



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at The Forum, Towcester, NN12 6AF on Tuesday 11 October 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present Councillor Jonathan Nunn (Chair)
 Councillor Adam Brown (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor Fiona Baker
 Councillor Rebecca Breese
 Councillor Matt Golby
 Councillor Phil Larratt
 Councillor Daniel Lister
 Councillor Malcolm Longley
 Councillor David Smith

Apologies Councillor Mike Hallam
for
Absence:

Officers Martin Henry, Executive Director - Finance (Section 151 Officer)
 Catherine Whitehead, Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring
 Officer)
 Jane Carr, Director of Communities & Opportunities
 Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director - People
 Sarah Reed, Executive Director - Corporate Services
 Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director - Place and Economy
 Paul Hanson, Democratic Services Manager
 Kathryn Holton, Committee Officer
 Jed Scoles, Political Assistant to the Labour Group

74. Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members

Councillor Mike Hallam. Apologies were also received from Anna Earnshaw, Chief Executive.

75. Declarations of Interest

None

76. Minutes

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting on the 13th September 2022 were approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

77. Chair's Announcements

None

78. **Recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny**

None

79. **Amendments to the Articles of Association**

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments:

- The report was welcomed and thanks were expressed to NPH and WNC for their work and commitment to investment in social housing.
- The role of tenants on the NPH Board was welcomed.
- Would the services of NPH be rolled out to the rest of West Northamptonshire?
- Was the name change indicative of a wider remit than West Northamptonshire?

Councillor Adam Brown presented the report and advised that the name change reflected the legal status since vesting day. Although the area covered was West Northamptonshire, the new name retained the identity of NPH. There were options for expanding beyond Northampton but WNC was also committed to working with its other partners.

RESOLVED: that Cabinet;

- a) Noted that from the 1st April 2021 the Council became a social housing provider for the entire West Northants area and the AoA were being amended to reflect this.
- b) Noted changes to the AoA which NPH will consider to enable them to operate within the wider West Northants area.
- c) Delegated to the Director of Communities and Opportunities the preparation of a new Management Agreement with NPH to incorporate the arrangements for NPH to operate in the wider area to be agreed at a future Cabinet meeting.

80. **Proposal to extend the age-range at Parklands Maintained Nursery School from 2-3 to 2-4 years of age via the incorporation of Parklands Playgroup**

Councillor Fiona Baker presented the report proposing to increase the age range of Parklands Nursery School from 31 October 2022 due to the imminent closure of Parklands Playgroup. No responses had been received from the WNC consultation but 22 received from Parklands' own consultation had been in favour of the change.

RESOLVED: that Cabinet;

- a) Approved the proposal to lower the admission age range at Parklands MNS from 3 years to 2 years to enable the Nursery School to offer provision to 2- year-old children from 31 October 2022.

81. **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Review 2021/22**

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments:

- A large number of complaints related to adult and children's services.
- The Education, Health and Care Plan process was lengthy – could this be shortened?
- It was concerning that over half of complaints had not been resolved.
- The report did not address capacity.
- Scrutiny was important – could this be added as a recommendation?
- There should be more transparency in tracking of complaints at the early stages – could this be a KPI?
- It was important to monitor staff and ensure they were supported.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn presented the report and noted that 13% of cases were remedied before reaching the ombudsman. Scrutiny involvement would be welcomed and KPIs could be considered. Regular reporting was needed now that a first year benchmark had been established.

RESOLVED: that Cabinet;

- a) Noted the proposed improvements to the process for administering and responding to Ombudsman enquiries in paragraph 2.7.
- b) Noted the proposed practice improvements set out at paragraph 2.8. 4.

82. **Household Support Fund 3 Proposal: Distribution of Funds and Recipients for HSF3**

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments:

- It was disappointing that due to timing the Anti-Poverty Oversight Group were not able to see the report beforehand.
- What were the staffing costs – and was this existing staff, redeployment or recruitment?
- A long term funding review was needed, together with campaigning the government for an uplift.
- Money in the Hardship Fund and that set aside for Covid needed to be used. It was difficult to get a list of which Councillors had not used funds.
- The work of the debt advice team needed to be expanded beyond South Northants.
- Concern was expressed that the time and effort required for voluntary organisations to distribute funds detracted from their main role.

Councillor Matt Golby presented the report and advised £2.6m would be distributed between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023 focussed on residents in work and on a low wage. He expressed thanks to voluntary groups for their support. There were three issues to be dealt with – poverty now, prevention of poverty and influencing government. The spending would be reviewed at 31 January 2023.

It was advised that the administration costs of the scheme were below the threshold at £130k. There would be a temporary team with additional staff to backfill.

Councillor David Smith advised that the Covid Support Fund ran until the end of the financial year and there would be assistance for councillors who had not yet spent the money.

RESOLVED: that Cabinet;

- a) Noted that the Household Support Fund (3) investment was to be managed locally.
- b) Approved the Recommended Scope and Diversity of Distribution as set out in section 4 of the report.
- c) Approved the control and oversight approach to be undertaken through a central operational team.
- d) Authorised any funds that had not been assigned or committed to by 31st January 2023 according to the distribution methodology set out in section 4, to be redistributed in line with the wider Department for Work and Pensions Guidelines (attached to the report as Appendix A).
- e) Agreed that Table 1 at paragraph 5.6 of the report be amended to clarify that the amount available per foodbank is “up to £20k per food bank as assessed on a case-by-case basis”

83. **New Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for the former Daventry District and former South Northants administrative areas of West Northamptonshire Council**

At the Chair’s invitation councillors made the following comments:

- The enforcement issue had not been addressed in the report.
- Balance was needed – it was important not to stigmatise dog owners.

Councillor David Smith presented the report and noted that the consultation had received a large number of responses. Targeted enforcement and education could be carried out. There would be further consultation around dog fouling on marked sports pitches. Councillor Adam Brown advised that he had lobbied extensively for this.

RESOLVED: that Cabinet;

- a) Approved the introduction of a new Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) across the former Daventry and South Northants District administrative areas of WNC with all nine proposed measures set out at paragraph 2.4 above to be included, to remain in force for a period of three years until September 2025.
- b) Resolved that the Draft PSPO at Appendix A shall be made by the Council as a result.
- c) Delegate the power to formally make the PSPO and to comply with the remaining statutory requirements to bring it into force (as set out in the legal implications at paragraph 7.2 below) to the Executive Director for Place and Economy.
- d) Agree to the gathering of further evidence take place between October and December 2022 and consultation to commence in January 2023 to determine if additional measures may be required regarding dog fouling on sports pitches. The consultation to be agreed with the Portfolio Holder prior to start.

84. Procurement of Elections Stationery and Printing Services

Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report on behalf of Councillor Mike Hallam and advised that the current contract would come to an end in April 2023. It was important that the supplier was able to meet the specific requirements for printing election materials.

RESOLVED: that Cabinet;

- a) Agreed that the Council proceeds with the procurement of a maximum five-year year contract for the supply of elections stationery and printing services; and
- b) Delegated to the Director for Legal and Democratic Services authority to conduct the procurement in accordance with paragraph 6 of this report and award to the successful bidder

85. Adoption and community use of assets

At the Chair's invitation councillors made the following comments:

- Had parishes been engaged in the consultation?
- How could relationships with parish and town councils be strengthened?

Councillor Malcolm Longley presented the report and advised that further consultation would be carried out, including with parishes.

Councillor Adam Brown stated that it was vital that WNC maintained oversight of properties. Councillor David Smith advised that NCALC would be undertaking an asset mapping project.

Councillor Adam Brown proposed an amendment to paragraph 3.2 on page 559 to state that the list would be agreed in consultation with Cabinet and thereafter published on the Council's website. He explained this was proposed in order to retain member oversight and input on assets being listed as available. This proposal was agreed.

RESOLVED: that Cabinet;

- a) Authorised consultation on the draft Adoption of Assets Policy.
- b) Adopted on an interim basis the draft Adoption of Assets Policy, pending the results of the consultation.
- c) Adopts the draft Policy on Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise, and Faith Group use of Council Property.
- d) That paragraph 3.2 on page 559 to be amended to read "The lists will be agreed in consultation with Cabinet and thereafter..."

86. Office Optimisation Stage 1 building adaptations budget and disposals

To supplement the published report and in order to aid clarity, the Chair advised that an information sheet had been circulated summarising the savings which would result from office optimisation.

Councillor Longley explained that the office optimisation programme was seeking productivity gain by better utilisation of assets. The estimated cost of upgrading the Abbey centre would be £1m. All current voluntary sector partners would be retained. £306k was the saving that would be made by exiting the Lodge Road premises. There were two options – to lease or sell and the estimated annual savings from each option were outlined - £507,909 for lease and £343,749 (plus £4.5m capital receipt) for sale.

Plans for the Leisure Centre were a work in progress and would only proceed if financially viable.

The office optimisation programme would result in a substantial productivity gain – including that from the Planning team’s move to Towcester.

At the Chair’s invitation, councillors made the following comments:

- Local residents were unhappy about the closure of Lodge Road – would it be possible to retain the office and move other organisations in to the surplus space?
- Had a building survey been carried out on the Abbey and Leisure Centre?
- Voluntary organisations felt they had not been consulted about the plans.
- The impact of the closure on staff needed to be considered.
- The briefing note should be made available on the WNC website.
- Work on the Abbey building should be undertaken in line with the net zero pledge.
- Outreach sessions should be increased so that residents can access support and services.
- The rationale of one council culture was accepted, but this should be balanced across West Northamptonshire.

It was explained that the first phase of office optimisation had looked at the model of support and the model of using hubs to deliver local services was being used. There was too much office space for modern ways of working. Consultation with voluntary organisations had taken place and each one had been spoken to. Consultation with staff had also been undertaken.

Councillor Adam Brown noted that the plans represented a great step forward in productivity. The public wanted the council to work in their interests with the best use of buildings and retention of public facing services. He proposed an amendment to the recommendation (recommendation d) below) which was agreed by Cabinet.

Councillor Rebecca Breese advised that a key part of transformation was to improve resilience and productivity. Staff would be supported, including financially.

RESOLVED: that Cabinet;

- a) Agreed to the proposed new capital budget of £2 million to carry out Stage 1 of the Office Optimisation project and recommended to Council that the Capital budget is amended to reflect the proposed change.
- b) Authorised the Assistant Director Assets & Environment to procure and award the contracts to deliver the Stage 1 works.
- c) Authorised the Assistant Director Assets & Environment in consultation with the Executive Director Finance and Cabinet Member for Finance to dispose of the Lodge Road offices, in whole or part, by leasehold or freehold, for the best consideration reasonably obtainable.
- d) Agreed that the Lodge Road offices be vacated by 31st March 2023 in order that the revenue savings and/or capital gains be achieved as quickly as practicable thereafter.

However, it is also possible that the building might deliver greater benefits from other Council uses. These will also be tested prior to any decision to dispose.

87. **Urgent Business**

None

88. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that, if the public and press were present, it would be likely that exempt information falling under the provisions of Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraph(s) 3 and 4 would be disclosed to them, and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

89. **Options and Business Case relating to the future delivery of legal services - EXEMPT**

Minutes exempt from publication.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____