

Minutes of the Council meeting held at Riverside, Canning Road, Lowestoft on **Wednesday, 22 February 2017** at **6.30 pm**.

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Members present:

M Bee (Chairman), S Allen, S Ardley, P Ashdown, E Back, S Barker, M Barnard, N Brooks, A Cackett, G Catchpole, J Ceresa, M Cherry, Y Cherry, G Elliott, J Ford, T Gandy, T Goldson, L Gooch, I Graham, K Grant, A Green, J Groom, M Ladd, C Law, P Light, F Mortimer, T Mortimer, J Murray, L Nicholls, M Pitchers, B Provan, C Punt, T Reynolds, D Ritchie, C Rivett, M Rudd, J Smith, L Smith, K Springall, C Topping, N Webb, S Webb and S Woods

Officers present:

S Baker (Chief Executive), A Jarvis (Strategic Director), H Javadi (Chief Finance Officer and S151), B Mew (Accounts Contractor), L Rogers (Finance Manager), H Slater (Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal & Democratic Services), S Taylor (Finance Manager) and N Wotton (Democratic Services Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Craig, L Harris-Logan, S Logan and K Patience.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 January 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

Stephen Jackson

The Chairman of the Council was very sad to report that Stephen Jackson, who was a member of the Council's ICT Team, had recently passed away. His funeral would be taking place on Friday, 24 February 2017 at midday at the Waveney Memorial Park and Crematorium at Ellough. The Council would be represented by the Vice Chairman and the Deputy Mayor of Lowestoft would be in attendance. Our thoughts were with Stephen's family at this time.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE / LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

There were no announcements from the Chief Executive or Leader of the Council on this occasion.

6. NOTICES OF MOTION

No Notices of Motion had been received.

7. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

With the agreement of the Council, the Chairman changed the order of business to enable the reports to be considered prior to receiving Members Questions.

8. PETITIONS

No Petitions had been received.

9. QUESTIONS FROM THE ELECTORATE

No Questions from the Electorate had been received.

10. SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council Procedure Rule 13.4 be suspended in relation to the Budget and Council Tax 2017/18 item to allow Members to speak for longer than 5 minutes but that each Member shall only be allowed to speak once.

On being seconded and then put to the vote, the Motion was **CARRIED**.

11. BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2017/18

The Chairman took the opportunity to report that the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 required local authorities to amend their Standing Orders to include the need for recorded votes at meetings where decisions on the budget were made. Therefore in accordance with Paragraph 16.5 (Recorded Votes) of Part 3 of the Constitution, there would be a recorded vote for this item.

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms presented the report, which sought approval of the Budget for 2017/18 and agreement of a proposed Band D Council Tax for 2017/18 of £157.41, which was an increase of £4.95 or 3.25%, when compared to last year. It was noted that the Medium Term Financial Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 20 November 2016, which provided a baseline of income and expenditure and provided a framework within which the Council's overall spending plans had been developed.

Members noted that setting the budget had been a lengthy and detailed process and the proposed budget had been considered by a joint meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny and Audit & Governance Committees and also Cabinet. Since the approval of the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Local Government Financial Settlement had been announced which included large reductions to Government Grant Funding and proposals for changes to the New Homes Bonus, which would have significant implications for the Council in both the short and medium term. It was reported that Local Government finance was now characterised by an increased shift towards locally generated resources, with a particular focus upon business rates.

The Local Government Act 2003 placed a personal duty on an authority's Chief Financial Officer to make a report to Council about the robustness of the estimates made for Council tax calculations and the adequacy of reserves and balances. The report concluded that the estimates as proposed were sufficiently robust to allow the Council to set a balanced budget for 2017/18 but raised concerns about the medium term financial sustainability of the Council given the Local Government funding position.

Members were advised that the Local Government Financial Settlement marked a clear change in the Government's approach to Council Tax, as it was based on the assumption in the overall funding position that authorities would increase Council Tax. The outlook for Local Government Finance indicated that there would be increasing Budget Gaps over the following 3 years. The estimated Budget Gaps were as follows: £1.344 million in 2018/19, £1.875 million in 2019/20 and £2.003 million in 2020/21.

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms took the opportunity to thank the Chief Finance Officer and her team for all their hard work and support over the past year.

Questions

In response to a query from a Member, confirmation was provided that the proposed Council Tax increase of £4.95 for a Band D property, did equate to a 3.25% increase. It was noted that the Council was able to increase its precept for a Band D property by £5.00 or 2%, whichever was the greater. If a more significant increase had been proposed, the Council would need to hold a referendum.

With regard to page 54, paragraph 6.24 of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy at Appendix B to the report, Members raised concerns that the balance of the Repairs and Maintenance Reserve of £80,000 was due to be brought back into the General Fund in 2016/17. Clarification was provided that the Repairs and Maintenance Reserve of £80,000 was for the Town Hall in Lowestoft, in case urgent repair works had been required. As the building was due to be transferred to Lowestoft Town Council in the near future, the earmarked funding would now be used for other purposes. It was noted that should any other Council-owned buildings in the district require urgent repair or maintenance work, the funding would be provided from General Reserves or the Capital Programme. In respect of the Town Hall in Lowestoft, Members were advised that work was underway to investigate other potential uses for the site. It was noted that the building was going to be transferred to Lowestoft Town Council, however the entire building was likely to be too large for their needs. They would require the Council Chamber and sufficient office space for their staff, however the potential to redevelop parts of the building (the two wings) for housing were being investigated. Reassurance was provided that although draft plans would be created, it would be the decision of Lowestoft Town Council whether to implement them or not. The District Council was trying to provide a number of options for the Town Council to consider, with regards to the future use of the Town Hall. It was noted that the Town Hall would be a difficult and expensive building to redevelop, however, if part of the Town Hall could be used to provide some much needed housing, it would be able to access Housing Revenue Account funding to assist with the redevelopment. The Town Council would ultimately make the decisions about the future of the Town Hall and the District Council was committed to assisting wherever possible.

A Member raised concerns that the Council had not raised the rate of Council Tax high enough for all Second Homes and Empty Homes within the District, as the increase in second home ownership was distorting the housing market. Members were advised that the Council had increased the Council Tax rate for second homes by the maximum amount which was allowed by Central Government. With regard to empty homes, it was noted that a home could be empty for 1 week only, after that the owner would then have to pay Council Tax on the property. Clarification was provided that it was not cost efficient for the Council to charge Council Tax for less than a week, when many houses were only empty for a very short period of time. Confirmation was provided that a homeowner would be exempt from Council Tax for a maximum of 3 months, if they were doing significant repairs and modernisation to a property.

With regard to East Point Pavilion, which was currently empty at South Beach, Lowestoft, a Member queried how much it was costing the Council for this building to remain empty. It was confirmed that the Council was responsible for the repairs, maintenance and insurance for the building and there would be no business rates received whilst it was not in use.

Debate

A Councillor commented that the entire budget had been shaped by Central Government policy, as a direct result of the reductions in Revenue Support Grant, the New Homes Bonus and changes to Business Rates. The budget had been cut to the bare bones and there was no room to make amendments or suggestions, therefore this year there was no alternative budget to be presented, as nothing could be done.

A Member reported that there were significant cuts of 30-40% suggested by the former Labour Government, due to their dramatic overspending. The Council had completed a huge amount of work and was now working more efficiently, with increased partnership working and services were being maintained, all whilst receiving significantly less funding.

A Member requested clarification at this point in the proceedings, as the previous Councillor had stated that the Council was receiving less funding, whilst the Council Tax was due to be increased this year by 3.25% or £4.95 for a Band D property. They stated that those residents in Lowestoft and Oulton Broad would face an additional cost, as they would have to pay a precept which would be significantly higher than that raised by the Lowestoft Charter Trustees, which would see their Council Tax increase by 12-15% in real terms. Indeed, they felt that the District Council had transferred many of its liabilities to the Town Council and the poorest people in the district should not have to pay the largest increase.

Clarification was therefore provided that the Councillor had meant to say 'receiving less funding from central government.' They conceded that the amount of Council Tax collected was proposed to be increased this year and those residents in Lowestoft and Oulton Broad would have an additional burden with the precept for the new Town and Parish Councils.

A Councillor reported that they would vote to accept the budget, however it was not a joyful occasion, as they were mindful of the amount of people who were reliant on food

banks and the working poor. Although the proposed increase in Council Tax was low, they felt it would affect those people disproportionately.

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms reported that they had been involved with the creation of Waveney District Council in 1973 and had advised that the aim was to unify the whole district. However, the lack of a Town Council for Lowestoft had caused many problems and complaints across the District and it was hoped that the creation of the two new Councils for Lowestoft and Oulton Broad would rectify the lack of democracy at the local level. They also reported that the proposed level of Council Tax was not excessive for the District Council or the Town/Parishes and the levels were comparable with the rest of the County. A Member queried this assertion, as they felt that this was misleading, and it was confirmed that some areas would pay a higher precept than Lowestoft residents.

The Leader of the Opposition reported that the Country was facing a great deal of uncertainty due to changes both globally and nationally, including Brexit, and she was very aware that changes from Central Government had directly led to the budget being presented for consideration. However, the continuing cuts had put the Council in a perilous position and further cuts to funding were still anticipated, which had forced the Council to consider merging with Suffolk Coastal District Council. The District Council was also going to offload costly assets and their liabilities to two newly created Councils, increase Council Tax levels and those residents of Lowestoft and Oulton Broad would have to pay an additional large amount of money as a precept. It was stated that Waveney District Council had been extremely harshly treated by the Conservative Government and austerity had reached dangerous levels which was having a significant effect on local residents and was undermining local decision making. The Councillor queried how high the Council Tax increase would have been in future, if the Council was not planning to merge or offload assets to the Lowestoft and Oulton Broad Parish Councils? The proposed budget did not contain any vision or hope and was entirely focussed upon austerity, whilst at the same time, public borrowing levels were at their highest ever levels. The Leader of the Opposition requested that the Opposition be including in plans to develop the strategy for regeneration of the district, in the spirit of hope and positivity.

A Councillor echoed the concerns about the impact on the poorest people in the district of the proposed increases. They also queried the perceived phrasing juxtaposition contained within the report, which mentioned ‘empowering local Town and Parish Councils by continuing to transfer amenity and community assets to them, with their agreement’. The assets being transferred would be costly to maintain and improve, therefore their transfer was not empowering local councils but transferring liabilities. The Councillor also stated that one of the best assets within the District was the beaches at South Lowestoft and that tourism needed to be a particular focus of the Council, to encourage more tourists to the area.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Tourism and Rural Affairs confirmed that the financial landscape was changing rapidly and there needed to be a focus upon sustainability and becoming more self-sufficient. They advised that tourism was a growth industry for Suffolk and a lot of work was underway to promote and improve it. Lowestoft South Beach was a particular asset that needed to be promoted more extensively and work was continuing to make the most of that area.

A Councillor commented that they were very pleased with the proposed budget. They reported that when the opposition had produced an alternative budget for Suffolk County Council, it had relied heavily on reserves, which would have left the Council in the precarious financial position should it have been implemented. They commented that when Labour had been in power previously, it was not unusual to have Council Tax increases of 16%, therefore the proposed budget was very balanced and fair.

A Member requested clarification at this point in the proceedings about page 81, Appendix B7, which stated that assets would be transferred ‘with the agreement of the Town or Parish Council.’ There followed some discussion in this respect and it was confirmed that this sentence related to town and parish councils already in existence; they would be able to agree or reject the proposed transfer of assets. In respect of Lowestoft and Oulton Broad Parish Councils, it was noted that the District Council was able to decide which assets would be transferred to them, as at this moment in time, the Councils did not legally exist and had no permanent staff or Councillors in place.

The Leader of the Council, reported that he was delighted that the Council was able to set a balanced budget for the next financial year. The budget had been set within a wider economic environment, characterised by uncertainty, which affected the costs the Council incurred, the funding it received and the contribution to the demand for services, as residents were affected by the wider economic circumstances. It was noted that funding from central government would be reduced and that by 2019/20, the Council would receive around £2.6 million less in Revenue Support Grant than it did in 2015/16.

Members were informed that the budget was aligned to a clear vision for East Suffolk, which was working towards key objectives in the Business Plan of Enabling Communities, Economic Growth and Financial Self Sufficiency. The decision to create a new super district council with Suffolk Coastal would help to save money, protect vital services and create a stronger and more powerful voice in the region. This would enable the Council to maintain and improve the services that local people depended upon. The decision to create new parish councils for Lowestoft and Oulton Broad recognised the importance of communities in decision making and resolved a decades-old discrepancy, with representation at this level for these locations.

The Council had a key role in the development of very significant infrastructure projects, such as the new third crossing in Lowestoft. The Council had also invested in temporary flood protection barriers, which had provided enormous reassurance to local residents, ahead of a permanent flood protection scheme for the town. Members noted that the Council had created two new funding pots that local community groups and voluntary sector organisations could apply to, and two Coastal Communities Teams had been created in both Lowestoft and Southwold to allow local people and businesses to have a real say in improvements, as part of a national scheme to revitalise resort towns. Members were also pleased to note that in Bungay, the first council houses had been built since the 1970’s, which had provided much needed affordable housing for local people.

The Leader of the Council advised that in 2017/18, the Council would be delivering over £3 million of efficiency savings, whilst generating over £1 million of additional income. The Council would also be protected against unforeseen events, risks and uncertainties by ensuring that there were robust balances in its reserves. However, the Council would continue to invest in the district, with just under £49 million of capital investment

planned over the next 4 years. Although there would be a very modest Council Tax increase of less than 10p per week for a Band D property, this was a remarkably low figure and was testament to the hard work of Members and officers, to put our communities first.

The proposed budget was then put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED

1. That the Chief Financial Officer's report attached at Appendix D to the report be received;
2. That the Medium Term Financial Strategy attached as Appendix B, including the General Fund revenue budget for revised 2016/17; proposed 2017/18; and forecast budgets for 2018/19 to 2020/21 as set out in Appendix B5 be approved;
3. That the movements to and from Earmarked Reserves and the General Fund Balance for 2016/17 to 2020/21 as shown in section 6 and Appendix B6 be approved;
4. That the items to be treated as special items in 2017/18, as set out in section 9 - the precepts by town-parish councils and parish meetings be approved;
5. That a Band D Council Tax for 2017/18 of £157.41, representing a 3.25% increase on 2016/17 be approved;
6. That the Efficiency Strategy set out in Appendix B7 be approved;
7. That the Pay Policy Statement set out in Appendix E be approved;
8. That the Council Tax Resolutions in Appendix F be approved;
9. That no changes would be made to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Council Tax Discounts for 2017/18;
10. That the awarding of business rates relief to local newspapers under the discretionary powers under section 47(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, in accordance with the Government's guidance set out in Annex A of Appendix C be approved;
11. That the revised Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2016/17 set out in paragraphs 10.8 and 10.9 be approved;
12. That the overall Business Rates tax base for 2017/18 (total net rates income) for the area of £26.555m be noted; and
13. That the Council Tax Base of 35,625.72 Band D equivalents for 2017/18 be noted.

In accordance with the regulations, the results of the recorded vote are shown as follows:

Councillors who voted For the Recommendations (42)

S Allen, S Ardley, P Ashdown, E Back, S Barker, M Barnard, M Bee, N Brooks, A Cackett, G Catchpole, J Ceresa, M Cherry, Y Cherry, J Ford, T Gandy, T Goldson, L Gooch, I Graham, K Grant, A Green, J Groom, M Ladd, C Law, P Light, F Mortimer, T Mortimer, J Murray, L Nicholls, M Pitchers, B Provan, C Punt, T Reynolds, D Ritchie, C Rivett, M Rudd, J Smith, L Smith, K Springall, C Topping, N Webb, S Webb and S Woods

Councillors who voted Against the Recommendations (0)

Councillors who Abstained (1)

G Elliott

12. AUTHORISATION OF OFFICERS – ATTENDANCE AT MAGISTRATES COURT

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms presented a report which sought approval to authorise a number of officers to represent Waveney District Council in the Magistrates' Court, in accordance with Section 223 of the Local Government Act 1972.

It was noted that Section 223 of the 1972 Act allowed local authorities to authorise officers who do not necessarily have legal qualifications (as solicitors, barristers or legal executives) to represent the Council in the Magistrates' Court. The Section 223 power was used very widely by local authorities. In particular, most district and unitary authorities had been using this power for many years to authorise recovery officers to appear in the local Magistrates' Courts in Council Tax and Business Rate enforcement cases.

The officers for whom authority was being sought were: Caroline Greig, Holly Rowley and Thereza (Terri) Lawson, who were employees of Waveney District Council, Gillian Juby who was an employee from Suffolk Coastal District Council, Peter Seeley who was an employee of St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Steven Oxborough who was an employee from Breckland Council. Clarification was provided that Peter Seeley and Steven Oxborough were working for the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) and if approval were granted for them to act on behalf of Waveney District Council, it would provide additional flexibility for the future. Members were advised that Paul Montgomery currently had the authority to represent the Council in the Magistrates' Court, however due to changes in his job role, this was no longer required and his approval to represent Waveney District Council was requested to be withdrawn.

RESOLVED

1. That Caroline Greig, Holly Rowley, Gillian Juby, Thereza (known as Terri) Lawson, Peter Seeley and Steven Oxborough be authorised to appear on behalf of the Council in the Magistrates' Court.
2. To remove Paul Montgomery from the list of approved officers.

13. ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP (ARP) NORWICH CITY COUNCIL SECTION 113 AGREEMENT

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms presented the report, which sought approval to enter into a Section 113 Agreement with another authority, to place its officers at the disposal of the other authority. Members were advised that the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) was a partnership of 7 district and borough Councils working together to provide Revenue and Benefit shared services. The partnership was between Breckland District Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Forest Heath District Council, Fenland District Council, St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council.

In March 2015, the ARP Joint Committee decided that the ARP would be closed to any new full partners or member of the Joint Committee for the time being. The Joint Committee subsequently agreed that, where it benefits the 7 ARP members, the ARP will work in partnership and/or provide services to other Councils, with regard to specific elements of their services but not their whole service.

The ARP had been approached by Norwich City Council to discuss the potential for the ARP to provide strategic and operational management support for the service. It was noted that Section 113 allowed a local authority to enter into an agreement with another authority to place its officers at the disposal of the other authority. A negotiated Section 113 Agreement would enable partnership working without the need for Norwich City Council to become members of the Joint Committee and in the future, may lead to trading and other partnership opportunities.

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms advised that the second recommendation contained within the report had been amended as follows:

‘That authority is delegated to the Chief Finance Officer and Head of Legal & Democratic Services, acting in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms, to negotiate and complete an agreement made under S113 of the Local Government Act 1972, on terms that best protect the Council’s interests, with Norwich City Council.’

Recommendations 1 and 3 contained within the report and the amended recommendation 2 above, were then duly proposed and seconded.

A Member queried whether the proposals would affect any devolution deal which may be received in future. It was confirmed that the proposals would not affect any such future deal.

In response to a query from a Member, it was confirmed that the 7 Councils involved in the ARP would share approximately £8,000 for undertaking the additional work for Norwich City Council.

Clarification was provided that Norwich City Council had been involved in another partnership for this particular area of work but had left that partnership and had sought assistance from the ARP. This was a testament of the hard work, high standards and professionalism of the officers, who worked for the ARP.

The Leader of the Council advised that he had recently met with the Minister for the Department for Work and Pensions, with the Head of Customer Services and Adrian Mills from the ARP. The Minister had been very impressed by officers wide ranging knowledge of the implementation of Universal Credit and the technicalities involved.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be noted.
2. That authority be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer and Head of Legal & Democratic Services, acting in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms, to negotiate and complete an agreement made under S113 of the Local Government Act 1972, on terms that best protect the Council's interests, with Norwich City Council.
3. That approval be given for the ARP Management Team to start working with Norwich City Council immediately to carry out any necessary work prior to 1st April 2017 that will assist with the commencement of the agreement.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

- (a) Question from Councillor A Green to the Cabinet Member for Operational Partnerships & Lowestoft Rising:

Members were advised the Councillor A Green had withdrawn his question about fly-tipping in the district.

- (b) Question from Councillor I Graham to the Leader of the Council:

In light of the fact that the people of Lowestoft have recently been told that they will have to wait until 2022 for their long-awaited third-crossing and they have been informed of the intended establishment of the new East Suffolk District Council, what guarantees can this administration give that this new council will keep the promise of the Conservative District and County Councils and the former Prime Minister?

Response from Councillor C Law

Thank you for your question. We are all determined to see Lake Lothing Crossing built and this time given the commitments that have been made by the Department for Transport, the Transport Minister and Suffolk County Council it will be built.

Waveney District Council working with Peter Aldous MP and Suffolk County Council successfully secured Government funding for this project where many others have failed in the past. I am proud of the role that our council played in securing the funds but now the responsibility for actually building the bridge has passed to Suffolk County Council, as the Highways Authority. I continue to take an active role as Leader of the Council in the project and I continue to be a member of Peter Aldous MP's Lake Lothing Third Crossing Key Stakeholders Group. Peter Aldous MP's Group is providing the support on the ground to help the county council deliver the bridge and we are keeping a close eye on the progress that is being made. The new East Suffolk District Council will continue to play this very important and active role.

As well as sitting on our MP's Key Stakeholder Group I have regular conversations with Cllr Guy McGregor who leads this project and his assistant director at the County Council who is responsible for its delivery. Can I reassure Cllr Graham that the Lake Lothing Third Crossing project is well underway and is on schedule as per Suffolk County Council's published timeline given on the website and the newsletter published in Autumn 2016 [timeline info graphic from the newsletter below]. This is not a project that has hit any complications.

To deliver the bridge the County Council needs to obtain all the necessary consents and a planning approval so they must follow a statutory planning process. The Government has streamlined the planning process to deal with national infrastructure projects such as the proposed bridge but it is still time consuming. Considering the work required, it is planned that construction will start at the end of 2019 with completion scheduled for during 2022.

Please be assured that the scheme is progressing well and all those involved are committed to completing it as quickly as possible. We will do all we can to support Suffolk County Council in the delivery of the bridge and we will also keep a very close eye on what progress is being made. There are some people that want to say that the bridge will not happen but I can tell you that the project is well underway and making good progress. Let us not, in this council chamber, do Lowestoft down, let us do all we can to explain what a great improvement the bridge will make and promote with enthusiasm all the improvements we want to see.

Supplementary Question from Councillor I Graham

Thank you, that was just the response I wanted to hear. I was concerned and I am pleased that we are still committed to the bridge. There was no supplementary question on this occasion.

(c) Question from Councillor L Gooch to the Cabinet Member for Tourism, Economic Development & Rural Affairs:

In January 2017, it was publicized in the 'Lowestoft Journal' that Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils have received a £300,000 funding boost from Arts Council England for the promotion of culture and tourism; what co-operation is WDC having with SCC to make best use of this grant?

Response from Councillor M Ladd

We are in discussion with Suffolk County Council about this project and they have confirmed that there will be lots of opportunities to promote Waveney's cultural offer. We understand the grant offer is only in principle at this stage as they still have £100k to raise to deliver the full project.

In addition SCC has supported us with our Great Places bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council. This is a joint bid with Great Yarmouth Borough Council and aims to position culture within Lowestoft as a driver for economic growth and to build a sense of place, community pride and enhance people's lives. This equates to around £800k over 3 years, split between Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft. We will know the outcome of this bid in March.

WDC are also developing a Coastal and Valleys Icons project, in partnership with Suffolk Coastal and South Norfolk, and this is a tourism project connecting heritage and cultural assets.

Supplementary Question from Councillor L Gooch

Splendid. Councils provide crucial seed funding for a number of initiatives and culture drives tourism, which ultimately leads to improvements in health and education. I look forward to receiving more information about this.

Response from Councillor M Ladd

Culture and Heritage are extremely important and we are doing a lot of work in this respect, including with the Coastal and Valleys partnership groups.

(d) Question from Councillor J Murray to the Cabinet Member for Community Health & Safety:

Will Cllr Rudd make representations on behalf of Waveney residents to the Gt. Yarmouth & Waveney CCG in the light of the information that the Stroke Association's vital support and advice service to stroke survivors will be decommissioned on the 31.3.17 with no public consultation.

Response from Councillor M Rudd

NHS Great Yarmouth and Waveney CCG commissions a Stroke Information and support service through the Stroke Association at a cost of £43,428 per year. In September 2015 the CCG decided to continue the service at the existing cost for a further two years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

The 2016/17 contract has not been signed by the Stroke Association because they do not feel they can continue to provide the same level of service within available funds. The Stroke Association approached the CCG to ask for more funding to enable them to continue to provide the service. Discussions were also held around what service could continue to be provided within the current contract value, the Stroke Association had proposed significant reductions.

The CCGs Clinical Executive considered the options and agreed that the CCG would continue to provide the stroke information and support service until 31 March 2017 but that formal notice would be given that it would not continue the service following year.

Like all other NHS organisations, the CCG are facing unprecedented financial pressure as demand for health services continue to grow. Put simply, we cannot afford to carry on providing the same services in the same way. We have a duty to make the best use of our finite resources in a way that maintains quality services and benefits the largest number of patients. Unfortunately this means we have to reduce funding in other areas, including the information and support service provided by the Stroke Association.

It was considered that much of the value of the service was predominately signposting patients or their families to access benefits and financial support and it was felt that this is

not a health function. In view of this and the current financial climate the CCG had to make the difficult decision not to continue funding the service.

We are grateful to the charity for the service it has provided over the past few years and would like reassure them that this is not a decision we have taken lightly.

The CCG has not carried out any engagement work around this decision because it did not feel that it would be appropriate given that the existing service could not continue to be provided with the funds available and the CCG does not have additional funds for the new service proposed by the Stroke association.

There are other generic information and support services available for health and social care users and we are now working closely with the stroke team at the James Paget Hospital to see what steps could be taken to further improve the support which patients receive after discharge once the agreement with the Stroke Association comes to an end in March.

Great Yarmouth and Waveney Health Scrutiny Committee has requested an updated information bulletin on this matter for their next meeting being held on 4 April 2017.

Supplementary Question from Councillor J Murray

Thank you for such a full answer. I am pleased that the Great Yarmouth and Waveney Health Scrutiny Committee are going to look at this. Can I just check that Neil Chapman will be updated?

Response from Councillor M Rudd

Yes, I will do that myself, personally.

(e) Question from Councillor J Craig to the Cabinet Member for Customers & Communities:

In the 'Eastern Daily Press' on Thursday November 17th 2016 the front page stated that the total number of children trapped in poverty in Suffolk is now 37,400. Chief Executive of Mancroft Advice Dan Mobbs, was quoted as saying 'This is not about asking for more money, it is about focusing our resources in the right place. Where are the 'right places' in Waveney?'

Response from Councillor F Mortimer

Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils are working with partners through the East Suffolk Partnership (ESP) on a project to identify and address hidden needs, deprivation and disadvantage across the two districts.

This work has been informed by the Hidden Needs report, commissioned by the Suffolk Community Foundation in 2016, which clearly identifies priority areas in both rural and urban communities. The report shows that there are 4,505 income deprived children living in Waveney, which is 22.7% of all children. A number of factors contribute to child poverty, including housing, health and employment and therefore tackling child poverty in the District requires a cross-service, multi-agency response.

Through our work to support delivery of the countywide ‘Working together to tackle poverty’ strategy, in East Suffolk we are initially focussing on digital inclusion (which increases access to services and better deals), fuel poverty and effective targeting of resources (both money and other types of resources).

However, it is important to acknowledge that a significant amount of work is already underway to tackle some of the issues identified. Whilst there is undoubtedly more work to be done, there are opportunities to build upon existing initiatives, including those led through the Council, Lowestoft Rising and the East Suffolk Partnership.

Supplementary Question from Councillor J Craig

There was no supplementary question on this occasion, as Councillor J Craig was not present at the meeting.

(f) Question from Councillor M Cherry to the Cabinet Member for Planning & Coastal Management:

Could Cllr Ritchie outline how Planning Officers will be strategically ‘merged’ between Lowestoft and Melton to achieve the best balance of staff and resources at the two locations.

Response from Councillor D Ritchie

You ask how will planning officers be strategically merged between Lowestoft and Melton? Let me reassure you, it has already happened, further merging is not required. For some years now East Suffolk has been divided into three planning areas. The Northern area, the Central area and the Southern area. These areas are not defined by the present boundary between Waveney and Suffolk Coastal. The Northern Team is based in Lowestoft (The northern area is mostly in Waveney District, with just a few rural parishes in Suffolk Coastal District). The Central team is based in Melton, but they also work out of the Riverside office in Lowestoft, as the central area includes Southwold, Reydon, and surrounding parishes. The Southern area is entirely in Suffolk Coastal District and the team are based at East Suffolk House in Melton.

In Summary the planning teams are already integrated across East Suffolk - responding equally to the needs of all the residents of East Suffolk. When East Suffolk District Council is formed, the planning teams are ready.

Supplementary Question from Councillor M Cherry

As the Shadow Cabinet Member for Planning, it would be very helpful if this information could be shared more widely.

Response from Councillor D Ritchie

I would gladly share this information with the Shadow Cabinet, however most of this information is already in the public domain.

(g) Question from Councillor S Barker to the Leader of the Council:

Could Cllr Law inform the Council when the Webcasting of meetings will be introduced at Waveney District Council for full Council meetings?

Response from Councillor C Law

Thank you Cllr Barker for your question.

I am aware that some councils do webcast meetings, but I am also aware that a number of issues need to be resolved before any council is able to do so. The first hurdle is the need to have the right technology; at present we do not have the cameras, recording facilities or digital storage capacity installed in this building to enable web casting of meetings, and that would require some considerable investment. Any web casting will also need to be supported by the necessary protocols, for instance to protect those members of the public who may wish to attend a meeting but not be filmed or recorded. As Councillors, I suggest we would also need to undergo some training; after all, any cameras will record not only what we do when we are speaking, but also what we do when we are NOT speaking!

In summary, therefore, whilst I thank Councillor Barker for her question my answer is that at present this Council does not currently have any plans to introduce webcasting of meetings.

Supplementary Question from Councillor S Barker

I find this response quite surprising, particularly as the recently completed East Suffolk House has the technology for webcasting meetings. Mr Pickles was very keen on transparency and being open in Council meetings. Can we start webcasting in the future?

Response from Councillor C Law

We had a strict budget for the Riverside building and webcasting was not a requirement at that time. We will review the situation again in the future, when we are nearer to the merger.

The meeting was concluded at 8.20 pm

Chairman