

## SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee of Broadland District Council, held on Friday 12 November 2021 at 1.00pm at South Norfolk House, Cygnet Court, Long Stratton, Norfolk, NR15 2XE.

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: J Thomas (Chairman), G Nurden (Vice-Chairman), T Adams, S Beadle, P Bulman, S Catchpole, S Clancy, S Holland, K Kelly and S Prutton.

**Cabinet Member Present:** Councillor: J Emsell.

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillors: S Gurney, K Leggett, S Riley

**Officers in Attendance:** The Managing Director, the Director of Place, the Internal Consultancy Lead – Future Office Accommodation Project and the Democratic Services Officer (JO)

### 44 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mackie and Cllr Roper.

### 45 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2021 were agreed as a correct record, save for the following amendments:

*Minute No: 40 – Work Programme*

The Chairman wished it recorded that not all members had been invited to tour the Horizon building.

*Minute no: 42 – Committee Management System*

The first sentence of paragraph six was amended to:

The Committee was informed that the Chairman had attended ~~been invited~~ to a demonstration of the committee management systems, which had been quite technical and more related to usage by staff than members.

**46 FUTURE OFFICE ACCOMMODATION PROJECT – APPRAISAL AND BUSINESS CASE**

On the suggestion of the Chairman the Committee agreed that as they had already received a comprehensive briefing on the project earlier today from the consultants there was no need for officers to present the report.

The Chairman, therefore, asked members of the Joint Member Working Group to present their findings and recommendations.

The Vice Chairman of the Working Group referred members to Appendix B of the report, which set out the Working Group's recommendations and the rationale behind them.

He emphasised that Appendix B did not comprise a full report, as the Working Group had not been able to access the level of information required to conduct a due diligence appraisal of the project. Similarly, the timetable for the project was very tight for the Working Group. However, the members had carried out a lot of work outside of meetings.

The Vice Chairman of the Working Group advised the meeting that he had submitted a paper to the 2 November 2021 meeting, which had identified that greater savings would be made by moving the One Team to Thorpe Lodge instead of the Horizon building.

The papers also raised questions over the energy needs and gas usage at both buildings and the possibility of increasing car parking at Thorpe Lodge.

Members were also advised that the Horizon building had an air recirculation system, rather than air heated and drawn in by internal heat exchangers to capture energy, which was recognised as the best, most efficient system and was healthier for staff than recirculating air systems.

The paper concluded that further due diligence must be undertaken to assess the office accommodation project and that Thorpe Lodge could not be ruled out at this stage.

The Chairman noted that members of the Working Group felt that they needed to carry out more work and it was confirmed that it should be

possible to complete this work within three months, as long as the Working Group was provided with sufficient officer support, could meet on a regular basis and receive the information from the various surveys that had been requested.

A member proposed and it was seconded that no decision should be made today regarding the recommendation from the consultants and that the Working Group should carry out a thorough investigation of all the options, as had already been suggested.

The Committee generally agreed with this proposal and a member noted that the project should have started by identifying the accommodation requirements of both Councils and proceeding from there, rather than looking for an existing building first.

Another member of the Working Group emphasised that they had also raised a number of concerns relating to the finance of the project, such as the costs of surveys, solicitors fees and stamp duty, which should have been made available to members at an earlier stage.

It was also suggested that the consultant's brief should have been wider, in order to address some of the concerns raised and especially in respect of financial matters

The Managing Director advised the meeting that the broad financial information was contained within the report to help members with their decision and that it was self-evident that surveys and studies would need to be carried out before a commitment could be made to purchasing a building. He emphasised, however, the legal duty of officers to advise members on achieving value for money with the public purse and he asked them to note the level of savings that would be achieved by agreeing the consultant's recommendation.

The Chairman noted that from what she had heard from members today there was a preference to look at wider options before they focused on just the Horizon building option at this stage.

In summary, the Chairman noted that the Working Group wanted a further three months of resourced meetings held on a regular basis to carry out due diligence for the project and to investigate further the Thorpe Lodge option. The Working Group would then report back through the formal committee cycle to both Councils.

## **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

1. That there was no decision in principle at this stage regarding the purchase of the Horizon Building on Broadland Business Park, due to further information being required; and

2. That the option to occupy Thorpe Lodge be investigated further, looking at the potential renovation of the building to make it carbon neutral, and to address the car parking issues; and
3. That the Future Office Project Joint Member Working Group should consider all the options for office accommodation and be provided with adequate officer support to complete their investigation within three months, or upon receipt of the relevant information from the surveys requested and then to report their recommendations to the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee and Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Policy Committee and then on to their respective Cabinets.

The Chairman noted and thanked officers for the hard work that they had put into the Office Accommodation project so far.

(The meeting concluded at 2.17pm)

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Chairman