



**GREAT YARMOUTH**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Cabinet

## Minutes

Monday, 04 December 2023 at 14:00

Councillor Smith (Leader & Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Major Projects) (in the Chair), Councillors Bensly (Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Culture & Coastal), Candon (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development & Growth), Plant (Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Operational Property and Asset Management) Flaxman-Taylor (Portfolio holder for Housing, Health and communities) & Wells (Portfolio Holder for Environment & Sustainability, Waste and Licensing).

Also in attendance

Ms S Oxtoby (Chief Executive Officer); Ms C Whatling (Monitoring Officer), Ms K Sly (Executive Director - Finance), Mrs P Boyce (Executive Director, People), Mrs N Turner (Head of Housing Assets), Mrs K Price (Head of Health Integration and Communities), Miss M Lee (Head of Customer Services), Mr J Wedon (Information Governance Lead), Mrs S Wintle (Corporate Services Manager), Ms L Snow (Finance Manager) Mr M Walker (Skills Manager) and Mr D Zimmerling (IT Support)

Councillors Wainwright, Williamson and Capewell attended as observers to the meeting.

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence received at the meeting.

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest declared at the meeting.

### **ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business to be discussed at the meeting.

## MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13 November 2023 were confirmed.

### 23-185 - QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023-24

Cabinet Members received and considered the Information Governance Lead's report.

The Leader presented and advised that the report provided an update on performance for the second quarter of 2023/24 (July to September), where progress is assessed against Targets which are set at the start of the financial year together with an update on the position of key projects that are linked to the corporate priorities from 'The Plan 2020-2025'.

The project highlight report detailed in Appendix 1 of the report provided a summary of the project, milestones and achievements, alongside open issues, mitigation and a financial summary.

It was reported that each report had a current status, which could be green, amber or red. Out of the 13 projects, 11 had a current green status defined as no problems or minor issues and 2 have an amber status, defined as having problems which have been identified but with a contingency plan in place.

The performance measures, detailed in Appendix 2, gave a comprehensive overview of how the authority as a whole was performing and covered most Council functions

The Leader advised that In total there were 44 targeted and 22 monitored measures reported in the second quarter performance report. The monitored measures were reported for contextual information and this data is important information for the Council as the actions of the Council may make improvements however there is not sufficient control over the outcome to set a target.

Of the 44 targeted measures 28 were reported as Green whereby performance had been met or exceeded target, 11 were Amber whereby performance is below target but within tolerance and 5 were red whereby performance is below target and tolerance.

The red measures were reported as follows :

- **PR06:** Contact centre telephone calls: Percentage of Contact Centre calls answered as a % of all calls offered (Quarterly Cumulative)
- **PR13(a):** Internal Audit recommendations - Number of priority 1 Internal Audit recommendations outstanding
- **PR13(b):** Internal Audit recommendations - Number of priority 2 Internal Audit recommendations outstanding

- **EN06:** Contamination rate in dry recycling
- **HN04:** Average cost of a Void repair

The Leader reported that each of the red measures included a commentary contained within the report explaining the reasons behind the performance and the actions being taken to bring performance back on target.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Growth, Councillor Daniel Candon commented that it was reassuring to see a number of Key Projects being highlighted as green and further commented that he was pleased to see the Leader and Deputy Leader together with Cllr Kay-Billing from Norfolk County Council commencing the first point of piling for the Operations and Maintenance campus.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Licensing and Waster, Councillor Wells reassured Cabinet Members that work was ongoing to improve the performance measure for recycling and advised that the recycling trial roll out had commenced and Members would be kept informed of it's progress.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to :

(1) Agree that all key performance indicators continue to be monitored during the next quarter.

(2) Agree that all key projects will continue to be monitored over the next quarter with the aim of maintaining a green status and where possible attaining a green status for those key projects which are currently amber.

## **23-186 - UKSPF PEOPLE SKILLS COMMISSIONING STRATEGY**

Cabinet Members received and considered the Executive Director's report.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Growth, Councillor Candon presented the report to Members and advised that the report set out recommendations for the open, competitive commissioning of three interventions under the Council's approved UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) 'People & Skills' investment priority in 2024/25.

The approved Great Yarmouth UKSPF Investment Plan makes provision for three interventions under the 'People & Skills' Investment Priority in 2024/25, reflecting local needs. Summaries of the funding, guidance and associated outputs/outcomes are presented in the annex.

- E33: Employment Support for Economically Inactive Residents (£150,000 allocated)
- E35: Supporting Residents Furthest from the Labour Market (£80,000 allocated)
- E37: Tailored Support for Residents in Employment (£50,000 allocated)

To ensure the delivery of activity from April 2024, a commissioning strategy must be established. Key stakeholders, including the County Council and GY Skills Taskforce members have been consulted.

The Great Yarmouth Skills Taskforce – comprising local skills and employability stakeholders – led the prioritisation of interventions under the ‘People & Skills’ Investment Priority. Their key aims include:

1. maximising social inclusion and the accessibility of local opportunities
2. ensure that the jobs that employers need to fill are aligned to pathways for residents to access them

Other bodies, such as the Town Board (which was augmented to meet the requirements of a UKSPF ‘Local Partnership Group’) and Great Yarmouth Health and Wellbeing Partnership – successor to the Great Yarmouth Locality Board and includes representation from elected members, council officers, colleges, hospitals, the police and voluntary sector – also had the opportunity to contribute.

The UKSPF-funded Skills Manager is in the process of drafting a new Skills & Employability Strategy and Action Plan for consideration. They, and the Skills Taskforce, have an ongoing role in the strategic mapping of progression pathways based upon current and emerging skills support provision in the Borough.

This report sets out recommendations for the open, competitive commissioning of three interventions under the UKSPF ‘People & Skills’ investment priority in 2024/25. It is recommended that management of the competitive commissioning process along the lines outlined is delegated to officers, with the evaluation of proposals and awarding of contracts undertaken by a panel comprising: GYBC (director level) and Skills Taskforce members from NCC, LSIP, DWP and resident representation.

These interventions directly support some key aims and objectives contained within the forthcoming Strategic Plan, meaning they impact localised challenges in factors such as economic inactivity, health and wellbeing, social mobility, low earnings and education attainment. Collectively, the interventions promote:

- Raising aspirations for initial employment and higher-skilled career destinations.
- Individualised support for people to overcome barriers to both employment and skills development
- Developing core employability skills as identified by employers
- Attaining basic skills to access advanced levels of in-house training and education
- Provision of more accessible skills programmes in terms of both place and times

- Widening employer facilitation for relevant and quality work placements
- Developing a 'learning culture' within both communities and workplaces

Furthermore, the interventions are designed to provide a legacy with factors such as recording data for future intervention appraisal, opening 'new' employer touchpoints, shared resource for employability skills development, and new learning sites.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Operational Property and Assets commented that he was pleased to see the plan coming to Great Yarmouth and noted the full cohort of people that would be able to benefit from the interventions.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to :-

- (1) Note and approve the commissioning strategy set out in the report
- (2) Delegate to Officers the management of the open, competitive commissioning process described.

## **23-182 - SAFEGUARDING POLICY 2023 - UPDATE**

Cabinet received and considered the Prevention and Early Hub Manager's report.

The Leader presented and advised that the report being considered provided members with an update to the Council's Safeguarding Policy 2020 and reporting procedures.

The review of the Policy which takes place every 3 years ensures that the Council complies with current and up to date legislation. The refreshed Safeguarding Policy subsumes the Child Protection Policy of March 2017 and the Modern Slavery Policy of March 2017.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council's safeguarding work is led by a network of trained Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSO) who are in turn supported by officers acting as Safeguarding Champions across the council's services. DSOs meet monthly to discuss individual safeguarding cases when needed, provide support to colleagues with safeguarding queries, track trends and ensure national guidance updates to policies and procedures inform local policy.

In October 2022, the DSOs identified the need to improve the way the council tracked safeguarding concerns and support staff and members to report safeguarding. As a result in October 2022, the Council introduced a new internal reporting form for staff and members. This helps the Council track and evidence its safeguarding interventions and onward interaction with and referral to the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) and Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board (NSAB).

Safeguarding data is reviewed and monitored by the Designated Safeguarding Officers at their monthly meeting and allows the Council to identify safeguarding trends, develop training requirements and prepare communication updates.

All member briefings were provided in July and September 2023 to present the Safeguarding reporting procedure and the data collection process.

The updated Safeguarding Policy has been restructured to outline responsibilities and legislation within the main body and has the inclusion of 3 appendices. These appendices are provided to give practical advice on recognising safeguarding topics, recognising abuse and the process required to follow reporting procedures for all staff and elected members.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to :

(1) Agree the Safeguarding Policy 2023 as amended and updated.

(2) Delegate authority to the Executive Director – People and Prevention & Early Help Manager to make minor and/or consequential amendments to the Policy for the purpose of keeping it up to date, clarifying its content or interpretation, correcting any errors or omissions, updating it in accordance with changes in legislation, and/or caselaw, or with changes in the management structure.

### **23-183 - DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY - UPDATE**

Cabinet received and considered the Head of Organisational Development's report.

The Leader presented and advised that the report provided members with an update to the Council's Domestic Abuse Policies; a new 'Domestic Abuse Policy' and a 'Domestic Abuse Policy for Staff and Members'.

The review of these Policies takes place every 3 years and ensures the Council complies with current and up to date legislation. The review at this time supports the Council's ambition to become accredited as an organisation with the national Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA).

Purpose of the proposed Polices :-

**Domestic Abuse Policy 2023** – the first policy supports people, in the borough and beyond. It sets out the Council's commitment to highlighting the issue, its processes for supporting victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, and how it will work with relevant external partner agencies to eradicate Domestic Abuse.

**Domestic Abuse Policy for Staff and Members 2023** - has been developed which aims to demonstrate our commitment to employees and members to

provide information about where and how to access support and information. This new policy strengthens the Council's commitment to those who come into contact with Domestic Abuse. The policy subsumes and replaces the previous Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy 2017.

The policies have been thoroughly reviewed and updated by HR and has been through the consultation process with ELT, UNISON and JCWG. Feedback has been positive and only minor amendments were made to the draft policy. UNISON and the JCWG, independently provided very similar feedback.

With funding support from Norfolk County Council, the Council has committed to become a Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accredited organisation in 2023/24. These policies forms part of the evidence base for that accreditation.

Subject to members approval, the policies will be published on the Council's website and made available to staff and member via the Council's intranet site (The Loop). Domestic Abuse training for the roles identified in both policies will be provided as and when required as part of the DAHA accreditation preparations.

The portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Growth, Councillor Candon commented that he was very happy to support the recommendations within the report and he was please to see that the policy also covered and included domestic abuse at the workplace.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to :

(a) Agrees the Domestic Abuse Policy 2023.

(b) Agrees the Domestic Abuse - Staff & Members Policy 2023 as amended and updated.

(c) Delegated authority to the Executive Director – People and Head of Organisational Development to make minor and/or consequential amendments to the Policies for the purpose of keeping it up to date, clarifying its content or interpretation, correcting any errors or omissions, updating it in accordance with changes in legislation, and/or caselaw, and/or learning from serious case reviews and domestic homicide reviews.

## **23-161 - AGILE WORKING REVIEW**

Cabinet received and considered the Head of Organisational Development's report.

The Leader advised that the report presented a review of agile working and makes recommendations on further ways to modernise the Council's working practices.

The Leader reported that Agile working provides greater flexibility particularly

in relation to the time and location employees can work, subject to the requirements of the service and individual jobs. It has been successfully embedded into the Council over the last two years. The key principals of agile working are still relevant and include:

- Agile and flexible working is based on the business needs
- A commitment to investment in technology
- Staff are supported, motivated, engaged and feel part of the organisation
- To support and increase opportunities on recruitment and retention
- Productivity, outputs and performance are increased
- Improved resilience and ability to flexibly deliver our services
- Reducing the running costs of the Council through making best use of our assets
- Reducing our environmental footprint

The impending changes to the flexible working legislation, working time regulations and this review, gives an opportunity for the Council to continue to modernise it's working practices and ways of working that will benefit the Council, its staff and communities.

The report summarises and takes into consideration all of the feedback, the evidence of performance, the latest research and the office rationalisation.

Councillor Williamson asked for clarification as to whether 4 day working weeks would be offered to staff if requested as it was detailed within the report. The Chief Executive Officer advised that this was not something that was being promoted but by having the policy in place does allow for such requests to come in and be considered, but these would be very much be based upon the business need. Councillor Wells commented that it was clear that this matter would be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Councillor Bensly commented on the environmental impact and the importance of this continuing to be addressed.

Councillor Wainwright commented on the need for hunt groups to be set up in departments to ensure calls are being answered and also raised the importance of departments ensuring that emails are being responded to.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to :

Note the review of agile working, its success and support the next steps to continue to modernise our ways of working.

## **23-162 - GREAT YARMOUTH'S USE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMODATION**

Cabinet received and considered the Head of Strategic Housing's report.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Communities, Councillor Flaxman-Taylor, presented the report and advised that the limited availability of affordable

rented accommodation in both the private and social sectors, has resulted in the Council not always being able to prevent homelessness or, where a household is found to be statutorily homeless, secure suitable settled accommodation in a reasonable amount of time.

The situation has led to the need to accommodate high numbers of households in temporary accommodation, which includes the use of costly and unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation.

To reduce the need for temporary accommodation it is proposed to facilitate access to affordable private rented accommodation through the creation of a social lettings scheme and to provide more social housing by accelerating the Council's affordable housing delivery programme.

In recent years the private rental market in the Borough Council area has seen an increase of rents. These are unaffordable to many households on low incomes, including households in receipt of benefits. The private rented sector has an important role to play in the provision of housing, therefore, to make it more accessible to households on low incomes, it is proposed to pursue the creation of a social lettings scheme. The social lettings scheme would be operated by a Council owned company and offer affordable, quality private rented accommodation to households at risk of homelessness. Moreover, such a scheme would also assist with supporting regeneration and renewal in the Borough as it provides further opportunities to bring empty homes back into use.

Although the Council continues to deliver and enable additional social housing, new provision combined with the impact of the Right to Buy and lower levels of turnover of existing stock is failing to meet need. Therefore, it is proposed that the Council's affordable housing delivery programme is accelerated to meet strategic housing need, which includes homeless prevention. The proposed acquisition programme is to comprise of two funding routes: Retained Right to Buy Receipts and Homes England grant; each route will be match funded by borrowing on rental income within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The proposed programme will seek to deliver up to 60 acquisitions of open market dwellings over the period 2023-26 and will supplement new build delivery over this period. All housing will be held in the HRA.

As an interim measure, to ensure that the cost of temporary accommodation is minimised, it is proposed that the Council enter into lease agreements for suitable properties to be used as temporary accommodation. It will be ensured that all proposed lease agreements are subject to robust business cases and have adequate break clauses.

Subject to Members approval of the above proposals, work will begin in earnest to facilitate access to private rented accommodation and an increase in the provision of social housing.

With respect to the creation of a social lettings scheme, to enable the use of appropriate tenancies and the ability to charge sub-market rents, the delivery of the proposed scheme requires a suitable Council owned vehicle. A fully costed proposal will be presented to Cabinet in early 2024.

The acceleration of the affordable housing delivery programme is based on the Council acquiring open market housing to meet need. Homes England grant will be subject to successful indicative bids for affordable housing.

Individual business cases for leased short term temporary accommodation will consider the financial viability and dwelling mix. Officers under existing delegations will ensure leasing opportunities have adequate break clauses in order to provide the Council's temporary accommodation offer on a short-term basis.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor advised that the report sets out proposals to facilitate access to quality, affordable housing for private and social rent which aim to prevent homelessness and reduce the number of households being placed in temporary accommodation. In addition, as an interim measure whilst additional settled accommodation is being delivered, to negate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation as a form of temporary accommodation, it recognises the need to provide more cost-effective and suitable temporary accommodation through leasing arrangements and the use of HRA dwellings.

The Leader commented on the need for this report in view of the continued use of Bed and Breakfasts being unsustainable.

The Portfolio Holder for Operational Property and Assets, Councillor Plant agreed with the Leader and commented that there was a clear need for this matter be looked.

Councillor Wainwright commented that he welcomed the report and highlighted the current figures of housing applications the Council had. He asked with regard to the length of time temporary accommodation could be deemed as temporary, although this could not be quantified as each case was treated individually. It was also reported that the Council were looking to accelerate the use of settled properties rather than temporary accommodation.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to :

1. Agrees to pursue the creation of a social lettings scheme, including an in-principle capital budget of £2million of General Fund borrowing, this being subject to Council approval (see recommendation (d) below).
2. Agrees to the proposed acceleration of the Council's affordable housing delivery programme, and for submission of grant funding bids to Homes England
3. Agrees that as an interim measure, to negate the use of bed and breakfast, up to 50 homes are to be leased to provide temporary accommodation. In line with the Council's Property Acquisitions and Disposals Policy, the decision to acquire and / or lease accommodation is delegated to the Executive Director – People, the Executive Director of Property and Housing Assets, and the Section 151 Officer.

And **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL:**

1. That a £2 million in principle capital budget is set aside to fund a social lettings scheme.

**23-052 - COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS 2024-25**

Cabinet received and considered the Head of Customer Services report.

The Leader presented and advised that this report sought approval of the levels of council tax discount that shall apply for 2024/25 as set out in the paper.

For the financial year 2024/25 it is proposed that there is one change to these discounts regarding Empty Property Premiums, as the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has now been given Royal Assent.

Currently Empty Property Premiums can be up to 100% for those properties that have been empty between 2 years and less than five years, 200% for those properties empty for between 5 years and less than 10 years and 300% for properties that have been empty for more than 10 years.

The enactment of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill now gives Councils the discretion to apply an Empty Property Premium of 100% after one year of the property being empty, instead of the current two years. The Premiums for the 200% and 300% will remain as currently of 5 years and 10 years respectively (see Appendix 4 for the increased revenue that could be generated by the change).

The Council has had discretion to be able to add a premium charge to properties that have been empty since 2013. It was introduced as part of the Government's range of measures to bring empty homes into use. Empty homes are wasted assets and are often a blight on the local community, harming the local amenity of neighbouring properties. Therefore, putting empty homes more quickly back into productive use will increase housing supply, details of the proposed change to empty property premium charges can be found at table 1 (3.2) within the report.

It was advised that Appendix 1 provided a summary analysis of the impact of the introduction of the empty property premiums on the number of empty properties within the time periods which demonstrates an overall reduction in the number of empty properties defined as 'long term'.

Full Details of the recommended Council Tax Discounts to be applied in 2024/25 can be found from pages 138 to 139 of the agenda pack.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to **recommend to Council** :

1) The approval of the council tax discounts as shown in the table in Section 4.1 which will apply for 2024/25

2) The approval of the Second Homes Premium of 100% for Class B properties (that we currently charge 100% council tax) to commence from 1 April 2025

### **23-051 - COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024-25**

Cabinet received and considered the Head of Customer Services report.

The Leader presented and advised that this report sought Cabinet endorsement to ask Council for approval of the recommended Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25.

There have been minimal changes to the scheme since its first introduction and financial assistance for those classed as working age customers has been limited to a maximum of 91.5% of their council tax liability. Those customers of pension age remain unaffected by the Council Tax Support Scheme and continue to receive the same financial level of assistance as they did under the Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

Serious consideration has been given to the 2024/25 Council Tax Support Scheme in recognition that the Council, like many other Local Authorities, is facing considerable challenges with budgets and have a lack of clarity around future government funding settlements.

Unlike council tax benefit where the expenditure was fully subsidised, funding for Council Tax Support schemes was less than council tax benefit and has since been lost within the Revenue Support Grant and core funding which has continued to reduce and be re-purposed over recent years. Taking the financial challenges into account, this year the council has considered options to reduce the overall cost of the Council Tax Support scheme.

A public consultation on the 5 options ran for a 12 week period and has now closed. As well as being published on the Council's website, every household in receipt of council tax support at that time was contacted directly by letter advising them that the council was considering a change to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 and that a change could affect the level of financial support they would receive. They were invited to take part in the formal consultation.

The options under consideration ranged from continuing with the current scheme, to various stepped reductions in the maximum award from 87.5% to 75% of the Council Tax Liability.

A total number of 143 responded to the consultation, 76% of the responders were in receipt of Council Tax Support.

As part of the consultation process, these options were considered by Members of Scrutiny at the 24th October 2023 committee. - The Committee recognised that the Council is facing ongoing financial challenges in years ahead, however, there was concern that any change to the existing scheme would affect vulnerable families who were already struggling with the cost of living. There were some assurances that should a change go ahead a hardship fund would be available to protect the most vulnerable, however, there was a preference to retain the current scheme.

The impact of any change has been considered by undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment on the recommended option, and can be found at Appendix A.

In recognition of the Council's financial position, it is recommended that a change to the existing scheme is made to reduce the overall cost to the Council. However, it is also important that a hardship fund would be available to help mitigate the impact of the change on vulnerable households.

It is proposed that the maximum award of Council Tax Support for working age is amended to 80% of the Council Tax Liability, however, Members may wish to consider the other options consulted on. **Appendix B** provides the estimated cost options of each scheme considered.

This change would affect all working age recipients with no protections in place for certain groups except for Care Leavers. The Equality Impact Assessment recognises the impact of this change on individuals and households, however, also concludes that working age households on low income eligible for Council Tax Support are likely to be similarly impacted to those with additional disability financial support to help with day to day living.

It is recommended a hardship scheme is in place in the sum of £200,000 to help support individuals and households who may be in more financial difficulty. The scheme would only be eligible to working age recipients of Council Tax Support with an eligibility criteria prioritising the most vulnerable groups.

Councillor Wainwright asked if consideration could be given to the establishment of a Working Group similar to the one that had been created to look at grants, to look at the Discretionary Council Tax Support Fund and to monitor the impact of the proposed changes.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to recommend approval to Council :

- (1) To amend the Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 to reduce the maximum council tax support to 80% of the Council Tax liability
- (2) To protect Care Leavers from this change
- (3) To make provision for a hardship scheme of £200,000

(4) To delegate the ability for the Head of Customer Services & Revenue & Benefits Service Manager to make any smaller adjustments to the scheme that may be required to align to the wider welfare benefits system for 2024/25

(5) To establish a Working Group in relation to the Discretionary Council Tax Support Fund and to monitor the impact of the proposed changes.

### **23-053 - COUNCIL TAX BASE 2024-25**

Cabinet received and considered the Head of Customer Service's report.

The Leader presented and advised that this report asked the Committee to endorse the calculation of the 2024/25 tax base totalling 30,581 This is the total number of domestic properties in the Borough using band D as the average property band which is to be approved by Council.

The Council Tax base is a technical calculation that must be formally set each year. It is the first stage of the Council Tax setting process that will be finalised once the budgets have been agreed.

Details of the Tax Base Calculation can be found within the report and for the purposes of this report the Local Council Tax Support Scheme has been estimated for maximum award of 80% for working age claimants.

The normal non-collection rate used is 1.75%. However, for this year the non-collection rate has been estimated as higher than normal due to the national cost of living issues at 2%.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** and **recommend to Council** :

1) The calculation of the 2024/25 tax base totalling 30,581 which represents an increase of 730 in the tax base, and the estimated tax bases for the Borough and for each parish, as shown in Appendix A

### **23-155 - SAVINGS 2024/25- MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

Cabinet received and considered the Executive Director, Resources report.

The Leader reported that Cabinet had received the updated Medium Term Financial strategy for the period 2024 to 2027 in November 2023 which included the latest forecast financial position.

Prior to this, work had already commenced on the 2024/25 and the identification of savings and additional income against the target of £2million to be delivered for the 2024/25 budget to mitigate the forecast funding gap.

The Leader advised that this report set out the next steps for the Council's plan to present a balanced budget for approval in February 2024 for the 2024/25 financial year.

The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27 was presented to Cabinet in November for recommendation to Council in December.

The MTFS included updated financial projections for the period of the strategy which at the time forecast a gap of £2.5 million in 2024/25 increasing to in excess of £4million by 2026/27. These are ahead of the detailed service budgets being produced for which work is underway.

The MTFS included a savings target of £2m for 2024/25 allowing for £500k to be taken from reserves. It should be noted that this is ahead of the production of the detailed service budget and the announcement of the finance settlement for 2024/25, however the delivery of the savings and additional income is an essential element of the business strategy work to deliver a balanced budget for the coming financial year.

As part of the budget process savings and additional income proposals have been submitted by officers for consideration by Members and this report now presents an update to Members on the work to date and makes recommendations on savings and income proposals to be taken forward as part of the budget for 2024/25.

To date there have been various officer and member working groups including joint party working groups to discuss the budget and savings proposals that are being presented for approval.

Further discussions are still being held and options for closing the budget gap and these will be finalised over the coming months and presented within the budget reports for approval in February 2024.

This report provides the outcome of the discussions to date and the implementation plan for the savings proposals to allow where applicable some of the proposals to be progressed for implementation to achieve forecast savings and deliver income as anticipated in the 2024/25 financial year. Savings proposals have been grouped into 3 groups and are detailed at page 4 and 5 of 5 within the supplementary agenda pack

This report is recommending approval for £1.489 million (in addition to those currently approved and in progress) savings and income which will have a significant impact on reducing the forecast budget gap for 2024/25 and future years. As the details of the service budgets are produced over the coming weeks and once the finance settlement has been announced this work will inform the final budget to be presented for approval in January/February 2024.

Early approval of the savings as detailed in the report supports the financial planning process for producing a balanced budget for 2024/25.

Councillor Wells asked with regard to the Gorleston putting green and the figure listed, it was however confirmed that this was a saving amount and not an income amount.

Councillor Wainwright asked with regard to the withdrawal of funding for the lifeguard provision and asked whether GYTABIA had been approached to see

if they could fund this provision, the Leader confirmed that he had requested a meeting with GYTABIA to discuss this matter.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to **recommend to Council** :

1. The savings and additional income proposals as outlined at Appendix A for implementation for the 2024/25 budget.

## **22-161 - CONTROL CENTRE AND COMMUNITY ALARM SERVICES EMERGENCY CONTRACT DECISION**

Cabinet received and considered the Head of Health Integrations and Communities report.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Communities, Councillor Flaxman-Taylor presented and advised that the Council currently operates an in-house Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) which takes calls from sheltered housing resident alarms, dispersed community alarms, Be at Home alarms and provides the Councils' Out of Hours call response service. After charges to residents and tenants for paid-for alarm services, the cost of the ARC is around £200,000 in subsidies from the Councils' budgets.

With the national switching of phonelines from analogue to digital, which is already underway and is due for completion by 2025, the current software and hardware used by the in-house service would require significant investment to maintain this service going forwards. In addition, there is a current service risk associated with the digitalisation of phone lines which requires prompt action to resolve, and additional issues related to this are emerging weekly along with difficulties caused by recent IT changes.

This, combined with significant risk to the service from a lack of resilience in the staffing capacity and limited ability to draw on shift cover from our existing partnership arrangement means we have a significant risk that this service could become undeliverable at short notice, which would put the lives of those relying on the alarm monitoring service at risk.

Were the Council to retain the in-house ARC, there would be a significant increased cost which cannot be met by the available budget. Therefore, retaining the service as-is, is considered not feasible on detailed options appraisals.

For the purposes of value for money, it is proposed that the ARC is not separated by its service delivery for sheltered housing tenants and community alarm customers (it is not possible to divide the service use as the staffing levels remain the same) which may result in a more favourable financial cost to the HRA for long term as the more lucrative customer base is included in the package.

Given the increase in immediate risks identified which officers believe are

likely to impact on loss of life (should the Council's service fail to respond to an alarm call owing to either lack of staff cover or analogue to digital drop-out) this report proposes a direct award to the existing partner organisation which provides staff cover to the in-house staff given the timescale for a full procurement. Were this process to go to a full tender process, there is a significant risk that during this timescale the Council could be in a position where at short notice it becomes unable to deliver this service in its current form.

In order to achieve this, officers recommend that article (42.10.5) of the Councils' Constitution be invoked to deem this an Operational Emergency as there is a possible risk to life from a service failure given the circumstances listed below with regards to unforeseen service resilience in both staffing and external availability of cover. These factors, along with the digital rollout increasing risk, are not within the Councils' control.

It is therefore vital for the Council that it takes these decisions imminently based on the risk to alarm users, the potential financial impact and associated legal risks. With these risks in place it is our obligation to ensure we do all we can to mitigate these to avoid risking lives.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor passed on her thanks to Officers for the work that had gone into the report in such a short space of time.

Councillor Capewell sought clarification as to whether the vacant posts were remaining to be advertised and this was confirmed.

Councillor Williamson and Wainwright expressed their concern that this matter had not been discussed with the Scrutiny Committee nor the Shadow Leader.

The Leader asked for this report to be taken to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration prior to Cabinet making a decision and therefore proposed that the item be deferred. The Leader advised that he would call a Cabinet meeting on the 14th December at 5pm for Cabinet to discuss the item and receive any comments back from Scrutiny Committee..

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to :

Refer the item to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration before being brought back to a Cabinet meeting on Thursday 14 December 2023.

## **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC**

There were no Members of public in attendance at the meeting.

## **23-109 - CONFIDENTIAL - EQUINOX ENTERPRISES LIMITED AND EQUINOX PROPERTY HOLDINGS LIMITED SHAREHOLDER'S UPDATE**

(Confidential Minute on this Item)

The meeting ended at: TBC