

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Emergency Committee of South Norfolk Council held on Friday 22 May 2020 at 10.00am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: J Fuller (Chairman), C Brown, R Elliott, M Edney, K Kiddie and K Mason Billig

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors: J Amis, Y Bendle, B Bernard, V Clifford-Jackson, A Dearnley, B Duffin, J Easter, L Glover, J Halls, C Hudson, T Laidlaw, N Legg, L Neal, J Savage, R Savage, A Thomas, V Thomson and J Worley

Officers in Attendance: The Managing Director (T Holden), the Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Director of Place (P Courtier), the Assistant Director Finance (R Fincham), the Assistant Director Governance & Business Support (E Hodds), the Acting Assistant Director Economic Growth (T Armstrong) and the Governance Manager (L Mockford)

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared an “other” interest, in relation to minute number 16, Business Grants:

Member	Reason for Declaration
Cllr C Brown	As Trustee of a Charity in receipt of a grant
Cllr M Edney	In receipt of a business grant
Cllr J Fuller	As President of Station 146 Control Tower Seething Airfield (in receipt of a business grant)
Cllr K Kiddie	Wife in receipt of a business grant
Cllr K Mason Billig	In receipt of a business grant

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 7 May were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. ECONOMIC RECOVERY UPDATE

The Interim Assistant Director – Economic Growth, presented his report, which informed members of the current project plan to create clean, safe and vibrant market towns by 1 June, as part of a whole Council response to economic recovery.

Members' attention was drawn to the overview of the project plan, which was appended to the report, and members noted that this had been co-ordinated in conjunction with Broadland and Breckland Councils. Work was progressing at pace, and the immediate priority was to ensure that market towns were safe, clean and vibrant places for people to visit and spend their money. Officers had started to liaise with local communities, and the Assistant Director stressed the importance of the Communications Strategy, which would be key to keeping businesses and residents informed and engaged in the process.

The Chairman commended the project, explaining that the Council would need to adopt a "whole Council" response to economic recovery, similar to the recent response to the humanitarian need. He stressed the importance of linking in with licensing and planning, to promote economic recovery.

In response to queries, the Assistant Director confirmed that letters would be going out to every business on the rates register, to advise them of the Council's actions. A phone hub was also to be set up to provide support to businesses, and would be able to provide advice on economic development, licensing, and planning.

Members also noted that whilst the project's initial focus was in Diss, Harleston and Wymondham, the response would be rolled out to other locations across the District, such as Loddon, from 1 June onwards. All members would be kept regularly informed and local members consulted as the project was rolled out.

During further discussion, members noted that Longwater in Costessey, although not a market town, was the largest shopping centre in the District. Officers had been in contact with the operators of the Centre, and they had confirmed that they were committed to managing the process themselves, but would call on Council support if required.

In response to a question regarding market stalls, the Assistant Director confirmed that they would bring particular challenges in ensuring social distancing and a safe environment, and that this would require careful consideration going forward.

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

RESOLVED: To endorse the project and note the contents of the report.

16. BUSINESS GRANTS

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Assistant Director Economic Growth, which provided an update on the distribution of business grants to date, and the recently announced discretionary business grant fund.

Members were pleased to note that 99% of the larger grants, and 93% of the smaller grants had now been paid, and further work was still taking place to contact remaining eligible businesses. Members agreed that this was fantastic performance and demonstrated the commitment and hard work of officers.

Referring to the discretionary business grant fund, the Interim Assistant Director advised that both South Norfolk and Broadland had been working closely with other authorities in Norfolk to try to establish some commonality in approach, however there would be some divergence in criteria as each authority responded to local needs.

Regarding the distribution of the fund, the Interim Assistant Director explained that he was proposing that the fund be split into two pots (a and b), with pot 'a' being ringfenced to provide support to those businesses referred to in the Government guidance, such as businesses in shared spaces, market traders, small charity properties and bed and breakfasts.

Pot 'b' could then be distributed using more discretion, to directly support the economic recovery of the local economy and support the re-opening of businesses.

Members expressed their support for this proposal and the Chairman suggested that pot 'b' could be used to provide support to public facing businesses to assist with issues such as social distancing and public safety. Members also noted that the level of grants would need to be much smaller, so that more businesses were able to benefit.

Cllr C Brown supported the proposals, and suggesting that demand would be extremely high, stressed the importance of complete clarity and transparency. The purpose of the fund, he felt, should be to protect jobs, and to ensure that businesses could reopen safely.

One member advised the Committee of a local business that had just missed out on a previous business grant, and members acknowledged that there were a number of businesses that had not qualified due to the strict criteria. It was hoped that the discretionary fund would be able to assist such businesses.

Summing up, the Chairman stressed the need for an affordable and equitable discretionary scheme.

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

RESOLVED:

1. To note the contents of the report;
2. To endorse the proposed approach to the discretionary grants scheme, as detailed above

17. REVIEW OF 2020/21 BUDGETS IMPACT ON INCOME BUDGETS AND SAVINGS OPTIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director Finance, regarding the financial impact of Covid - 19 on the 2020/21 Budget. Members noted that this was a preliminary report; the full budget proposals would be presented to the Emergency Committee at its meeting on 5 June.

The Assistant Director outlined the salient points of his report to members, referring to the impact on income budgets, the investment needed in the public realm, and potential future savings options. Members noted that as the Council has been very successful in growing its income base, it unfortunately did have more to lose than other local authorities.

The Assistant Director referred to the estimated losses in leisure, planning, car parking and commercial income. He advised that it was very likely that there would be a need to use reserves to cover short to medium term losses, and he also drew attention to potential savings to be made, in an attempt to offset costs.

The Chairman acknowledged the need to use reserves, and felt that this needed to be balanced, with any future savings. He warned that this could mean potential increases in fees, and the delivery of statutory services only in some areas. He stressed that the Council needed to be imaginative, and he viewed IT as the main driver in this approach.

Cllr C Brown agreed that it was necessary to use reserves in the current climate, but also looked forward to a further analysis of potential savings in all aspects of the Council's delivery. He considered the financial assumptions made in the report to be fair, acknowledging that it was really difficult to predict what might happen. He noted that leisure had taken the biggest impact, and he hoped that by broadening its offer, this would help to offset some losses. He also referred to the need to revisit the Council's capital spending programme, and to look at the more medium//long term impacts.

Cllr A Thomas, the Cabinet Portfolio holder, thanked the Assistant Director and his team for the huge amount of effort officers had put in to re-examining the budgets. She stressed that the assumptions were based on best estimates, and that members needed to be mindful that things could change going forward.

The Chairman agreed that there was financial uncertainty going forward, referring to the Fair Funding Review and New Homes Bonus. He stressed the need for the report to examine in more detail, the medium-term financial pressures and risks, and he also agreed that the leisure service needed to reimagine its approach and develop a more customised offer. He stressed that despite being hit hard with loss of income, the Council would be best placed to bounce back, with the proposed approach.

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

RESOLVED: To:

1. Endorse the proposed approach to calculating the income losses in 202/21;
2. Agree and initial budget figure of £100,000 for investing in the public realm;
3. Confirm that the savings options presented should continue to be worked on;
4. Request further analysis of the medium term financial pressures and risks.

18. NORFOLK POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

The Governance Manager introduced her report, which sought agreement for an amendment to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel arrangements, to allow the Panel to reappoint a co-opted independent member, without open recruitment, and to permit Air Commodore Kevin Pellatt to continue in his role as co-opted independent member, beyond his appointed term of office, should the Panel be unable to meet (and consider his re-appointment), before the end of June 2020.

Members indicated their support for the proposals and voting was then carried out by way of a roll call. It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To agree:

- a) An amendment to the Panel Arrangements which would allow the Panel to re-appoint a co-opted independent member without open recruitment (at paragraph 4.1 of the report)
- b) Air Commodore Kevin Pellatt continuing in his role of co-opted independent member, beyond his appointed term of office, should the Panel be unable to meet (and consider his re-appointment) before the end of June 2020

19. CURRENT PORTFOLIO ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairman advised the he intended to propose changes to portfolio arrangements at the next meeting the Committee. Recognising the need for a more commercial approach, he suggested that an additional portfolio, might be required going forward.

20. WORK PROGRAMME AND CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the Emergency Committee Work Programme and the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

The Chairman explained that the Budget Review Paper and Changes to Portfolios report, to be considered at the 5 June meeting of the Emergency Committee, would both be making recommendations to Council. He hoped that there would be a special Council meeting sometime in June, to consider these recommendations.

The Managing Director then referred to the need to stand down the Emergency Committee, following the meeting on 5 June. The Committee had been required to deal with the complexities of the situation, however now that the technology and legislation was in place to enable the Council to operate differently, he felt it was time to stand down the Committee. He stressed that should there be a second peak in the virus, there may be a need to reconvene the Committee.

Cllr C Brown agreed that it was right democratically, that all members should be able to debate and vote on the changes to the budget.

Cllr K Mason Billig also agreed that the timing was right to revert back to the Cabinet /Council system, especially now that a number of successful virtual meetings had taken place.

The meeting concluded at 11.23am.

Chairman