the city council unanimously agreed a motion from the Lib Dem Group calling for a UEA Night Bus. In that motion, the Council resolved to ask the Leader to write to the Cabinet Member for Transport at the County Council asking that the county’s prohibitively low funding offer to UEA and FirstBus be reconsidered, and for the Leader and Transport Cabinet Member here to work with various partners to seek funding arrangements towards a night bus for the long term.

May I ask the Leader/Cabinet Member to confirm that such efforts have taken place, including for example sending of the described letter and/or any meetings with relevant parties about the night bus, and detail their nature or any progress made?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change’s response:

“The city council is keen to see a night bus to UEA reinstated. The Leader of the Council has written to the County Council’s Cabinet Member, Councillor Graham Plant. We are currently awaiting a response and once we have received a response, we will seek a meeting with the County Council and First Bus if necessary.”

3. Questions to Cabinet Members

No questions had been received.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2024.

5. Scrutiny Committee Recommendations

Councillor Stonard referred to the report circulated prior to committee and introduced the item, available [here](#). Members discussed the proposed recommendations, in relation to the request to better capture demographic data, Councillor Jones the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety noted that this conflicted with a previous recommendation from scrutiny committee, which criticised the need for respondents to register and provide their demographic data on the Get Talking Norwich platform. She considered that the ultimate priority was that people engaged with the consultation process, she was happy to explore other methods to capture demographic data but engagement in the consultation process was first and foremost the most important thing.

In relation to the recommendation to add a section to the Corporate Plan committing to creating more posts that worked with the community and more posts which would see people face to face, Councillor Stonard, the Leader of the Council, commented that he was concerned to commit to more posts when the budget had just been agreed. Councillor Jones, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety considered that the recommendation was too vague. It was the Council's role to work with people, which it did, staffing arrangements could be changed if there was an identified need which had been evidenced.

In relation to the recommendation to share the minutes of Future Shape Norwich (FSN) Board meetings, Councillor Stonard, the Leader of the Council, advised this was an officer led group to action the decisions which members had made. He noted that a recommendation from scrutiny committee to provide an all-member briefing on FSN was agreed at the last meeting of the Cabinet. He did not consider that members needed the minutes of FSN, but felt it was important that officers were allowed to explore delivery options and speak freely and there was a process for member decision making that was adhered to.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) involve scrutiny committee in the development of the business planning process for the Corporate Plan and the associated corporate performance framework;
- 2) explore ways to involve more young people in the Corporate Plan consultation;
- 3) ensure that the Corporate Plan commits to continue to provide provision of access to services for those individuals who do not have digital knowledge or

access;

- 4) consider exploring ways to better capture demographic data where appropriate without deterring people from responding; and
- 5) add a section to the Corporate Plan that the council will continue to provide face to face contact to those that most need it.

6. The Corporate Plan 2024-2029

Councillor Stonard, Leader of the Council, was proud to present the new draft Corporate Plan 2024-2029, which had been developed for and with the people of Norwich, underpinned by a consultation including more than 900 citywide conversations. The content of the plan 'We are Norwich' was developed from the priorities and challenges raised during the engagement process with residents, councillors, the council's workforce, partners, businesses, charities, and voluntary, creative and cultural organisations.

He highlighted that some of the areas of work raised as priorities, sat outside the council's direct control and committed to using the council's convening, influencing and advocacy powers to advance them. The approach the plan proposed was one of working together to identify local needs, aspirations and ambitions, co-designing solutions with local communities and partners, and focussing on outcomes rather than outputs. As such, it enabled and empowered communities and council colleagues to dynamically respond to changing needs throughout the city.

It represented a different way of working, with greater community participation and the flexibility to adapt to the changing world. It was the beginning of a journey as culture and processes were aligned with new ways of thinking. As delivery of the plan progressed there would be further consultation and engagement, and the greater involvement of communities in decisions and actions.

He referred to the extensive consultation process which had been undertaken and sought a rich picture of how a broad selection of different kinds of people from different contexts felt about specific issues. He considered that it was important that respondents were not required to submit demographic data. The advice of the independent engagement consultants was that it would be a barrier to participation and limit what people might tell us. So, to prioritise higher response rates and more meaningful insights the sharing of demographic information was optional for participants.

He noted that concerns had been raised in relation to the engagement of children and young people in the consultation process and confirmed that their input and views would be sought as part of the business planning process. A new performance framework would be developed to assess the impact of and align the council's resources and activities to meet the outcomes of the plan. He considered that the plan would deliver the best for the people of Norwich, a fair and thriving city full of ambition.

Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety was proud to be part of a new leadership team bringing forward a plan which tackled the root causes of health inequalities. She referred to the increasing

challenges facing people and the ability of local authorities to impact on health, wellbeing and happiness. She was proud that these themes had come through so clearly in the plan which expressed the ambition to work more effectively in partnership to achieve outcomes.

Councillor Galvin was pleased that people had been asked what they wanted to see in the plan, were consulted early and that many councillor comments had been included. She noted that people wanted to see very similar things to the previous corporate plan and questioned if this suggested that the objectives of the previous plan had not been delivered. She asked if there would be a commitment to ongoing consultation of a representative sample of residents to measure their perception on the objectives being achieved.

Councillor Stonard, leader of the council noted that the objectives were not short term and that if they were still alive it did not mean progress had not been made against them but rather that improvements would come over time. In relation to the consultation process he considered it was as representative as it could be and that the right level of data was captured. It had been noted that there was a tension between recording demographic data and maximising responses received.

The Head of Strategy, Engagement and Culture advised that there was work underway to consider how the organisation were engaging with people and how this might be improved. Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety commented that the reasons the themes identified were consistent was because they would always be important. She referred to work in relation to rough sleeping in the city, the rates for which were bucking the national trend but whilst it still existed it would be an important issue.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) agree 'We are Norwich', the draft corporate plan 2024-29; and
- 2) recommend the plan to Council for consideration at its meeting to be held on Tuesday 12 March 2024.

7. Adoption of the Greater Norwich Local Plan

Councillor Stonard, Leader of the Council, introduced the item and advised that this was the final step in a long seven-and-a-half-year process, which was coming to fruition thanks to the hard work of the Council's officers and other Councils in the partnership. It had been a hugely complicated process, and he expressed his thanks to all partners and colleagues involved. This was a great example of partnership working and it was in the common interest of the partners to plan for a rapidly growing city.

There were considerable benefits to adopting a local plan, it gave the best chance of delivering development that met the needs of communities, maximised the prospect of securing affordable housing, de-risked the development of allocated sites, increased the likelihood of securing external support and reduced the chance of speculative development harmful to economic development or environmental assets.

The Inspector's report on the plan was highly positive, there were a number of modifications to be included in the adoption of the plan which reflected the passage of time since the plan was submitted in 2021. The main modifications most related to Norwich were, the policies for East Norwich which had been updated in light of more recent evidence, that a contingency site was no longer needed as there were sufficient sites in the plan to meet housing need and a number of smaller sites had been removed where landowners had changed their views on development at Ber Street, Lower Clarence Road and Ipswich Road. He commented that there was still a desire to see the contingency site at Costessey developed in the long term as it was a well located and sustainable site.

Other main modifications provided wider benefits, changes to policy 3 would address nutrient neutrality issues, the reframing of the approach to new settlements would assist consideration of their potential role compared with other growth options in future plans and Gypsy and Traveller sites would be allocated. Overall, the main modifications strengthened the plan. The significant benefits of adopting the plan included help to meet housing and jobs needs, addressing climate change and providing infrastructure, including green and blue infrastructure.

The Executive Director of Development and City Services referred to amendments to the plan which had been circulated to members and were available to view on the website [here](#). These were minor amendments which were needed to ensure the plan was legally watertight. The Greater Norwich Planning Policy Manager reiterated what a long process it had been to get to this stage and emphasised the numerous benefits to adopting a plan for the area.

In response to a question from Councillor Galvin, Councillor Stonard the leader of the council commented that the airport was an important part of the local economy providing many jobs from those in hospitality to those in complex engineering. The Executive Director of Development and City Services advised that the plan sought to set the vision for encouraging a post carbon economy and set the metrics to measure this. The plan looked at the housing and industrial needs for the city going forward and land was allocated for development in and around the airport. It would be unsound to bring forward proposals for a plan which did not include the airport and seek to maximise its economic potential.

RESOLVED to recommend that Council:

- 1) notes the inspectors' report ([in annex 1](#)) and the required main modifications in appendices 1 to 5 (available from [this link](#));
- 2) adopts the modified GNLP (documents J2.1 to J2.11 inclusive available from [this link](#)); and
- 3) delegate authority to the Executive Director, Development and City Services to publish the Adoption Statement and accompanying documents, making the GNLP part of the Adopted Local Plan for Norwich.

8. Customer and Digital Strategy 2024-2029

Councillor Packer, Cabinet Member for Customers and Digital, presented the report. He referred to the City Council's vision as set out in the previous Corporate Plan item

to become a fair and thriving city, full of ambition. He emphasised that delivering on key priorities, being an open and modern council and doing the basics well in an efficient, timely and well-informed way was key to achieving this. The strategy outlined how the vision would be supported through the development of customer and digital services.

Residents increasingly wanted to access services digitally and at a time which suited them, by providing straightforward, initiative services, 24/7 customers would use digital services by default. Traditional contacts options such as face to face and via telephone would continue for those that found accessing digital services challenging. The resources saved by increasing the provision of services online would be focussed on those that most needed them.

He noted that extensive consultation and engagement had taken place with customers to shape the strategy and an action plan would be developed to deliver the key actions and objectives. Feedback on the strategy would continue to be gathered as it was implemented to ensure that digital services were accessible and easy to use.

In response to a question from Councillor Galvin the Head of Customers, IT and Digital advised that work was starting to look at a new design for the website which would prompt customers to download a shortcut to online services which would provide a similar experience to using an app.

RESOLVED to approve the Customer and Digital Strategy 2024-29.

9. Pay Policy Statement 2024/25

Councillor Kendrick, the Cabinet Member for Resources, presented the report and advised that it was a legal requirement to produce, publish and approve a pay policy statement each year, which covered the pay of all officers.

In response to a question from Councillor Galvin, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that the Council tried to align the pay of interim staff to the pay structure. However, this was not always possible and pay rates were dictated by other factors such as market conditions. She noted that the use of interims was reducing and that they tended to be used for project type work or whilst restructures were ongoing. The number of interims and agency staff on roll was reported to the Executive Leadership Team to monitor and this could be adapted and provided to members.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) agree the contents of the pay policy statement for 2024/25; and
- 2) recommend the Council's pay policy statement for 2024/25 to full Council for approval.

10. Funding Approval for Three Carbon Reduction Projects

Councillor Hampton, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, was pleased to present the report, which included three items providing an opportunity to tackle

climate change. Identifying relevant external funding to deliver such projects was a priority for the Council. The decisions in relation to these projects were required to be made now as this was the last meeting of the Cabinet before the pre-election period commenced.

The first item involved an application the Council had made to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, (SHDF) a decision on which was expected imminently. If successful, authority was requested to accept funding of the grant, agree match funding and sign a memorandum of understanding. The total project fund would be £5.2m, which was required to be spent over a 24-month period. The project aimed to improve the energy efficiency of the least efficient council homes and would make a real difference to the lives of residents.

The second related to a successful grant, which had been received to install solar panels at Riverside Leisure Centre, which also required a proportion of funding from the Council and would result in £25,000 net savings being added to the Medium-Term Financial Programme. The last asked for funding for feasibility work in relation to Heat Networks and was aimed at ensuring the Council was best placed to apply for any available grant funding.

Councillor Hampton thanked officers for their hard work and commended the recommendations for approval.

Councillor Giles, Cabinet Member for Communities and Social Inclusion thanked Councillor Hampton and the Environmental Strategy Team for their work, he emphasised that the installation of solar panels at Riverside leisure centre would not only reduce carbon emissions but contribute to the centre's financial viability.

Councillor Galvin asked Councillor Hampton if she was confident that the housing team had enough capacity in place to deliver the work which was required. Councillor Hampton confirmed that resources had been put in place within the housing and environmental strategy teams to drive work forward. Councillor Jones, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety, commented that there was no area which could not do with greater resource but that these works were identified as a priority.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Recommend that Council delegates authority to the council's Chief Finance (s151) Officer in consultation with the portfolio holder for resources to:
 - a) Sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Department of Net Zero and Energy Security (DESNZ) to agree terms and conditions for Social Housing Decarbonisation funding up to a value of £3m;
 - b) Increase the HRA Capital Programme by an amount equivalent to any DESNZ grant funding agreed plus the match funding element from the council, currently anticipated to be £2.7m.
 - c) Increase the General Fund Capital Programme by £0.895m for the solar panel project on Riverside Leisure Centre and formally sign any related

grant documentation for £0.520m. Note that the funding requirement from the council of £0.375m can be funded from borrowing.

- d) Apply and sign a grant application for heat networks feasibility and business case.
- 2) Delegate authority in consultation with the portfolio holder for climate change:
- e) to the Executive Director of Housing and Community Safety in combination with the Section 151 Officer to sign subsequent delivery contracts for the energy efficiency works on its social housing stock;
 - f) to the Executive Director of Housing and Community Safety to sign subsequent delivery contracts for the solar panel project at Riverside Leisure; and
 - g) to the Chief Finance Officer to sign subsequent procurement contracts for the energy network items detailed within the report.

11. Write-off of irrecoverable debt over £50,000

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources presented the report. He advised the decision to write off a debt was one that was carefully considered. However, once a company became insolvent it was not possible to recover the debt. This did not preclude the council from chasing the debt in future if the means to do so arose.

RESOLVED to approve write offs totalling £513,479.02 of non-recoverable NNDR debt which is 100% covered within the NNDR bad debt provision.

12. Contract award for the main contractor for the development at Argyle Street (key decision)

Councillor Jones, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety presented the report. The contract was to build 14 new units of social housing which were highly energy efficient. Five local suppliers were invited to bid and a robust procurement process that considered quality, cost and social value applied. By the tender deadline only one bid had been submitted. This bid had been through the robust tender process and additional engagement with the company was conducted. The company had a strong track record of working well with local authorities and the bid was independently reviewed by Oxbury chartered surveyors.

Councillor Jones was confident in the scrutiny of the company, which had been conducted and considered this provided a good opportunity to build a working relationship with a new local company. The development had been part funded via right to buy receipts, brown field government funding and S106 monies from the development at Wherry Road.

RESOLVED to agree to:

- 1) award the contract for construction of the 14 homes to Marfleet and Blyth Ltd; and

- 2) utilise £729,166 S106 affordable housing commuted sum towards this development.

13. Response to Scrutiny Committee Recommendations on Retrofitting

Councillor Hampton, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, introduced the item and advised that a verbal update was provided at the last meeting of the Cabinet and, as requested, a written response was now presented with an opportunity for questions to be asked.

In response to a question from Councillor Galvin, Councillor Jones, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety advised that the stock condition survey would be completed within the next month or two. Once the condition of the stock was understood, decisions on how best to incorporate retrofitting works could be made. She emphasised that she agreed with the recommendations from scrutiny in principle but could not agree to them exactly because flexibility was required to take account of other factors.

Councillor Hampton, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, confirmed that Cabinet was keen to engage on retrofitting with scrutiny committee going forward if that was the will of the committee.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) include retrofitting as a priority in the Corporate Plan 2024-2029;
- 2) continue to ensure a state of readiness across council teams to enable funding applications to be submitted efficiently for all available funding opportunities;
- 3) ask officers to ensure that training on retrofitting appropriate to staff roles is offered;
- 4) arrange training for councillors on signposting to existing schemes and support;
- 5) ask officers to include a Retrofit Communications Plan and Engagement Strategy to share learning, best practice, and opportunities, and to ensure that local residents are well informed and engaged as part of the Citywide Climate Action Strategy;
- 6) continue to seek to play a leading role in terms of retrofitting within the council's estate within the context of the resources and funding available;
- 7) explore launching a municipal loan scheme to fund retrofitting measures;
- 8) explore if extra sources of funding for retrofitting of community spaces can be obtained;
- 9) ask officers to explore working with private sector investors to utilise potential external funding opportunities, i.e. in large scale heat networks; and

- 10) continue to work with planning officers to use the National Planning Policy Framework to develop local supplementary planning documents to promote and enable retrofit.

14. Assets (Non-Housing) Five Year Plan

Councillor Kendrick, the Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the report and said he supported the philosophy behind the plan and noted that the successful management of assets was fundamental to the financial security of the Council.

The Head of Property and Economic Development advised that the list of assets for which authority to dispose of was being sought was in the exempt appendix to the report.

Councillor Galvin referred to the Asset and Development Board referenced in the report as the board tasked with the disposal of assets. She asked who sat on the board and how members could have oversight of its work. The Head of Property and Economic Development advised this was an officer led board which was chaired by the Interim Executive Director of Major Projects with input from finance. The cabinet portfolio holder was provided with regular briefings on the work of the board and there were six monthly updates on the asset plan which would come to cabinet.

With no members indicating that they wished to discuss the exempt appendix accompanying the report, it was: -

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Endorse the revised asset management action plan appended to this report.
- 2) Endorse the governance arrangements for management of the non-housing property portfolio.
- 3) Delegate the disposal of the assets listed within the exempt appendix to the Executive Director of Development and City Services, in consultation with the S151 Officer and Cabinet Member for Resources;
- 4) Agree to the use of the Commercial Property Reserve to fund condition surveys and rent reviews, which related to assets listed within the exempt appendix; and
- 5) Note that there would be a report to Cabinet in 12 months' time to report on progress and consider additional disposals in later years of the plan.

15. Development Site Pipeline (key decision)

The Chair advised that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

16. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of items *17 and *18 (below) on the grounds that they contained exempt information, as defined in the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 to Schedule 12A, as amended, of the Local Government Act 1972.

***17. Assets (Non-Housing) Five Year Plan - (Exempt appendix) (Para 3)**

This item was noted under item 14 above.

***18. Development Site Pipeline - (Exempt appendix) (Para 3)**

The Chair advised that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

CHAIR