

## **BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH COUNCIL** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Tuesday, 23 January 2024

### **PRESENT:**

Councillor: Simon Dowling (Vice-Chair in the chair)

Councillors:	Peter Beer	David Busby
	Jane Carruthers	Paul Clover
	Helen Davies	Sallie Davies
	Derek Davis	Kathryn Grandon
	Michael Holt	Ruth Hendry
	Bryn Hurren	Leigh Jamieson
	Margaret Maybury	Alastair McCraw
	Mary McLaren	Mark Newman
	John Nunn	Adrian Osborne
	Stephen Plumb	Daniel Potter
	Isabelle Reece	Tim Register
	Deborah Saw	Laura Smith
	John Ward	John Whyman

Officers:

- Chief Executive (AC)
- Director - Customers, Digital Transformation and Improvements (SW)
- Director - Planning & Building Control and Interim Director Communities & Wellbeing (TB)
- Corporate Manager - Strategic Policy (JH)
- Corporate Manager - Communications & Engagement (BJ)
- Interim Corporate Manager Finance, Commissioning and Procurement (KW)
- Senior Business Partner - Capital & Treasury (AG)
- Governance Support Officer (P R-T)
- Assistant Manager - Governance (HH)

### **Apologies:**

Councillors:

- Jessie Carter
- Elisabeth Malvisi (Chair)
- Alison Owen
- Lee Parker
- Brian Riley

## **72 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

72.1 The Assistant Manager – Governance reported all apologies received.

72.2 Councillor Maybury informed the Council that Councillor Riley's absence from the meeting was due to his wife passing away. She conveyed her condolences to Councillor Riley and his family, and the Chair also conveyed condolences on behalf of all Members of the Council.

## **73 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS**

73.1 There were no declarations of interests by Councillors.

## **74 BC/23/29 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2023**

74.1 Councillor Holt questioned the accuracy of the wording of paragraph 64.3 on page 9.

74.2 it was agreed that this paragraph be changed to read:- Councillor Holt commented that not all Members were consulted on the letter sent to South Cambridgeshire District Council and requested that all members be consulted to confirm their agreement before any future correspondence be sent.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

**That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.**

## **75 BC/23/30 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR AND LEADER**

75.1 The Chair referred Councillors to Paper BC/23/30 which listed events attended by the Chair of the Council for noting.

75.2 Councillor Ward, Acting leader of the Council made the following announcements:-

### **Living Well in Winter grants**

I am pleased to report Babergh has provided Living Well in Winter grants to 17 projects in the district.

The grant was introduced last year to support VCFSE organisations in providing new accessible spaces and activities, or expand upon existing projects, to provide warm spaces and help tackle social isolation.

I'd like to thank all of the people who make projects like these happen in our communities.

We hope that this extra funding is helping support the wellbeing of residents during the colder months, and helping people to forge new connections within their communities.

### **New toilets in Gaol Lane**

It was good to see the newly refurbished public toilets at Gaol Lane in Sudbury now open.

Upgrading the toilets has been something both we and Sudbury Town Council have been wanting to do for several years – so it's great to see these plans come to life.

We committed over £50k to the project, and the building now has new sinks, toilets, flooring, tiles and the outside has also been updated.

Along with our plans for a café and toilets in Belle Vue Park, we remain committed to improving facilities in Sudbury town centre for residents and visitors.

### **SPSL funding for climate action**

At the latest meeting of Suffolk Public Sector leaders, a further £2million has been pledged to tackle the climate emergency and help the county achieve its net zero target.

The money will be used on a variety of projects to bring in low carbon transport, sustainable homes, and cleaner power for the county. It will also be used to support communities and businesses with environmental initiatives.

### **Cockfield Village of the Year**

Finally, I was delighted to have been invited on last Saturday, along with the ward members Cllrs Maybury and Clover, to Cockfield's Village of the Year event, to celebrate their being named SALC's Small Village of the Year. There was a huge range of village organisations and clubs with stalls showcasing what they do. Cockfield has taken quite a lot of new housing, but the well-run and proactive parish council has ensured that it has maximised the availability of CIL to improve facilities for the village.

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

76.1 None received.

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

77.1 None received.

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

78.1 The Chair confirmed that the question received from Councillor Riley would be deferred until the next Council meeting as Councillor Riley was not in attendance.

78.2 The Chair invited Councillor Holt to ask his question.

### **Councillor Holt to Councillor John Ward, Acting Leader of the Council**

Re the proposed Full Council debate on the Governance structure review, it was agreed at Full Council in March 2022 to be presented to the New Council after the May 2023 Elections. I raised this at Full Council on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023 and as yet no one has come back to Members, I note in the minutes from the July 18<sup>th</sup> meeting that the 'The Chief Executive responded that a further review of the governance structure was agreed upon by Full Council in March 2022 and that Officers would

seek to bring that debate before the Constitution Working Group as soon as possible. Six Months on and there has been no discussion within the Constitution Working Group. Q - What is happening?

### **Response from Councillor Ward, Acting Leader of the Council**

What is happening? To be honest, not a lot at the moment. The March 2022 council meeting did agree that a further review of governance arrangements would be undertaken after the elections in 2023, but it didn't specify a timeframe. I would remind all members that we do operate a cabinet model that is more open and inclusive than it could be: both open and confidential items are available to all members, who can attend and ask questions. Whilst chairing Cabinet meetings, I have exercised discretion on more than one occasion to allow non-cabinet members to make statements, the most recent being Cllr Owen's statement at the last meeting.

The administration has been very preoccupied with finalising its priorities for the next 3-4 years, pursuing several initiatives such as progressing a Local Listed Building Consent Order, signing up to the Considerate Constructor Scheme, tackling the issues raised by the Housing Regulator and latterly setting the budget for 2024/25. Fiddling with governance structures while needing to address the pressing budget problems could be construed as navel gazing.

However, once we have a permanent Monitoring Officer in place then I am sure they will bring this work forward.

### **Supplementary question from Councillor Holt**

This was a commitment made by the previous administration of which 18 members we re-elected and some sit in this chamber today. It is undemocratic for it not have been put before this council for debate which is now 8 months since it was re-elected. The Monitoring Officer back in 2022 confirmed that it was a statutory requirement that any change to governance model would come into effect at the annual council meeting meaning that it is now very unlikely that to come before all members for the decision to be implemented before May 2024. The position we find ourselves in today is a repeat of the 2022 scenario, where we find the Cabinet model not delivering democratic process to members of this chamber and our residents and I quote Councillor Parker who is not here today he said back in 2022 'A Cabinet system works well with a political majority but a committee system was a better system over all'. I like Councillor Parker have been in office for 9 years and experienced both systems and I have to agree with him we should not forget it was proposed during the parking charges debate of 2022 this is what drove members to have the debate. So I ask the question to Councillors Busby, Ward and Saw to commit to that debate previously agreed back in 2022 by the end of March this year 2024 and let this council decide its own future and not the select few.

### **Response from Councillor Ward**

The cabinet model works when there is a political majority, obviously when there is a Conservative group in majority, so I think we would all like to ask why the

Conservative group so eager to pursue this? they seem to have suddenly changed their minds on what they would like the governance model to be. Members in the chamber and members of the public should remember that the leader cabinet model was agreed by a conservative majority council in 2016 and implemented by that same council in 2017 so this is a U turn.

## **79 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET / COMMITTEES**

### **80 BC/23/31 HALF YEAR REPORT ON TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2023/24**

80.1 The Chair invited Councillor Hurren Joint Chair of Audit and Standards Committee to introduce Paper BC/23/31.

80.2 Councillor Hurren outlined the contents of the report and moved the recommendations contained in the report.

80.3 Councillor Maybury asked for clarification of when it was decided that officers would be able to attend Council meetings virtually.

80.4 The Chief Executive clarified that Councillors as decision makers were obliged to be in the chamber, however officers were not obliged to be in the chamber.

80.5 Councillor McLaren stated that on Page 40 of the report there was a comment regarding the Funding Circle Performance which said bad debt to be recovered and enquired what the level of the bad debt was and if there was a time limit on the recovery of those bad debts.

80.6 Karen Whatling – Interim Corporate Manager Finance, Commissioning and Procurement stated that she did not have that detail and would provide that to councillors outside of the meeting.

80.7 Councillor Holt referred to table 7 on page 41 of the report and asked if CIFCO were paying their full interest payments to the Council.

80.8 The Interim Corporate Manager Finance, Commissioning and Procurement replied that the loans payments were being paid by CIFCO but the interest payments were currently being accrued.

80.9 Councillor Ward added that for two or three years there were a small amount of deferred payments to the Council so that CIFCO could retain funds for capital investment in the portfolio.

80.10 Councillor Holt enquired how much the deferred payments were and how much pressure it was putting on the Council in difficult budgetary circumstances.

80.11 Councillor Ward stated that he did not have the exact figures and would inform councillors outside of the meeting.

80.12 Councillor Beer asked if the costs for Corks Lane were shown in the Babergh Growth figures on page 41 of the report or where in the report he could find the costs relating to Corks Lane.

80.13 Councillor Busby replied that Babergh Growth has never appeared in the Treasury Management report.

80.14 The Interim Corporate Manager Finance, Commissioning and Procurement informed councillors that the amounts would be in the Capital Programme which is reported each quarter to Cabinet and would be included in the budget which is being brought to full Council in February.

80.15 The recommendations in the report were Proposed by Councillor Hurren and Seconded by Councillor Register, and by a vote of 23 votes for, 3 against and 1 abstention.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

**1.1 That the Treasury Management activity for the first six months of 2023/24 as set out in this report and Appendices be noted.**

**1.2 That it be noted that Babergh District Council's treasury management activity for the first six months of 2023/24 was in accordance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy, and that the Council has complied with all the Treasury Management Indicators for this period.**

## **81 BC/23/32 OUR PLAN FOR BABERGH**

81.1 The Chair invited Councillor Ward to introduce the report and propose the recommendations within it.

81.2 Councillor Ward stated that 'Our Plan for Babergh' set out the administrations vision, approach and priorities to help create a resilient more sustainable future, with and for, all residents and communities.

81.3 Councillor Reece raised that in paragraph 4.4 on page 50 of the report it stated that a low response had been received from some areas including businesses and the VCSF Sector and enquired if these sectors would be listened to regarding the upcoming car parking conversations.

81.4 Councillor Busby replied that hopefully a broader conversation would take place with businesses to enable them to thrive in Babergh.

81.5 Councillor Holt asked if targets and deliverable programs would be brought forward not just headlines.

81.6 Councillor Saw replied that each of the pillars would have an action plan and would be evaluated and assessed against those action plans.

81.7 Councillor Ward asked Jo Hobbs Corporate Manager – Strategic Policy to give context and details regarding engagement process.

81.8 Jo Hobbs stated that strategy documents were a difficult subject for people to engage with, but engagement numbers were comparable with other Councils for the subject.

81.9 Councillor McLaren asked what was going to be done to reduce the 26.1% of adults classed physically inactive as shown on page 58 of the report.

81.10 Councillor Saw replied that the feelgood initiative was launched in October which has three key areas, weight management, getting people physically active and helping people to give up smoking. People were able to self-refer or be referred by a GP and in October, 200 plus people referred themselves and this number had been increasing over the following months. Councillor Saw also stated that there were programmes available at the leisure centres to encourage people to be more physically active.

81.11 Councillor Holt enquired why economic growth was not mentioned in the headlines of the plan.

81.12 Councillor Ward replied that on page 60, one of the main themes was thriving economy and there was a list of items which the Council was committed to, to help build the economy.

81.13 Councillor Hurren asked where the money was coming from for the ambitions within the plan.

81.14 Councillor Ward acknowledged that the Council was in a challenging financial time but there were a number of measures being taken in the budget to be discussed at the February Council meeting to try and put the Council on a sound footing and also afford the ambitions within the plan. Also, a number of things in the plan would be done in partnership with others and would not necessarily require huge investment from the Council.

81.15 Councillor Maybury asked for more detail regarding the proposed partners as previously mentioned.

81.16 Councillor Ward replied that it would depend on the individual delivery plans but at this stage that detail was not available.

81.17 Councillor debated issues within the report and the plan including funding, changing the way the Council works with partners, the role of parish councils and better ways of using the money the Council does have.

81.18 The recommendations were PROPOSED by Councillor Ward and SECONDED by Councillor Saw, and by a vote of 23 votes for, 1 vote against and 3 abstentions.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

**To accept the recommendation from Cabinet to adopt Our Plan for Babergh, setting out the vision, approach and strategic priorities for Babergh District Council for 2023-2031 (Appendix A).**

## **82 BC/23/33 POLLING DISTRICT REVIEW**

82.1 The Chair invited the Electoral Registration Officer to introduce the report.

82.2 Arthur Charvonia outlined the key issues in the report and stated that the Council was obliged to carry out this exercise on a regular basis and asked for individual ward queries regarding polling stations to be raised outside the meeting.

82.3 Councillor Beer complimented the elections staff that worked on this, in particular Patrick.

82.4 The recommendations in the report were PROPOSED by Councillor Derek Davis and SECONDED by Councillor Beer. By a unanimous vote of 27 votes for.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

**That the Polling Districts and Polling Places as listed in Appendix A to this report be agreed.**

## **83 BC/23/34 DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE UNDER DELEGATED POWERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 2 OF THE CONSTITUTION**

83.1 The Chair invited the Chief Executive to introduce the report.

83.2 The Chief Executive explained that an urgent decision was necessary to put in place a policy to spend funding released by government for those affected by flooding by Storm Babet.

83.3 Councillors debated the issues in the report including residents struggling to find information at the time of the flooding and assistance for farmers. Councillors also expressed their sympathies and best wishes to those affected by the flooding.

83.4 The recommendations in the report were PROPOSED by Councillor Beer and SECONDED by Councillor McCraw. By a unanimous vote of 27 votes for.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

**That Council notes the decision taken under delegated powers by the Chief Executive as detailed in Appendix A.**

## **84 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS**

84.1 The Chair amended the Councillor appointments within the agenda, to appoint Councillor Tim Register to the Suffolk Enhanced Bus Partnership in place of Councillor Leigh Jamieson.

84.2 The recommendations were PROPOSED by Councillor Busby and SECONDED by Councillor Hurren. By a vote of 25 votes for, 1 vote against and 1 abstention.



**It was RESOLVED:-**

- 1.1 That Councillors Tim Register, Elisabeth Malvisi and John Ward be appointed to the Suffolk Enhanced Bus Partnership.**
- 1.2 That Councillor Deborah Saw replace Councillor Sallie Davies on the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board.**

**85 MOTIONS ON NOTICE**

85.1 None received.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 6.55 pm.

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Chair