

CABINET

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council, held on Monday 7 December 2020 at 9.00 am.

Members Present:

Cabinet: Councillors: J Fuller (Chairman), Y Bendle, M Edney, L Neal, K Mason Billig, A Thomas and J Worley

Non-Appointed Councillors: C Brown, B Bernard, V Clifford-Jackson, T Laidlaw, N Legg and R Savage

Officers in Attendance: The Managing Director (T Holden), the Director of Place (P Courtier), the Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Assistant Director Chief of Staff (H Ralph), the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (E Hodds), the Assistant Director Community Services (S Phelan), and the Place Shaping Manager (P Harris).

2845 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 2 November 2020, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2846 BUDGET UPDATE REPORT – SECOND WAVE COVID FUNDING

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director of Finance, which requested additional funding to support the Council's response to Covid-19, for both the current year and 2021/22 budgets.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Worley briefly introduced the report, explaining that the request for additional resources was, in the main, to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He referred to the table detailed at paragraph 5.2 of the report, which illustrated the financial impact of COVID-19, explaining that despite being in receipt of compensation grants, the Council had currently been adversely affected to the sum of £1.035m for the current financial year.

The Director of Resources drew attention to the key areas of the report, explaining that additional funding was required in order to continue to deliver services in line with the amended delivery plan for the current financial year and in to 2021/22. She confirmed that the proposals were in addition to those additional resources already agreed by Cabinet back in November.

The Chairman suggested that as the Council was yet to receive the financial settlement from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), it was premature to be considering the following year's budget. He also expressed some disappointment that the requests in the report had not followed the usual governance procedures, involving preliminary discussions at Board, and detailed briefings to each of the relevant portfolio holders.

During discussion, Cabinet queried whether some of the additional human resource, could, instead, be provided through the redeployment of staff from other areas, and more information was sought with regard to how the Council had performed against additional funds already allocated. With regard to the proposals to increase the Information Technology Capital budget by £40,000, Cabinet agreed that the outcome of the Members' survey to establish Members' needs, was required before a final budget requirement could be agreed.

The Managing Director explained that the additional funding was required to allow officers to deliver effectively against the Delivery Plan and to continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. He stressed that funds would only be used if required.

After some debate, Cabinet agreed that it could agree to recommend to Council, in principle, all the recommendations of the report, subject to further consideration. The recommendations would be considered and examined in more detail at Board on 14 December, before the meeting of full Council, where a final decision would be required.

Cllr Worley commended this approach, stressing the need to continue to deliver quality services, whilst providing value for money and re-allocating existing resources where appropriate.

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

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND in principle, subject to further consideration, the following recommendations to COUNCIL

1. To increase the general 20/21 Covid 19 emergency budgets by £450,000 to provide additional resource to support the Council's response to Covid 19. To be funded by the Government's Covid grant.
2. To increase the housing 20/21 Covid 19 emergency budget by £50,000 to meet the ongoing need for homelessness support. To be funded by the Government's Covid grant.
3. To agree that £350,000 should be included in the 21/22 budgets to help cover the cost of responding to the Covid 19 pandemic, to be funded from the Council's general reserve.

4. To increase the SNC 20/21 Information Technology Capital Budget by £40,000, to provide funding to support the outcome of the review of member IT.
5. To increase the SNC 20/21 Information Technology Capital Budget by £50,000, to improve the technology in the council chamber.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that the Council's financial position remains robust, whilst responding to the needs of the community.

Other Options Considered

Not to agree the requests for additional funding at this stage.

2847 BUSINESS RATES POOLING 2021/22

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director of Finance, regarding Business Rates Pooling for 2021/22.

The Director of Resources presented the report, explaining that the Council had benefitted from being a member of the Business Rates Pool, however, the current risks were higher than they had been in previous years. She referred to the uncertainty around government support and the NHS Trust appeal, the date of which was yet to be set. In response to queries, she confirmed that if any authority were to enter the safety net position, all other members of the pool would need to support that position and she explained that South Norfolk had set aside £5m in reserves to accommodate such a position if required. Members noted that the Government would only intervene should all authorities enter the safety net position. The Director of Resources stressed that a final decision was not required until after the Provisional Local Government Settlement announcement later that month, and advised that should any one authority choose to withdraw, then the whole pool would fall.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Worley, commended the report to Cabinet, stressing that it was too early to make a final decision, and the Local Government settlement announcement would provide more information on which to make an informed decision. He referred to paragraph 3.6 of the report, explaining that since writing the report, the Government had decided not to pursue plans to reset Business Rates in the forthcoming financial settlement.

The Chairman agreed that South Norfolk had previously benefitted from the pooling arrangements, however, stressed the need to look carefully at the risks, before deciding whether to continue with the current arrangements.

The vote was conducted by way of a roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED To agree

1. In principle to continue with Business Rates Pooling for 2021/22.
2. That the Assistant Director Finance, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources, is authorised to withdraw SNC from the Norfolk pool, if the latest modelling undertaken by the Norfolk authorities no longer demonstrates a financial benefit from pooling.

The Reason for the Decision

To maximise income to the Council and the Joint Investment Fund, whilst being mindful of the risks of pooling.

Other Options Considered

None

2848 LONG STRATTON BYPASS: PROPOSAL TO UNDERWRITE THE DEVELOPER'S FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION

Members considered the report of the Director of Place, which sought Cabinet approval to underwrite the developer contribution, in order to strengthen the Outline Business Case, to be submitted to the Department of Transport, for the funding of the Long Stratton bypass.

Cllr A Thomas, one of the local members for Long Stratton, explained that she had been campaigning for a bypass for Long Stratton since 1997, and that she supported the proposals in the report, to strengthen any business case submitted to the Department of Transport. However, she did feel that a form of security for the Council was needed, to ensure payback from the developer.

The Director of Place stressed that the decision was one in principle only, and that should any future agreement seek to utilise South Norfolk's funds, details of the agreement would be brought back for Members' consideration, with more details of securities in place for the Council.

Cabinet agreed that this added some comfort but also requested that the current recommendations be strengthened to ensure that an appropriate security and repayment mechanism was in place.

One member expressed concern that the current arrangements might compromise the planning process for the broader housing development, however, the Chairman stressed that it was the Council's role to ensure that schemes were viable, and that it was making an "in principle" agreement to ensure that the proposal for a bypass was viable, with no favour being placed on any particular developer. The Director of Planning assured Members that such arrangements

were now commonplace, and he was satisfied that as the bypass would form part of the planning application, it would not prejudice any future planning decisions. He added that it was important that the Development Management Committee had the freedom to decide on developer contributions; the risk of this not meeting the proposed £4.5m was recognised and was mitigated through access to other areas of funding.

The Chairman agreed with these points, adding that the project was a significant priority for a number of partner organisations.

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

RESOLVED To agree to reduce the £10m set aside in the Capital Programme for Other Property/Economic Development Investment, to £4.5m and that this is used to underwrite the developer's contribution, subject to satisfactory security and commercial terms being agreed through a legal agreement.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that the business case presented to the Department of Transport is robust.

Other Options Considered

Not to underwrite the developer's contribution.

2849 UPDATE TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

Members considered the report of the Place Shaping Manager, which sought amendments to the Local Development Scheme, to reflect the changes to the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) timetable.

The Place Shaping Manager briefly presented the report and explained that further changes to the Local Development Scheme were likely, with an anticipated delay in the South Norfolk Village Cluster Plan.

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

RESOLVED **TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL** approves the proposed amendments to the current Local Development Scheme.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that the Local Development Scheme timetable reflects the amendments to the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP)

Other Options Considered

None.

2850 PROPOSALS ON THE FUTURE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE BIG SKY COMPANIES

Members considered the report of the Director of Resources, which sought approval to invite the Big Sky Board, to consider a change to the Big Sky Companies governance arrangements.

The Chairman commended the report to members, explaining that the returns from Big Sky were an important and significant part of the Council's Strategy to maintain the level of services it delivered. As projects grew and the level of investment required from the Council to deliver larger sites increased, it became more appropriate to strengthen the governance arrangements.

The Managing Director added that the Council was wanting to build on this success, on what had been an exemplar model, used by other authorities.

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

RESOLVED **TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL** invites Big Sky Board to consider

- a. increasing the number of Directors on the Board of Big Sky Ventures by one to a total of three; and
- b. offers two of the above positions to Members drawn from the Council.

The Reason for the Decision

The proposed revised governance arrangements for the wholly owned Big Sky Companies, would reflect the increased investments requested to deliver larger sites.

Other Options Considered

None.

2851 CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core agenda.

2852 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was

RESOLVED: To exclude the public and press from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the following item of business on the grounds that it involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended)

2853 CONTRACT FOR TYRES AND RELATED SERVICES AT THE DEPOT

Members considered the exempt report of the Senior Waste Operations Manager, regarding the contract for tyres and related services at the depot.

The Assistant Director of Community Services briefly outlined the report and Members concurred with its recommendations.

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

RESOLVED To agree the recommendations, as outlined in paragraph 8 of the report.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure the most cost-effective and value for money option for the Council.

Other Options Considered

None.

(the meeting concluded at 10.12 am)

Chairman