

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Broadland District Council, held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on Tuesday 3 May 2022 at 10.00 am when there were present:

Committee Members Present: Councillor: S Riley (Chairman), M Murrell (Vice-Chairman), N Brennan, P Bulman (for part of meeting), S Catchpole, J Davis, N Harpley, S Holland, C Karimi-Ghovanlou, K Leggett MBE, G Nurden and S Prutton

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: D King and N Shaw

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors: J Emsell, J Leggett, T Mancini Boyle, S Vincent and F Whymark

Officers in Attendance: The Managing Director, the Director of Resources, the Director of Place, the Chief of Staff, the Assistant Director Economic Growth, the Assistant Director of Community Services, the Senior Governance Officer, and the Democratic Services Officer (JH)

144 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

145 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr King and Cllr Shaw.

146 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

CABINET REPORTS

147 FUTURE OFFICE ACCOMMODATION PROJECT – APPRAISAL AND BUSINESS CASE

The Director of Resources presented the report which outlined the conclusion of the Accommodation Review, the outcomes of the Joint Member Working Group (JMWG) on the Future Office Accommodation Project and asked members to consider the recommendation to purchase the Horizon Centre 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.

The Director of Resources informed members of the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee's (SIEC) previous recommendation, to further investigate the option of occupying Thorpe Lodge. She explained that South Norfolk Council had ruled this option out as the building was not big enough to fulfil its requirements, similarly, Broadland District Council had ruled out South Norfolk House as the location was too far out of the district.

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 Managing Director explained the 'One Team Culture' and how a move to a single office space would enable officers to work more effectively as 'One Team'. He referred to a recent all staff briefing where roughly 250 officers completed a short poll, with 78% indicating that they were in favour of relocating to a shared office space. One member highlighted the benefits that a move to a single office space would have not only on the One Team Culture, but for members and residents. Some members believed that it would aid the Council with its ambition of providing a first-class customer service. Another member felt that the Once Team Culture should not be relevant to the discussion as the purpose of the Committee's meeting was to discuss if the Horizon Building should be purchased.

The Committee was presented with two videos produced by officers, the first outlined the Help Hub Team's views on a single office location, the second highlighted the experiences of an officer who previously worked at the Horizon Building. Some members expressed that the videos should be presented to Cabinet before its meeting as they provided invaluable insight into officers' views on the proposed move and first-hand experience of working in the Horizon Building. Other members felt the videos, especially the second, should only hold limited weight in the decision-making process.

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. In terms of the rising energy costs, officers explained that the provision of solar panels at the Horizon Building would mitigate the impact of the rising energy costs.

The discussion turned to the environmental credentials of the Horizon Building, one member noted that the whilst the Horizon Building was below the decarbonisation pathway, it was not carbon net-zero and additional measures would be needed in the future. The Managing Director reminded members that the Horizon Building already represented an 84% decrease in the Council's carbon footprint compared to the two current sites and that there was a plan to replace the gas heating system with a more carbon neutral alternative, which would further improve the carbon footprint, of the Council, as well as further reduce running costs. A number of members felt that to enable a like for like comparison, a feasibility study of Thorpe Lodge should have been carried out. Officers reminded members that the 20-year maintenance plan for Thorpe Lodge had been included within the report and the projected cost of maintaining both council offices was more than the cost of maintaining the Horizon Building. The Director of Resources reminded members that the 20-year maintenance plan did not include the investment needed to improve the carbon footprint of Thorpe Lodge.

In response to a query on the timescale of occupying the Horizon Building, if agreed by both Councils, the Director of Resources explained that there were a number of critical items of infrastructure, such as the internet line, which would need to be in place before the building was occupied. The Council Chamber would also impinge on the critical path in relation to the timescale. However, officers could occupy the building using existing furniture and still access the servers from the two existing offices.

In terms of the Council Chamber, members were informed that a number of locations for the Chamber had been considered, and that the final designs would be drawn up with officer and member involvement. However, the Horizon Building could be occupied without a Council Chamber. In the short-term the Council's current Chamber could be used, or neighbouring Council Chambers rented as needed.

The Chairman recommended that the meeting be moved into a private session for the remainder of the meeting to allow members to review and comment on the exempt aspects of the report as well as consider the other exempt report.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining items of business 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 in section 11 of the report. With a vote of 5 for, 5 against and the Chairman exercising his casting vote, it was

RESOLVED

That the proposals should not be recommended to Cabinet and Council.

148 ACCOMMODATION REVIEW FINANCE

Members considered the exempt report of the Assistant Director of Finance, which outlined the options for financing the proposed purchase of the Horizon Building.

The Director of Resources presented the report, referring members to the reasons for the proposals.

Members queried how the accommodation review would be financed should the Council agree to purchase the Horizon Building individually. The Director of Resources outlined the financial plan in the event of this scenario.

After the discussion had taken place, the Committee voted on the recommendations listed in section 4 of the exempt report. With a vote of 5 for, 5 against, and the Chair exercising his casting vote, it was

RESOLVED

That the proposals should not be recommended to Cabinet and Council.

(The meeting concluded at 12.33pm)

Chairman