

# CABINET

**Minutes of a remote meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk Council, held on Monday 15 March 2021 at 9.00am.**

<b>Committee Members Present:</b>	Councillors: J Fuller (Chairman), Y Bendle, M Edney K Mason Billig, L Neal, A Thomas and J Worley
<b>Other Members in Attendance:</b>	Councillors: B Bernard, C Brown, V Clifford-Jackson, T Laidlaw and V Thomson
<b>Officers in Attendance:</b>	The Managing Director (T Holden), the Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Assistant Director of Governance and Business Support (E Hodds), the Assistant Director of Finance (R Fincham), the Assistant Director Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Chief of Staff (H Ralph), the Place Shaping Manager (P Harris), the Revenues Manager (S Quilter), the Strategy and Programme Manager (S Carey), the Communities Senior Manager (K Gallagher), the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager (R Dunsire), the Senior Community Planning Officer (R Squires) and the Housing Enabling Officer (K Mitchell)

## 2875 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet meeting held on 8 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

## 2876 STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE, RISK AND FINANCE REPORT FOR Q3 2020/21

Members considered the report of the Senior Finance Business Partner and the Strategy and Programmes Manager, which provided an overview of the performance of the Council for quarter 3 of the year, against the key outcomes set out in the Delivery Plan for 2020/21.

The Strategy and Programmes Manager summarised the key areas relating to the Council's performance in Quarter 3, and the current position in relation to risks. She drew attention to a number of areas of performance and advised Cabinet of two new strategic measures that had been added to the Strategic Risk register, relating to the impact of Covid-19.

During discussion, members raised the potential increase in demand on housing services, and the Director of People and Communities assured Cabinet that the team was well prepared. The team continued to work proactively, taking a preventative approach where possible.

Turning to Leisure, the Portfolio Holder, Cllr A Thomas, referred to the recent redeployment of staff to the NHS, and advised that the Council had received exemplary reports from the hospital regarding the hard work and commitment demonstrated by staff from South Norfolk Council.

Cllr Thomas further explained that officers were working very hard in anticipation of the 12 April re-opening of the leisure centres and she also referred to the Council's on-line leisure provision, which would continue to be available after the re-openings. This was in recognition of the changing needs of customers.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Cllr L Neal, wished to record her thanks to the Development Management officers for continuing to maintain high standards of performance, whilst the level of planning applications received remained high and many officers were having to work from home.

In response to a query from the Chairman, the Director of People and Communities confirmed that a number of unlicensed houses of multiple occupation had been uncovered through the track and trace work, and he advised that further work was being carried out to ensure that these properties met appropriate standards, and were licenced where necessary.

Cllr K Mason Billig drew attention to the predicted savings made through the collaboration work with Broadland District Council, referring to the anticipated savings of £8.8m over the first 5 years, against the target of £8.6m. She congratulated all staff for this achievement and reminded Cabinet that the collaboration was not just about savings, but improving the quality of employment for staff, and becoming an employer of choice in local government.

The Assistant Director Finance then provided a brief summary of the revenue budget position for the Council at the end of Quarter 3, and advised that there was an estimated underspend of £2.139 million at year end. He explained that the reasons for the underspends varied, some being as a result of

additional funding from the Government, the redeployment of staff, and salary savings.

Turning to Capital, he advised that to date, the Council had spent £14.9m on capital schemes during 2020/21. Members noted that it was always expected that some schemes would take longer to come to fruition due to matters outside the control of the Council, although the capital funds were available to take them forward when appropriate to do so. The Chairman felt that given Covid-19, the capital spend on local projects was to be applauded.

The Chairman referred to a number of prudent decisions made by the Council, which he believed had helped to place the Council in a strong position going forward. The Managing Director agreed, adding that the Council needed now to focus on driving areas of the business that created a return for the Council, and would drive the economy.

## **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 Quarter 3 (detail in Appendix 3).

## **The Reason for the Decision**

To ensure that processes are in place to improve performance and that budgets are management effectively.

## **Other Options Considered**

None

## **2877 LONG STRATTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SUBMISSION**

Members considered the report of the Senior Community Planning Officer, which sought Cabinet agreement to take the proposed Long Stratton Neighbourhood Plan through to the next stages of consultation and independent examination.

The Senior Community Planning Officer outlined his report to Cabinet, explaining that the proposed Plan had satisfied the required assessment criteria. Officers were therefore recommending that the Plan proceeded to consultation, and attention was drawn to a small number of proposed representations to be submitted on behalf of the Council, as part of the

consultation process. Members noted that if approved, the consultation would commence on 22 March for a period of 6 weeks, and that the Council would seek to appoint an examiner during that time.

Local member, Cllr A Thomas welcomed the Plan and acknowledged the time and effort that went into its production by Long Stratton Town Council and its Neighbourhood Plan Team (made up of both town councillors and members of the public). She queried what the Council could do to assist the Town Council in achieving a greater level of participation during the next round of consultation.

Cllr J Worley, also local member for Long Stratton, echoed Cllr Thomas' comments and thanked all those who had been involved in the production of the Plan, and he also agreed that it was important that as many local residents as possible, were involved in the process.

The Place Shaping Manager advised that the next consultation would be a more formal stage of the Plan, and comments would be sought on its contents, not on new ideas to shape the Plan. In response to queries regarding the content of the Plan, he agreed that some areas were ambitious and although officers were supportive of those ambitions, officers felt that some clarity was needed around some of the Plan's aspirations.

It unanimously

## **RESOLVED**

To agree that

1. The submitted Long Stratton Neighbourhood Plan meets the requirements of Part 6 of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
2. The Neighbourhood Plan can proceed to consultation, in accordance with Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, and subsequently to an independent examination.
3. The proposed South Norfolk Council response, as detailed in Appendix 2, is formally submitted as part of the Regulation 16 consultation.

## **The Reason for the Decision**

The Plan has met the assessment criteria and should therefore progress through to the next stage of consultation and independent examination.

## **Other Options Considered**

None

## **2878 PROPOSED CHANGE TO DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY**

Members considered the report of the Revenues Manager, which sought approval of a change to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy with regard to top-up relief for registered charities.

The Revenues Manager briefly outlined his report to members, explaining that the threshold for this element of the Policy had not been amended for ten years. Members noted that the proposed change would currently offer additional support to five charities in the District, at a cost of £1000 per year.

Members expressed their support for the proposal, and it was unanimously

### **RESOLVED**

That the Discretionary Rate Relief policy is amended to increase the discretionary top-up relief cap from £4,000 to £5,000 per registered charity (with the exception of those for properties listed as being outside the scope of the policy).

### **The Reason for the Decision**

To provide higher levels of top-up relief to all eligible charities, which do not currently benefit from full relief.

### **Other Options Considered**

None

## **2879 COVID-19 HARDSHIP FUND POLICY 2021/22**

Members considered the report of the Housing and Benefits Manager and the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager, which presented members with the Covid-19 Hardship Fund Policy for approval.

The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager explained that the purpose of the fund was to help mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the local economy, through the provision of short-term financial support to residents that were really struggling financially.

Commending the report to members, the Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, expressed her support for the Policy, explaining that this was a short term measure, to be reviewed later in the year.

It was unanimously

## **RESOLVED**

To approve the adoption of the Covid-19 Hardship Fund Policy for the year 2021/22.

### **The Reason for the Decision**

To ensure that the Council continues to provide short term financial support to those residents when suffering severe financial hardship.

### **Other Options Considered**

None

## **2880 AFFORDABLE HOME OWNERSHIP - QUALIFICATION**

The Housing Enabling Officer presented his report, which proposed that residents of the three Greater Norwich authority areas (Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk) should have equal priority for affordable home ownership properties in the three areas, in circumstances where a local connection priority was applied.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, commended the report to Cabinet, and members welcomed the proposals.

It was unanimously

## **RESOLVED**

That unless otherwise agreed by the Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder:

- 1 For affordable home ownership (shared equity and Discounted Market Sale) provided through negotiation with developers and in circumstances where a local connection is applied, priority will be given for residents of Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk.
- 2 The reciprocal agreement with Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk will be entered into for a trial period of 2 years.

### **Other Options Considered**

None.

## **2881 SOCIAL PRESCRIBING**

Members considered the report of the Senior Communities Manager, which sought agreement from Cabinet to sign off the agreement between the Council and South Norfolk Healthcare CIC (GP provider organisation) for the running of the Social Prescribing Service.

The Senior Communities Manager presented her report, explaining that the Social Prescribing Service was run through a collaboration between the Council and the Primary Care Network. The aim of social prescribing was to divert patients away from clinical services, accessing more appropriate support from other agencies or within the Community where possible.

Members noted that one of the aspirations of the service was for it to continue to be funded externally and officers would continue to work with the NHS and other interested parties to secure this.

Members agreed that the Community Connectors provided a very valuable service, however queried how the Council would be able to provide tangible evidence that the service was an asset and was succeeding in diverting patients away from clinical services. It was felt that the report had failed to provide this information, which would be very important in order to secure future funding.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, expressed her support for the recommendations of the report and advised that South Norfolk Council had begun work on social prescribing, before the real benefits of the service had been recognised by the NHS. She challenged officers to produce a further report for future consideration, providing more detail and tangible evidence on the success of the service. It was suggested that it would be appropriate for this report to be considered by the People and Communities Committee.

The Senior Communities Manager explained that she anticipated the service to continue to grow and advised that the value of the service was recognised nationally within the NHS. She stressed that officers would ensure that the Council had the best evidence base possible to demonstrate success. In response to queries, she advised that one of the aims of the service was to build community resilience. Members noted that mental health remained a huge priority and that a District Direct Officer was now employed at the Hellesdon Hospital, a mental health facility in Norwich.

During further discussion, the Chairman stressed the need to find a tangible evidence base going forward. The Managing Director agreed that it was important to demonstrate the value for money delivered by the scheme and that the Council remained at the forefront of such partnership working.

It was unanimously

**RESOLVED:**

To delegate to the Director of People and Communities, in consultation with the portfolio holder for Better Lives, to sign off the contract for social prescribing services.

**The Reason for the Decision**

To continue to support the aim to have strong local connections and to identify and support those residents who need help.

**Other Options Considered**

None

**2882 RESPONSE TO NEW HOMES BONUS CONSULTATION**

Members considered the report of the Director of Resources, which sought an agreed response to the Government's "The Future of the New Homes Bonus Consultation".

The Director of Resources referred Cabinet to the draft response circulated the previous Friday by email, which detailed the Council's draft response. She briefly outlined the questions in the consultation paper, and the proposed responses.

The Chairman stressed the need to emphasise the materiality point, and the significance of the New Homes Bonus income to the Council, explaining that the proposals could impact the Council to the sum of £3 million. Members agreed that this should not only be laid out in monetary terms, and that the impact on other Council services should be highlighted, for example the impact on communities should the Help Hub have to cease operating. The Chairman suggested that this needed to be highlighted alongside the very small positive impact this level of resource could have on social care.

Members also suggested that the narrative be strengthened regarding the importance of incentives to build the economy and stressed that it was not a good time to be destabilising the incentive to build homes.

In response to a query regarding the opportunity for members to review a final draft of the document, the Managing Director suggested that this could be circulated to members before it was submitted in April.



It was unanimously

## **RESOLVED**

To delegate to the Director Resources and Director Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Resources and Stronger Economy, the authority to approve the Council's final response to the New Homes Bonus Consultation.

## **The Reason for the Decision**

To ensure a robust response to the consultation.

## **Other Options Considered**

None

## **2883 CABINET CORE AGENDA**

Members noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

It was agreed that a report regarding in person meetings should be considered at the next meeting of the Cabinet on 19 April. The Chairman suggested that he, the Managing Director and the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support, along with the Leader of the Opposition and the Chairmen of Committees, worked collectively on the paper.

The Assistant Director Governance and Business Support advised members that reports on the IT Systems and the Accommodation Review were currently being drafted, and that these would be programmed in for consideration, when timescales were more certain.

The Managing Director asked members to note that 19 April was the last date to register to vote at the May elections, and that Tuesday 20 April was the last date to apply for a postal vote.

(The meeting concluded at 10.54 am)

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Chairman