

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee of Broadland District Council, held on Tuesday 26 April 2022 at 6pm at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: J Thomas (Chairman), P Bulman, S Clancy, G Nurden, S Catchpole, S Holland, K Kelly, M Murrell, S Prutton and D Roper.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor: I Mackie

Substitutes: Councillor: T Adams (for I Mackie)

Cabinet Members Present: Councillors: S Vincent, T Mancini-Boyle, J Copplestone, S Lawn, J Leggett and F Whymark.

Other Members Present: Councillors: S Beadle, K Leggett and Steve Riley

Officers in Attendance: The Director of Resources, the Chief of Staff (Monitoring Officer) and the Democratic Services Officer (LA).

One member of the press was also in attendance.

61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

62 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr I Mackie.

63 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

64 FUTURE OFFICE ACCOMMODATION PROJECT – APPRAISAL AND BUSINESS CASE

The Director of Resources introduced the report which concluded on the Accommodation Review and the outcomes of the Joint Member Working Group (JMWG) on the Future Office Accommodation Project. The report sought member approval to purchase the Horizon Centre on the Broadland Business Park, to serve as the Council's main office for the One Team.

Members were reminded that in November 2021, the consultants had recommended the move to the Horizon building and advised of the benefits, such as a substantial annual reduction in running costs, reduction in the Council's carbon footprint, electrical vehicle charging points, sufficient car parking spaces, reduction in future capital costs and a significant move in cultural change as all staff would be under one roof.

It was noted that since the meeting in November the JMWG had met on several occasions to gather further information and surveys relating to this option alongside exploring the cost of a new building. Many of the details contained within the exempt appendices of the report had been provided at the request of the Group.

The Chairman thanked officers for their report and asked members for their comments on the public part of the report. She further explained that the Committee would have the opportunity to ask questions on the exempt section later in the meeting, once the press and public were excluded. Members noted that information contained in Appendices A to Q was exempt and was not for discussion during the public section of the meeting.

The Chairman opened the discussion by thanking the JMWG for their time and contribution to the process.

In response to a question on whether the “work from home” ratio for staff had been reassessed, officers confirmed that the organisation was still developing and working on the hybrid model. The Chief of Staff explained that a full-time staff member would be expected in the office at least three days a week. The Horizon building would provide enough space for all staff members to be present, with the opportunity to rent out space to other outside organisations.

After a member raised concern over the cost of the move and how realistic the figures could be within the current climate, officers explained that any inflationary increase in costs would apply equally to both the two existing offices as well as the Horizon Building. There would be a saving in the ongoing capital cost of maintenance compared to the capital cost of maintaining the two separate buildings in their current state. Officers explained that over time the two existing buildings would need extensive maintenance to remain operational.

Several concerns were raised over the lack of details provided in the report regarding the reasoning behind the Working Group's final decision, and members queried whether the Group should have produced a final report, detailing its processes and key discussions. Officers explained that all members had access to the minutes of the Working Group, however it was noted that officers had not been present for the final deliberations, and these were therefore not detailed in the minutes. In response to a further query, officers explained that the Working Group was not a public meeting, and the minutes were not made available to the public.

Reference was made by a member on the decision not to proceed with SIEC's previous recommendation, to further investigate the option of occupying Thorpe Lodge. The Director of Resources explained that South Norfolk Council had ruled this option out as the building was not big enough, similarly, Broadland District Council had ruled out South Norfolk House as the location was too far out of the district.

The conversation turned to the legal implications of the report and a question was raised on whether there were any examples of other councils purchasing a building jointly for use as office accommodation. Members noted that officers were not aware of other councils who had purchased buildings jointly but there were many examples of councils sharing office accommodation. Officers explained that legal advice had been sought, which had confirmed it was legal for two councils to jointly purchase a building. Several members raised concerns over this and suggested that further investigations should have taken place to which the Director of Resources replied this was not necessary as legal advice had been obtained.

During further discussion, one member suggested that it would be appropriate for Broadland District Council to own 51 per cent of the building if purchased jointly, as the building was situated within the Broadland district.

The Committee then went into a private session where members had the opportunity to review and comment on the exempt aspects of the report.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting because otherwise, information which is exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, would be disclosed to them.

After the detailed discussion had taken place on the exempt appendices, the Committee voted on the recommendations listed at Section 11 of the

report. Members voted on each of the recommendations separately and the majority of members voted against all the recommendations.

(The meeting concluded at 7.12pm)

Chairman