

Minutes of the Council meeting held at Riverside, Canning Road, Lowestoft  
on **Wednesday, 21 February 2018** at **6.30 pm**.

Members present:

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

Officers present:

S Baker (Chief Executive), C Bing (Legal Services Manager), A Jarvis (Strategic Director), H Javadi (Chief Finance Officer & Section 151 Officer), D Knight (Head of Customer Services) and N Wotton (Democratic Services Manager)

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The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting. In particular, he welcomed the Chief Finance Officer who would be updating Members on the General Fund Budget and Council Tax report and the Head of Customer Services, who would be giving a presentation on Universal Credit. He also welcomed the Legal Services Manager, who was in attendance in place of the Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal & Democratic Services, who was unwell. All those present wished her a speedy recovery.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Ford, R Neil, K Springall, J Smith and S Webb.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor P Byatt declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 6 - Notice of Motion and Item 10 - General Fund Budget and Council Tax for 2018/19, as he was a Lowestoft Town Councillor and both items of business made reference to Lowestoft Town Council. He also declared a further Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 6 Notice of Motion, as he was an Observer on the Save Our Record Office (SORO) Committee.

Councillor I Graham declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 6 - Notice of Motion and Item 10 - General Fund Budget and Council Tax for 2018/19, as he was a Lowestoft Town Councillor and both items of business made reference to Lowestoft Town Council.

Councillor A Green declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 6 - Notice of Motion and Item 10 - General Fund Budget and Council Tax for 2018/19, as he was a Lowestoft Town Councillor and both items of business made reference to Lowestoft Town Council.

Councillor K Patience declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 6 - Notice of Motion and Item 10 - General Fund Budget and Council Tax for 2018/19, as he was a Lowestoft Town Councillor and both items of business made reference to Lowestoft Town Council.

Councillor T Goldson declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 6 Notice of Motion, as he was the Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member for Health and had been involved in discussions regarding the Records Office.

Councillor J Murray declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest during the discussions on Item 10 – General Fund Budget and Council Tax for 2018/19, as she was a Trustee of Sentinel Leisure Trust, which was mentioned within the report.

### **3. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED**

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 January 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion in full of Councillor Murray's Supplementary Question:

'I am aware that STPs are preparing the ground for Accountable Care Organisations. In order to safeguard the community from the marketization of any future ACO and protect comprehensive healthcare for all, would Councillor Rudd join others in Waveney in contacting our MP requesting that there is a full public consultation before any measures are taken to create in ACO in Waveney?'

The Chairman took the opportunity to request that should any Councillor wish to have their questions included in full in the Minutes, they should forward the wording to Democratic Services by end of business on the day after the Full Council meeting.

### **4. COMMUNICATIONS**

#### Councillor J Ford

The Chairman of the Council took the opportunity to wish Councillor Ford a speedy recovery following her recent operation and sent her the best wishes of the Council.

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

#### Chief Executive

There were no announcements from the Chief Executive on this occasion.

#### Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council reported that the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had recently agreed for the first time, to the creation of a 'super district council' for East Suffolk. It was noted that colleagues in West Suffolk were also on the way to the creation of super district council. This was an historic moment that all Councillors should be proud of and was the culmination of many years hard work.

## 6. NOTICE OF MOTION

A Notice of Motion had been received from Councillor P Byatt:

‘This Council will urgently engage with Lowestoft Town Council and other stakeholders involved with the Heritage Action Zone, to prioritise the renovation and redesign of Lowestoft Town Hall, with a view to including a purpose built facility if needed, to relocate the Lowestoft Record Office.’

In accordance with the Council’s Constitution, it was proposed and seconded “That the Motion be discussed immediately.” On it being put to the Vote the Motion was **CARRIED** and the Motion was therefore duly discussed.

Councillor Byatt reported that he had received many emails voicing people’s concerns about the future of the Records Office in Lowestoft. Although a final decision had not yet been made by Suffolk County Council in this respect, it was important to have a back up plan, in case it was required. He confirmed that the Heritage Action Zone programme had a strict timetable, however it may be possible to request that the timetable be amended to include the redevelopment of the Town Hall, to include the Records Office, as a priority. The district had a lot of heritage and assets to be proud of and it was important for everyone to work together to help create an ongoing legacy for future generations, for the common good. He therefore commended the Motion for consideration, which was duly seconded.

Councillor Ladd, Cabinet Member for Tourism & Economic Development, was also the Heritage Champion for the Council. He reported that the Town Hall was identified within the North Lowestoft Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) application as one of the priority buildings that the partnership of Waveney District Council, Lowestoft Town Council, East Suffolk Building Preservation Trust, Lowestoft Vision and Historic England were looking to bring back into viable use. It was very early days, as HAZ status was subject to the Partners having completed and agreed a Delivery Plan and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Historic England, which is due to be signed off on 4 May 2018. It was noted that this was the timescale set out by Historic England.

He reported that, whilst we are unable to access any funding prior to this, the Council would engage in a discussion around possible options for the Town Hall with Lowestoft Town Council, including a facility for the relocation of the Lowestoft Record Office if this was an option they wish to explore, and if a new facility was required. The Council would do this via the HAZ Partnership Team, which includes both councils, along with the other partners already mentioned.

Once the Delivery Plan was agreed in May, funding could be applied for to further explore and to appraise the viability of the options for the Town Hall, including the need and demand, renovation costs, future sustainability etc. It was worth noting that the Town Council were also looking at a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to support the redevelopment of the Town Hall, and therefore the timing and any associated conditions of this funding would also need to be taken into consideration. In the meantime, with regard to the Lowestoft Record Office, a meeting has been set up with Suffolk County Council, and this was being facilitated by Waveney MP Peter Aldous. Councillor Ladd advised that he would be attending this meeting and had agreed to feed back the outcome to the HAZ team.

Councillor Goldson advised that he was also a Suffolk County Councillor and that he supported this Motion. It was important to have further options for the future of the Records Office in Waveney. However, there needed to be a proviso concerning the funding, as the potential facility at the Town Hall would need to meet National Archive Standards and be suitable for the twenty-first century. The main priority would be the long term preservation and care of vulnerable items, to enable future generations to enjoy the rich heritage of the area, in the future.

The Leader of the Council stated that he was supportive of the Motion, as it was an important opportunity to bring the Town Hall back into use and to stop the further decay of the building. The vulnerable items and public records belonged to the whole of Waveney and should remain within the District for future generations, as many local groups and schools used the facility on a regular basis. Although many of the records were able to be digitalised and viewed electronically, it was still important to have a facility locally and for ease of access for all. Interested parties needed to work together to find a way to make this happen to preserve the facility for future generations.

Councillor Barker reported that the Records Office was a symbol of history and was part of Lowestoft's identity and civic pride. It was therefore important to keep the facility and the district's heritage in the local area. She queried whether the closure of the Records Office could be delayed until such a time that the Town Hall was ready to host the facility. It was important that more local facilities were not lost and it was important that local schools were able to access the information held within the Records Office, rather than having to travel to Ipswich to view important historical items.

Councillor Graham advised that Lowestoft Town Council were currently in the process of having the Town Hall surveyed, and it was hoped that Lowestoft Town Council could prevent further water damage to the building. However, he raised concerns that there was no car parking associated with the Town Hall and requested that Mariners Street Car Park be transferred to the Town Hall, so that there would be sufficient parking for those using the Town Hall in the future.

Councillor Webb reported that it was an important issue for Lowestoft and the facility ought to be retained in Lowestoft for future generations.

Councillor Allen reported that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee were going to have a joint Scrutiny meeting with the Suffolk County Council's Scrutiny Committee regarding this matter. Further information on the date of the meeting would be provided in due course.

Members were supportive of the Motion and it was therefore unanimously

**RESOLVED**

That the Notice of Motion be unanimously approved.

The Leader of the Council reported that he had asked for the Chief Executive to arrange a visit to the Town Hall for all Councillors, to view the condition of the building. Further information about a date for the visit would be circulated in due course.

## 7. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

### (a) Question from Councillor S Barker to the Cabinet Member for Community Health & Safety:

According to figures released recently by Public Health England in Waveney during 2016/17 21% of Year 6 pupils are obese and 4.6% severely obese. At the start of Secondary School in Waveney the percentage pupil figures are the same. This is the highest total across Norfolk and Waveney, equal to that in Gt. Yarmouth.

Can the Cabinet Member for Community Health & Safety give details to the Council about the initiatives that are being undertaken by Waveney District Council to reduce the childhood unhealthily overweight figures in Waveney?

#### Response from Councillor M Rudd

Obesity is described as ‘a major global health crisis’ and childhood obesity has been classed by the World Health Organisation as one of the most serious challenges for the 21st Century.

However, tackling obesity is a complex and multifaceted problem with over a hundred contributing factors including biology, food intake, exercise and food marketing. To help to address this epidemic, we need to look across all these different factors and explore what can be done over the short, medium and long term through a sustained whole systems approach.

The role of local authorities (LAs) in tackling and working to prevent obesity is crucial. Public Health England, the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Public Health are exploring how to make greater in-roads into tackling obesity by developing ‘whole systems approaches’ that act across the local system. Leeds Beckett University has been commissioned to lead a three year programme to explore with LAs and other partners what a Whole Systems Approach may look like on the ground and a number of multi agency workshops have been held in Suffolk to develop the local model which Waveney District Council has been part of.

At a local level, we supported a number of projects through the Health and Wellbeing Community Call to Action last year, including a ‘Lowestoft Dance’ project to provide a fun, social, dance-based activity programme for older people, Lowestoft Town Sport Academy to promote the inclusion of girls in football and Active Lives project work in Bungay, Beccles and Southwold.

Through Lowestoft Rising we supported the Beat the Street and subsequent Golden Mile project to encourage primary school children and their families to get and stay more active and we are currently planning a range of activities linked to the OvO Energy Women’s Tour coming through our area on June 13, including Ride Smart Cycling Days for Year 5 and 6 pupils from each school along the route.

Our main leisure delivery partner, Sentinel run a huge range of activities which support healthy weight by encouraging active lifestyles, including:

- Ogogo Family Interventions
- School Nurse Programme

- Junior Gym
- Swim for a Pound and over 1,000 children in swimming lessons
- Energised Kids Club
- Child Weight Management with OneLife Suffolk
- Stage Stars Dance
- GoGeronimo
- Road 2 Pro Football Academy (girls and boys)
- Supporting for Sports Clubs (e.g. Lowestoft Swim cCub, Kuk Sool, Karate, Judo etc.) and clubs (e.g. Waveney Youth FC using the gym for fitness sessions)
- Primary Schools using the Gym and Dance Studios for fitness Sessions
- General Swimming, Roller Skating, Soft Play (all promoting active lifestyles)
- Family Fun Sessions (promoting family activity)

Given the increasing number of meals eaten outside of the home and rising obesity levels we are also encouraging food businesses to offer their customers healthy food choices which are low in saturated fat, sugar and salt and high in fibre through the promotion of the Eat Out Eat Well healthy food award scheme. There are currently 35 food businesses that hold an award in East Suffolk.

Supplementary Question from Councillor S Barker

On the 8 February 2018, a report came out, almost on the same day as I sent in the question to Full Council, saying that research shows that much wider action is needed to tackle childhood obesity after a major programme in more than 50 primary schools in the West Midlands was shown to have made no difference to obesity levels. Researchers said that much wider local and national action is needed, especially curbs on the advertising of junk food. What research has been done on the Council's initiatives mentioned by Councillor Rudd, as to the positive outcomes achieved to date?

Response from Councillor M Rudd

I will provide you with a written response outside of the meeting.

(b) Question from Councillor L Gooch to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Merger & Communities

(c)

100 years ago in 1918 some women won the right to vote in Parliamentary elections, alongside some men; with this in mind the Women's Local Government Society have requested each Local Council appoint a Champion to help lead local celebrations and activities. The Waveney Labour Group requested this to be addressed by the administration in August 2017. To date we have not received a reply.

Can the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Merger & Communities outline what plans he has to appoint a Champion?

Response from Councillor S Ardley

I apologise for the lack of response to the Labour Group. The email about this matter was sent to me during my recuperation from a stroke and it was unfortunately overlooked, however it has taken over 6 months for the Labour Group to remind me about this!

The aim of the Women’s Local Government Society Project is to identify and celebrate the lives of 100 women and men who were active in the campaign for extending the vote to all women and who went on to use their extended rights of citizenship in a positive way in their local areas. The aim is to inspire ‘the next generation of young activists’. The LGAs ‘Be a Councillor’ campaign is aimed at redressing the gender imbalance by encouraging women and under-represented groups to engage with and enter politics.

45 pioneers – female councillors, magistrates and mayors and those who campaigned for the right to vote, changing our public and political landscape for ever - have been identified to date, with the other 55 to be announced on International Women’s Day on 8 March 2018. These include Margaret Wintringham, the first British Woman to take her seat in the House of Commons, Catharine Alderton, the first Lady Mayor of Colchester and first female member of Essex County Council and Jessie Stephen who became the first female president of the Trades Council as well as serving as a Councillor in Bermondsey.

The WLGS is also seeking ‘champions’ to bring organisations and people together to develop local projects to find out about local suffrage pioneers.

I have now undertaken further research into the WLGS project, as it has not been widely promoted, and feel that we need to fully understand/scope what being the ‘Champion’ for Waveney District Council would involve. However if any Councillors are interested in putting her or his name forward, either after the meeting or by email, expressing an interest in the role, please let me know.

Supplementary Question from Councillor L Gooch

There was no Supplementary Question on this occasion.

**8. PETITIONS**

No Petitions had been received.

**9. QUESTIONS FROM THE ELECTORATE**

The following questions from the electorate had been received:

(a) Question from Mr R Chilvers to the Cabinet Member for Housing

With regard to the Capital Programme and Housing Revenue Account Budget, which were considered by Full Council last month:

Does Waveney District Council think that in consort with other local authorities responsible for local authority housing, that there is a good case for a review of the debt settlements under the auspices of the 2011 Localism Act regulations, which includes 2012 HRA Self Financing, in which this council was loaded with 68 million over a 30 year period of repayment because of the substantive changes of government policies over recent years, which have reduced substantially rental income: controlling housing benefit by decreasing rents, the rollout of universal benefit causing increased rent arrears now over 1 million as of December 2017, the spare room (bedroom) tax and the increasing discounts and encouragements allowed for Right to Buy (RTB)?

Response from Councillor C Punt

Waveney District Council is supportive of the HRA self financing model which replaced the subsidy system. Under the previous subsidy system authorities such as Waveney District Council whose deemed rental income was in excess of their deemed expenditure paid into the system (negative subsidy). The subsidy system was considered restrictive and highly reliant on annual determinations. This did not give authorities the certainty they needed to plan ahead. The new self financing system has provided the Council with a greater certainty to develop a 30 year Business plan which sets out its longer term vision and framework for delivering its housing requirements.

Whilst in comparison to the Council's earlier HRA business plan, the rental income has reduced considerably, the business plan has been updated to reflect this reduction and it continues to be robust and sustainable.

(b) Question from Mr R Chilvers to the Cabinet Member for Housing

If agreed that there is a case to be answered under these regulations, what course of action and representation to government does WDC propose in pursuing this case for review?

Response from Councillor C Punt

We don't feel the need to challenge the HRA self financing model for reasons already outlined. Whilst the initial impact of UC on rental income has been challenging the Government have announced changes that should help ease the situation over the coming months. Tomorrow a briefing note on these changes will be issued to all Cllrs. It is also worth noting that Lowestoft was one of the first Job Centre locations nationally to become a full service as part of an 'agile' rollout of UC, and there have been a number of policy changes to UC some of which have been influenced by WDC, such as reverting temporary accommodation back to housing benefit, which demonstrates the Government does act on feedback. I am also pleased to add that the WDC led East Suffolk Universal Credit Support Partnership is a finalist for the prestigious iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards for the work supporting customer and communities with UC.

(c) Question from Mr R Chilvers to the Cabinet Member for Housing

Why has the Authority not taken up the option of borrowing the headroom of £11 million allowed under its borrowing cap of £87.26 million in order to increase, through its development programme, its housing stock and therefore its rental income, considering that the housing stock has decreased in March 2017 from 4,467 to December 2017 at 4,450?

Response from Councillor C Punt

The Council is committed to delivering its 30 year HRA business plan (currently being updated) and a HRA financial strategy to support that. The Council's HRA balances are strong and sufficient to provide for the required funding for the new development. In addition the Council works very closely with its partners and Homes and Community Agencies to secure external funding.



(d) Question from Mr R Chilvers to the Cabinet Member for Housing

Does the Authority, in the new housing developments at present being consulted upon, plan to directly invest in council housing at social, rather than affordable rents, which would not only boost its rental income but cut the waiting lists which can be calibrated on the basis of the outrageous bidding figures seen in Gateway to Home Choice?

Response from Councillor C Punt

All tenants who were on a secure tenancy let at a social rent have remained on a social rent. The decision was made to move to affordable rents when re-letting existing stock or letting new build homes to provide additional income to the HRA to assist with funding additional homes under our development programme. Following the decision by central government to commence a 4 year programme of reducing all rents charged by Local Authorities and Housing Associations by 1%, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has seen a reduction in its income. The Council is alert to the financial pressures facing some sections of the community and will consider reviewing the use of affordable rents in the future but this will need to be evidence based and will have to take into account the possible impact on the development programme which enables us to provide new homes for those families most in need.

**10. SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE**

The Leader of the Council proposed that Council Procedure Rule 13.4 be suspended in relation to the General Fund Budget and Council Tax 2018/19 report, 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. GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2018/19**

The Cabinet Member for Resources presented the report, which sought approval of the Budget for 2018/19 and agreement of a proposed Band D Council Tax for 2018/19 of £162.27.

The Chief Finance Officer then gave a detailed presentation on the last proposed budget for Waveney District Council. The Cabinet had considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in September 2017, which had provided a baseline forecast of income and expenditure and looked at the overall financial climate. The MTFS provided the framework within which the Council's overall spending plans had been developed.

The Government had announced proposals for Councils to retain all locally raised business rates by the end of the decade and to end the distribution of core grant from central Government. These proposals, which were subject to consultation, would radically change the Local Government Finance environment and the relationship with Central Government. It was noted that the long-term financial picture was characterised by an increased shift towards locally-generated resources, with an accompanying transfer of both risk and opportunity. The MTFS sets out the assumptions made in identifying resources for this period and had been developed in advance of the emergence of detail regarding the Government's proposals on business rates.

It was reported that a significant amount of work had been undertaken with regards to financial planning and setting a balanced budget for 2018/19. The budget had been considered on multiple occasions at a variety of meetings including Cabinet Briefing, Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet Workshops and other meetings. The Leader of the Council took the opportunity to thank the Chief Finance Officer and her team for their ongoing hard work and support in setting a balanced budget for 2018/19.

Members were also provided with comparative data for Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils, which showed how the Council's compared and contrasted in terms of weekly average earnings, house prices and the number of businesses.

Members noted the proposals to achieve a balanced budget and contribute towards a sustainable position going into the medium term and the major changes to the Local Government finance environment. It was therefore proposed that the Band D Council Tax for Waveney District Council would be £162.27, which was an increase of £4.86 or 3.09%. Reassurance was provided that the Council would maintain sufficient contingency reserves in order to cope with any unforeseen circumstances or emergencies.

Members were pleased to note that there would be a balanced budget for the 2018/19 financial year, which made some use of the In-Year Savings Reserve which was set up in prior years to help fund future years' budget gaps. Reported budget gaps shown for 2019/20, 2020/21, and 2021/22 were £2.275m, £2.665m, and £2.589m, respectively.

The sources of Council funding were considered and it was reported that Council Tax was currently the most reliable source, as there had been significant legislative changes in respect of business rates and the New Homes Bonus, which meant that levels of funding from those sources could potentially fluctuate significantly over time.

The Council would collect £56 million in Council Tax during the 2018/19 financial year, 80% of which was allocated for Suffolk County Council, 10% for the Suffolk Police Force and the remaining 10% was for Waveney District Council. Members were pleased to note that Suffolk had been successful in its application to take part in a Business Rate pilot scheme and Waveney would therefore benefit from a share of £10.5 million.

Members were advised that no assumptions had been made regarding the budget for the new Council for East Suffolk, at this time. It was noted that the Capital Programme over the next 4 years was extensive and approximately £80 million was earmarked to be spent on specific purposes. £53 million was ear marked for the tidal barrier in Lowestoft and Members were pleased to note that there was significant external funding to help deliver that project. There would be £26 million of borrowing to help support the Capital Programme, from internal and external sources, and a detailed business case had to be provided for each project.

The Council had continued to deliver all of its services and none had been reduced. External Audit now had to check that the Council was delivering Value For Money (VFM) and that it was innovative in its working practices.

The Cabinet Member for Resources advised that all Members were in receipt of an amended Appendix F to the report and all Members had sight of a copy of the new document. The Council was proposing to set a balanced budget, which was robust and

had an extensive Capital Programme, whilst only proposing to increase the Council Tax by less than 10 pence per week. He took the opportunity to thank the Chief Finance Officer and her team for their ongoing hard work and support for the Council's finances. He then moved the recommendations contained within the report and this was duly seconded.

The Chairman of the Council reported 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 are made. Therefore in accordance with Paragraph 16.5 (Recorded Votes) of Part 3 of the Constitution, the Council would be having a recorded vote for this item.

### Questions

A Member queried the funding for CCTV on Page 75 of the report. They stated that Lowestoft Town Council Officers covered the CCTV facilities in Lowestoft and as part of that work, they took out of hours call for Waveney District Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Suffolk County Council, and were also the contact point for Waveney Norse and other agencies. They stated that this service was currently being received free of charge and queried whether Waveney District Council ought to pay for this service. It was reported that all of the CCTV cameras in the District were currently in Lowestoft, therefore they were a Lowestoft Town Council responsibility. The Strategic Director reported that there were ongoing discussions regarding the out of hours service provision and it was currently being funded via the contract with Waveney Norse, therefore the costs were not being shown explicitly in the CCTV budget summary.

Clarification was provided in respect of Public Conveniences and Residents Parking on Page 75 of the report. It was noted that the funding for public conveniences was broadly similar over the coming years and this would pay for the ongoing cleaning and maintenance of the facilities. The figures shown in relation to Residents Parking, was the amount of income received from parking permits, which would be reinvested to pay for improvements and maintenance of parking facilities.

In respect of the Marina Theatre, a Member queried why there was no mention of the management grant on Page 76. The Chief Finance Officer advised that it was not possible to reconcile the District Council's budget with that of Lowestoft Town Council, as this was a high level, strategic budget which did not contain every detail of itemised expenditure. Lowestoft Town Council had been in receipt of a package of transfers of assets, services and fees. The impact of these transfers was recognised within the high level analysis and would be included under different headings to those used by Lowestoft Town Council.

A Member queried whether the Council had robustly challenged the Government's reduction in the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and whether Waveney was receiving a similar amount to other Councils? The Chief Finance Officer reported that all local authorities were in the same position and that the RSG was in the process of being completely phased out. The funding was being replaced, with an assumption that all councils would become more financially self sufficient in the future.

With regard to Tourism & Economic Development, a Member queried why the funding level would be decreasing in future years, in some areas. It was reported that this was a high level view of the budget. The fluctuations in funding levels could be due to a variety of reasons such as staffing levels, programmes of work commencing or being completed

and various projects. Slippage over time was to be expected due to the nature of the projects being undertaken and the budgetary figures would be amended over time as a result.

With regard to the Parks and Gardens summary on Page 76, a Member queried why some of the funding was going to increase in future years, when many parks and gardens had been transferred to Lowestoft Town Council. It was reported that this budget was a high level view and that category of spending covered street cleansing and other matters. The funding summary also covered the whole of Waveney District, not just Lowestoft.

In respect of the Street Scene funding on Page 75 of the report, a Councillor queried whether the Council had contacted other Town and Parish Councils to seek their advice on what was needed in their areas. The Strategic Director confirmed that a consultation had been undertaken and as a result, it had been agreed that there a campaign would be undertaken to reduce litter and plastic waste across the whole district.

A Member queried the high level of spending on Markets during 2017/18 when future year's spending levels were quite low. It was reported that this was an adjustment for previous years and presented the Council's revised position for 2017/18.

In response to a query from a Member, it was confirmed that the residents in Suffolk Coastal District Council would be required to pay the same amount for their Green Bins to be collected during 2018/19, as Waveney residents. The Chief Finance Officer reported that there was currently no agreed position with Suffolk County Council regarding Green Bin waste collection for this year, therefore it had been prudent to instigate a contingency fund of £300,000, in case it was required.

With regard to the Pay Policy Statement, a Member queried why some of the ratios were different between the two Councils. It was reported that this was due to the different number of staff at both Councils, as both Councils used the same pay scales. In respect of the gender pay differentials which were mentioned within Appendix E, it was confirmed that HR were in the process of collating this information and it would be published on 31 March. It was confirmed that this information could be circulated to Members for information.

A Member commented that the purchase of new vehicles for Waveney Norse was not included within the budget and they queried whether this was included within the Waveney Norse fee? The Chief Finance Officer advised that the purchase of new vehicles was included within the Capital Programme, which had been approved by Full Council in January. This was in accordance with the accounting rules and regulations that the Council had to abide by.

A Member queried the costs involved regarding the Marina Theatre transfer on Page 76 of the report. She reported that at a previous meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee last year, the associated legal fees quoted had been in the region of £5,000 and since that time there had been an increase of over £11,000. She queried what had prompted the reassessment of the figures. The Chief Finance Officer reported that she would check the specific amounts outside of the meeting. However, it was likely that additional fees had been generated and the costs had been received by the Council over time. Therefore the latest figures contained within the report were the most accurate.

In respect of Business Rates Retention, a Member queried why they were fully allocated and who had made those decisions. The Chief Finance Officer advised that the report contained the draft governance arrangements for Business Rates Retention, which was a place based scheme. It was confirmed that the allocations were based on estimates only and the figures would be finalised at a later date. The Leader of the Council reported that the Public Sector Leaders Group (PSLG) had been discussing Business Rates Retention for some time and he felt that additional transparency was needed regarding the review of governance arrangements. It was noted that the work of the PSLG had grown over time to include the Police and Health and it was hoped that the PSLG would be more open in the future.

A Member queried whether the Council's Electoral Services were shared with Suffolk Coastal District Council or whether they were separate teams. Confirmation was provided that it was now one service shared by both Councils. As a result of the amalgamation, there had been no change to the level of service currently being provided to both Councils.

In respect of the reduction in the Sentinel Leisure Trust (SLT) Management Fee as mentioned on page 68 of the report, a Member queried the wording, as they thought that SLT no longer received a fee to run leisure services and were instead paying the Council a dividend. The Chief Finance Officer reported that when setting the budget for the delivery of services, she had to rely on SLT's estimates for providing various services. In respect of income generation, it was noted that there were some new potential sources, which were currently untested. Therefore she had taken a prudent view and had set aside a contingency fund to cover those untested sources of funding. This was recorded within the SLT Management Fee summary. During 2018/19, adjustments would be made, should the proposed sources of funding prove to be viable and be received as anticipated.

### Debate

Members took the opportunity to comment that it was their duty to set a balanced budget, for the good of the local community, which included much needed infrastructure for the district, such as the tidal barrier and the third crossing over Lake Lothing. Thanks were also given to the Cabinet Member for Resources, the Chief Finance Officer and her team for their ongoing hard work and support. Those present also took the opportunity to commend the work of the Chief Finance Officer since her appointment to the role. The proposed increase in Council Tax was very modest and demonstrated that the Council provided excellent value for money.

Councillor Barker raised concerns about the number of assets which had been transferred to both Lowestoft Town Council and Oulton Broad Parish Council, which came with significant financial liabilities that had saved Waveney District Council a lot of money. Councillor Ardley commented that he had been a Councillor for 17 years and during that time the Opposition had presented an Alternative Budget on only one occasion, which was a wasted opportunity. Had they submitted an Alternative Budget, the Opposition would be able to demonstrate how they would finance the Council's services and where savings could be made. Councillor Gooch stated that she was concerned that Lowestoft Town Council would need to significantly increase its precept to cover the costs of the liabilities that were compulsorily transferred, which would greatly impact upon the poorest members of society. Councillor Graham stated that Lowestoft Town Council had some legal concerns regarding the transfer of some of the assets and he would be taking legal advice and possible action in due course. Clarification was requested and it was confirmed

that Lowestoft Town Council had a variety of concerns regarding the sea wall and that they sought a letter of indemnity from the District Council in this respect. The Leader of the Council advised that it was inappropriate to raise those matters at this time and stated that a separate meeting would be arranged with Lowestoft Town Council and the District Council to consider these matters in detail, in due course.

The Leader of the Council reported that this was an exciting time for the district and that there had been a large number of achievements to be proud of, including:

- Work was underway regarding the Heritage Action Zone.
- Wayne Hemingway was involved in the redevelopment of Lowestoft South Beach.
- Significant coastal management schemes were in progress, including the tidal barrier.
- The third crossing for Lowestoft had been confirmed.
- The Secretary of State Sajid Javid had approved the creation of a new Council for East Suffolk, which would be the largest in England and would be the first ‘super-district’.
- The democratic deficit in the unparished areas of Lowestoft had been rectified, with the creation of Lowestoft Town Council and Oulton Broad Parish Council.
- House building was underway across the district and the Council was now building its first homes in Bungay since the 1970s.
- The Council’s Housing Strategy was ambitious, involving a number of partners and organisations.
- There had been an investment of £200,000 in leisure facilities in Bungay.
- The Council had also provided 43 apprenticeships since 2012, which had made a significant difference to the lives of local young people, providing them with much needed skills and experience.
- Lowestoft Festival has been arranged for the summer of 2018 and would help to put Lowestoft on the map.
- Following the tragedy at Grenfell, the Council had been in contact with the residents of St Peter’s Court and had made improvements to the tower block as a result, plus the installation of a sprinkler system throughout the block was planned for later in the year.

This was an historic budget, as it would be the last ever budget for Waveney District Council. The budget had been rigorously and robustly debated by the Audit & Governance Committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and now Full Council. He gave thanks for the hard work of the current Cabinet Member for Resources and the former Cabinet Member, as well as the former Leader of the Council, Councillor Law. The Labour Group had not provided an alternative budget for consideration and had asked a number of questions this evening, which could have been answered at an earlier stage of the budget setting process, which was unsatisfactory.

In response to a query from Councillor Barker, it was reported that the recommendations contained within the report would be voted upon ‘en bloc’. It was not possible to vote on each recommendation separately on this occasion. It was therefore

#### **RESOLVED**

1. That the Chief Financial Officer’s report attached at Appendix D be noted;

2. That the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2017/18 to 2021/22 attached as Appendix B, including the General Fund Revenue Budget for revised 2017/18; proposed 2018/19; and forecast budgets for 2019/20 to 2021/22 as set out in Appendix B6 be approved;
3. That the movements to and from earmarked reserves and the General Fund Balance for 2017/18 to 2021/22 as set out in Appendix B7 be approved;
4. That the items to be treated as special items in 2018/19 as set out in Section 7 – the precepts by town/parish councils and parish meetings be approved;
5. That a Band D Council Tax for 2018/19 of £162.27, representing an increase of £4.86 or 3.09% on 2017/18 be approved;
6. That the Efficiency Strategy attached as Appendix B8 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 the current Class C discount of 100% on empty and unfurnished properties is increased from one week to two weeks and then apply full charge be approved;
10. That the Government's offer made on 19 December 2017 to the local authorities in Suffolk that they all participate in the Suffolk Business Rates Pilot for 2018/19 be accepted;
11. That Delegated Authority be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of Waveney District Council and the Chief Finance Officer, to make decisions on amendments to the draft governance arrangements for the Suffolk Business Rates Pilot for 2018/19, as set out in draft in Appendix C2;
12. That the overall Business Rates tax base for 2018/19 (total net rates income) for Waveney of £26.718m be noted; and
13. That the Council Tax Base of 36,193.92 Band D equivalents for 2018/19 be noted.

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

Councillors who voted For the Recommendations (29)

S Allen, S Ardley, P Ashdown, E Back, M Barnard, M Bee, N Brooks, A Cackett, G Catchpole, J Ceresa, L Coulam, G Elliott, T Goldson, K Grant, J Groom, M Ladd, P Light, F Mortimer, T Mortimer, B Provan, C Punt, D Ritchie, C Rivett, K Robinson, M Rudd, L Smith, C Topping, N Webb and S Woods.

Councillors who voted Against the Recommendations (14)

S Barker, P Byatt, M Cherry, Y Cherry, J Craig, T Gandy, L Gooch, I Graham, A Green, J Murray, L Nicholls, K Patience, M Pitchers and T Reynolds.

Councillors who Abstained from voting (0)

**12. AUTHORISATION OF OFFICERS: MAGISTRATES COURT**

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

It was noted that Section 223 of the Local Government Act 1972 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 Rates enforcement cases.

The officers for whom authority was being sought were: Thereza (Terri) Lawson, Jak Miller, Caroline Greig, Gillian Juby, Peter Seeley and Steven Oxborough. Members were advised that Holly Rowley currently had the authority to present the Council in the Magistrates' Court, however she had recently left the Council and therefore her approval to represent Waveney District Council was requested to be withdrawn.

**RESOLVED**

That Caroline Greig, Jak Miller, Gillian Juby, Thereza (Terri) Lawson, Peter Seeley and Steven Oxborough be authorised to appear on behalf of the Council in the Magistrates' Court and that Holly Rowley be removed from the list of approved officers.

**13. PRESENTATION ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT FROM THE HEAD OF CUSTOMER SERVICES**

The Cabinet Member for Customer Services welcomed the Head of Customer Services to the meeting, who would be giving a presentation to Councillors. He reported that Universal Credit had been introduced in Lowestoft in 2016, as part of a national pilot scheme.

Members were reminded that at the last Full Council meeting, Councillor Green had queried how many people in receipt of Universal Credit were paid on time. The Head of Customer Services advised that 94% of claimants were paid on time. Of those, 85% of claimants received their full payment, whilst 15% were reduced as they had not provided sufficient evidence for their claim. He reported that Waveney had been one of the first areas in the UK to have Universal Credit and the Council was part of the support partnership.



Universal Credit claims were 'digital by default', so claimants would need to have a mobile phone, email address and a bank account. Universal Credit covered all benefits, including Housing Benefit. Payments were made directly to the claimant and they would therefore have to pay their landlords their rent, which was a significant culture shift. Social Landlords were able to apply for direct payments if their tenants were 8 weeks in arrears or more.

In order to assist people with their claims, staff from the Marina Centre were trained and available to assist with all stages of a claim, alternatively claimants could seek assistance from the Citizens Advice Bureau. The Marina Centre had assisted over 600 claimants with their online claims and positive feedback had been received in this respect. Staff were also able to assist with personal budgeting support, to help with the transition from weekly to monthly benefit payments and over 500 people had benefitted from this additional support. It was anticipated that demand for this type of support would increase significantly over the next 2 years, as more people were transferred over to Universal Credit. The Council had helped to facilitate the first national co-location of a Citizens Advice service within a Job Centre and it had been so successful that other areas were now looking into adopting this approach.

The Head of Customer Services provided an example of how a member of staff from the Marina Centre had noticed a mistake on a disabled claimants Universal Credit application. Their intervention meant that the claimant received £3,000 in back dated benefits to which they had been entitled and this enabled them to move into a better property which was more suited to their particular needs. This had a huge impact upon their health and wellbeing.

The Council had also been proactively lobbying government with regards to their experience in piloting Universal Credit in Waveney. Many of the Council's comments had been taken on board and changes had been made, eg the inclusion of temporary accommodation has since been removed from Universal Credit due to the timescales involved for payment. Work had also taken place to enable Private Landlords to be able to apply to be paid directly when their tenants rent arrears had reached 8 weeks, rather than having to seek the permission of their tenants, which could be hard to get. This would help to reduce the number of evictions over time. The Head of Customer Services was also pleased to report that there had been a number of policy changes in recent months, including the scrapping of the 55p per minute phone line. The Council has tried to be positive and constructive with the government in this respect and had therefore developed a good relationship in this respect.

Members were advised that Suffolk Coastal District Council would commence the Universal Credit roll out in 2018. In mid 2019, there would be a managed migration whereby all the remaining claimants would be moved over to Universal Credit and preparations were already underway to help support that initiative.

It was noted that the amount of rent arrears for the Housing Revenue Account had increased significantly since the implementation of Universal Credit, however the levels were now slowly reducing as claimants and tenants became used to the new system. It was anticipated that there would be many fluctuations over time and it would be pragmatic to take a longer term view in this respect.

The Head of Customer Services had taken a number of practical steps to assist the whole process. It was noted that a new Tenant Services Manager had been appointed and they would assist new tenants in applying for Universal Credit, at the same time that they signed up for their tenancy. A new computer system had been implemented, which made a better use of technology and recorded tenant information more effectively. The Council had good working relationships with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and actively encouraged job shadowing, to improve staff's awareness of Universal Credit. Staff were working extremely hard and the Council had received national recognition for how it had implemented Universal Credit.

A Member reported that many of their constituents had come to them for help in their applications for Universal Credit, as it was a significantly different approach and process. They queried whether a presentation could be given to community groups, so that they could understand what was happening and where they could get help. It was reported that the slides from the presentation would be available on FRED after the meeting and the Head of Customer Services reported that he would be happy to engage with the public and provide additional presentations, as requested.

A Member commented that they had been a Trustee of the Citizens Advice Bureau for 30 years and they were very aware of the high levels of adult illiteracy and lack of computer experience in the area. It was confirmed that some residents did need a lot of assistance in this respect and that was why staff were available at the Marina Centre, to help claimants with their online claims. Support was also available from the Job Centre. Work was already underway to assist those people with poor levels of literacy or no IT skills and this was an area for further development.

A Member reported that they were confused by Universal Credit, as they had been told of an example where a claimant had been better off claiming benefits rather than working, which was the opposite aim of the new system. The Head of Customer Services reported that he could look at specific cases, if required, and that the Universal Credit system did provide some challenges. However, he would circulate a briefing note after the meeting, for information.

A Member commented that the government expected claimants to have mobile phones in order to claim Universal Credit, however some phone contracts were very expensive. Did the government provide claimants any support to help pay for their phones? It was reported that help would be available for vulnerable claimants, in this respect.

A Member stated that one of their constituents was currently out of work however they were not eligible to claim Universal Credit. Should they still apply so that they could claim their 'stamp'? It was confirmed that they should still apply in this respect. If there were any further concerns, the Head of Customer Services would be able to assist.

The Chairman of the Council thanked the Head of Customer Services for his interesting presentation.

The meeting concluded at 9.20 pm.

Chairman