

Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee of South Norfolk Council held on Wednesday 11 May 2022 at 2.00pm.

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

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: R Elliott

Other Members in Attendance Councillor: J Halls

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director for IT/Digital and Transformation (C Lawrie), the Assistant Director of Regulatory (N Howard), the Customer Experience and Insight Lead (J Tovee-Galey), the Food, Safety and Licensing Manager (L Chant) and the Democratic Services Officer (L Arthurton)

49 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made

50 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee held on Monday 25 April 2022 were approved as a correct record. The Chairman thanked Cllr Kemp for Chairing the meeting in the absence of himself and the Vice-Chair.

51 SPARK TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Assistant Director for ICT/Digital and Transformation introduced the report, which provided the Committee with an update on the major projects currently being progressed through the SPARK Transformation Programme.

The Committee noted that three projects had been completed: the Moving Towards a First-Class Customer Service, the Complaints Approach and the Waste Contract for Broadland District Council. A further project on Digital Mail Solutions had been added and focused on the operational aspects.

Members noted that the Domain Migration project had progressed to a green status with a Project Manager in place and an audit being carried out.

In respect of the Council's Infrastructure Project, members noted that phase two was progressing well, with the migration of the servers being completed in June. There would be an ongoing decommissioning project of the original servers, but the overall risk had decreased significantly.

Lastly, the Best-in-Class Housing Programme was sitting at a green status and was progressing well with a focus on the customer journey being looked at.

In answer to a query on how RAG statuses were assigned, the Assistant Director for ICT/Digital and Transformation explained that timeframes, resource implications and costs formed the status of each project.

One member sought clarification on the timelines regarding the review of the Council's Depots project. Members noted that this project was in its early stages and reports were being drafted. Further information would be provided to members after the meeting.

After several members raised issues with the phone system, it was confirmed that phase one of the project had been completed with all staff using the new system. Members noted that phase two had begun which would investigate how the Council could use the system to its best. It was also confirmed to members that issues surrounding the ring groups and voicemails had been fixed to aid residents' journey through the Council.

RESOLVED

To note the content of the report with regard to the progress made with the programme.

52 BROADLAND AND SOUTH NORFOLK CUSTOMER PANEL

The Director of Resources introduced the report which provided an update on the progress made towards the creation of a customer panel, following a commitment made by the Council's Cabinet.

The Customer Experience and Insight Lead advised that engagement and feedback with stakeholders was key and was why the creation of a customer panel had been agreed. It was proposed that the panel would be used in a variety of ways, for example, surveys, focus groups, user testing groups, customer journey mapping, snap polls and consultations.

In response to a question about who would be on the Customer Panel, officers confirmed that the panel would consist of range of people with the aim of being fully diverse.

Several members expressed support for the proposals and stressed the importance of including non-digital users to make sure the whole spectrum users was covered.

The Chairman welcomed the report and encouraged members to promote the Panel in their parishes to help ensure all residents could engage with the Council. The Portfolio Holder for Customer Focus fully endorsed the report and added that the proposals followed on from the First-Class Customer Service project.

Following a show of hands, it was then

RESOLVED to

1. note the creation of a Customer Panel as agreed in the *Moving Towards a First-Class Customer Service strategy*
2. note the planned external communication plan.

53 LICENSING SERVICES – SERVICE ENHANCEMENT OPTIONS

Members considered the report of the Food, Safety and Licensing Manager, which sought Cabinet approval for a service enhancement proposal and options for the provision of licensing-related advice and support to businesses, in connection with licensing products and their associated costs.

The Assistant Director of Regulatory presented the report and explained that the Council provided a reasonable amount of free advice and support. The Council was also currently piloting a business regulatory support hub which would maximise the free support for businesses. The introduction of the enhanced service would add further value to the existing statutory services.

One member welcomed the ambitions of the report and looked forward to further commercialisation reports coming through to the Committee for oversight. A member suggested that a business plan be included at the end of the pilot detailing the future ambitions and insights of the service.

Officers answered further questions on the report and provided further clarification on service details. Members noted that the enhanced service would help businesses to fill in forms and provide further advice on certain aspects of their businesses.

One of the aims of the pilot was to measure the demand for the service and would run at cost-neutral. If the demand for the service was to increase, a review of officers' time and capacity would be undertaken.

In response to a question on whether the new proposals would require additional staff, officers explained that there was a service review for the area built into the current Delivery Plan.

Conversation turned to if a business would be charged if they only required a small amount of support, and officers confirmed that support would always be provided for smaller issues. The proposed scheme would only come into force for larger proposals. Members were further reassured that the Council would always provide free advice to those who required it.

Reference was made to the revenue of the project and the reinvestment back into the service. Officers noted that the service had seen a rise in demand over the last few years with the Council having to use licencing contractors to help with workloads. The cost recovery from the additional service provided would be reinvestment in additional staffing hours including the potential for an additional post to be added to the team.

Following a query about the issues surrounding the registration of electric vehicles for taxi licencing, officers confirmed that a new policy had been put in place to rectify any previous issues.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Focus noted that the scheme added value to the service and was not a wide-scale venture.

Several members of the Committee voiced concerns over the proposals and the effect they would have on businesses using the service. Officers reassured members that there was no intention to make businesses use the service as the pilot was there to offer further advice to businesses if they required it. The existing support for businesses would still be offered to those who needed it.

The Chairman summarised the salient points of the discussion and the Committee's agreement to amend recommendation one with the additional text "*with feedback from the enhanced service offer coming back to the Committee for review at the end of the pilot*". It was then

RESOLVED:

To recommend that Cabinet;

1. authorises the piloting of enhancements to Licensing services in 2022/23 and the mainstreaming of successful service enhancements in 2023/24, at full cost recovery, with feedback from the enhanced service offer coming back to the Committee for review at the end of the pilot.
2. agrees the reinvestment of income generated from service enhancements to licensing activity into the Council's regulatory licensing service, so as not to impact on regulatory service capacity.
And;
3. delegates to the Assistant Director Regulatory the setting and review of Licensing fees for the service enhancements.

54 FOOD SAFETY SERVICES – SERVICE ENHANCEMENT OPTIONS

Members considered the report of the Food, Safety and Licensing Manager, which outlined the proposed service enhancement and options for the provision of food safety-related advice and support to businesses, in connection with food safety products and their associated costs.

Officers explained that the Council worked closely with Trading Standards to uphold legal standards. Members noted that work had commenced improving the information packs for businesses to use. It was noted that there was a three-month wait for businesses to obtain visits from the Council. The proposed enhanced service would allow a faster turnaround and would provide greater flexibility to the service.

A question was raised regarding new business start-ups and whether there would be a charge for businesses for advice at the start of their journey. Officers confirmed that the initial advice and service would be provided free of charge, a service the Council already provided for businesses. New businesses could elect to use the enhanced service if they wished, which would provide further guidance if required. A further question was asked regarding the type of extra support offered in the enhanced paid service. Officers explained that the enhanced service could help businesses with additional advice on funding and areas of improvement.

A concern was raised over cash-restricted businesses and the impact the inspection wait times could have on them. Officers reassured members that the Council would always provide support to businesses that needed it, and the proposed service enhancement pilot would be offered as an addition to that.

It was then agreed to amend recommendation one in the report to include a review of the enhanced service to come back to the Committee after the pilot period.

RESOLVED:

To recommend that Cabinet

1. authorises the piloting of enhancements to Food Safety services in 2022/23 and the mainstreaming of successful service enhancements in 2023/24, at full cost recovery, with feedback from the enhanced service offer coming back to the Committee for review at the end of the pilot.
2. agrees the reinvestment of income generated from service enhancements to food safety activity into the Council's regulatory food safety service, so as not to impact on regulatory service capacity.
3. delegates to the Assistant Director – Regulatory the setting and review of Licensing fees for the service enhancements.

(The meeting concluded at 3.47pm)

Chairman