

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes from the Meeting of the Regeneration and Development Panel held on Tuesday, 28th November, 2023 at 5.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn

PRESENT: Councillors S Bearshaw (Chair), P Beal, F Bone, R Blunt, T Bubb, J Collingham, C J Crofts, D Heneghan, A Kemp and C Rose.

MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATE PERFORMANCE PANEL AND ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY PANEL BY INVITATION FOR ITEMS RD56 AND RD60: Councillors T Barclay, J Bhondi, S Collop (remotely), S Dark, P Devulapalli (remotely), B Jones, S Lintern, B Long, J Osborne, J Ratcliffe (remotely) and A Ware

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS:

Councillor Beales – Portfolio Holder for Business

Councillor de Whalley – Portfolio Holder for Biodiversity and Climate Change

Councillor Moriarty – Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development

Councillor Parish – Leader of the Council

Councillor Ring – Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Events and Marketing

Councillor Rust – Portfolio Holder for People and Communities

REMOTE ATTENDEES: Councillor Joyce

PRESENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 34: Councillor Parish

OFFICERS:

Duncan Hall – Assistant Director

David Ousby – Assistant Director

Karl Patterson – Senior Housing Development Manager

Hannah Wood-Handy – Planning Control Manager

BY INVITATION:

Hannah Edge – Norfolk County Council

RD52: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Colwell and Dickinson.

RD53: MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34

Councillor Parish.

RD54: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Kemp declared an interest in RD62: Update on the Carnegie Library as she was involved in a campaign to save the library.

Councillors Bhondi and Ware declared an interest in items RD56: Proposed business plans for West Norfolk Property and West Norfolk Housing Company and RD60: Finance Model Proposals for the Loan Facility for Council Companies as they were both on the Board of Directors for West Norfolk Property and West Norfolk Housing Company.

Councillor Long declared an interest in items RD56: Proposed business plans for West Norfolk Property and West Norfolk Housing Company and RD60: Finance Model Proposals for the Loan Facility for Council Companies as he had previously been appointed to the Board of Directors for West Norfolk Property and West Norfolk Housing Company.

RD55: **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

RD56: **EXEMPT - CABINET REPORT - PROPOSED BUSINESS PLANS FOR WEST NORFOLK PROPERTY AND WEST NORFOLK HOUSING COMPANY**

Those present were reminded that Members of the Environment and Community Panel and Corporate Performance Panel had been invited to the meeting for this item.

The Senior Housing Development Officer presented the report which presented the proposed Business Plans for West Norfolk Property and West Norfolk Housing Company. It was explained that the Shareholder Agreements for the company required the Board of Directors to provide a draft updated business plan annually for the Shareholder Committee to comment on and endorse. The Business plans could not be adopted or varied unless the Shareholder has given consent.

The Business plans were currently in draft format and more detail on the financial modelling would follow. The Panels would have a further opportunity to consider the business plans before they were finalised. The Senior Housing Development Officer outlined the national and local issues affecting the private rented sector and the important role that the Companies played in delivering Social rented housing and quality private sector rented housing.

The Assistant Director acknowledged that the Business Plans were still incomplete and further detail was required on costs, income and investments. This would be updated after the loan facility proposals had been considered by the Council. He commented that the Boards were both relevant and met the Council's objective to fulfil the housing role, including the need for affordable housing options and to bring forward more housing. He also made reference to the heavy reliance on bed and breakfast temporary accommodation which was unsuitable.

The Panel was invited to comment and consider the draft business plans.

Councillor Dark asked if now was the right time to make the decision as the Business Plans were still in draft and Council had not yet considered the loan facility proposals for the Council. The Assistant Director acknowledged that there was a timing issue, but the Business plans set out the strategic ambition, with figures to follow.

In response to a question from Councillor Collingham, the Assistant Director explained the role of the two companies and their relationship to other Social Housing Providers. He explained that West Norfolk Housing Company was set up to increase the capacity of social housing in the Borough and deliver affordable housing. It was a Registered Provider of Social Housing and had acquired affordable homes and leased flats at Broad Street that were used for temporary accommodation. Properties acquired were managed and maintained through a management company.

West Norfolk Property had been set up to acquire properties from the Council to rent out privately and create a revenue stream.

The Senior Housing Development Officer explained that a fact sheet was being created to clarify the role of each Company and Councillor Collingham commented that a Councillor Briefing on the role of the Companies would be useful.

Councillor Kemp commented that there was a need for more housing and that acquisition was better than spend on bed and breakfast, especially if some people were being sent outside of the Borough for temporary accommodation. The Assistant Director explained that a new strategy was being discussed with the Homelessness and Housing Delivery Task Group to tackle homelessness issues and the use of temporary accommodation.

Councillor Long welcomed the draft Business Plans and, having been involved in their inception, commented that the ethos behind them was still right and proper and benefitted the people of West Norfolk. He welcomed the consideration of adding additional housing stock and providing quality housing for rent. The Assistant Director explained that initially there had been gaps in temporary accommodation, which

was why the Broad Street Flats were acquired and further opportunities would be investigated to meet demand.

In response to a question from Councillor Bone it was explained that different types of properties would be looked at going forward including affordable rented homes and shared ownership. To date the general needs homes had been built on Council development sites. Reference was also made to the homes that would be made available through the Local Authority Housing Fund.

Councillor Bubb asked what arrangements were in place for maintenance of homes and it was explained that management agreements could be considered if there were additional needs.

The Portfolio Holder for People and Communities, Councillor Rust commented that steps needed to be taken to support families and individuals needing help and the different demographics of rough sleepers and those in need of temporary accommodation needed to be considered. She commented that it was important to open up opportunities to move away from bed and breakfast accommodation.

Councillor Crofts requested that less acronyms be used in the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Crofts, it was explained that shared ownership percentages were flexible and the right to acquire also existed for social housing tenants.

Councillor Bhondi commented that there was a need for housing and the council was providing options to meet the needs of the Borough.

Councillor Dark commented that the Council had a responsibility for housing and the Companies provided a mechanism to take direct action.

Councillor Blunt supported the draft Business Plans but raised concern that the viability and ability to have an offer of houses that met particular circumstances needed to be considered. The Assistant Director explained that the financial proposals with the Council would need to be looked at alongside looking at various other funding opportunities.

The Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Events and Marketing, Councillor Ring commented that the Companies were limited in what they could do, but this would change as the Companies became more credit worthy and had a history of trading. He endorsed the Business Plans and commented that they were a great mechanism to help people in the Borough and create a revenue stream for the Council.

Councillor Beales, Portfolio Holder for Business thanked the Panel Members for their comments and explained that technical information and information on legislative requirements could be added to the

Business Plans if required. He outlined the implications of opportunities such as the accelerated construction programme and external factors such as market pace and cost of resources.

RESOLVED: That, jointly, the Panels support the draft West Norfolk Property and West Norfolk Housing Company Business Plans, having due regard to the strategic outcomes defined in the Councils Corporate Strategy in respect of the provision of affordable housing and the comments made by the Panels would be passed to the Shareholder Committee as appropriate.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

RD57: **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

RD58: **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was none.

RD59: **CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE**

There was none.

RD60: **CABINET REPORT - FINANCE MODELS PROPOSAL FOR THE LOAN FACILITY FOR COUNCIL COMPANIES**

[Click here to view the recording of this item on You Tube.](#)

Members of the Environment and Community Panel and Corporate Performance Panel had been invited to attend the meeting for this item.

The Assistant Director presented the report which set out options for dealing with the properties leased from the Council to the companies and set out proposed funding criteria to support transfer of the properties into the companies freehold and to meet governance requirements.

Members were advised that the report was still draft and subject to external feedback/advice from consultants. The Assistant Director confirmed that this feedback would be available before the report was considered by Cabinet on 5th December 2023.

The key issues were set out in the report including the capacity of the council to lend money which was limited by legislation and the social value return. Consideration also had to be given to West Norfolk Property and the requirement to charge comparable interest rates. It

was noted that West Norfolk Housing Company and West Norfolk Property were fairly new Companies, with limited trading history, which limited the opportunities for loans.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Director for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panels, as summarised below.

Councillor Dark acknowledged the time constraints to fit in with the budget setting process and that external advice was still awaited, but he felt it was difficult for Members to make recommendations to Cabinet on proposals that had not yet been finalised and proposed that no recommendation be put forward by the Panel at this time. He recognised that the report was being considered by Cabinet on 5th December and asked the Leader if he would permit Members to attend Cabinet under Standing Order 34 and ask questions at Cabinet, rather than be limited to making statements, as per the rules set out in the Constitution.

The Leader confirmed that he would permit this at the Cabinet meeting and requested that Members provide a steer as to if they agree with the proposals in principle, and then the figures would follow.

Councillor Dark's proposal that Cabinet are requested to permit Members to ask questions under Standing Order 34 at the Cabinet Meeting on 5th December, and that no recommendation was put forward by the Panel at this time was seconded by Councillor Long and agreed by the Panel.

Councillor Jones was concerned that the proposals had been presented to the Panel incomplete. The Assistant Director explained that external advice had been sought and research had been conducted to ascertain if banks would provide a loan, but because of the limited trading history and portfolio, they would not. Further external advice was now awaited on the loan facilities available and future funding opportunities.

Councillor Kemp supported the building of more houses to meet the needs of people in the Borough and asked who would safeguard, provide security of assets and monitor. The Assistant Director explained that the Council's Cabinet and Shareholder Committee oversaw the work of the Council Companies and monitored through the Business Plans.

In response to a question from Councillor Bhondi, it was explained that the advice awaited would include detail of the percentage of debt-to-equity options and the cost to the council if they continued to hold the homes.

Councillor Dark commented that he hoped that he could attend the Cabinet meeting and be reassured by the awaited advice.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Director explained that the housing market was slowing, but there was still a need for rented and social housing and the Council was currently the main developer in the area.

Councillor Long commented that it was all about supply and demand and Social Housing Rent was stipulated by the Regulator. Build costs and rental value needed to be factored in and the Assistant Director commented that viability would need to be considered and balanced against the need for additional housing.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Director commented that introduction of net zero planning policies would increase build costs, but would make houses cheaper to run.

The Portfolio Holder for Business, Councillor Beales, thanked the Panel for their comments and agreed that their approach to reserve judgement until the final report was available was sensible. He reassured Members that Cabinet would thoroughly consider the implications of the proposals.

RESOLVED: That, jointly, the Panels reserve judgement on the proposals. The comments made at the Panel meeting would be passed onto Cabinet and representatives from the Panels would attend the Cabinet Meeting on 5th December 2023 to comment and ask questions on the final report.

RD61: **CABINET REPORT - CIL GOVERNANCE AND SPENDING DOCUMENT 2024 AND ANNUAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING LIST**

[Click here to view the recording of this item on You Tube.](#)

The Planning Control Manager presented the report which set out the proposed scheme for allocating funds collected through CIL and presented the final version of the proposed priorities.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Crofts asked what assurances were in place to ensure that allocated CIL funds were spent correctly, and the Planning Control Manager explained that annual reports had to be provided and recipients also had to sign a contract and terms of reference. They also had to adhere to timescales and progress was monitored by the CIL Team. Monitoring methods were included in the Governance Document.

The Chair commented that the CIL Spending Panel thoroughly considered applications at their meetings.

Councillor Blunt commented that the CIL Spending Panel was still learning and adapting its criteria and processes as they gained more experience. He assured Members that the CIL Spending Panel ensured the best use of CIL funds and he supported the recommendations.

Councillor Kemp commented that there were barriers to accessing CIL funding in unparished areas where there were no constituted groups set up. The Planning Control Manager commented that the CIL Officers provided an excellent service and would support and advise potential applicants. There was also a plethora of information on the application process and criteria on the Borough Council's website.

Councillor Collingham commented that she had received great support from the CIL Team when preparing an application.

The Portfolio Holder for Biodiversity and Climate Change, Councillor de Whalley, thanked officers for their work and welcomed proposals to simplify and clarify processes. He provided comment on further improvements which could be considered in the future.

The Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Marketing and Events, Councillor Ring, welcomed ideas to improve processes and commented that, in the future, consideration should be given to giving greater weight to applications where community fundraising had taken place.

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development, Councillor Moriarty thanked the officers for their contribution and explained that this had been a light touch look at the way CIL was governed, and a more thorough review would be conducted in the future. He noted the comments of the Panel Members and Portfolio Holders and explained that the CIL Spending Panel would look at processes in more depth and further changes and proposals would be brought bank to the Panel in due course for consideration.

RESOLVED: The Regeneration and Development Panel support the recommendations to Cabinet, as set out below.

That Cabinet agree to adopt the arrangements in the CIL Governance and Spending document attached to the report.

RD62: **UPDATE ON THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY**

[Click here to view the recording of this item on You Tube.](#)

Hannah Edge, Head of Communities and Customer Services from Norfolk County Council presented the Panel with an update on future planning, and the engagement plans for the Multiuser Community Hub Project and the Carnegie Library Building. She explained that throughout November the Communities Team at Norfolk County

Council had been gathering feedback and talking to residents to start conversations about the next stage of design for the Multiuser Community Hub and provide residents with the opportunity to talk about the future of the Carnegie Library.

Norfolk County Council with support from the Borough Council had jointly produced a timeline to set out intentions of community transition for the community owned Carnegie Library and the update today provided an update on progress.

Drop-in sessions had been held for residents along with the opportunity to complete an online feedback form which included the opportunity to suggest future use of the Carnegie Building. The next stage in the timeline was to engage with interested parties.

Hannah Edge provided an overview of some of the comments and interest received from residents and interested parties. A feedback report would be prepared and published by Norfolk County Council and then an expression of interest process would be carried out.

The Chair requested that any available reports be circulated to Councillors as appropriate.

The Chair thanked the Head of Communities and Customer Services for the update and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Kemp thanked the Head of Communities and Customer Services for the work she had been doing with the community and consulting with residents. She commented that the practicalities of the Carnegie Building were that it was a Grade II Listed Building and would have repairing and maintenance costs, which could prevent community use and put the future of the building at risk. She commented that it should stay under the ownership of the County Council. On suggested uses she commented that the building should be used as a museum, gallery or a free public access space. The Head of Communities and Customer Services thanked Councillor Kemp for her ideas and commented that a sound financial plan would be important, and the Council would work, and support interested parties as much as possible.

Councillor Bone commented that the Carnegie building needed to remain in community use and could be used as a museum or a wedding venue.

In response to a question from Councillor Crofts, it was explained that a variety of options would be explored once the expression of interest exercise had opened.

Councillor Bubb commented that the building should be used to house the many pictures and museum items which were currently in storage,

it could also be used for pop up exhibitions. He commented that the site should not be used for something unworthy, and use needed to reflect the special nature of the building.

Councillor Lintern suggested an Asset of Community Value application.

The Portfolio Holder for Biodiversity and Climate Change, Councillor de Whalley, commented that he had received lots of concern from residents on the future of the building. He suggested it could be used as a children's library or a community centre.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Parish asked if structural surveys were available, and the Head of Communities and Customer Services explained that a survey had been commissioned which set out the detail of the features and fabric of the building and this would be made available to interested parties.

The Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Event and Marketing, Councillor Ring commented that the building was not suited for a library. He thanked the Head of Communities and Customer Services for the update and looked forward to a further update on the expressions of interest, once available.

RESOLVED: The update was noted.

RD63: **WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD DECISION LIST**

The following items were suggested for addition to the Work Programme:

- Further workshop session on the Transport Strategy
- Car Parking Strategy
- Review of Crematorium Facilities – more appropriate to be presented to the Environment and Community Panel.
- LCWIP Update

RESOLVED: The Panel's Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Decision List was noted.

RD64: **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Regeneration and Development Panel would be held on Wednesday 10th January 2024 at 6.00pm in the Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn.

The meeting closed at 7.27 pm