

Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee of South Norfolk Council held on Friday 1 April 2022 at 10.00am.

Committee Members Present:	Councillors: C Hudson (Chairman), B Duffin, W Kemp and T Laidlaw.
Apologies:	Councillors: J Overton (with Cllr James Easter appointed substitute), T Holden (with Cllr Florence Ellis appointed substitute), D Burrill and T Spruce.
Cabinet Member in Attendance:	Councillor: R Elliott
Officers in Attendance:	The Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby) the Assistant Director for IT/Digital and Transformation (C Lawrie) and the Assistant Director of Community Services (S Phelan)

41 URGENT ITEM – ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

The Chairman raised an urgent item regarding the accommodation review. He felt that it was important to highlight a recommendation made by the Committee at a meeting held on 12 November 2021 which had yet to be fulfilled by officers. The Committee in that meeting had resolved for the Council to *undertake a public consultation process, which would utilise the Council's website. The consultation should be promoted by District Councillors as well as Parish and Town Councils.* The Chairman noted that no consultation had taken place to date and he felt that this devalued the Committee's involvement in the process. He added that he would not be willing to Chair a meeting of the Committee regarding the accommodation review unless the requested consultation had taken place.

Members of the Committee agreed with the Chairman and suggested that the consultation should be district-wide to capture a wide range of residents' views alongside the views of the officers.

One member who was part of the Joint Member Working Group for the accommodation review explained that, when discussed at the working group, a residents' consultation was seen to be premature before a recommendation was finalised.

During further discussion, it was suggested that further information was needed on the proposed Hub and Spoke model which had been an integral part of the possible move to another office. The Chairman agreed that this approach would be highly effective in engaging with residents in the district. It would also provide vital access to the services provided by the Council.

The Director for People and Communities advised the Committee that he would take the concerns raised away with him and would speak to the lead officer involved with the project.

42 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

43 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee held on Wednesday 26 January 2022 were approved as a correct record.

44 INVESTING IN OUR STAFF, SYSTEMS AND APPRENTICESHIPS – IN-YEAR OPPORTUNITIES

The Assistant Director for IT/Digital and Transformation introduced the report which provided members with proposed projects and initiatives regarding the use of the in-year additional income, savings, and efficiencies. The approach would enable the Council to accelerate its progress towards the initiatives set out in the delivery plan. Members noted a correction to the figures listed within the table in section 1.7 of the report. The revised figures saw the estimated total for the single laptop build project change to £60,000 resulting in the South Norfolk Council total cost rising to £462,000.

Members noted that, following a review at February's Cabinet meeting of in-year savings, a report was requested to come to relevant policy committees to outline how officers would use the funding to support workstreams in the next financial year. The report in front of members detailed projects in relation to the theme Investment in our Staff, Systems & Apprenticeships.

Members' attention was drawn to details in the report where it was noted that some projects and initiatives would be subject to further business cases before the draw down from reserves was agreed.

The breakdown of the costs in relation to projects was detailed in section 1.7 of the report. The proposed projects and initiatives were:

- Domain Migration Project
- Customer Relationship Management
- Single Image Laptop Build
- Apprenticeships

- Depot Facilities
- Vehicle Lifting Equipment

In response to a concern raised over the increase in the total costs of the projects and money allocated, officers explained that Cabinet would make the final decisions on the allocation of money, but the Policy Committee could provide Cabinet with a steer on the different projects. The Chairman added that projects such as Customer Relationship Management and Apprenticeships could potentially be scaled back to allow scope for additional projects.

A member of the Committee queried why there was an additional allocation of money for the ongoing Domain Migration project and asked why it had not been budgeted previously. The Assistant Director for IT/Digital and Transformation explained that an increase in the volume of materials needed had come out of an audit review of the project.

Conversation turned to the original domains and what would happen to them. Several members raised concerns over the protentional switch-off dates for the original domains. One member queried the reasoning for the old domains being switched off so quickly. Members noted that the Government Digital Services Company required the decommission of the domains to improve the customer journey to the new domain. The process would also allow the IT team the opportunity to work on one domain instead of upkeeping three.

The Chairman expressed the need for the Council to keep its old domain name, highlighting that two sovereign Councils existed. He also noted that many of the residents of South Norfolk would still use the original method to gain access to the new website. Officers explained that data showed that most of the online traffic to the website was through search engine methods and that switching off the old domain was a requirement of the Government Digital Services.

In response to a question if there was any data on how many users were still using the old domain name to access information, the Assistant Director for IT/Digital and Transformation confirmed that she would circulate the information to members after the meeting. She reminded members that the termination of the old domains was part of the original project plan and was integral to the progression to the new joint domain.

After a member's suggestion to request a delay in the switch-off date of December 2022, officers explained that this could be done, but a plan would still need to be in place for when it happened. Further points were highlighted around the accessibility for older residents and the customer journey. The Chairman suggested that a report could come before the Committee in the future with further details on the Domain Migration project.

Concerning the allocation of funds to the different projects listed, the Chairman pointed out that it would be desirable for the Committee to steer Cabinet on the priority projects in case the increased funding required was not possible. The Assistant Director for People and Communities confirmed that members could agree to recommend the full list of projects to Cabinet for approval noting the rise in budget for the Single Image Laptop Build. If the increase in money was not feasible, officers and Cabinet members could look to the minutes of this meeting for a steer on the priority projects. Following a detailed discussion, the following priority grouping was decided if the full allocation of money was not available:

- Priority group one
Single Image Laptop Build – Depot Facilities – Vehicle Lifting Equipment
- Priority group two
Customer Relationship Management – Apprenticeships
- Priority group three
Domain Migration Project

Members highlighted the importance of the Depot Facilities improvements and the Vehicle Lifting Equipment impact on the running of the depot's operations.

A brief discussion followed, during which members agreed on the value of apprenticeships within the organisation. A question was raised on how the apprenticeships project would work if scaled back to fit within the allocated funding. The Director for People and Communities explained that work would take place to understand which positions were a priority within the organisation's structure, with a focus on hard to recruit areas. Members noted that this was a one-off extra funding opportunity for the Council and would not be included in wider budget settings.

RESOLVED:

To recommend to Cabinet

To progress all projects and initiatives outlined within the report noting the increase in South Norfolk's contribution to £462,000.

(The meeting concluded at 11.00am)

Chairman