

Agenda Item No 7

South Norfolk Moving Forward Together Plan**Chief Executive**

This paper sets out our proposals for making South Norfolk Council even fitter for the challenges ahead. It will ensure that staff are well equipped for the new and ever-changing local government environment of the future. These proposals are essential if we are to develop this organisation to deliver its corporate objectives and values so that everyone in our community will have an opportunity to enjoy an improving quality of life. The proposed arrangements in this report bring together the key elements of the Moving Forward Together programme for Cabinet approval.

Cabinet member(s): John Fuller	Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Background

- 1.1. In the last 12 months, the Council has changed radically to meet the challenges of one of the worst recessions in living memory. It anticipated the severity of the downturn and reacted quickly and effectively, with a whole Council restructuring, where every job went under the microscope. We took 15% out of the net budget – a huge challenge in itself – and put the Council in balance. It has been a challenge, but we have come through this together, and the staff should be recognised for this remarkable achievement especially as so far we have been able to avoid compulsory redundancies with their attendant costs.
- 1.2. With a greater emphasis on team and collaborative working, today, the Council is stronger and more resilient than before. It will need to continue changing and developing as the Government tackles record levels of national debt by expecting further efficiencies and savings from councils. Embracing change is our daily reality.
- 1.3. This council values people, and its focus is the community we are accountable to and we respond to. There is a new determination to be ambitious and resourceful. We want to be recognised as a leading and innovative council amongst our peers by demonstrating that we are creative and flexible in the way we change to meet the needs of our community.

- 1.4. In order to achieve this I am proposing a program called the South Norfolk Moving Forward Together Plan, which will demonstrate how we intend to unite the many different strands of delivery, from improving performance, to providing consistent customer service to increasing efficiency, into one coherent programme of activity.

2. Current Position and Issues

- 2.1. The major issues facing the Council in the near future are:
- The possibility, even if it is less likely as the country moves closer to a General Election, of Local Government Reorganisation
 - The continued recession and the delay in any recovery for the public sector, coupled with low interest rates
 - The potential for deep cuts to Revenue Support Grant from Government with additional cost pressures, for example the additional costs of pensions
 - The need to provide more focussed services, efficiently delivered and with high customer service levels
 - The need to be the right scale and have sufficient critical mass, which means we can punch above our weight in a tough future environment, where we must respond to many fluctuating demands.

3. Proposal and Reasons

- 3.1. We need to develop a coherent consolidation and change programme, which supports the new teams, which have been created, in a consistent manner. It will allow us to improve performance, increase efficiency and provide a consistent customer service. To achieve these objectives, work needs to be undertaken across a number of activities, which will be drawn together into the Moving Forward Together Plan.
- 3.2. Customer focus. This is a key area for the Council and includes investment in the website as a service delivery and communications tool and delivering a consistent, high standard of customer service across the Council. This is explored in more detail in a Cabinet report on this agenda for Members' consideration.
- 3.3. Communications. We need to link our council brand to the many services we provide, breaking down the myths that we simply empty the bins and collect Council Tax. We must go further to engage and involve local people in our decision making asking people what they want, listening to what they said, and then communicating how we delivered.
- 3.4. Staff. We must support our staff in fulfilling their potential within a culture that gives a motivated professional staff new opportunities for promotion and advancement. It means targeted skills development, the introduction of organisational values, building stronger links between performance and reward

and a more effective use of our appraisal system, and transforming the way we work with each other to serve our community.

- 3.5. Performance Management. The focus of performance management is being shifted from a monitoring role, to a performance improvement role, and being seen as embedded in the services rather than the responsibility of the Performance Team. This will reinforce for the organisation the linkages between resources, improving performance and a leaner organisation.
- 3.6. Efficiency programme. We are reviewing income and charging in various services, along with looking to deliver services in different or more streamlined ways. Procurement is a key area for improvement and work is on going to consider other organisations we could work alongside to deliver savings. We are looking at the totality of public sector spending in Norfolk – through new structures like the Norfolk Public Service Leaders Board - with a view to identifying opportunities for joint working and improving operational efficiency across all public agencies in the area.
- 3.7. Programme Management. The Head of Special Projects has been charged with establishing a programme office to draw together all projects and programme management already in existence, and enable effective prioritisation, avoid duplication, and ensure the work is directed, monitored, managed and delivered in a businesslike and efficient way.
- 3.8. The success in driving the organisation forward requires capacity and skills in the above areas to work together, rather than being separate strands of work. Individual teams (such as IT) would be required to deliver parts of the work programme. We need to create a strong network so that teams feel part of the organisational development process.
- 3.9. The Head of Human Resources (HR) role was broadened as part of the organisational restructuring to provide the lead role on Organisational Development (OD) work. This role is currently vacant. Leading on management culture performance and continuous improvement are all key elements of the role of the Deputy Chief Executive. This role is also vacant and the duties are currently being covered by the Chief Executive. To progress this essential work requires effective co-ordination and strong corporate leadership in the immediate term, and that is being provided through the recruitment of an experienced change specialist, with a track record of achievement in public sector organisations.
- 3.10. Staff from across the Council will be brought into the Moving Forward Together project team as and when required. The change consultant will provide the direction for programme delivery, ensure the elements of the programme are coherent, ensure effective communication with Members and officers and ensure delivery of outcomes.
- 3.11. It is clear there are likely to be funding shortfalls across the public sector in future years. It is not feasible to make further significant budget reductions within the Council without having an impact on service levels. We, like many authorities, are looking at the efficiencies which can be gained from shared services, in the areas

of integrated waste, asset management and regulatory services, through the Public Service Leaders Board and in bilateral conversations with other organisations such as the Police, Primary Care Trust and other local authorities. The Chief Executive, in consultation with portfolio holders and the Leader will continue to develop these discussions.

4. Other Options

- 4.1. If the Council sits still and does nothing to prepare for the challenges outlined, then it will not have the scale, the critical mass or the capacity to continue to provide the high quality services we are proud of. It could take that option, having achieved its restructuring and its significant savings. But the council is widely known for anticipating challenges – like the recession - and moving to meet them fast, and very often first.
- 4.2. The Council could take the route of mass outsourcing of its services, shrinking the core business to a bare minimum, using staff to manage contracts and cutting costs. It could also simply cut services to the community to make savings but we do not believe this is the most effective and efficient way to deliver high quality services.

5. Relevant Corporate Objectives

- 5.1. The approach described in this report will be central to delivering all the corporate priorities.

6. Implications and Risks

- 6.1. The financial risks of failing to undertaking a wide ranging change programme are significant because it is expected there will be substantial reductions in the Revenue Support Grant in future years and this Council needs to ensure it is fit for purpose, and has the capacity to deal with future challenges.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. Having anticipated many of the pressures that are now facing us, we must ensure that we remain competitive and able to respond to future challenges. The overall aim of the programme is to make South Norfolk Council fit for the challenges ahead, ensuring that staff are the very best they can be. They must be well equipped for the new and changing local government environment. The organisation needs to deliver its corporate objectives and values so that everyone in our community will have an opportunity to enjoy an improving quality of life.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1. That Cabinet endorse the approach taken by the Chief Executive in driving the South Norfolk Moving Forward Together Plan through the Council.

- 8.2. That Cabinet delegate authority to the Chief Executive to explore the option of working with other organisations to deliver services and make savings and report back to future meetings.