

## **BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH COUNCIL** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 21 February 2022

### **PRESENT:**

Councillor: Adrian Osborne (Chair)

Councillors:	Clive Arthey	Susan Ayres
	Melanie Barrett	Simon Barrett
	Peter Beer	David Busby
	Trevor Cresswell	Siân Dawson
	Mick Fraser	Jane Gould
	John Hinton	Michael Holt
	Bryn Hurren	Leigh Jamieson
	Robert Lindsay	Elisabeth Malvisi
	Margaret Maybury	Mary McLaren
	Mark Newman	Zachary Norman
	Jan Osborne	Alison Owen
	Lee Parker	John Ward

### **In attendance:**

Officers:

- Chief Executive (AC)
- Strategic Director (KN)
- Assistant Director, Corporate Resources & Section 151 Officer (KS)
- Assistant Director, Housing (GF)
- Assistant Manager - Financial Accountant (RH)
- Corporate Manager – Governance and Civic Office (JR)

### **Apologies:**

Councillors:

- Sue Carpendale
- Derek Davis
- Kathryn Grandon (Vice-Chair)
- Richard Hardacre
- Alastair McCraw
- John Nunn
- Stephen Plumb

## **83 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS**

83.1 In accordance with delegated authority, the Monitoring Officer had granted dispensations to all Members in respect of the Budget papers.

83.2 Councillor Jan Osborne declared a local pecuniary interest in BC/21/31 as a Trustee of CA Sudbury.

83.3 Councillor Maybury declared a local non pecuniary interest in BC/21/31 as a Director of CA Sudbury.

**84 BC/21/29 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2022**

**It was RESOLVED:-**

**That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2022 be confirmed and signed as a true record.**

**85 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

85.1 Councillor Ward made the following Leaders announcements:

**Housing**

I just want to provide a brief update on our HRA as we will be considering the budget for it in a short while. So far in 2021/22 we have added 94 new homes to our housing stock, including the recently announced completions in Shotley and Brantham, bringing the total for the past seven years to 228.

Our retrofitting programme to improve insulation, install new heating systems and address damp and mould is proceeding well and significant progress can now be seen on the Springlands estate in Sudbury. Phase 1, involving 39 properties, has been completed and phase two will start in the spring, involving 28 properties. The final phase 3 will address about another 30 properties.

In addition, we are installing external wall insulation and replacement windows elsewhere in the district.

We are completing a desktop study into the energy performance of our housing stock, and aligning our ambitions to improve the worst performing homes to an EPC rating of C or above. Indications are that works required will affect approximately 2,700 homes.

I was very pleased to be able to go on Radio Suffolk just over a week ago to talk about the money we have been awarded from the government's new Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme. This will allow us to build specialised emergency accommodation units for those who have been excluded and marginalised due to complex needs and will add to the existing 80 temporary units and 11 rough sleeper units our districts already have.

This latest round of funding will also allow us to build on work made possible due to the previously successful Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding bid, which was used to create a dedicated outreach and mental health support service for rough sleepers.

**Town Recovery**

Our towns are getting busier, and business does seem to be picking up for many. Vacancy rates – 10% in Sudbury and 11.6% in Hadleigh – are lower than the national average, which is clearly due to the greater prevalence of small

independents rather than chain stores.

Last week we informed you that the Digital Skills Programme, initially launched for businesses on the Virtual High Street, is now open to all businesses in the districts. This is part of our post-covid recovery strategy and is being run by MENTA using funding from the Suffolk Inclusive Growth Investment Fund.

The programme is based on virtual workshops, which are free to attend, that cover topics such as online security, digital and social media marketing, e-commerce, and information management. The past two years have demonstrated that these skills, together with a strong online presence, which the Virtual High Street has provided for the first time for many businesses in our towns, are no longer 'nice to haves' for businesses: they are essential to enable them to survive and thrive.

Along with our Innovate Local scheme and Innovation Labs, our councils are providing real and valuable support for our businesses.

The works at Gainsborough's House and St. Peter's in Sudbury are proceeding well, with the former scheduled to open soon. Our artistic and cultural heritage in the district is strong and in the Suffolk Free Press last week James Cartlidge again reinforced the desire to build a joined up offering that also incorporates Benton End in Hadleigh and Flatford Mill. Last week, I was pleased to visit the latest venture in Sudbury's art scene: the new Voluptas Gallery that has been widely featured recently on TV and in the press. I had a good chat with the owner about her plans and ambitions. I really hope she will be successful.

The Eastern Gateway business park at Sproughton that Ipswich Borough Council owns is seeing further development, with part of it sold for construction of five industrial and logistics units. Although tenants have not been identified yet, the purchaser, who has a programme of acquisition of development sites along the A14, is confident that the units will be occupied quickly. There is a growing demand, particularly for logistics units, and we must ensure that economic growth is not held back by an inability to satisfy this demand through a lack of identified sites.

### **Peer Challenge**

You will be aware that Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have invited the Local Government Association to carry out a Corporate Peer Challenge. These are sector-led improvement reviews, undertaken by councillors and officers from councils from elsewhere in the country.

The peer review team will be visiting us between 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> March. The process involves engaging with a wide range of people connected with the Councils, and many of you will be involved in the process through participation in focus groups.

The peer review team will be looking for your considered, honest and constructive feedback, so please do highlight good practice but also those areas for improvement and challenge.

The team will also be conducting site visits to Sudbury and Stowmarket.

## **Car Parks**

And finally, we can't have a Babergh meeting without at least one mention of parking. But this time it is good news.

The new machines have been successfully installed last week at both Sudbury and Hadleigh car parks. Customers can now pay for parking using coins, debit or credit card, contactless, or the MiPermit app. User guide videos have been produced and will be shared on social media and our Website.

### **86 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

86.1 The Corporate Manager, Governance and Civic Office informed Council that a validated petition had been received regarding planning application DC/21/06519 Belle Vue House, Sudbury which would be dealt with through the usual planning processes.

### **87 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

87.1 None received.

### **88 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

88.1 None received.

### **89 BC/21/30 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

89.1 Councillor McLaren introduced report BC/21/30 which updated Council on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> January where the Draft General Fund 2022/23 and Four-Year Outlook, and Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Four-Year Outlook were discussed.

89.2 Councillor Maybury raised her concerns that the types of accommodation used by victims of domestic abuse had been discussed and noted in the report and asked for the detail to be removed.

89.3 Councillor McLaren sought advice from the Deputy Monitoring Officer who stated that as the discussion took place in an open meeting the information was already in the public domain and could not be withdrawn. However, the matter would be investigated and reported back to Councillor Maybury.

89.4 Councillor Arthey queried that the report stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a zero-council tax increase budget and asked if the concept of a plus 2% council tax increase budget was introduced at the meeting and if so, why this had not been minuted.

- 89.5 Councillor Simon Barrett confirmed that at the stage that the papers were put forward to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the budget had been calculated on a zero percentage increase.

## **90 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET / COMMITTEES**

### **91 BC/21/31 GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2022/23 AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK**

- 91.1 Councillor Simon Barrett introduced report BC/21/31 and explained why a 0% council tax budget had been replaced by the 2% council tax budget detailed in the report.
- 91.2 Councillor Jamieson asked if the ongoing costs for Corks Lane were included in the budget and if so, what the ongoing costs were.
- 91.3 Councillor Jamieson also asked Councillor Barrett to clarify what he meant when he said climate change and biodiversity reductions would be made if financially viable.
- 91.4 Councillor Simon Barrett replied that he agreed with the climate emergency declared by Council however there was not a blank cheque and the benefits to residents should be clear as it was public monies that were being spent.
- 91.5 Councillor Hinton asked for clarification on the increase in staffing costs shown in the report.
- 91.6 Councillor Hinton also asked where the Communities budget mentioned by Councillor Barrett was shown in the report as the chart of forecasted budget gaps on page 33 of the report did not show any increase in community funding.
- 91.7 Councillor Simon Barrett replied that the wellbeing reserve had been agreed by Council as part of the Strategic Priorities and the fund was intended to be used for grants which could be applied for by organisations across the Babergh district.
- 91.8 The Chief Executive clarified that as of the middle of January, Babergh and Mid Suffolk combined employed 579 officers which was a full time equivalent of 525 officers and the combined salary costs of those employees was just over 21 million pounds.
- 91.9 Councillor Beer asked why a council tax increase was being proposed when the report showed the council having a surplus. Councillor Beer also asked where in the report the additional £41,000 for senior officers was shown and if it was necessary to spend £250,000 on refurbishment of the office rooms in Endeavour House.
- 91.10 The Chief Executive clarified that the £41,000 for staffing increase shown in the budget was a potential for an increase rather than an actual increase.

- 91.11 Councillor Ayres asked for more detail on the £200,000 in the budget for Communities.
- 91.12 Councillor Simon Barrett replied that this would contribute to organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau and Quay Theatre and grants for other organisations to assist them to access funding from other sources.
- 91.13 Councillor Hinton asked why the 2% pay rise for staff shown on page 26 of the report had not been paid.
- 91.14 Councillor Simon Barrett replied that the staff pay rise was subject to a national negotiation and an agreement on the amount had not yet been agreed.
- 91.15 The Chief Executive confirmed that although a 2% rise had been budgeted for, the current offer was 1.75% but this had been rejected by the Unions and was subject to a strike ballot.
- 91.16 Councillor Melanie Barrett enquired if it was possible to pay the current pay rise offer of 1.75% to staff now before an actual agreement had been reached and the final agreement was unlikely to be less than that.
- 91.17 The Chief Executive stated that the advice from the LGA was not to pay any pay increase until an agreement had been reached however, he was happy to further explore the possibility of paying a pay increase before an agreement is reached.
- 91.18 Councillor Hinton sought clarification on what the amount in the budget for consultants' fees was for.
- 91.19 The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources clarified that condition surveys needed to be carried out on Council owned properties and consultants may be required.
- 91.20 Councillor Malvisi sought clarification on the £55,000 in the budget for business rates on a car park in Sudbury.
- 91.21 Councillor Simon Barrett clarified that the car park was owned by a business, but the Council paid business rates to enable the car park to be available to the general public.
- 91.22 Councillor Jamieson enquired if the CCTV costs were an ongoing cost or a one-off cost.
- 91.23 Councillor Simon Barrett replied that it was an ongoing cost and Hadleigh and Sudbury Town Councils were also contributing.
- 91.24 Members debated issues in the report including parking charges, why there was a council tax increase proposed while the council has a surplus and pay increases for staff.

91.25 The recommendations in the report were **Proposed** by Councillor Simon Barrett and **Seconded** by Councillor Ward.

**In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19.3, the vote was recorded as follows:**

For	Against	Abstain
Clive Arthey		
Sue Ayres		
Melanie Barrett		
Simon Barrett		
	Peter Beer	
David Busby		
Trevor Cresswell		
Sian Dawson		
Mick Fraser		
	Jane Gould	
	John Hinton	
Michael Holt		
Bryn Hurren		
	Leigh Jamieson	
	Robert Lindsay	
Mary McLaren		
	Elisabeth Malvisi	
	Margaret Maybury	
Zachary Norman		
Mark Newman		
Adrian Osborne		
Jan Osborne		
	Alison Owen	
Lee Parker		
John Ward		
TOTAL 17	TOTAL 8	

By 17 votes for and 8 votes against

**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That the General Fund Budget proposals for 2022/23 and four-year outlook set out in the report be approved.
- 1.2 That the General Fund Budget for 2022/23 is based on a 2% increase to Band D Council Tax, which is equivalent to £3.48 per annum (7p per week) for a Band D property.

## 92 BC/21/32 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2022/23 BUDGET

- 92.1 Councillor Simon Barrett introduced report BC/21/32 and **Proposed** the recommendations contained the report.
- 92.2 Councillor Ward asked for clarification of the increase of properties assumed in paragraph 4.16 of the report, as compared to previous years the figure seemed low.
- 92.3 Councillor Ward also enquired if there was confidence that no right to buy receipts would have to be repaid.
- 92.4 Councillor Jan Osborne replied that there was an overspend of the right to buy receipts so no monies would be repaid.
- 92.5 The Assistant Director for Housing clarified that the number quoted in paragraph 4.16 was in addition to the existing programme and it was expected that there would be more than 200 social or affordable rent new homes in the next 3 years.
- 92.6 Councillor Maybury asked for clarification of the right to buy figures quoted by Councillor Jan Osborne.
- 92.7 The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources, who supplied the figures to Councillor Jan Osborne stated that she would supply clarification to Councillor Maybury outside of the meeting.
- 92.8 Councillor Beer asked if the percentage of tenants who would pay the proposed increase could be confirmed.
- 92.9 Councillor Simon Barrett replied that 49% of tenants received benefits and would not pay the increase but the percentage would likely be higher due to tenants receiving universal credit.
- 92.10 Councillor Hurren asked for clarification on the depreciation charge described in paragraph 4.16 on page 84.
- 92.11 Councillor Simon Barrett replied that the depreciation charge to the housing stock was required due to regulations but does not affect the day to day workings of the HRA.
- 92.12 Councillor Hurren also asked for details on the area in Boxford identified for development as stated in paragraph 4.24.
- 92.13 The Chief Executive suggested that the houses referred to were houses to be acquired under Section 106.



- 92.14 Councillor Hurren questioned if these homes should have been included in the report if they related to a planning application that had not yet been passed.
- 92.15 Councillor Jamieson asked if the retrofit programme was referred to in the report.
- 92.16 Councillor Jan Osborne replied that the retrofit programme was included in the planned maintenance figures.
- 92.17 Councillor Hinton asked why Babergh appeared to have higher social rents compared to other authorities and would this increase the number of tenants falling into arrears or relying on benefits.
- 92.18 The Assistant Director for Housing informed the council that there were some key principles set out by Government under Social Rent Policy in relation to setting social rents including the condition and location of the property, local earnings and property size.
- 92.19 Councillor McLaren asked if a cost was known for the 85 air source heat pumps that had been installed and whether the benefits were being evaluated.
- 92.20 The Assistant Director for Housing replied that there was a programme to install more air source heat pumps and a variety of factors were taken into account when looking for suitable accommodation to install them.
- 92.21 Councillor Maybury asked if any additional resource was being provided to assist people who were struggling to pay their rents and queried if it would have been better to increase utility charges for sheltered accommodation rather than increasing rents.
- 92.22 The Assistant Director for Housing gave assurance that there was a comprehensive tenancy support service already in place and there was no need to increase utility charges for sheltered housing with communal facilities as sufficient monies had already been collected to cover the costs.
- 92.23 Councillor Ward began the debate stating his agreement to the recommendations in the report and commending the information contained within the report for being clearer than in past reports.
- 92.24 The recommendations were **Seconded** by Councillor Jan Osborne.

**In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19.3, the vote was recorded as follows:**

For	Against	Abstain
Clive Arthey		
Sue Ayres		
Peter Beer		

Melanie Barrett		
Simon Barrett		
David Busby		
	Trevor Cresswell	
Sian Dawson		
Mick Fraser		
Jane Gould		
	John Hinton	
		Bryn Hurren
Leigh Jamieson		
Robert Lindsay		
Mary McLaren		
Elisabeth Malvisi		
		Margaret Maybury
Mark Newman		
Zachary Norman		
Adrian Osborne		
Jan Osborne		
	Alison Owen	
Lee Parker		
John Ward		
TOTAL 19	TOTAL 3	TOTAL 2

By 19 votes for, 3 votes against and 2 abstentions.

**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.**

**93 BC/21/33 JOINT CAPITAL, INVESTMENT AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES 2022/23**

- 93.1 Councillor Hurren introduced report BC/21/33 summarising all appendices and **Proposed** the recommendations contained in the report.
- 93.2 Members debated the environmental, social and governance investments and investments in fossil fuels.
- 93.3 The Deputy Monitoring Officer asked for a show of hands to extend the meeting in accordance with the guillotine rule. By a unanimous vote it was agreed to extend the meeting.
- 93.4 The recommendations were **Seconded** by Councillor Arthey.

**In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19.3, the vote was recorded as follows:**

For	Against	Abstain
Clive Arthey		
Sue Ayres		
Peter Beer		
Melanie Barrett		
Simon Barrett		
David Busby		
	Trevor Cresswell	
Sian Dawson		
Mick Fraser		
	Jane Gould	
John Hinton		
Bryn Hurren		
	Leigh Jamieson	
	Robert Lindsay	
Mary McLaren		
Elisabeth Malvisi		
Margaret Maybury		
Mark Newman		
Zachary Norman		
Adrian Osborne		
Jan Osborne		
Alison Owen		
Lee Parker		
John Ward		
TOTAL 20	TOTAL 4	

By 20 votes for and 4 votes against

**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 The Joint Capital Strategy for 2022/23, including the Prudential Indicators, as set out in Appendix A be approved.
- 1.2 The Joint Investment Strategy for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix B be approved.
- 1.3 The Joint Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23, including the Joint Annual Investment Strategy as set out in Appendix C be approved.
- 1.4 The Joint Treasury Management Indicators as set out in Appendix D be approved.
- 1.5 The Joint Treasury Management Policy Statement as set out in Appendix G be approved.
- 1.6 The Joint Minimum Revenue Provision Statement as set out in Appendix H be approved.
- 1.7 That the key factors and information relating to and affecting treasury management activities set out in Appendices E, F and I be noted.

**93a IRJAC/21/18 ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS**

- 93a.1 Councillor Hurren introduced report IRJAC/21/8 and **Proposed** the recommendations contained in the report.
- 93a.2 Councillor Hinton asked what would be done to ensure whoever was appointed by the PSAA complied with good standards of practice.
- 93a.3 The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources replied that a detailed specification would be set out by the PSAA for all auditor firms applying for the contracts and that there were also national standards they had to be adhered to.
- 93a.4 Councillor Busby asked why the Babergh scale fees were 10% higher than Mid Suffolk.
- 93a.5 The Assistant Director – Corporate Resources replied that this was a historic issue.
- 93a.6 Councillor Simon Barrett and Councillor Ward thanked Katherine Steel for her work as Assistant Director Corporate Resources and Section 151 Officer and wished her a happy retirement.
- 93a.7 The recommendations were **Seconded** by Councillor Simon Barrett.

**It was RESOLVED: -**

- 1.1 That the arrangements and options for appointing an external auditor to audit the Final Accounts of the Councils from 2023/24 be noted.
- 1.2 That the Council continues to 'opt-in' to the sector led body (Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA)) for the independent appointment of the Councils' external auditor, beginning with responsibilities for the financial year 2023/24.

#### **94 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS**

- 94.1 There were no changes to placings.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 8.35pm.

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Chair