

## **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, 23 January 2023 at 5.30pm

### **PRESENT:**

Councillor: Kathryn Grandon (Chair)  
Derek Davis (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Clive Arthey  
Simon Barrett  
David Busby  
Trevor Cresswell  
Mick Fraser  
John Hinton  
Bryn Hurren  
Elisabeth Malvisi  
Mary McLaren  
John Nunn  
Jan Osborne  
Lee Parker  
John Ward  
Melanie Barrett  
Peter Beer  
Sue Carpendale  
Siân Dawson  
Richard Hardacre  
Michael Holt  
Robert Lindsay  
Alastair McCraw  
Zachary Norman  
Adrian Osborne  
Alison Owen  
Stephen Plumb

### **In attendance:**

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)  
Deputy Chief Executive (KN)  
Monitoring Officer (IA)  
Director Corporate Resources (ME)  
Corporate Manager SRP (AM)  
Interim Director Communities & Wellbeing (DR)  
Corporate Manager Communities (VM)  
Corporate Manager Governance & Civic Office (JR)  
Assistant Manager Governance (HH)

### **Apologies:**

Sue Ayres  
Jane Gould  
Leigh Jamieson  
Margaret Maybury  
Mark Newman

## **47 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY COUNCILLORS**

47.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**48 BC/22/34 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2022**

48.1 Councillor Busby apologised for a belated response in regard to the supplementary question from Mr Riley at the Council meeting held on 22 November. Councillor Busby explained that the increase in auditors' fees was largely due to extra demands made by the government on the actual auditors in terms of the fixed assets.

**It was RESOLVED:-**

**That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2022 be confirmed and signed as a true record.**

**49 BC/22/35 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND LEADER**

49.1 The Chair referred Councillors to paper BC/22/35 for noting.

49.2 The Chair thanked those who had bought tickets for the Chairman's charity dinner and those who had donated to the raffle.

49.3 The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

**Levelling Up Fund**

You will have heard by now that the Council's second bid for £5.8m from the Levelling Up Fund for the Hamilton Road site regeneration and Sudbury town centre transport schemes failed. Indeed, there was nothing at all for Suffolk in this LUF round. It was hugely disappointing, especially considering it had a medium to high benefits/cost ratio on monetary value in addition to other non-monetarised benefits. It has made a complex and difficult project very uncertain, and we will be talking to SCC about our options.

**Photo ID for Voting**

You will probably be aware by now that, as a result of last year's Elections Act, photo ID will be required for those voting in person in the council elections in May. A range of existing documents are acceptable as valid photo identification and most people will have at least one of these, but those who don't will have to obtain a Voter Authority Certificate. We now have an information page on the Council's website, where we have included a link to the application page on the gov.uk website as well as information about how a paper application can be made. This only applies to voting at a polling station – there is no change to the postal voting process.

The Council will be embarking on a comprehensive publicity campaign over the next few weeks, and we will include more details in next month's Town and Parish Briefings.

It would be good if everyone could publicise this as widely and as often as possible so that no one is denied a vote on May 4<sup>th</sup>.

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

50.1 None received.

**51 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

51.1 None received.

**52 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

52.1 None received.

**53 BC/22/36 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT**

53.1 The Chair invited Councillor Hinton - Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee to introduce report BC/22/36 which was for noting.

**54 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM CABINET MEMBERS**

**CMU1 – Cabinet Member for Communities and Wellbeing**

54.1 The Chair invited Councillor McLaren – Cabinet Member for Communities & Wellbeing to introduce paper CMU1.

54.2 Councillor Hinton referred to the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership Action Plan and asked why there was no reference to the Eastern Suffolk Community Safety Partnership.

54.3 Councillor Davis clarified as the Chairman of the Western Suffolk Community Safety Partnership, that it covered the entirety of Babergh.

54.4 Councillor Holt sought assurance of Babergh's continued support for Abbeycroft Leisure in the face of the energy crisis.

54.5 Councillor McLaren conveyed her satisfaction with relations between Babergh and Abbeycroft Leisure and stated that meetings are held on a quarterly basis.

54.6 The Interim Director for Communities and Wellbeing reported that Abbeycroft Leisure was performing positively post-covid. Although they had predicted a shortfall, they were able to manage this, and although financial back up had been made available, they had never drawn on it.

**CMU2 – Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformation & Improvement**

54.7 The Chair invited Councillor McCraw – Cabinet Member for Customers, Digital Transformations & Improvement to introduce paper CMU2.

54.8 Councillor S Barrett raised issue with the term 'customer' and suggested 'taxpayer' as more suitable alternative.

- 54.9 Councillor Lindsay agreed with Councillor S Barrett that the Council was not a business and suggested the term 'citizen', to further denote the obligations and duties that constituents are beholden.
- 54.10 Councillor McCraw voiced support for 'customers' as an appropriate term in emulation of the right culture and due respect to those the Council works for. Additionally, Councillor McCraw declared that the effect should be the focus as opposed to language-use and noted that 'customers' worked.
- 54.11 Councillor Hinton noted the involvement of 'customer' language-use in other similar services. In addition, Councillor Hinton questioned whether adequate provision had been made for those who have disconnected from the internet due to economic constraints that had arisen from the energy crisis.
- 54.12 Councillor McCraw remarked that the priority would be to dispense with streaming services rather than internet providers and noted developments in low-cost internet access, albeit something far off.
- 54.13 Councillor Parker raised concern with the complexity of language in paragraph 2.1.4 and enquired about the ease of access for customers.
- 54.14 Councillor McCraw agreed that online forms needed ease-of-use and to be jargon-free. Councillor McCraw exemplified improvements on gov.uk as direction forward.
- 54.15 Councillor Holt raised concern that 1 in 4 people dropped out before the phone was answered and noted that this was worse over the past 4 years.
- 54.16 Councillor McCraw agreed and clarified that the demand increased whilst the staff to manage the demand decreased but that it was being addressed.
- 54.17 Councillor M Barrett asked whether there was a desire to downgrade face-to-face.
- 54.18 Councillor McCraw asserted that the services were not underloaded nor overloaded and that the access points in Sudbury and Hadleigh are able to meet demands.
- 54.19 Councillor Lindsay sought reassurance to resolve the backlog in housing repair issues. Additionally, Councillor Lindsay enquired about the track record of Placecube and the help the project provides citizens.
- 54.20 Councillor McCraw acknowledged that the backlog due to covid required time to work through, as well as new compliance issues was being addressed. Councillor McCraw advised that the contractors have a good track record, will provide a user forum and stated that the project cost was reasonable with anticipated reductions in the cost of running services.

**55 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET / COMMITTEES**

**56 BCA/22/38 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION (WORKING AGE) SCHEME 2023/24**

56.1 The Chair invited Councillor Busby – Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets and Investments to introduce report BCA/22/28.

56.2 Councillor Busby detailed the purpose of the report and **PROPOSED** the recommendations contained within the report, which **SECONDED** by Councillor S. Barrett.

56.3 Councillor Fraser asked for clarification of the wording in paragraph 1.2 regarding the additional council tax award of 'up to at least' £25.

56.4 Councillor Busby clarified the base award is £25.

56.5 Councillor M. Barrett enquired whether in subsequent years the tax for recipients of the award would revert back.

56.6 Councillor Busby clarified that the £25 is a discretionary benefit that the Government has provided, which will disappear but that the 100% reduction would remain in place. Councillor Busby further explained that the aim is to avoid weekly recalculations and the intention of the scheme is to be self-funding reducing administration.

56.7 Councillors debated the matter and agreed that the current system was inefficient and problematic for residents. Clarification was stated that this scheme only affects working age recipients, however it was put forward that the implementation of the scheme should free up resources and prevent multiple reassessments being sent out. Officers confirmed that the scheme would allow for a reduction of regulatory paperwork sent to residents.

**It was RESOLVED:**

**That Option 3 (as set out in Appendix C of the report) be used as the basis for a revised (Working Age) Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24.**

**In addition, the following recommendations as a result of the Governments announcements in the Provisional Settlement relating to the additional local Council Tax Support award for 2023/24.**

- **That Council approved the introduction of an additional Local Council Tax Support award for 2023/24 of up to at least £25 per recipient where residual liability for Council Tax exists, as permitted under Section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.**

- That Council gives authority to the Director for Corporate Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance to agree Local Discretionary Policy as permitted under Section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to determine the method of distribution for any funds remaining from the additional Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/24.

## 57 JAC/21/38 HALF YEAR REPORT ON TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2022/23

- 57.1 The Chair invited Councillor Hurren – Co-Chair of Joint Audit and Standards Committee to introduce report JAC/21/38.
- 57.2 Councillor Hurren detailed the purpose of the report and **PROPOSED** the recommendations contained within, which were **SECONDED** by Councillor S. Barrett for formal noting only.
- 57.3 Councillor S. Barrett queried the date issued on the paper.
- 57.4 The Corporate Manager for Governance & Civic Office clarified that the date on the paper was the date of the Joint Audit and Standards Committee.
- 57.5 Councillor Busby sought clarification on 4.7 detailing confusion over Mid Suffolk's reported debt.
- 57.6 The Corporate Manager for Finance, Commissioning and Procurement confirmed the debt reduction of £7million in table 3 as correct and acknowledged the error stated in table 2.
- 57.7 Councillors debated the issue adding that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had scrutinised the item on 25<sup>th</sup> July and reiterated the importance of the committee's role in safeguarding the Council in the face of dynamic legislative currents.

### It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1) That the Treasury Management activity for the first six months of 2022/23 as set out in report JAC/21/38 and Appendices be noted.
- 2) That it be noted that Babergh District Council's treasury management activity for the first six months of 2022/23 was in accordance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy, and that the Council has complied with all the Treasury Management Indicators for this period.

## 58 BC/22/37 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS 2022

- 58.1 The Chair invited the Monitoring Officer to introduce report BC/22/37.
- 58.2 The Recommendations in the report were **PROPOSED** by Councillor Ward and **SECONDED** by Councillor Norman.

58.3 Councillor Owen asked how long it would take to receive an answer.

58.4 The Monitoring Officer responded that the timeline would extend until completion of the due process. The first steps highlighted were for a response from the Boundary Commission and after which, wider consultation.

58.5 Councillor S Barrett questioned the acceptability of disproportionately allocated parish councils to wards in Sudbury.

58.6 The Monitoring Officer replied that it would be subject to further consultation, which he clarified was after the initial consultation; a second stage broader consultation outside of Sudbury Town Council.

58.7 Councillors considered whether Wolsey Grange required changes. Agreement was voiced that current representation is not balanced, and that wider consultation would support the initial consultation.

**It was RESOLVED:**

1. **The Council agreed the recommendations contained in Appendix A.**
2. **The Council noted the reason in Appendix B, that the Community Governance Review were unable to complete the review which is ongoing.**

**59 BC/22/38 SPECIAL URGENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY OFFICERS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 2 OF THE CONSTITUTION**

59.1 The Chair invited the Chief Executive to introduce report BC/22/38 which was for noting.

**60 COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS**

60.1 There were no changes to placings.

**61 MOTIONS ON NOTICE**

61.1 None received.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 6.51pm.

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Chair