

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH CABINET** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Tuesday, 9 January 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors:	Jessie Carter	Sallie Davies
	Derek Davis	Alastair McCraw
	Daniel Potter	Deborah Saw
	John Ward	

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Peter Beer
Paul Clover
Simon Dowling
Kathryn Grandon
Ruth Hendry
Margaret Maybury
Mary McLaren
Mark Newman
Adrian Osborne
Alison Owen
Brian Riley
Laura Smith
John Whyman

Officers: Chief Executive (AC)
Interim Monitoring Officer (JR)
Director for Operations (ME)
Director for Housing (DF)
Director - Economic Growth & Climate Change (FD)
Corporate Manager - Public Protection (TH)
Interim Corporate Manager, Finance, Commissioning & Procurement (KW)
Corporate Manager – Strategic Policy (JH)
Corporate Manager - Housing Solutions (AA-Y)
Senior Finance Business Partner (SC)
Finance Business Partner (JB)
Parking Services Manager (MS)
Climate Change Manager (SW)
Climate Change Consultant (MC)
Governance Support Officer (BW)

Apologies: David Busby (Chair)
Helen Davies

63.1 None received.

64 BCA/23/31 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 DECEMBER 2023

It was **RESOLVED**: -

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 4 December 2023 be confirmed and signed as correct record

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

65.1 None received.

66 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

66.1 None received.

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

67.1 There were no matters referred from the Overview and Scrutiny nor the Joint Audit and Standard Committees.

68 FORTHCOMING DECISIONS LIST

68.1 There were no comments made by Councillors.

69 BCA/23/32 FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25

69.1 The Chair introduced the report as Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets and Investments.

69.2 Councillor Ward proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor Davies seconded this motion.

69.3 Councillor McCraw highlighted that the 120% increase in dog breeding fees detailed in the report should be amended to a 20% increase.

69.4 Councillor Davis questioned how the current figures would be established as a foundation for the rest of the administration's term. Councillor Ward responded that the charges were set with a move towards full cost recovery, and this would be considered moving forward. The Senior Finance Business Partner added that it had been calculated what full cost recovery would be, however in some instances the volumes of fees should be considered as they have few to process, such as zoo fees which there was only 1 of in the district.

69.5 In response to questions from other Members present Councillor Ward outlined that the cost of dog bin collection had historically been low and that a graduate increase towards full cost collection had been implemented as there would have been too great an increase in one go.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That, the proposed Fees and Charges for 2024/25 as shown in Appendix A, be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION

To ensure that the Council achieves sufficient income and thereby reduces the subsidy on non-essential services which may compromise the Council's ability to fund statutory services.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

To make no change, leave them at the current year's level.

Any Declarations of Interests Declared: None

Any Dispensation Granted: None

70 BCA/23/33 FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25 - PARKING CHARGES

70.1 The Chair introduced the report as Acting Leader of the Council.

70.2 Councillor Ward proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor McCraw seconded this motion.

70.3 Councillor Davies referred to paragraph 4.5 in the report and questioned whether the consultation would be extended to all of Babergh. The Acting Leader responded that whilst the timeframe was small, other communities across the district could be consulted through parish councils and individuals.

70.4 Councillor Davis asked if documents would be available to all parish councils. The Acting Leader responded that all documents regarding the decision were in the public domain and would be made available to those who wanted it.

70.5 Councillor Carter asked for a breakdown of the current parking costs. The Acting Leader outlined the costs from the previous year's budget with employment costs of £39,947, operational costs of £435,428, enforcement costs of £24,330, recharges of £73,370, and an income of £145,590.

- 70.6 The Chair invited Councillor Owen to read a statement.
- 70.7 In response to questions from other members present the following replies were given.
- 70.8 In response to questions from on the impact of charges on the economy of towns the Acting Leader stated that whilst the impact of introducing parking charges in towns was anecdotal, there was little proof that parking charges had an impact on the economy of towns. Additionally similar towns such as Stowmarket which had parking charges and had a similar vacancy rate to Sudbury. The Cabinet Member for People and Place added that People and Places outlined that convenience and accessibility were greater draws to market towns than parking charges, and that Babergh was one of the few Councils who did not charge.
- 70.9 In response to other Members questions relating to the use of the 2021 Cabinet decision without an option of no action, the Acting Leader outlined that this was a new decision with a new process and the other options considered were set out in the report.
- 70.10 The Acting Leader clarified that the consultation would be limited to within Babergh as residents would be most affected by changes to Council services should charges not be introduced..
- 70.11 In relation to questions on the online petition the Interim Monitoring Officer clarified that it would be debated at Council and would be voted on by all Members to either refer the petition to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, disagree with the petition, or note the petition.
- 70.12 In response to how the deficit of £425,000 would be achieved through parking charges the Acting Leader outlined that the budget deficit of £1.8m was the more relevant number and parking charges were one element and additional measures would be needed to make up this deficit.
- 70.13 In relation to questions on the vision for Sudbury outlining free parking as a draw, the Acting Leader highlighted how there was a need to maximise income and parking needed to be paid for at the point of use like all other services.
- 70.14 In response to questions on the targeted engagement exercise the Director – Operations outlined that the engagement would be in the context of the budget, and improvements to current underlying parking issues and work with Suffolk County Council on resident permits would also be explored.
- 70.15 During the debate Councillor Potter outlined that Sudbury had highlighted where there were benefits to free parking and shopping behaviour would change if charges were in place which could be detrimental to independent shops.

- 70.16 Councillor Carter stated that Sudbury would be greatly affected by the introduction of parking charges and that there would be an impact on independent businesses, and the high street. She referred to the recommendation 3.1 outlining that it would be beneficial for the consultation to extend to the whole district, and praised recommendation 3.2 referring to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewing parking charges as there could be an increase in on street parking issues.
- 70.17 Councillor Saw highlighted that if parking charges were not introduced there would be the issue of what services would need to be cut. She added that with Suffolk County Council introducing cuts there would be a greater pressure on the Council to provide additional services.
- 70.18 Councillor Davis outlined that the issue of parking charges was part of the wider budget and that a greater consultation could be held this time. However, it should be considered what could be lost if parking charges were rejected.
- 70.19 Councillor McCraw highlighted that the Council needed to present a balanced budget. Additionally, the proposed charges were reasonable and that costs had increased in all sectors. He questioned which services would be cut if parking charges were not agreed.
- 70.20 Councillor Potter welcomed the consultation being open to the whole district and in addition to the effected towns.
- 70.21 Councillor Saw questioned how on street parking could be strengthened and whether Suffolk County Council could be lobbied for resident permits. The Director – Operations responded that due to the cost of resident parking zones public support would be needed.
- 70.22 Councillor Davis queried whether town councils could buy the car parks and take on the running costs. The Director – Operations responded that this had not been considered and would have to be looked at in relation to the budget.
- 70.23 Councillor Carter proposed that recommendation 3.1 be amended to read “To carry out engagement and consultation with town and parish councils within Babergh, and with Babergh Councillors and with any other recognised groups making representation over the engagement period”. Councillor McCraw seconded this motion.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

- 1.1 Carry out engagement and consultation with town and parish councils within Babergh, and with Babergh Councillors and with any other recognised groups making representation over the engagement period.**

1.2 A proposal for varying car parking charges and road traffic orders across Babergh Council car parks will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their examination and advice to Cabinet.

1.3 Proposals will be brought to Babergh Cabinet (after presenting to O&S) for varying car parking charges and off-street road traffic orders across Babergh Council car parks.

REASON FOR DECISION

Varying car parking charges had previously been agreed by Cabinet. To deliver the approved parking strategy and remove the budget burden of subsidising this service from other non-parking income, varying charges must now be urgently considered.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Options that have been considered and shared with cabinet include outsourcing of car parks to an external provider, not varying the charges and varying the charges.

Outsourcing to another provider has been rejected based on factors such as diminished control of tariff setting and road traffic order requirements, distracting focus on contract management and contract value versus strategy delivery, and incompatibility between on-street and off-street enforcement delivery not leading to any perceived savings.

Not varying the charges has been rejected as this will make delivery of the agreed strategy unaffordable, and this option was previously rejected by cabinet in 2021.

Any Declarations of Interests Declared: None

Any Dispensation Granted: None

A short break was taken between 17:11- 17:19

71 BCA/23/34 OUR PLAN FOR BABERGH

71.1 The Chair introduced the report as Acting Leader of the Council.

71.2 Councillor Ward proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor Saw seconded this motion.

71.3 Councillor Davis outlined that it was important for the Council to carry out what they have set out to do and new policies needed to keep the plan in mind.

71.4 Councillor Ward agreed that ambitions needed to keep the plan for Babergh in mind.

71.5 Councillor Saw highlighted that due to the financial position of the Council the use of partnerships and collaborative working should be considered to action

policies and that finances should not stop ambition.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 To consider the feedback from engagement and endorse the final plan setting out the vision and strategic priorities for Babergh District Council for 2023-2031, as set out in Appendix A.

REASON FOR DECISION

To enable adoption of Our Plan for Babergh by Council on 23rd January 2024.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Options considered include:

No plan: This was not pursued as there are new challenges for our districts that the Council needs to respond to within its refreshed plan.

Plan adopted with no amendments from draft version: This option was not chosen as valuable feedback and insight was provided by stakeholders during the engagement that we wish to reflect in the final plan.

Joint plan with Mid Suffolk: It is important for our communities to see how we are reacting to the challenges facing our district. Whilst there are commonalities with Mid Suffolk and their published priorities, we first want to ensure we have a representation of the challenge and opportunities facing Babergh.

Respond to feedback from the engagement and amend plan to reflect, to ensure the priorities identified consider the valuable insight shared during this engagement.

Any Declarations of Interests Declared: None

Any Dispensation Granted: None

72 BCA/23/35 EMPTY HOME PREMIUMS

72.1 The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Housing to introduce the report.

72.2 Councillor Carter proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor Davis seconded this motion.

72.3 Councillor Davies queried point 6.2 of the report and whether the figure of £106,000 was for Babergh. The Head of the Shared Revenues Partnership confirmed that this figure was for Babergh.

- 72.4 Councillor McCraw referred to point 4.2 in the report and asked for clarification on the timeframe of emptiness before increased charges. The Head of the Shared Revenues Partnership responded that the timeframe was being reduced from 2 years unoccupied to 1 year unoccupied.
- 72.5 During the debate Councillor Ward outlined that the policy would encourage empty homes to come back into use, and would help the housing shortage.
- 72.6 Councillor McCraw stated that he hoped the policy would reduce the number of people avoiding the premium outside of the exceptions.
- 72.7 Councillor Davis highlighted that not only would the policy bring economy into Babergh, but it would ensure that homes were filled by landlords and not left empty.
- 72.8 Councillor Saw suggested that empty retail properties seeking a change of use to residential properties should also be looked into. Councillor Ward added that this could be taken up with the planning policy team.
- 72.9 Councillor Davies queried whether the empty homes scheme had incentivised people to bring homes back into use. The Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions responded there had been an uptake in Babergh due to the Empty Homes Premium.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That Cabinet approve the empty homes and second homes premiums policy for 2024-25 attached in appendix A

1.2 That Cabinet delegate authority to the Director of Housing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to make technical amendments to the policy to ensure it meets the criteria set by Government and the Council

REASON FOR DECISION

To maximise revenue, but more importantly to incentivise owners to bring empty and under-utilised properties back into use.

To ensure the policy is kept in line with Government regulations.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Implement only one of the proposed changes.

Implement only one of the proposed changes. This could be either implementing a

premium of up to 100% for second homes and leaving the current long term empty qualifying time period for the premium at 2 years. Alternatively, it could just be reducing the long-term empty premium qualification time from two years to one, and not implementing any change for second homes. This would have the same benefits as option 1 but to a lesser scale.

Do Nothing

Do nothing, leave existing premiums in place for long term empty properties, namely that they would be applied after the two-year period. Do not introduce a premium for second homes.

Any Declarations of Interests Declared: None

Any Dispensation Granted: None

73 BCA/23/36 2022/23 GREENHOUSE GAS REPORT

73.1 The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Environment to introduce the report.

73.2 Councillor Potter proposed the recommendation as set out in the report. Councillor Carter seconded this motion.

73.3 Councillor Davis requested that communications be published on the success of HVO fuel.

73.4 Councillor McCraw questioned where the next big reduction of emissions would come from. Councillor Potter responded that there would be more progress in HVO figures. The Climate Change Manager added that the refreshed carbon reduction management plan would set out the priorities going forward. Additionally, for bigger projects capital funding would be required so there was an aim to secure grants.

73.5 Councillor McCraw further questioned whether reduction through the Council's housing stock had been considered. The Climate Change Manager responded that whilst leisure centres were the top emitter of carbon, social housing was the second greatest. A social housing decarbonisation fund bid was being submitted at the end of the month, however funding required a 50% match in funding. Councillor Potter added that retrofitting of Council properties was a high priority.

73.6 Councillor Davies asked how confident the Climate Change Manager was in the reduction target being achieved. The Climate Change Manager responded that she was confident that this would be achieved by the deadline.

73.7 In response to questions from other Members present Councillor Carter outlined that an audit of the housing stock was being undertaken and was projected to be completed soon.

By a unanimous vote.

It was RESOLVED: -

1.1 That the contents of the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report 2022-23 at Appendix A to the report be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION

Since 2011, the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has required local authorities to measure and report greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from their estate and operations. Each Local Authority has been requested to publish their Greenhouse Gas reports locally online each year.

The Council is therefore required to note this report prior to publication on the Councils website.

Over 4 years ago the Council declared a climate emergency and produced their first Carbon Reduction Management Plan a refresh of this Plan is also nearing completion.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

Do nothing.

Any Declarations of Interests Declared: None

Any Dispensation Granted: None

74 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (WHICH TERM INCLUDES THE PRESS)

75 BCA/23/37 CONFIRMATION OF THE CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 04 DECEMBER 2023

It was RESOLVED: -

That the amended confidential minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2023 be confirmed and signed as a true record.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 18.08pm.

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Chair