

SPECIAL COUNCIL

Minutes of a remote special meeting of South Norfolk District Council held on Monday 15 June 2020 at 7.00pm

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| Members Present: | Councillors: Minshull (Chairman), Amis, Bendle, Bernard, Bills, Blundell Brown, Burrill, Clifford-Jackson, Curson, Dearnley, Dewsbury, Duffin, Easter, Edney, Elliott, Ellis, Elmer, Francis, Fuller, Glover, Halls, Hardy, Holden, Hudson, Hurn, Kemp, Kiddie, Knight, Laidlaw, Legg, Mason Billig, Neal, Nuri - Nixon, Rowe, Ridley, J Savage, R Savage, Thomas, Thomson, Wilby and M Wilby and Worley. |
| Apologies: | Councillors: Hornby, Overton, and Spruce |
| Officers in Attendance: | The Managing Director (T Holden), the Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Director of Place (P Courtier), the Director of Resources (D Lorimer) the Assistant Director, Governance and Business Support (E Hodds) and the Assistant Director of Finance (R Fincham) |

3537 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr S Blundell declared an other interest in relation to minute 3540, the Review of 2020/21 Budgets, by virtue of being in receipt of a Council Tax Support grant.

3538 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. On behalf of the Council, he conveyed his appreciation to all staff at the Council for their hard work and commitment over the last 3 months, during what had been a difficult time for all.

3539 BIG SKY LIVING ANNUAL REVIEW 2019

Cllr J Fuller, as share holder's representative, was pleased to present the Big Sky Living Annual Review for 2019.

Cllr Fuller explained that approximately one third of the Council's capital was tied up in Big Sky and that it formed an integral part of the Council's business activity. Although the economy had taken a recent downturn due to COVID-19, in a good year, Big Sky would generate a return for the Council of nearly £3 million. Big Sky provided the Council with the opportunity to spread its risk of investments, whilst investing in the District, creating work for local trades people and providing homes for people in need.

3540 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

(a) Review of 2020/21 Budgets

Cllr Fuller presented the recommendations from the Emergency Committee, with regard to the Review of 2020/21 budgets.

Cllr Fuller reminded members that the budget had been reviewed mid-year in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. He was grateful to Cllr C Brown, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group at South Norfolk Council, for his contributions and for working collaboratively, at a time when he believed party politics should be put aside.

Cllr Fuller believed that although the Council was receiving less income and having to spend more, this was not the right time to be cutting back services. He advised that the Government had provided some financial support to compensate for the loss of income on business rates and for a hardship fund, and he confirmed that all this and more was being spent to support local residents. The Council had sufficient reserves, and he believed that now was the time to draw upon them to the sum of £703k, to support the current year budget. Looking ahead to 2021/22, he stressed the need to reimagine the “new normal”, warning that circumstances were ever changing.

Turning to the capital programme, he explained that no changes were proposed to the capital budget, with an even greater need for investment needed now in some areas, however, he acknowledged that some projects might need to slip.

Cllr Fuller congratulated all officers on the huge humanitarian response and the distribution of business grants worth over £30 million, and he also drew attention to the environmental response with every bin being collected since lockdown. He also gave special mention to officers in the Accountancy team, and the additional work gone into reviewing the budget mid-year.

Referring to the recommendations arising from the Emergency Committee, Cllr Fuller explained that there was a need to add a further recommendation as detailed below:

“To delegate to the Director of People and Communities, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, the relevant Cabinet member, and the Leader of the Council, to make interim changes to the offer and tariffs relating to the Council’s leisure service.”

This he believed would allow for a more timely and appropriate response when leisure services were permitted to reopen, and he stressed the need to look after existing members and to consider fair and appropriate pricing, should the full leisure offer not be available.

Summing up, he referred to the budget proposals as sensible, fair and affordable, which he hoped would reassure residents and businesses. He then commended the budget to members.

Cllr A Thomas, in seconding Cllr Fuller’s proposals, stressed that the budget had been reviewed based on best estimates going forward. She acknowledged the huge efforts from staff in preparing the relevant papers, at a time when they would usually

be preparing the draft accounts, and she expressed her support for the proposals, and what she felt to be very prudent use of reserves.

Cllr C Brown expressed his support for the proposals, explaining that there had been plenty of detailed discussion at the Emergency Committee. He thanked officers for the preparation of the new budget, and their patience in providing briefings and responding to queries.

Cllr Brown drew attention to the ambitious recovery plan, presented at a recent meeting of the Emergency Committee, noting that this contained an estimated deficit of £2.3 million, compared with a current estimate of £2.247m in the budget report. This demonstrated how things changed constantly and he stressed the need for constant monitoring of the new budget. He also welcomed being part of any early discussions to ensure a sustainable budget for 2021/22.

Cllr Brown considered the greatest impact on the Council to be on leisure services and he stressed the importance of ensuring that these services were up and running as soon as possible. He indicated his support for the additional recommendation regarding delegations and felt this to be an appropriate and sensible way forward.

With a potential impact of £3.8 million on Council finances, he hoped the Council would regularly raise all its concerns at the highest level of government.

During discussion, Cllr B Bernard referred to the budget planning for this and the following year and asked whether the impact of a no deal exit from the European Union had been considered. In response, Cllr Fuller explained that any impact from leaving the European Union in December had been planned for in the budget set back in February. However, he felt there to be more material considerations, such as the potential loss of the New Homes Bonus, and the reset on business rates.

Cllr V Clifford-Jackson stressed that although times had been very difficult, it was important to remember that some positives had come out of the last three months, with for example more help being available for the homeless, and businesses (including the Council) finding new ways of working, which was having a positive impact on the environment.

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

RESOLVED: To agree:

- (a) The proposed changes to the 20/21 income budgets, as set out in the table at paragraph 2.3.
- (b) The proposed changes to the 20/21 expenditure budgets.
- (c) The following requests for additional funding
 - Hardship Payments (£150 Council Tax Support (£100,000)
 - Discretionary Housing Payments (£50,000)
- (d) The use of £703,000 of General reserves to support the current year budget.

- (e) The proposed in year saving options.
- (f) To delegate to the Director of People and Communities, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, the relevant Cabinet member, and the Leader of the Council, to make interim changes to the offer and tariffs relating to the Council's leisure service.

(b) Monitoring Officer Report

Cllr J Fuller presented the report of the Monitoring Officer, which outlined plans to modify the Cabinet's portfolios and corresponding policy committees, to increase the number of portfolios to seven, and introduce a new Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee.

Cllr Fuller outlined the proposed changes and announced his new portfolios and Cabinet members, as detailed below:

| Portfolio | Cabinet Member |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Leader | Cllr J Fuller |
| Better Lives | Cllr Y Bendle |
| Clean and Safe Environment | Cllr M Edney |
| Customer Focus | Cllr A Thomas |
| Finance and Resources | Cllr J Worley |
| Governance and Efficiency | Cllr K Mason Billig |
| Stronger Economy | Cllr L Neal |

He welcomed Cllrs Edney and Worley to the Cabinet, explaining that Cllr Kiddie had decided to step down from the Cabinet, as he would soon be taking on the chairmanship of Norfolk County Council. He thanked Cllr Kiddie for his valuable services to the Cabinet.

Cllr Fuller went on to explain the proposals for a Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee, and advised that he had appointed Cllr C Hudson as Chairman of the Committee. Members noted that the membership would consist of a 7:2 political split, with the membership of the Committee to be announced by Group Leaders in the coming days.

Turning to the Appendix of the report, Cllr Fuller explained that a correction was required under the Stronger Economy portfolio, where Strategic Housing Policy needed to be moved to the Better Lives portfolio. Referring to CNC Building Control and Commercial Waste, he suggested that these did fit with the designated portfolios (Stronger Economy and Clean and Safe Environment), however, it was to be noted that the Customer Focus portfolio and the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee, had the right to look at the commercial elements of these services, if felt necessary. In response to a query, Cllr Fuller explained that he expected the new Committee to have a full programme of work.

Cllr K Mason Billig, in seconding the proposals, explained that it had become clear, especially since the lockdown in March, that Cabinet members were under a lot of pressure and it was felt appropriate to appoint an additional member. This was also a slight shift to a better alignment with Broadland District Council, where seven members also sat on the Cabinet. The alignment was not perfect, but she hoped it was a step closer in providing a more efficient working environment for officers.

Cllr Y Bendle explained that she would be losing leisure from her portfolio and thanked the leisure team for their hard work and flexibility during the last three months. She looked forward to focussing on housing and communities.

Cllr A Thomas welcomed Cllr Edney and Worley to the Cabinet and advised that she looked forward to working on her new portfolio and the challenges it might bring.

The Chairman of the Development Management Committee (DMC), Cllr V Thomson, reported that the current arrangements for the Committee, with remote meetings and a reduced membership, had worked extremely well, and that he currently had no plans to make changes. Members noted that additional meetings had been scheduled, to ensure agendas were not too heavy and meetings not too long. He thanked officers for all their work in ensuring the smooth running of meetings.

Both Cllrs Brown and Clifford-Jackson expressed their disappointment at the decision to remain with a membership of five on the DMC and hoped it would return to a full membership of nine, when reviewed in three months' time. Cllr Brown suggested that planning was a complex area, and he believed that a membership of nine would provide more transparency, openness and challenge. Cllr Fuller advised that legally, the minimum quorum on a Planning Committee was three.

Cllr Brown agreed that there was a need to respond accordingly to the current situation with focus on economic recovery, providing support for communities, and ensuring financial recovery. He understood the need for an additional portfolio holder, however, was more sceptical with regard to the need for an additional policy committee. He reminded members that the Growth Infrastructure and Environment Committee had recently met for the first time in two years.

At the request of Cllr Brown, a separate vote was taken on recommendation 5, concerning the formation of the new policy committee.

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

RESOLVED: To:

1. Note the modification to the delegation of responsibilities to portfolios and cabinet policy committees as included in Appendix 1 of this report.
2. Note the increase of portfolios to seven and to approve the additional special responsibility allowances.
3. Approve any subsequent amendments to Committee membership as a result of the proposed changes to cabinet membership.

4. Authorise the minor amendments to the Cabinet Portfolio Committees' names and terms of reference to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Group Leaders.
5. Authorise the Monitoring Officer to make the consequential changes to the constitution as a result of this report.

With 33 votes for, 6 against, and 3 abstentions, it was

RESOLVED: To approve the introduction of a new Commercial, Trading & Customer Focus Committee and delegate to the Monitoring Officer, through consultation with the Group Leaders, the creation of the terms of reference.

(The meeting concluded at 8:33 pm)

Chairman