

Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee of South Norfolk Council held on Monday 25 April 2022 at 2.00pm.

Committee Members Present:	Councillors: D Burrill, T Holden, W Kemp, T Laidlaw, J Overton and T Spruce
Apologies:	Councillors: C Hudson and B Duffin
Substitutes:	Cllr Y Bendle (for Cllr B Duffin)
Cabinet Member in Attendance:	Councillor: R Elliott
Other Members in Attendance	Councillor: J Halls and A Thomas
Officers in Attendance:	The Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Chief of Staff and Monitoring Officer (E Hodds) and Democratic Services Officer (JK)

45 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

In the absence of both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Cllr J Overton proposed Cllr W Kemp as Chairman for the meeting, which was duly seconded. In the absence of any other nominations, Cllr Kemp was duly appointed as Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr W Kemp be appointed as Chairman of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.

46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Kemp and Laidlaw both advised they were members of the working group considering the Accommodation Review.

47 MINUTES

Councillor Laidlaw queried the term stakeholder engagement and asked if the staff had been fully consulted, as they were the key stakeholders affected. The Director of Resources confirmed the staff had been fully consulted. The minutes of the meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee held on Friday 1 April 2022 were then approved as a correct record.

48 FUTURE OFFICE ACCOMMODATION PROJECT - APPRAISAL AND BUSINESS CASE

The Director of Resources introduced the report and explained that it addressed three key areas which members might want to explore before a recommendation was made to Cabinet. These were:

- The financial implications of a move to the Horizon building;
- The future use of the site of the Council office in Long Stratton and
- How the needs of residents in for example Diss, would be impacted by the move.

Members were reminded that in November 2021, the consultants had recommended the move to the Horizon building and advised of the benefits, such as a substantial annual reduction in running costs, an 84% reduction in the Council's carbon footprint, electrical vehicle charging points, sufficient car parking spaces, reduction in future capital costs and a significant move in cultural change as all staff would be under one roof.

In terms of accessibility for residents, although this was an issue, footfall was still extremely low at each current site with only approximately ten residents a day visiting at both current buildings. For two thirds of the residents of South Norfolk, the Horizon building was the same, or closer in distance for travel by car and for those in the further reaches of the district, options were being investigated to provide services in a site more convenient to them.

The Chairman then explored Option 2 around the potential development of Retirement/Supported Living accommodation, on the site at Long Stratton and in response to a query, the Director of Resources advised that the need for additional schools had not been mentioned, as that option was aimed at those over the age of 55.

A member of the Committee raised the issue of consultation and advised he felt it would have been helpful for staff, who were mainly affected, to have had the chance to visit the building and asked if the Horizon building specifically had been part of the consultation as anecdotally, he had heard it was not an attractive building in which to work. The Director of Resources reassured members that the Horizon building was specified in the consultation with an online video showing the exterior and interior and that groups of staff had visited the building and their responses had been very positive. In addition, several staff had previously worked at that site and would be happy to return. Although there were of course some officers who were against the move, for

example those living in Long Stratton, there had been more positive than negative responses from staff. One member of the Committee advised that his wife used to work there and would be very happy to return, as would her colleagues.

In response to a query as to whether a relocation allowance would be possible, the Chief of Staff advised that it would not as the current policy on relocation only applied to new members of staff having to move some considerable distance.

A member of the Committee acknowledged there were very few residents visiting the buildings, however she required reassurance that more work would be done on improving other means of communication, for example the website and the telephone options as there were instances of poor customer service. The Director of Resources advised that the Council now had a Customer Service Lead looking at improving the phone service and website with phone champions in each area to improve the service, for example speed of response, quality of response and the introduction of new methods such as online chat.

Another member advised that they had consulted residents, and no one they had spoken to had ever visited the Council offices, and that they just wanted good communication channels.

In response to a query, the Director of Resources confirmed that all parishes had been consulted on the potential move at the beginning of the process.

A member raised an issue around a possible delay to redevelop the current office area as it was a commercial building, and therefore could not be developed for housing until after six months of attempting to sell it as a commercial enterprise. The Director of Resources confirmed that the Planning Service would be fully involved and all relevant planning guidance for change of use would be followed.

The local member commented that any new development should always come hand in hand with local employment, however, the proposed development did not, and could lead to a loss of local jobs. She felt that moving the Council offices could have a significant impact on local businesses and pointed out that a lot of staff lived locally. Another member agreed and raised a concern around the impact of any development on local businesses and shops and recommended consulting the local community in terms of any development. Members were advised that although it was not possible to be certain, with staff working more from home, it was likely that removing the office and providing more housing, would in fact provide more custom for local shops.

Following a show of hands, with the addition of a recommendation to specifically consult the local members on all aspects and impact of the potential redevelopment, it was

RESOLVED:

1. To recommend to Cabinet that it recommends that Council:
 - a) Agrees to purchase the Horizon Centre jointly.
 - b) Shares any future capital costs on an equal basis between both Broadband Council and South Norfolk Council if jointly owned.
 - c) Shares the revenue expenditure related to the Horizon Centre in accordance with the agreed apportionment model in place for that financial year.

2. To recommend to Cabinet that it agrees to:
 - a) Establish a Facilities Management Agreement between the two Councils that incorporates the governance arrangements and income in relation to the Horizon Centre; this is to be delegated to the Leader in consultation with the Director of Resources.
 - b) Explore the options recommended by the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee for the future of the South Norfolk House site.
 - c) Ensure that local members be fully consulted on all aspects and impact of the possible redevelopment of the Council office in Long Stratton.

(The meeting concluded at 3.05pm)

Chairman