



## **Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee**

**Minutes of a remote meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee of South Norfolk Council held on Wednesday 18 November 2020 at 3.00pm**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: C Hudson (Chairman), B Duffin, J Easter, T Holden, W Kemp, T Laidlaw and J Overton

**Apologies:** Councillor S Blundell

**Substitutes:** Councillor J Halls (for S Blundell)

**Cabinet Member in Attendance:** Councillor: A Thomas

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillor V Clifford -Jackson

**Officers in Attendance:** The Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Director People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Assistant Director Communities (S Phelan), the Assistant Director of Governance and Business Support (E Hodds), the ICT and Digital Manager (C Balmer), the Leisure Business Development Manager (M Heazle) and the Leisure Operations Manager (D Infanti)

**Also in Attendance:** Mr P Woodford -Director of Alliance Leisure at TA6

### **4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr A Thomas declared an “other” interest by virtue of her husband being a member of the Long Stratton Leisure Centre.

### **5 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee, held on Wednesday 15 July 2020 were approved as a correct record.

### **6 LEISURE SERVICES RECOVERY PLAN UPDATE**

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director Communities, which provided an update on the recovery plan for the Council’s leisure centres.

Officers presented the report, providing an overview of operational matters, participation and usage, marketing and communications and financial implications.

Officers introduced Paul Woodford from Alliance Leisure TA6, a leisure specialist marketing consultant, to the meeting. Mr Woodford explained that his organisation had been working with a number of different leisure centres across the country, and he was currently assisting the South Norfolk Leisure team with advice on marketing. He had been most impressed with the progress that South Norfolk had made, explaining that the percentage of those members choosing to “unfreeze” their membership was higher than other centres he had worked with, and he praised the marketing methods and levels of positive engagement with members. He also referred to the excellent high standards to ensure Covid-Safe environments, which he felt had helped to entice people back to the centres.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Focus, Cllr A Thomas commended officers on their hard work in creating a Covid Safe environment for users and welcomed comments from the Panel. She sought views with regard to any future pricing structure when the leisure centres were able to reopen.

The Chairman referred to the recent Sheffield Hallam report which stated that in the 62 million visits to Leisure Centres across Europe since the start of the pandemic, there had only been 76 confirmed Covid cases, and he queried whether there was anything that could be done to encourage the Government to allow Leisure Centres to remain open in the event of another lockdown. Mr Woodford explained that it was disappointing that Leisure Centres weren't considered to be essential services during the lockdown, given the health benefits of exercise, and he advised Members to share details of the Council's excellent record and to support UK Active who were lobbying the Government on the matter.

Members noted that many users had been keen to return to the Leisure Centres, and that the uptake of memberships had been increasing whilst they had been open. However, officers also explained that feedback received had suggested that some users would not wish to return as they, or a person they lived with, was shielding.

The Director People and Communities advised Members of the social media campaigns that had been circulated to entice existing and new customers, adding that further communications could be considered regarding Covid safety measures, however, it was accepted that some members would not be returning for some time, whatever measures were in place.

In response to queries regarding the Leisure Centres' YouTube channel, the Leisure Business Development Manager explained that this process was designed to keep the public engaged. He also explained that the Council was working with Move GB to stream on-line classes and advised that this would be integrated with the Membership system and would offer online classes to those with a Leisure Centre membership. Members were very encouraged by this approach and agreed that on-line classes should be an addition, even when all users were able to return to classes in person.

Members queried how the Council had engaged with those members who did not use social media. Officers explained that in addition to social media campaigns, members had been telephoned, written to directly and there had been adverts in the local press.

Turning to the pricing structure, some members indicated their support for a move from the current reduced charge in January, however, stressed the need to be mindful of the impact of Covid on some household incomes. Mr Woodford explained that many centres would be competing for business in January, but stressed that reputation and trust was as important to some users, as pricing.

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

**RESOLVED: TO:**

1. Note the efforts made by officers in ensuring that the facilities were able to reopen in the safest possible manner and the progress made since those points, until the centres were forced to close again in early November.
2. Note the financial projections for the service based on the participation, membership recovery and second closure.
3. **RECOMMEND TO CABINET:** that revenue funding of up to £1.8m should be provided to underwrite the projected operational losses within the Leisure Service and allow continued operation in 2021/22, to be agreed through the usual budget setting processes.
4. Note the future challenges facing Leisure Service in 2021/22 and possible interventions that could be taken to ensure future financial sustainability, suggesting those that should be developed into further proposals.

## **7 PROPOSAL ON THE FUTURE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE BIG SKY COMPANIES**

The Director Resources presented her report which sought Cabinet approval to invite the Big Sky Board to consider a change to the Big Sky Companies governance arrangements. She suggested that with an increased amount of investment from the Council, it was now appropriate to strengthen the governance arrangements and the Council's involvement with the Board of the Big Sky Ventures.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Focus, Cllr A Thomas advised Members that she felt there needed to be more Member involvement within Big Sky, to allow the opportunity for more challenge and questions at points where decisions were being made, and she hoped that the Panel would support the proposals.

In response to a query regarding non-exec Directors, it was believed that Peter Catchpole who used to work for the Council, had taken on such a role. The Director Resources, believed that Stuart Bizley, who was originally a non-exec Director, had since taken on a more "day to day" role.

One member raised previous issues with lack of customer care, and the Committee was advised that such issues were now being addressed through the appointment of an additional member of staff. Cllr Thomas added that the concerns regarding customer service had been voiced at the most recent AGM.

In response to a query, the Director of Resources explained that the selection criteria for an additional board member (if approved) would be down to the share holder's

representative (the Leader of the Council) and that as an independent company, there would be no requirement for political balance.

During further discussion, one member referred to the need for a wider review on governance, to examine whether, for example, the current articles were fit for purpose. Members agreed that this could be picked up at a later stage, depending on the outcome of the current recommendations.

Voting was then carried out by way of roll call, and with 7 votes for and 1 abstention, it was

**RESOLVED: TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET:**

That the Big Sky Board be invited to consider:

- a. Increasing the number of Directors on the Board of Big Sky Ventures by one to a total of three and
- b. Offering two of those positions to Members drawn from the Council

## **8 IT UPDATE**

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director of Governance and Business Support, which provided updates regarding key ICT projects, outlined the current case for a committee management system, and referred to developments with virtual meetings and electronic voting.

The Assistant Director Governance and Business Support outlined the salient points of her report. She drew attention to Appendix 1, and briefly outlined the progress made with a number of key projects.

Turning to the Committee system, Members noted that officers were proposing that funds for the system be included in the 2021/22 budget. They further noted the benefits the system would bring to both Members and officers. Officers explained that it would replace File Director, and agendas would be viewed through an application on iPads.

The Chairman Cllr C Hudson inquired whether there were plans for any Member workshops to be carried out as part of the procurement process of a Committee system. The Assistant Director of Governance and Business Support advised that she was looking to run a number of Member and Officer Workshops.

Discussion turned to on-line voting and the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support explained that unfortunately the Zoom voting function was not yet developed to a standard that could be used in committee meetings; one issue being that it was not possible to share the results of a poll with those watching on YouTube. The Chairman advised that the Mod.gov Committee system did have a fully functioning voting system which was successfully working for a number of councils.

With regard to virtual meetings, members acknowledged that despite the frustrations with roll call voting, meetings were going well, and noted that public viewership and attendance had increased since the live streaming of meetings had commenced. Members hoped that live streaming would continue post Covid and once meetings had

returned to the Council offices. The Chairman suggested that the real challenge would be hybrid meetings which would be a technical challenge and come at a significant cost.

During discussion, Cllr A Thomas referred to the need for some members to access Microsoft Teams when partaking in meetings with other organisations, and officers confirmed that this could be installed on Members' iPads on request.

It was then

**RESOLVED:** To note the content of the report and the updates provided with regard to the key ICT projects.

(The meeting concluded at 4.57pm)

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Chairman