

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 9 March 2020 at 9.00 am.

Members Present:

Cabinet: Councillors: J Fuller (Chairman), Y Bendle, L Neal and A Thomas

Apologies: Councillor K Kiddie and K Mason Billig

Non-Appointed Councillors: D Bills, V Clifford-Jackson, F Ellis, T Laidlaw, G Minshull and V Thomson

Officers in Attendance: The Managing Director (T Holden), the Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Director of Place (P Courtier), the Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (E Hodds), the Interim Assistant Director Economic Development (T Armstrong), the Assistant Director Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Strategic Growth and Funding Manager (N Cunningham), and the Revenues Manager (S Quilter)

2788 URGENT ITEMS: NORWICH RESEARCH PARK

The Chairman advised members that an urgent item had arisen regarding the Norwich Research Park, and that this required urgent consideration, so as not to delay development on the site. A report had been emailed to members over the weekend, and this would be considered as an exempt item, at the conclusion of other business on the agenda.

The Managing Director updated members regarding the latest situation concerning preparations for the impact of coronavirus. He advised that there had been an informal meeting of the Emergency Committee where members and officers had considered possible implications on the workforce, and the delivery of services. He stressed the importance of the Community Leadership role of members and agreed that members across the whole Council needed to be kept fully informed.

Members noted that the Managing Director was a member of the Norfolk Resilient Forum; a County wide group that would be co-ordinating an approach to the impact of COVID-19 across Norfolk.

2789 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 3 and 17 February 2020, were confirmed correct records and signed by the Chairman.

2790 DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS RATE RELIEF – RETAIL DISCOUNT, PUB DISCOUNT AND LOCAL NEWSPAPER DISCOUNT

Members considered the report of the Revenues Manager, which sought approval to update the Discretionary Business Rate Relief Policy, to incorporate Government funded discounts.

The Revenues Manager presented his report and advised members that the proposed changes included an enhancement to the existing Retail Discount, the re-introduction of the Pubs Discount, and an extension to the Newspaper Discount. Members noted that the costs of the proposed discounts were fully funded by Government and would positively impact on 246 shops, 56 public houses and 1 local newspaper, in South Norfolk.

In response to queries, the Revenues Manager explained that businesses were not required to make applications, and that bills would go out with discounts automatically applied.

Members expressed their support for the proposals, and it was

RESOLVED

1. To agree to implement the enhanced Retail Discount and Pubs Discount for local businesses and the Local Newspaper Discount in 2020/21.
2. To delegate decisions over the formulation and implementation of Business Rate discount schemes to the Assistant Director for Finance in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, where the criteria and operation of schemes are prescribed by and fully funded by Government.

The Reason for the Decision

The schemes are fully funded by the Government and will benefit a high number of businesses.

Other Options Considered

Not to implement the discounts.

2791 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY ANNUAL UPDATE

Members considered the report of the Policy and Partnerships Officers, which summarised the progress made by both Broadland and South Norfolk Councils, during 2019, in meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty, introduced in the Equality Act 2010.

The Assistant Director Governance and Business Support briefly outlined the key areas of the report to members.

The portfolio holder, Cllr Y Bendle, commended the report, and referred to the good work already been carried out across both South Norfolk and Broadland Councils.

During discussion, reference was made to the age profile of councillors, and the increase in the number of younger councillors at both South Norfolk and Broadland, was welcomed. Members also referred to the need to encourage more female candidates to stand in district elections.

Turning to the workforce, the Chairman queried whether the stated number of employees included temporary staff. He reminded Cabinet that a number of temporary and seasonal staff were employed at both the Ketteringham Depot and in Leisure Services, and he suggested that this might impact on staff turnover figures. The Assistant Director agreed that some narrative could be added to highlight this, and to clarify the figures presented.

One member queried the definitions used in the Ethnicity profile and the way in which the information was presented, and the Assistant Director agreed to check that this fulfilled Government guidance. It was noted that a high proportion of employees had not declared their ethnicity.

During further discussion, the appropriateness of a "Christian" Civic Service and Council Prayer was raised, and Cllr G Minshull, the Chairman of the Council, explained that he had sought advice on this, and the wording of the prayer had been deemed not to be connected to any particular religion. Members were also pleased to note that a quiet/prayer room was now available at South Norfolk House, for use by both employees and members.

Attention was drawn to the Bronze Award, awarded to the Council from the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme, in recognition of the Council's commitment to support the armed forces community through employment practices. It was noted that the Council's practices would qualify for a "gold award", however, the Council would have to wait a further two years for this award, under the scheme's current rules.

It was

RESOLVED To approve the Public Sector Equality Duty Annual Report 2019, subject, to a number of clarifications and textual adjustments.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that the Council complies with its Public Sector Equality duty

Other Options Considered

None

2792 PRIORITISATION OF WELFARE RIGHTS AND DEBT ADVICE RESOURCES

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director, Individuals and Families, which sought a decision on the future of core funding, for externally delivered debt and welfare rights advice.

The Assistant Director presented his report to Cabinet, and highlighted the need to ensure that residents received the right support, as early as possible, to prevent issues from escalating. He stressed the need to ensure that resources were prioritised, and Early Help Services were safeguarded.

The portfolio holder, Cllr Y Bendle, referred to the range of functions the Council was able to deliver to support customers with welfare rights and debt issues. She referred to the changing model of service delivery through the “Two Councils, One Team” approach, and explained that whilst the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) continued to deliver an important role, they no longer fitted with the Council’s general direction of travel, in terms of welfare rights and debt advice.

During discussion, the Chairman referred to the resource needed to provide the specialised debt advice and personal bespoke service, provided by the Council. Members also noted that the Hub was a “one stop shop” that could provide support on a whole range of issues, connected to debt. Cabinet agreed that with the Service Level Agreement with CABx ending on 31 March, it was timely now to cease the funding of all external debt and welfare rights advice.

Cllr G Minshall, as Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, explained that the Committee had discussed the role of CABx in delivering debt and welfare advice to residents and would have liked to have seen the agency represented in the Help Hub. He believed that the funding was better placed in the Help Hub but stressed the need to recognise the valuable role carried out by the CABx.

It was

RESOLVED

1. To remove core funding for external debt and welfare services in favour of continued investment in the Council’s Help Hub approach.
2. To end outside body member representation of Citizens Advice Services.

The Reason for the Decision

To ensure that residents received the right support, as early as possible

Other Options Considered

To renew the Service Level Agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureaux.

2793 CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

Cabinet noted that there might be a requirement for a special meeting of the Cabinet at the end of April, or early May, to consider the Council's future legal services provision.

2794 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was

RESOLVED: To exclude the public and press from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the following item of business on the grounds that it involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended)

2795 ZONE 4 BUILDING; NORWICH RESEARCH PARK

Members considered the exempt report of the Interim Assistant Director, Economic Development, and the Strategic Economic Growth and Funding Manager, regarding funding required to ensure the delivery of the Zone 4 building on the Norwich Research Park.

After considerable discussion, and officers had responded to a number of queries on points of detail, it was

- RESOLVED**
1. To agree the recommendations as outlined in the report.
 2. That a number of amendments be made to the report and kept as the official record.

The Reason for the Decision

To enable the delivery of the Zone 4 building on the Norwich Research Park.

Other Options Considered

As outlined in the report.

(the meeting concluded at 10.17 am)

Chairman