

# Council

## Minutes

Thursday, 22 December 2016 at 19:00

PRESENT :

His Worship the Mayor Councillor Bird (in the Chair); Councillors Annison, Bensly, Borg, Carpenter, B Coleman, Connell, Fairhead, Flaxman-Taylor, Grant, A Grey, K Grey, Hammond, Hanton, Jeal, Lawn, Myers, Plant, Pratt, Robinson-Payne, Smith, Thirtle, Wainwright, Walker, Waters-Bunn, Weymouth and Wright.

Also in attendance were :-

Mrs S Oxtoby (Chief Executive Officer), Mr C Skinner (Monitoring Officer), Ms K Sly (Section 151 Officer), Mrs K Watts (Transformation Programme Manager), Mr R Hodds (Corporate Governance Manager), and Mr D Wiles (Communications and Press Officer).

### **1      TERRORIST ATROCITY IN GERMANY**

His Worship the Mayor referred to the recent terrorist atrocity in Germany and Members stood in one minute's silence as a tribute to those that had lost their lives in this incident.

### **2      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrews, M Coleman, Cutting, Davis, Hacon, Jones, Mavroudis, Reynolds, Rodwell, Stenhouse and Williamson.

### **3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Hammond declared a Personal Interest in the item relating to the Market Place Fees and Charges review.

### **4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

a) Question from Great Yarmouth and District Trades Union Council as follows :-

" In view of the current Universal Credit crisis, would the Council agree to hold a public meeting where agencies and those affected are encouraged to voice their own experience of this new benefit? That Mr Brandon Lewis, our MP is invited to that meeting, to hear first hand the problems faced by residents. Furthermore, will the Council implement a policy where those eligible, who present themselves to the Council, having been evicted because of sanctions or rent arrears triggered by Universal Credit system, are not considered to have intentionally made themselves homeless? In adopting such a policy, the Council commits to supporting the victims of the Universal Credit system find housing."

In response the Leader of the Council reported that the Council are currently engaged in regular meetings with DWP and supporting agencies to discuss the operational impact of Universal Credit in Great Yarmouth. At a local level we discuss the impact on residents, landlords and ourselves as a Council. Any concerns and suggestions of improvements are fed back to the Universal Credit National Programme Office. We have attended Universal Credit local authority engagement sessions with the DWP in London and discussed the impact of the full service of Universal Credit in Great Yarmouth. These discussions are ongoing and we continue to work with voluntary agencies to secure funding in order to provide impartial advice. We are also working to secure additional resource, targeted at those most vulnerable and least able to manage their claims online from the DWP to improve services further.

We currently have a number of locations across the borough, including the Council, where residents can access the universal credit online and find advice and assistance in managing their Universal Credit claim. As these facilities are in place we do not see the necessity of holding a public meeting at this time which may impact on personal data implications.

In line with legislation and national guidance the Council does not operate any blanket policies when assessing homelessness applications. Each case is decided on the particular facts and circumstances of the household who make application. This will include whether the property that they previously lived in was affordable.

The question of whether we will evict will depend on the individual circumstances of the case. As an example, we have had cases where the tenant has claimed and possibly received Universal Credit and is also in large rent arrears. In addition there have been substantial issues with anti social

behaviour e.g. drugs, violence etc. In those cases we will continue the process and have evicted. We have had other cases where we believe the tenant is not in occupation and again we would proceed. The finer categories where tenants have claimed Universal Credit at the end of the eviction process where arrears are already very high, up to £3000 plus, are responsibilities as a Council will depend if the household meets the five tests of homelessness i.e they are eligible, homeless, in priority need, not intentionally homeless and have local connection. In brief, single people with no medical issues would not qualify for assistance but households with children and/or with disabilities probably would unless they caused their own homelessness.

The current state of play is that the process of the claiming appears to be smoother, we are not experiencing the issues around lost forms etc, however, rent arrears are increasing purely due to the increased number of our tenants transferring to Universal Credit.

In accordance with the Constitution Mr Cannell was then entitled to ask one supplementary question as follows :-

" Does the Leader believe that Brandon Lewis MP should get away from the shirt tails of the Prime Minister and take a more active role with regard to Universal Credit issues ?"

In response the Leader reported that he was aware that the MP had been in contact with the relevant Minister for Universal Credit and was fully aware of all issues relating to this matter. The Leader commented that he felt that for the majority of people the process of Universal Credit was working well.

## **5 COUNCIL MINUTES**

The Mayor presented the Council minutes of the 3 November 2016.

Councillor Wainwright referred to the item relating to Motions on Notice in respect of the matter concerning the letter that had been sent to the Secretary of State for Works and Pensions Damian Green MP regarding Universal Credit and referred to the effect this was having on a significant number of households.

For clarification, the Monitoring Officer reminded Members that Council minutes were included on the agenda for clarification and accuracy comments and that if Members wished to hold a debate on any items contained within Council minutes then Members should submit a Motion on Notice in order for this matter to be fully discussed by the Council.

Both Councillors Wainwright and Jeal commented that it had always been the practice of Great Yarmouth Borough Council to make comments and raise issues as a result of the Council minutes.

Councillor Wainwright also commented on the issue of food banks and the

percentage numbers of referrals that had been made. He also commented that he felt that it was a disgrace that the Leader had indicated in the Public Question Item that the Council would not be willing to hold a public meeting to discuss this issue. Councillor Myers also commented on his disappointment at the response received from the Secretary of State on this issue.

Councillor Walker expressed his concern with regard to the process of dealing with Council minutes and felt that a debate by Members was being stifled.

The Chief Executive Officer made the point that a Motion on Notice included on a agenda would make all Members aware of an item to be discussed at a Council meeting. A comment was made that the procedure for dealing with Council minutes could be discussed by the Constitutional Working Party.

PROPOSER : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor K Grey

That the Council minutes of the 3 November 2016 be approved.

CARRIED

## **6 SERVICE COMMITTEE MINUTES - OCTOBER 2016**

Proposer : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor B Coleman

That the minutes of the October 2016 meetings of the Policy and Resources, Economic Development, Environment and Housing and Neighbourhoods Committees be received.

CARRIED

## **7 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2017-18 TO 2020-21**

Council considered the Section 151 Officer's report which presented an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 to 2020/21. The Strategy had been updated to support the current Plan and will be used to inform the detailed budget for 2017/18.

Proposer : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor Carpenter

(1) That the current financial forecast for the period 2017/18 to 2020/21 be noted.

(2) That the revised reserve statement as included at Appendix A of the Section 151 Officer's report to the financial strategy be noted.

CARRIED

## **8 FEES AND CHARGES 2017-18**

Council considered the Section 151 Officer's report which outlined for approval the schedule of Fees and Charges for the 2017-18 financial year.

Proposer : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor Carpenter

That the schedule of Fees and Charges for 2017-18 as detailed in Appendix A of the Section 151 Officer's report be approved.

CARRIED

## **9 MARKET PLACE FEES AND CHARGES REVIEW**

Council considered the Transformation Programme Manager's report with regard to the Market Place Fees and Charges review. Council was reminded that this report had been considered and approved by the Economic Development Committee at its meeting on the 21 November 2016.

Councillor B Coleman reported that over the last year the Council had undertaken a significant review of its market and had made some substantial changes to improve the market in terms of its management and the physical market area, alongside the enhancement of a programme of events to boost footfall.

Councillor Wainwright commented that not all Members of the Economic Development Committee had agreed with the proposed recommendations and he reminded Council that the current policy with regard to fees and charges was RPI +2% and he felt that this policy should apply to the market place fees and charges.

Councillor Jeal also commented that if Council was minded to agree to the recommendations this could give rise to other requests for similar reduction in fees and charges.

Councillor Plant reminded Council that the recommendations for the market place fees and charges had been agreed by the Economic Development Committee. He stated that there was a general decline year on year with regard to the operation of the market and measures were now proposed to try and strengthen the market place operation which would hopefully result in an increase to usage and footfall in this area.

Councillor K Grey stated that the Council should support the proposed Town Centre Initiative and commented that she supported the recommendations as now proposed.

Councillor Walker stated that the Market Place will be receiving funds to improve the town centre through the Town Centre Initiative. He also felt that the Council should not go against the current Council policy on rent increases.

Proposer : Councillor Walker

Seconder : Councillor Wainwright

That no action be taken with regard to the proposed Market Place fees and charges and that this issue be referred for consideration to the Town Centre Initiative.

LOST

Proposer : Councillor B Coleman

Seconder : Councillor Plant

(1) That option 3 with regard to the two day fees and charges for a 2.5% decrease for the 2016/17 fees be agreed, and that in future years this fee is changed in line with the Council's fees and charges policy

CARRIED

(2) That option 1 for the Friday market fees and charges of no increase from the 2016/17 fees be agreed, and that this fee structure be applied to any additional markets that are held during the year, for example a Sunday market as part of a Town Centre event.

CARRIED

(3) That the charity barrow charges be continued and that no change be applied for the use of this barrow by a registered charity.

CARRIED

(4) That a second barrow scheme be put in place for craft traders and that they pay a daily fee of £10

CARRIED

(5) That option 3 in respect of the six day fees and charges for a 2.5% decrease be agreed, and that in future years this fee be changed in line with the Council's fees and charges policy.

CARRIED

**10 COUNCIL TAX – TAX BASE - 2017-18**

Council considered the Revenue Manager's report which asked Members to approve the calculation of the 2017/18 Tax Base totalling 27,342.

Proposer : Councillor Plant

Seconder : Councillor Smith

That approval be given to the calculation of the 2017/18 Tax Base totalling 27,342, and the estimated tax bases for the Borough and for each Parish as detailed in Appendix A of the Revenue Manager's report.

CARRIED

**11 ADDITIONAL COUNCIL MEETING**

His Worship the Mayor reported that an additional meeting of the Council will be held on Thursday 12 January 2017 at 8pm and that prior to that would be a Members briefing on the options for the Marina Centre and this would take place between 6pm and 8pm.

**12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

His Worship the Mayor concluded the meeting and wished all Members and Officers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

The meeting ended at: 20:10