

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee of Broadland District Council, held on Tuesday 17 May 2022 at 6pm at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich.

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor: P Bulman, S Clancy and S Holland.

Substitutes: Councillor: K Leggett (for P Bulman) and S Beadle (for S Holland)

Cabinet Members Present: Councillors: J Emsell and J Leggett

Other Members Present: Councillors: S Riley

Officers in Attendance: The Director of Resources, the Assistant Director for Regulatory Services, Assistant Director for Planning, the Development Manager, the Customer Experience and Insight Lead, the Food, Safety and Licensing Manager, and the Democratic Services Officer (JK).

65 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs P Bulman, S Clancy and S Holland.

67 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Director of Resources introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on the major projects that were being progressed as part of the SPARK Transformation Programme. A short update was given on each live project and members' attention was drawn to the significant progress made on establishing the One Team serving the two councils.

The Chairman thanked officers for their report and asked members for their comments on the report. A member raised the issue of the joint emails and that it still referred to "my new email address" and the Director of Resources agreed to ensure the standard wording was updated to remove this.

In response to a question on whether any projects would be affected because of the move to the new Horizon building, officers confirmed that all projects should be able to be progressed regardless of the move and there should be no impact on cost or resource or timing.

A query was raised as to the new proposed CRM and whether the Digital Mail Solution project was part of that. Officers clarified that the Digital Mail Solution project was concerned with mailing only. At present an electronic process was used for all major mailings, such as council tax bills which saved significant costs and this project was looking at possibly utilising this approach for all our mail. It was clarified that this was separate to the CRM, which was a separate project and would be presented to members shortly.

In response to a question on whether the budget had already been set to cover any costs around moving to the Horizon building and all other projects in the forward plan, it was confirmed the budget for all current projects was previously agreed and at the Full Council meeting, and all the necessary budget had been agreed and set aside for the move to the Horizon building.

Discussion continued around the Horizon building and the project oversight by members and the Committee was reassured that although it was still early days, governance was part of the process and how members could engage with and have oversight of the project would be picked up as part of Phase Three and as part of SPARK. Officers would also continue to report back to this Committee on this project.

A member asked who the Project Manager would be, and the Director of Resources confirmed the Transformation and Innovation Manager, Emma Pepper would be in overall charge and responsible for ensuring all the different strands of the project were pulled together into one overall programme with a range of projects underneath such as IT, facilities and HR.

AGREED

To note the content of the report with regard to the progress made with the programme.

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BROADLAND AND SOUTH NORFOLK CUSTOMER PANEL

The Director of Resources introduced the report which provided an update on the progress made towards the creation of a customer panel, following a commitment made by the Council's Cabinet.

The Customer Experience and Insight Lead advised that engagement and feedback with stakeholders was key and was why the creation of a customer panel had been agreed. It was proposed that the panel would be used in a variety of ways, for example surveys, focus groups, user testing groups, customer journey mapping, snap polls and consultations. The suggestion was that they would meet four times a year to ensure regular feedback but would not over burden the panel members. She went on to reassure members that the costs would be minimal and were already accounted for in the marketing budget.

In response to a query from a member, officers confirmed the panel would be representative of the population and demographics of the district and it would include representatives from businesses and organisations, as well as residents. The panel would be filtered as needed, so for example only panel members who had interacted with the planning area would be surveyed on the planning service, whereas the whole panel would be used, for example if the Council wanted to explore how accessible its offices were.

Officers confirmed the panel members would be volunteers, however there were some hard to reach groups, for example Gypsy and Travellers, and a specific approach might be needed to get representatives from these groups. One member advised that Norfolk County Council had a specific team to liaise with Gypsy and Travellers and suggested contacting them.

Reference was made to the possibility of adding an instant quick survey to all emails sent, with an automatic email being sent asking the customer to rate their experience from their contact with the Council, with maybe five ratings from excellent to poor, which removed the need for people to move to another part of the website to give their feedback. Officers confirmed this was an option that would be considered, but that this was just one of the tools that could be used, for example lessons learned from complaints, the customer satisfaction survey on the website, and the rolling out of the survey via phone contact.

Several concerns were raised by members regarding the next stage, and it was stressed that the data collected needed to be visible and accessible to members and officers. Officers advised that information would be

reported to Cabinet on the quarterly outturns and that the differentiation between South Norfolk and Broadland would be clear, as all respondents would need to declare the village or town they lived in.

In response to a concern around branding and the Director of Resources confirmed that everything would be under the brand of One Team, Two Councils.

A number of members raised the issue of ensuring the significant section of the community with no internet access were fully included. Officers confirmed this was an issue that was being addressed, in a number of ways, for example, officers were planning to use parish magazines and Broadland News, adverts in doctors' surgeries, provide reply paid envelopes, Older People's Partnership, libraries and other such places.

The conversation turned to the issue of how members could be sure this approach was a success and the Customer Experience and Insight Lead advised members she was hoping to come back within a year with the results, however it would take a while to get the panel set up and several surveys done. The Director of Resources confirmed that this would not show quick results, but there were two distinct stages; getting the panel set up and keen to engage, and then secondly ensuring the results were fed back to services to have a positive impact. She also agreed to add the project to the SPARK programme.

On a show of hands, members unanimously

AGREED

1. To note the creation of a Customer Panel as agreed in the Moving Towards a First Class Customer Service Strategy.
2. To note the planned external communication plan.

70 LICENSING SERVICES – SERVICE ENHANCEMENT OPTIONS

The Assistant Director of Regulatory Services introduced the report which outlined the options for the introduction of paid for licensing related advice and support to businesses. Support and advice were currently offered to businesses, mainly via the new Business Regulatory Support Hub which offered free advice by way of a low cost phone number, and covered the range of Regulatory Services as well as advice on economic development for example grants.

The overarching duty of the Council was to promote public safety with the aim of providing advice to achieve compliance by education rather than enforcement. The current free advice was mainly generalist and in future, the Council would be looking to provide more specialised advice, specific to the business. The Assistant Director of Regulatory Services advised

members the team provided excellent service and regularly received good feedback from businesses.

The Assistant Director of Regulatory Services drew members' attention to the proposed deletion of recommendation three in both this report and the following report as the setting of fees would need to be approved at Full Council and could not be delegated to officers.

The proposed change in advice supported the Commercialisation Strategy by supporting the whole range of businesses in the district to grow. This proposal, if agreed by members, would deliver the concept of commercialising licensing services as agreed in the Delivery Plan.

The Food, Safety and Licensing Manager reminded members that the availability of free advice would not be eroded; this was a way to provide value added services that businesses might wish to pay for. All the fees would be reinvested in the service to support the regulatory function. The costs should be lower than other providers as no profit would be made, and the Council had the unique selling point in that it was the regulator.

The Food, Safety and Licensing Manager then went on to outline the types of advice that were proposed to be made available.

In response to a query from a member about whether all advice should be free, officers explained that this was an improved offer alongside the free advice and that only if really bespoke advice was needed on specific issues, would a charge be made. This type of enhanced service could not be provided at present, without an increase in the team resource and consequent cost to all tax payers.

Reference was made by a member on a possible impact on current service delivery and members were advised that the impact of the charged advice should have a positive impact, as it would be cost neutral and also should reduce enforcement, as for example the bespoke advice could result in a higher hygiene rating, and thus less inspections and the public would be more protected.

The conversation turned to the projected level of income and officers explained that the proposed pilot scheme would provide a good indication of this. The pilot results would be brought back to members with a report outlining what had gone well with the pilot and reliable income projections and that would also provide data to determine whether additional resources might be needed to satisfy the demand.

During further discussion, one member asked if South Norfolk Council was currently charging and it was confirmed that apart from a chargeable half hour service provided to taxi drivers, no other services were currently charged for.

Following a concern raised over start-up businesses and possibly refunding the costs for them, officers explained that the costs involved in charging and then refunding would be prohibitive.

The Chairman thanked officers for their report and following a show of hands it was unanimously:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. To authorise the piloting of enhancements to Licensing services in 2022/23 and the mainstreaming of successful service enhancements in 2023/24, at full cost recovery.
2. To agree the reinvestment of income generated from service enhancements to licensing activity into the Council's regulatory licensing service, so as not to impact on regulatory service capacity.

71 FOOD SAFETY SERVICES – SERVICE ENHANCEMENT OPTIONS

The Food, Safety and Licensing Manager introduced the report which was effectively a mirror of the licencing report members had discussed, however, this report related specifically to food safety.

One member raised the issue of a possible conflict of interest between giving advice and also having to undertake enforcement and officers were clear that the enforcement would always override the paid advice, so for example a potentially unsafe food business would always be dealt with under enforcement to ensure public safety.

The Food, Safety and Licensing Manager advised members that a food business that received a low hygiene score, could choose to immediately implement the recommendations, and pay again for an immediate re-visit and could in fact request and pay for multiple re-visits to receive a better score, thus ensuring public safety in the shortest possible time, whilst increasing income.

After a show of hands, it was unanimously agreed:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. To authorise the piloting of enhancements to Food Safety services in 2022/23 and the mainstreaming of successful service enhancements in 2023/24, at full cost recovery.
2. Cabinet to agree the reinvestment of income generated from service enhancements to food safety activity into the Council's regulatory food safety service, so as not to impact on regulatory service capacity.

PLANNING BUSINESS CASE – APPOINTMENTS TO NEW VACANCIES AND UPDATES TO STRUCTURE

The Assistant Director of Planning introduced the report and outlined the results of the recent full review of the Development Management service which was that more resource was needed to create some additional capacity and to be able to properly deal with large scale developments. The Council had a number of large developments at present and indeed the proposed development at Rackheath was the largest in the entire county and more resource was needed to effectively and properly consult with the parishes, the members and public. In addition, the next iteration of the Local Plan would be coming soon, numbers of all types of planning applications were on the increase, as well as Development Consent Orders, Nutrient Neutrality and many other issues.

The proposal was to create eight new posts, which would be the equivalent of an additional 6.4 FTE at a total extra cost of £146,491 but that would be split between the two councils. Some existing posts would be deleted to assist in the funding of the new posts and the remainder would be funded by the increase in income, for example the initial Rackheath fee for outline permission was £150k.

The key changes would be the creation of a Strategic Growth Team to focus on this key area across the district, and the creation of more capacity to address the workloads and deliver against new workstreams. The Assistant Director of Planning then outlined the specific posts and their proposed remit and responsibilities.

Reference was made by a member to the opportunities for internal promotion which was welcomed, and it was also clarified by officers that the Council could also go out to advert with an attractive offer – the chance to work in a multi skilled team, with the opportunities to work on major developments as well. This meant there would also be continuity on big projects as just obtaining outline permission could take a year.

In response to a query about the additional £100,000 recently agreed for the planning service, the Assistant Director of Planning advised that the additional funds were welcomed but would be used as a one off to prepare for Nutrient Neutrality, rather than directly fund the service.

Members endorsed the approach acknowledging that if the Council wanted strategic developments, it was vital that there was the resource available to deliver them properly and it was noted that it was not just planning fees, council tax income would also be forthcoming.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

1. Cabinet to agree the proposed changes to the Planning Team and the intention to fill the current and new vacancies.

2. Cabinet to agree the use of the additional funding of £45k (£100k in total for both Councils), approved as part of the in-year opportunities report in April, to fund development of mitigation measures to address Nutrient Neutrality and/or other immediate environmental pressures arising from the Environment Act.

73 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.

74 EXEMPT MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD 26 April 2022

The Committee received and noted the exempt minutes from their meeting on 26 April 2022.

(The meeting concluded at 8.45pm)

Chairman