

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

1 SEPTEMBER 2022

COUNCILLOR ANGIE DICKINSON - CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE

For the period 15 July 2022 – 1 September 2022

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

My report will be short as in the main I have continued to progress matters that were reported in detail at the last Council meeting.

The Member Major Projects Board was deferred by one week but then had a productive meeting, seeing the improved reporting mechanism. Future reports will see a series of improvements with the next one being the addition of a timeline per project.

This period saw the production of the Revenue and Capital Outturn report for 2021/22, which has been reported elsewhere. There were a number of variances from the revised budget position, due to a variety of valid reasons, and the overall position of a contribution to the General Fund was very close to that originally budgeted for.

The period also saw the first quarter's budget monitoring report. Again, a number of improvements to the reporting mechanism have been incorporated with others in the pipeline. The timeliness and frequency are also improved for 2022/23 with the expectation that reports will be produced on a monthly frequency, before the end of the month following the period being reported on. This frequency is not followed during the first 3 months as officers are engaged on the closure of the accounts.

We had already started work on the budget process for 2023/24 at the time of my last report and at the time of writing, Cabinet members are about to have a day devoted to looking at budgetary pressures and what can be done to alleviate them. This is a significant step in the process as inflation is soaring to heights not seen for over forty years, way in excess of the amount the Council was permitted to increase its council tax by, i.e. 3.3%. The staff pay award has yet to be settled but early indications are that it is likely to be significantly in excess of the budgeted sum, and therefore difficult decisions might have to be made.

Work has progressed on Earmarked Reserves as this is a topic that is often referred to because of the large balances held, however, a large amount is "untouchable" because it's held for various reasons, as previously reported. This still leaves a significant amount that is open to further examination and this is a process currently underway.

The Finance Team completed its work on the closure of 2021/22's draft accounts, which are currently available for all to see on the website. Progress on the closure of earlier years is still ongoing, put back yet again because of our external inability to meet its promised timescale.

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments

Work on all aspects of major projects will continue to be a priority, including new ones coming on line because of successful Levelling Up applications. There are many challenges ahead, not least because of inflation, as mentioned earlier.

The budget process will continue to accelerate until closure is achieved in February with the budget setting report to Cabinet. It's no simple task as different pressures come on board every year and we must then strive to maintain or improve the excellent services we provide with fewer resources.

The work on Earmarked Reserves will also continue, as will the draw on the General Fund over the period of the Financial Plan, i.e. up to 2026/27.

The settlement of the annual Pay Award will be another area of intensive work. All employers will have the pressure of expectations from its workforce for salaries to meet cost of living increases but most employers will not be able to afford this and therefore it is hoped that a suitable middle ground can be found. It is also hoped that we will succeed in recruiting a new Executive Director to oversee the large value projects the Council has in its capital programme during the next few weeks.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

19 Jul	Update with the Leader
19 Jul	Appointments Panel
19 Jul	Cabinet Briefing
21 Jul	Fees & Charges preliminary meeting with Deputy S 151 Officer
21 Jul	Portfolio Holder Briefing
26 Jul	Member Major Projects Board
26 Jul	Cabinet Briefing
27 Jul	Levelling Up Fund applications update
27 Jul	QEH Covid Briefing
27 Jul	Town Deal update
28 Jul	Shared Prosperity briefing
29 Jul	Portfolio Holder Briefing
2 Aug	Cabinet
4 Aug	Portfolio Holder Briefing
5 Aug	West Norfolk Transport & Infrastructure Steering Group
9 Aug	Cabinet Briefing
16 Aug	Pay Award discussions with Leader, Deputy Leader and senior officers
16 Aug	Cabinet Briefing
18 Aug	Portfolio Holder Briefing
23 Aug	Pay Award update
23 Aug	Cabinet Briefing
26 Aug	Portfolio Holder Briefing
26 Aug	Motorhome Parking
30 Aug	Cabinet Awayday
30 Aug	Cabinet Briefing
1 Sep	Council Tax Support Scheme mid year update
1 Sep	COUNCIL