

CABINET

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council, held on Monday 2 November 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, V Clifford-Jackson and T Laidlaw

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 Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Assistant Director Finance (R Fincham), the Assistant Director Planning (H Mellors), the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager (R Dunsire), the Business Improvement Team Manager (S Pontin), the Environmental Protection Manager (T Cooke), the Strategy and Programmes Manager (S Carey), the Policy and Partnerships Officer (V Parsons), the Senior Governance Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer (E Goddard) and the Senior Finance Business Partner (M Bussens)

2834 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 28 September 2020, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2835 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER – DOG FOULING

Members considered the report of the Environmental Protection Manager, which sought recommendations to Council for the making of a new dog fouling and dog restrictions Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr M Edney, commended the report to Cabinet, explaining that this was a requirement following the expiry of the existing PSPO. The Order was in place to ensure that there was a mechanism in place to act as a deterrent to irresponsible dog owners. A new PSPO at this stage would also provide alignment with Broadland District Council.

Members noted that the proposals included an increase in the Fixed Penalty Notice for breaching the Order, from £80.00 to £100.00, which would bring the charge in line with other Norfolk councils.

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

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL:

- (a) Makes a Public Space Protection Order to require people in control of dogs to clean up after them if they foul in a public open space and restrict dogs from enclosed children play areas.
- (b) Sets the Fixed Penalty charge for breaching the Public Space Protection Order to £100 (reduced to £80 if paid within 14 calendar days from issue of the Fixed Penalty Notice).

The Reason for the Decision

To provide a deterrent to irresponsible dog owners and to protect open spaces and the health of residents.

Other Options Considered

None.

2836 BUDGET UPDATE REPORT

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director of Finance, which provided members with an update report on the budgetary position for the Council.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Worley, introduced the report, and drew attention to its key recommendations.

The Chairman referred to the report's second recommendation, to fund an additional resource to help implement the actions set out in the recently agreed Environmental Strategy, and suggested that with the second national lockdown to commence shortly, it was not an appropriate time to be taking on additional staff. The Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Cllr M Edney agreed with Cllr Fuller, suggesting that consideration of the proposed resource could be postponed, acknowledging that all current focus was on providing support to the vulnerable. This was unanimously supported by Cabinet.

Turning to the fifth recommendation which proposed a reduction in the budgetary provision for Covid -19 direct hardship payments, the Chairman proposed that in light of the second wave of Covid-19 and the pending lockdown, this proposal was premature, and should not be actioned, and this view was unanimously supported by Cabinet.

Regarding paragraph 4 (d) of the report concerning Discretionary Local Lockdown Grants, the Assistant Director Finance explained that this was a fast-moving issue, and that the Council was awaiting more guidance from the Government, before payments could be made to local businesses. The Chairman queried whether the grant values outlined at paragraph 4.21 were under review, and also suggested that it was likely that the Government would be awarding a “£20 pre head grant” to all areas to support local businesses during lockdown, and that a mechanism would need to be in place to support its distribution. He felt that an urgent review to prioritise those businesses most in need was required. The Assistant Director Economic Growth explained that further clarity was required from the Government before these areas could be progressed further. With this in mind, and the fact that figures and criteria were fast moving, Cabinet agreed that the approval of the criteria for the distribution of all lockdown grants, should be delegated to the relevant officer, in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder.

Members noted that the Council had been allocated £57,176 to spend on Covid-19 related compliance and enforcement and the Chairman believed that further funding amounting to £8 per head would be awarded for work on compliance and to assist in rolling out a community test and trace system.

The vote was taken by roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED 1. TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL

- (a) Increases the SNC 20/21 IT Capital Budget by £141,000, to fund the rollout of additional laptops to better facilitate the New Ways of Working;
 - (b) Agrees that the unspent ‘joint waste budget’ be applied to cover the costs of developing a full business case for a LATC and depot projects.
 - (c) Increases the budgetary provision for Covid-19 expenditure from £250,000 to £305,000 to cover the additional £55,000 regulatory expenditure.
 - (d) Agrees the proposed changes to the 20/21 income budgets as set out in paragraph 4.17 of the report;
 - (e) To agree that the Assistant Director Regulatory, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Economy and the Leader of the Council, is authorised to spend the new Coronavirus Enforcement grant of £57,176, to help the public and businesses understand the latest Covid 19 regulation, and increase compliance work and enforcement checks on businesses
 - (f) Remove the post of Assistant Director Consultancy Team from the establishment.
2. To agree that proposals to increase the SNC annual Revenue Budget by £44,000 to fund an additional resource to help implement the actions set out in the recently agreed Environmental Strategy, be postponed for future consideration;

3. To note the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy;
4. That the approval of criteria for the distribution of lockdown grants be delegated to the Assistant Director Economic Growth, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Economy and the Leader of the Council.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that budget levels were appropriate and managed effectively

Other Options Considered

- To increase the revenue budget to fund an additional resource to assist implement the actions recently agreed in the Environmental Strategy
- To reduce the budgetary provision for Covid-19 direct hardship payments

2837 REVIEW OF EARMARKED RESERVES

Members considered the report of the Senior Finance Business Partner, which presented a review of the Council's earmarked reserves.

The Assistant Director Finance outlined the proposals in the report.

The Chairman queried whether it was an appropriate time to be reducing the Localisation of Business Rates reserve by £3,169.00, referring to the Spending Review on 25 November and the pending non-domestic rates reset and the NHS Business Rates Appeal. Members unanimously agreed that the reserve should remain at its current level.

The Chairman also suggested, and it was agreed, that the new reserve "Depot Works", should be renamed "Depot Works and LATC".

In response to a query regarding the "New Ways of Working Reserve", the Assistant Director Finance explained that this reserve could be used to offset some of the £2 million capital budget needed on IT, and any additional resource required when looking at bringing systems together in the medium term.

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

RESOLVED To agree the following changes to the Council's Reserves:

1. The closure of the following reserves:
 - a. Localisation of Council Tax Benefit
 - b. Low Cost Housing (New Homes Bonus)
 - c. Communities and Localism
2. The merger of the following two reserves:
 - a. Non-Commercial Assets Replacement Reserve

- b. Vehicle and Equipment Procurement and Replacement Reserve
3. The creation of the following Reserves:
 - a. Depot works / LATC - £5m.
 - b. New Ways of Working - £4m.
 - c. Leisure Centre - £2m.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that appropriate reserves are in place.

Other Options Considered

- To reduce the Localisation of Business Rates Reserve by £3,169,000

2838 TREASURY MANAGEMENT QUARTER 2 REPORT 2020/21

Members considered the report of the Corporate Accountant, which reviewed the treasury management activity during the first six months of the financial year 2020/21 and reported on the prudential indicators.

The Portfolio holder, Cllr J Worley, outlined the key issues arising from the report.

The Chairman referred to the Council's total worth of approximately £75-80m, which included cash, other investments and commercial property and trading assets. He felt the current allocation of investments was an appropriate balance.

During discussion, one member requested that in future, the Council aimed to make ethical investments only, with no investments in fossil fuels. The Chairman noted these comments but stressed that the Council was driven by its current Treasury Management Strategy, with credit ratings and safety of funds taking priority.

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

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL

- a) Notes the treasury activity for the first half of the year and that it complies with the agreed strategy;
- b) Notes the 2020/21 prudential indicators for the first six months of the year.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that the Council's Investment Strategy remains prudent and complies with statutory requirements.

Other Options Considered

None.

2839 STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE, RISK AND FINANCE REPORT FOR QUARTERS 1 AND 2 2020/21

Members considered the report of the Senior Finance Business Partner and the Strategy and Programmes Manager, which provided a summarised overview of the performance of the Council against the key outcomes set out in the Council's Delivery Plan for 2020/21, for the period April to September.

Turning first to risks, the Strategy and Programmes Manager reminded Members that the Council's Risk Management Policy had recently been agreed by Cabinet and Council and she explained that Management Team was developing new processes to manage strategic and operational risks. Referring to Appendix 2 of the report, she explained that the comments and progress to date on actions column, would be updated for Quarter 3.

Referring to the Council's core performance, the Strategy and Programmes Manager outlined the performance highlights and areas for improvement. Members noted the good performance in Planning, increased rates of recycling, the increase in external funding received, and the work carried out to support vulnerable residents.

With regard to the reduction in footfall at the Council's leisure centres, the Strategy and Programmes Manager reminded Members that they had been closed from mid-March and since partially reopening in mid-July, had seen an 82% reduction in footfall. The Portfolio Holder, Cllr A Thomas explained that officers had been working very hard to positively engage with those members who had not returned to the centres since lockdown, and also to provide an offer that was Covid-19 compliant. Unfortunately, many members had not returned to the centres due to personal reasons, such as the need to shield, or to protect family members that were shielding. She explained that officers would continue to engage with members to encourage their return, however, the pending lockdown would delay this process.

Members noted that this was the first time the report had been before Members in its new format. Cabinet agreed that it would be useful in future for it to include colour coding alongside the commentaries in the Performance Highlights and Areas for Improvement section of the report. It was also agreed that it would be helpful for officers to colour code the performance detailed in Appendix 3, and include details of targets, the previous year's performance, and line graphs to indicate performance levels.

The Chairman stressed the need to be mindful of the impact of the pandemic, when considering performance generally, and also reminded Cabinet that a quarter of the workforce had been redeployed throughout Quarter 1. With this in mind, he felt the performance to be extraordinary, and he acknowledged the long hours many staff had been working since March. He stressed the need for this to continue as the country entered in to its second lockdown, however voiced concerns that this level of work might not be sustainable.

In response, the Managing Director assured Members that Management Team was looking to assist staff as much as possible to ensure that they were able to take breaks when needed. Officers were examining the Business Plan and available resources and would shortly be presenting future options to Members.

It was

RESOLVED To:

1. Note the revenue and capital position (variance details in Appendix 1).
2. Note the current position with respect to risks and agree the actions to support risk mitigation (detailed in Appendix 2);
3. Note the 2020/21 performance for Q1 and Q2 (detail in Appendix 3).

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that processes are in place to improve performance, the management of risks is sound, and that budgets are managed effectively.

Other Options Considered

None.

2840 APPROVAL OF REVISED UK MUNICIPAL BOND AGENCY'S FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Members considered the report of the Director of Resources, which sought approval for the Council to enter into a revised framework agreement with the UK Municipal Bonds Agency.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Worley commended the report to Members, briefly outlining the salient points. Members noted that the Council was required to sign up to the revised framework prior to borrowing and that loans provided by the Agency were pooled and guaranteed by the borrowers.

The Director Resources added that the changes made were favourable to the Council and signing up to the agreement in advance would allow the Council to borrow from the Agency at short notice. She assured Members that no Authority had ever defaulted on a loan.

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

RESOLVED To agree that the Council enters into the revised Framework Agreement with the UK Municipal Bonds Agency.

The Reason for the Decision

To reduce any future risk and allow the Council to borrow at short notice.

Other Options Considered

None.

2841 THE VISION FOR A BEST IN CLASS HOUSING OFFER AND DRAFT ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

Members considered the report of the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager and the Policy and Partnerships Officer, which presented the findings of the work towards a Best in Class Housing Model, and also recommended adoption of a revised Allocations Scheme.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, commended the report to Members, and she thanked officers for their hard work, also referring to the valued input from the consultants, Campbell Tickell, and colleagues at Broadland District Council.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer then provided a brief overview of her report, explaining that the vision sought to deliver a truly innovative and preventative service for residents, enabling the Council to provide the support needed to the more vulnerable residents.

Members referred to funding recently awarded to both South Norfolk and Broadland, and Cllr Y Bendle explained that this would be used to address long term homelessness where specialist support was often required. The need for this had become particularly apparent following the “Everybody In” scheme, during the first lockdown.

The Chairman welcomed the proposals and the excellent report from officers. However, he did voice concerns with regard to the spend on Disabled Facilities Grants, and how frequently adaptations were removed from properties, when properties were re-let. He felt that this was a prime opportunity to address those issues and ensure that adaptations were not removed unnecessarily.

Officers confirmed that the Allocations Policy did provide priority to those individuals requiring properties with adaptations, however, finding the right tenant at the right time was sometimes difficult, and there was a pressure to reduce voids. The Director People and Communities confirmed that officers had already started to examine how to manage this more effectively, and it was agreed that a report would be presented to a future meeting, examining how to prevent the unnecessary removal of adaptations.

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

RESOLVED 1. TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL

- (a) endorses the officers work towards the Best in Class Housing model;
 - (b) agrees the adoption of the Allocations Scheme.
2. That a report is presented at a future meeting of the Cabinet, examining Disabled Facilities Grants and how to ensure more effective use of housing adaptations to properties, to prevent their unnecessary removal.

The Reason for the Decision

To deliver a truly innovative and preventative service for residents, enabling the Council to provide the support required to those that need it.

Other Options Considered

None.

(Cllr M Edney then left the meeting)

2842 HOUSING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT POLICY

Members considered the report of the ICT Lead, which recommended the adoption of the Council's new Housing Standards Enforcement Policy.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, commended the report to Members, explaining that the current policy required updating to reflect new legislation and practice. The Assistant Director Individuals and Families added that an additional discretionary policy would follow in due course.

During discussion, reference was made to the process for recovery where a penalty was not paid, and the Chairman queried whether in addition to a county court order, this could also lead to an attachment to a land register title. The Assistant Director Individuals and Families explained that the Council would take all measures within the legislation to recover funds, including land registry charges, and agreed to amend the policy accordingly.

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

RESOLVED To approve the Council's new Housing Standards Enforcement Policy, subject to minor amendment.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that the Policy reflects new legislation and adheres to central government guidance.

Other Options Considered

None.

2843 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PLAN AND STRATEGY

Members considered the report of the Business Improvement Team Manager, which proposed a Planning Enforcement Plan and Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr L Neal, introduced the report, explaining that the documents had been produced following a recent internal audit review of the Planning Enforcement service. As a result of the review, the service would become more proactive, with more monitoring of commencement of developments and compliance of conditions. Members noted that there were plans to send out a monthly monitoring report to all Members from early next year.

The Business Improvement Team Manager explained that the documents had already been considered at a meeting of the Regulation and Planning Policy Committee and its suggested changes around priorities had been incorporated into the Enforcement Plan. He also advised of some suggested amendments to the Strategy from Members at Broadland District Council, relating to the addition of headings, and a process flowchart. It had also been suggested that Parish Councils be offered training, in addition to District Members. Cabinet welcomed these amendments.

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

- RESOLVED**
1. To agree the Enforcement Plan, outlined at Appendix 1 of the report
 2. To agree the Enforcement Strategy, outlined at Appendix 2 of the report, subject to minor amendment.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure a high quality, customer focussed service.

Other Options Considered

None.

2844 CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

In response to a query regarding the need for a meeting of the Emergency Committee, following the announcement of a second national lockdown, the Managing Director explained that with better infrastructure in place, the Council was in a better position to deal with matters, and therefore there was no requirement for a meeting at this stage. However, Members noted that this might change, depending on how events evolved and the pace of delivery.

(the meeting concluded at 10.48 am)

Chairman