

## **BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH CABINET** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 7 February 2022

### **PRESENT:**

Councillor: John Ward (Chair)

Councillors:	Jan Osborne	Derek Davis
	Clive Arthey	David Busby
	Michael Holt	Elisabeth Malvisi
	Alastair McCraw	Simon Barrett
	Siân Dawson	

### **In attendance:**

Councillor(s): Melanie Barrett  
Mary McLaren

Officers:

- Chief Executive (AC)
- Strategic Director (KN)
- Assistant Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer (EY)
- Assistant Director – Corporate Resources and Section 151 Officer (KS)
- Assistant Director – Housing (GF)
- Assistant Director – Commercial Partnerships and Regeneration (FD)
- Assistant Director – Assets and Investments (EA)
- SRP Operations Manager (AW)
- Corporate Manager – Finance Operations (RH)
- Governance Support Officer (CP)

### **Apologies:**

None.

## **75 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS**

There were no declarations of interest made by Councillors.

## **76 BCA/21/34 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2021**

It was **RESOLVED:-**

**That with the following amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on the 6 December 2021 be confirmed as a correct record:**

**Page 12, 75.2 to amend *initially* to *initial***

**77 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME**

None received.

**78 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS**

None received.

**79 MATTERS REFERRED BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OR JOINT AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEES**

79.1 The Chair invited the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor McLaren to introduce the item.

79.2 Councillor McLaren detailed the recommendations for the General Fund Budget 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the recommendations for the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2022/23 and Four-year Outlook from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

79.3 In response to Members' queries in relation to recommendation 1.2 in the Overview and Scrutiny report, the Monitoring Officer advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was concerned with the effectiveness of the new monitoring framework and whether the newly set-up performance team was delivering and was effective.

79.4 The recommendations were noted.

**80 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST**

80.1 The Forthcoming Decisions List was noted.

**81 BCA/21/35 GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2022/23 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK**

81.1 The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Simon Barrett introduced the report, and drew Members' attention to a Council Tax increase of 2% as included in the recommendations. This would be equivalent to an annual increase of £3.50 or 29 pence per month for a Band D Property, providing an annual surplus of £527k for 2022/23, this had to be considered in relation to a forecast cumulative deficit of £2.3m by 2025/26.

81.2 Councillor Barrett proposed the recommendations in the report which was seconded by Councillor Busby.

81.3 In response to a question from Councillor Malvisi regarding the New Homes Bonus, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Barrett explained that the New Homes Bonus impacted on the Council's deficit.

- 81.4 Councillor Holt was supportive of 2% increase in Council Tax.
- 81.5 Councillor Busby queried the capital expenditure on page 53 and whether the £2m for the Belle Vue project was set a figure or whether it was dependent on the sale of the site. The Cabinet Member for Finance responded that the £2m was over and above any receipts for the sale of the land.
- 81.6 The Assistant Director for Economic Development and Regeneration clarified that the final cost for the entrance had not been received yet and that the £2m would come from borrowing and was allocated for the development of Belle Vue.

Note: Councillor Dawson joined the meeting at 2:35pm.

- 81.7 The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Barrett confirmed to Councillor Malvisi that planned maintenance for car parks for next year was £7k.
- 81.8 Councillor Arthey questioned if improvement work to car parks was included in the budget for 2022/23 and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Barrett stated that the car parking review was coming forward to Cabinet later in the year and that once the requirements and costs had been established, recommendations would be brought to Cabinet for adoption.
- 81.9 Councillor Holt referred to the expenditure for the leisure centres and what the allocated ongoing costs were for. The Assistant Director for Corporate Resources clarified that this was for emergency repairs as required for the two leisure centres throughout the year.
- 81.10 Councillor Busby referred to page 53 and the target capital expenditure of a total of £22.5m, which was never fully spent and how the cost of interest was calculated over the year. The Cabinet Member for Finance responded that it was assumed that 50% of the capital spend would be carried forward.
- 81.11 The Cabinet Member for Finance informed Members that £200K from the General Fund Reserve would be transferred to the General Grants Fund and enable organisations to apply for grants to assist their recovery from the financial effects of the Covid Pandemic.
- 81.12 Members continued to debate the issues including the implementation of car parking charges and that the cost of running and improving car parks in the District was irrespective of the implementation of car park charges.
- 81.13 The debate continued in relation to the proposed 2% Council Tax increase and whether this was really needed to fund services in the future given that the cost of living was going to increase in the coming year.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That the General Fund Budget proposals for 2022/23 and four-year outlook set out in the report be endorsed for recommendation to Council on 21 February 2022.**

**1.2 That the General Fund Budget for 2022/23 is based on a 2% increase to Band D Council Tax.**

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To bring together all the relevant information to enable Cabinet Members to review, consider and comment upon the Council's General Fund budget for endorsement and recommendation to Council.

**82 BCA/21/36 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2022/23 BUDGET**

- 82.1 The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Barrett introduced the report and proposed that the recommendations were voted for on block.
- 82.2 Councillor Barrett proposed the recommendations in the report, which was seconded by Councillor Osborne.
- 82.3 Councillor Arthey queried if the cost for the work at garage sites was specified in the report and the Cabinet Member for Housing responded that this was not identified as a separate item but covered by existing resources and that a report would come forward shortly.
- 82.4 In response to Members' questions regarding supporting tenants in relation to the rent increases, the Cabinet Member for Finance detailed the number of tenants receiving financial support and the SRP Operations Manager detailed the level of support some tenants were entitled to receive.
- 82.5 Councillor Ward stated that the increase of 4.1% in tenant rents was based on the CPI from a couple of months ago, which was lower than now. A council tax rebate would be proposed by the Government soon.
- 82.6 Councillor Busby referred to the chart for interest payable on page 88 and queried if the interest payment remained the same for the next two years and the Cabinet Member for Finance confirmed that it was a Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) fixed term loan interest payments and would remain the same.
- 82.7 The Assistant Director for Housing responded to Members' questions regarding the Council's garage sites and potential developments. A garage site review was being undertaken and any necessary work would be funded out of the Building Service Budget. The garage site review would be brought to Cabinet in due course.
- 82.8 Councillor Arthey reiterated that the Council should continue to look at garage sites and the issue of parking on some council estates, he was concerned that nothing would be done to address these issues until 2023/24 and the Assistant Director for Housing responded that it was possible if there was a requirement and if there was sufficient funds in the capital work programme.
- 82.9 The Cabinet Member for Finance stated that if the development of a garage site for housing was identified then the cost would come out of the general HRA budget and would not necessarily require a report to Cabinet and could

be taken by delegated officer decision.

- 82.10 Councillor Ward posed several questions including if the Council was still paying for temporary hotel accommodation, and that the valuation of the Council's housing stock was based 38% of the market value, but where did the figure of 38% come from. He also queried the Right to Buy receipts.
- 82.11 The Cabinet Member for Housing clarified that the cost for any temporary accommodation came out of the General Fund Budget and not the HRA.
- 82.12 She then stated that the current income from the Right to Buy receipts was at £2.9m and that the Council had committed to £3.34m. Any underspend would be given back to Government after five years if receipts had not been spent in time.
- 82.13 The Assistant Direct for Corporate Resources advised Members that the guidance was to use 38% of the market value for the Housing stock.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That the HRA Budget proposals for 2022/23 set out in the report be endorsed for recommendation to Council on 21 February 2022.**
- 1.2 That the CPI + 1% increase of 4.1% in Council House rents, equivalent to an average rent increase of £3.72 a week for social rents and £5.23 a week for affordable rents be implemented.**
- 1.3 That garage rents are kept at the same level as 2021/22.**
- 1.4 That Sheltered Housing service charges are kept at the same level as 2021/22.**
- 1.5 That Sheltered Housing utility charges are kept at the same level as 2021/22.**
- 1.6 That the budgeted surplus of £511k be transferred to the Strategic Priorities reserve in 2022/23.**
- 1.7 That in principle, Right to Buy (RTB) receipts should be retained to enable continued development and acquisition of new council dwellings.**

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To bring together all the relevant information to enable Cabinet Members to review, consider and comment upon the Councils Housing Revenue Account budget for recommendation to Council.

**83 BCA/21/37 BUSINESS RATES RELIEF POLICIES**

- 83.1 Councillor Barrett introduced the report and outlined the reasons for the

Business Rates Relief Policies coming to Cabinet.

- 83.2 Councillor Barrett proposed the recommendations in the report which was seconded by Councillor McCraw.
- 83.3 In response to Councillor Dawson's questions in relation to failed businesses which had received the grant, the SRP Operations Manager responded that the retail discount was 50% and was set by the Government and that payments could be portioned and capped if necessary.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That Cabinet give authority to the Assistant Director for Corporate Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Finance and Economy, to agree the COVID-19 additional relief fund policy.
- 1.2 That Cabinet agree the retail, hospitality and leisure policy, transitional relief policy and supporting small business relief policy for 2022/23 as set out in Appendices a, b and c.
- 1.3 That Cabinet give authority to the Assistant Director for Corporate Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to agree any future changes to the 2022/23 retail, hospitality and leisure discount policy.
- 1.4 That Cabinet gives authority to the Shared Revenues Partnership Operations Manager to administer the Covid-19 additional relief fund, discretionary retail, hospitality and leisure discount, transitional relief and supporting small business relief policies.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To provide discretionary reliefs to support ratepayers in Babergh.

To enable the implementation of the discretionary schemes.

**84 BCA/21/38 ACCOMMODATION AND AGILE STRATEGY - ENDEAVOUR HOUSE**

- 84.1 Councillor Busby introduced the report and highlighted the benefits of reducing the floor space in Endeavour House and delivering the most suitable workspace for officers to work in.
- 84.2 Councillor Busby proposed the recommendations in the report, which was seconded by Councillor Ward.
- 84.3 In response to a question from Councillor Barrett, the Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments referred to the concept design plan attached in appendix A.
- 84.4 Councillor Holt expressed his concern in relation to the Strategy including that staff had not been involved enough in the preparation of the proposed workspace, that there were not enough desks, the impact on staff wellbeing

when working from home and that he thought this decision should have gone to full Council for debate. In response, the Assistant Director for Assets and Investments detailed the results from the staff survey, in which 70% of the responses received were in favour of coming into work at Endeavour House for between one to three days per week. The workspace design encouraged officers to come into the office to work both at workstations and in the collaborative workspaces. In addition to the Gold floor plate space, Members and officers would maintain the current access to other spaces in the building.

- 84.5 Councillor Ward stated that the floor plate would be used in a far more efficient way for officers to work in and that the requirements outlined in the report were evidence based.
- 84.6 Councillor McCraw was concerned with the speed of the decision and the timeline for the implementation of the strategy and that this was caused by the September date for the break clause in the lease. He queried whether it would be possible to take the report to Council for debate. The Assistant Director for Assets and Investments outlined the timings for the Strategy and explained that work for the Strategy had commenced at the beginning of the Covid Pandemic in 2020.
- 84.7 The Monitoring Officer advised Cabinet that this was an executive decision for Cabinet and could not be referred to Council for discussion.
- 84.8 In response to questions relating to working arrangement for officers, the Chief Executive advised Members that officers had always been encouraged to work in the District.
- 84.9 Councillor Osborne asked for clarification on the number of desks allocated for officers working three days in Endeavour House. The Assistant Director responded that the data had been extrapolated from the staff survey, producing the result of 48 fixed desks in addition to the collaboration and meeting spaces as a blended figure of the data.
- 84.10 The Assistant Director for Assets and Investments continued to respond to questions from Members including the minimum number of working days required by officers to be in Endeavour House, the number of desks required to accommodate this, new ways of working in a collaborative way and how Councillors would use the proposed workspace.

Note: A break was taken between 4:10pm and 4:22pm.

- 84.11 In response to other Members attending the meeting in relation to what arrangements were put in place if the proposed new way of working was not working, the Assistant Director for Assets and Investments responded that the concept design was a response to the way the Council was currently working and that there was a degree of flexibility for the layout of the concept plan and for furniture arrangements.
- 84.12 Members debated the issues and other Members attending the meeting

outlined some of the concerns around working from home and hybrid working and the emotional impact on staff working under these circumstances.

84.13 In response to Members debating the location of Babergh Council offices, the Cabinet Member for Assets and Investments stated that the location of Council offices in Endeavour House enabled the Council to get a better level of staff, and that this was helped by the offer of agile working and the modern workspace and facilities. In addition, Ipswich was easy to access, and the Council needed to move forward with the times. Officers might be working in Endeavour House however, the services the Council provided were continued to be delivered in the District.

84.14 Councillor Malvisi stated that she thought that the issues should be debated by all Members, and she was concerned about where officers would be for Members to contact them.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That the Cabinet agrees to reduce and reconfigure the floorspace demised to the Councils within Endeavour House in accordance with this report.**
- 1.2 That the Cabinet delegates authority to the Assistant Director of Assets & Investments to deliver the reconfiguration of the floorspace including finalising the detailed design, the appointment of contractors and suppliers and completing negotiations with the landlords.**

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To create a fit for purpose workspace at Endeavour House to reinforce our organisational culture, enable collaboration, networking and learning whilst promoting well-being and supporting the delivery of effective and efficient services for residents.

To deliver financial savings over the term of the original lease period.

To enable the timely, efficient, and effective delivery of the project.

**85 BCA/21/39 HAVEN GATEWAY PARTNERSHIP MEMBERSHIP**

85.1 Councillor Holt introduced the report and detailed the reasons and background for the recommendations in the report.

85.2 Councillor Holt proposed the recommendations in the report, which was seconded by Councillor Barrett.

85.3 Councillor Holt confirmed that the Council would save £7K per year once the membership of Haven Gateway Partnership was ended.



**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That the key information in this report which outlines the current economic funding and policy landscape and the range of partnerships which now exist across the East of England which support the Babergh/Mid Suffolk economy, be noted.**
- 1.2 That the withdrawal of the Council's membership of the Haven Gateway Partnership from 31 March 2022 be approved.**
- 1.3 That delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director Economic Development and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth to finalise any legal documents associated with a withdrawal from the Partnership.**

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To ensure future resources are diverted to areas and partnerships to drive greatest growth and support, especially as part of covid 19 recovery.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 4:37 pm.

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Chair