



Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee of South Norfolk Council held on Wednesday 15 July at 10.00am

Committee Members Present: Councillors: C Hudson (Chairman), S Blundell, B Duffin, T Holden, W Kemp, T Laidlaw and J Overton

Apologies: Councillor J Easter

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: A Thomas

Officers in Attendance: The Director People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Assistant Director Communities (S Phelan), the Assistant Director of Governance and Business Support (E Hodds) and the Leisure Business Development Manager (M Heazle)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr A Thomas declared an "other" interest by virtue of her husband being a member of the Long Stratton Leisure Centre.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chairman explained that as this was the inaugural meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee, it was appropriate for Members to review its terms of reference, to ensure that they were fit for purpose, and to guide the work of the Committee going forward.

The Assistant Director outlined the background to her report and drew attention to Appendix A, which detailed the proposed terms of reference for the Committee. Members noted that final approval of the terms of reference had been delegated to the Assistant Director, as Monitoring Officer.

The Committee considered the clause, detailed at paragraph 3.3 of the report, which prohibited any more than three members of the Committee, also being members of the Scrutiny Committee. Members noted the reasons for this clause and agreed that it should remain to encourage wider member representation.

Turning to the areas of scope for the Committee, outlined at paragraph 2.4 of the report, the Chairman suggested, and members agreed, that the terms of reference should be expanded to include references to those areas.

Voting was carried out by way of a roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To note the proposed terms of reference and request that they be expanded to include the areas of scope for the Committee, as detailed at paragraph 2.4 of the report.

3 LEISURE SERVICES RECOVERY PLAN UPDATE

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director Communities, which provided an update on the recovery plan for the reopening of the Council's leisure centres.

The Chairman began by explaining that the report on the agenda was slightly different to that which was to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 21 July. This was due to the recent Government announcement (made after the Policy Committee's papers had been despatched), that the leisure provision could re-open on 25 July.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Focus, Cllr A Thomas, introduced the report, acknowledging the huge amount of work that had gone into the recovery plan for leisure, so that customers could attend the facilities safely and with confidence. She explained that the reopening of the swimming pools had not been anticipated and that the Council's pools would not be reopening for another month, due to planned maintenance work. Unfortunately, it had not been possible to undertake the work earlier during lockdown, due to the availability of parts.

The Assistant Director Communities then delivered a presentation, detailing the operational issues, the new offer to members, marketing strategies and income losses and projections.

Members were pleased to note that an independent inspection, carried out by Right Direction, leisure industry health and safety specialists, had given the Council an excellent report, suggesting it was leading the way in its arrangements to ensure a Covid-safe environment for both staff and users. Training was underway to ensure that all staff were well versed with the new arrangements.

Officers explained that the first stage of the recovery was to re-engage with existing customers, the second to attract new members and to look at new and innovative ways in taking leisure out into the community. Members noted that officers had engaged a specialist marketing and communications agency, "Spring", to comprise a high-level delivery plan and assist in delivering a targeted opening campaign. In response to queries, officers confirmed that the campaign would initially run until October, although this would be reviewed, depending on success levels. It was hoped that the campaign would also assist with the relaunch of the swim school, which the Council would want to maximise, once the pools were open.

Regarding income projections, Members noted that the Government had announced a support scheme, which would allow the Council to claim back some of its lost income. After officers had responded to a number of queries regarding income losses and expenditure, Members agreed that the position was ever changing, and that the Council would need to revisit budgets regularly.

In response to further queries, the Leisure Business Development Manager advised Members that the leisure centres currently operated an IT system called Easy Runner, which managed the booking system. The Council had recently started working with a company that provided a tool to enable it to better understand its customer base and would also allow the Council to track and trace customers.

During discussion, Members turned to membership recovery targets and officers stressed that no one could predict how quickly the centres would recover, especially should there be a second wave of Covid-19. The Committee agreed that the Council should be striving to build the membership to a similar level to that in February 2020 by March 2021.

One Member referred to the change in behaviours whereby office workers previously travelling into the office in Norwich, were now working from home, and also the fact that other leisure provisions might not open as early as 25 July. Officers acknowledged that this might provide opportunities to attract new memberships, however, stressed the need for a careful balance in ensuring that there was sufficient capacity at the centres for existing members.

In response to a Member's suggestion regarding a targeted "Covid-Fit" campaign, the Leisure Business Development Manager advised the Committee that officers were currently looking to reframe the GP referral scheme. The Director People and Communities explained that community-based activities and the health and wellbeing of residents, would be a theme of the second phase of the recovery, but stressed that a clear focus on financial pressures was currently needed.

Referring to the recommendations of the report, the Committee agreed that it should also demonstrate its support for the additional recommendation in the revised Cabinet report, which proposed that changes to the pricing structure should be delegated to the Director People and Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer Focus.

Voting was then carried out by way of roll call, and it was unanimously

RESOLVED: TO RECOMMEND THAT CABINET:

1. Notes the progress being made by officers in ensuring that the facilities are able to reopen in the safest possible manner.
2. Notes the facility offer being presented to customers at the first phase of reopening, the £20 loyalty offer and the engagement of a specialist marketing and communications agency to deliver the reopening campaign.
3. Notes the income projections for the service based on the membership targets set.
4. Notes the potential level of financial support the Council may be able to reclaim from the Government for the loss of income.
5. Notes that the membership fees will be reviewed after the initial two months introductory offer and to agree that any prices increases are delegated to the Director People and Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer Focus.

(The meeting concluded at 11.05am)

Chairman