Cabinet

Members of the Cabinet

Mr J Fuller
Chairman
Leader, External Affairs

Mr M Wilby
Vice-Chairman
Deputy Leader, Community Empowerment and Building the Big Society

Mrs Y Bendle
Localism

Mr D Bills
Organisational Efficiency and Shared Services

Mr K Kiddie
Public Protection and Development Control

Mr G Wheatley
Corporate Resources and Governance

Portfolio Holders

Group Meetings

Conservatives:
Cabinet Office 8.00 am

Liberal Democrats:
Kett Room 8.15 am

Agenda

Date
Monday 26 March 2012

Time
9.00 am

Place
Cavell and Colman Rooms
South Norfolk House
Swan Lane
Long Stratton Norwich
NR15 2XE

Contact
Claire White  tel (01508) 533669
South Norfolk District Council
Swan Lane
Long Stratton Norwich
NR15 2XE
Email: democracy@s-norfolk.gov.uk
Website: www.south-norfolk.gov.uk

If you have any special requirements in order to attend this meeting, please let us know in advance
Large print version can be made available
AGENDA

1. To report apologies for absence;

2. Any items of business which the Chairman decides should be considered as matters of urgency pursuant to Section 100 B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act, 1972; [Urgent business may only be taken if, "by reason of special circumstances" (which will be recorded in the minutes), the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion that the item should be considered as a matter of urgency.]

3. To receive Declarations of Interest from Members;  
   (Please see guidance form and flow chart attached - page 6)

4. Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 6 February 2012;  
   (attached – page 8)

5. South Norfolk Council’s Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document: Preferred Options (part 1);  
   (report attached – page 22)  
   (draft parish chapters of the DPD available to view on the Council’s website)

   The Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document is an important part of the Council’s Local Development Framework as it sets out the areas of land being proposed for development as well as areas for which there are specific policies governing development proposals. Having completed two periods of public consultation and having assessed sites, this report recommends publishing the sites that have the best results as the Council’s preferred options to meet the requirements of the Joint Core Strategy for a further period of six weeks consultation.

   (report attached – page 26)  
   (copy of Place- Making Guide to follow)

   This report summarises the work undertaken in the preparation of the South Norfolk Place-Making Guide, along with the proposed contents and format of the guide. Cabinet is asked to approve the illustrated draft for consultation.
7. **Update on Changes to Local Government Financing:**  
(report attached – page 30)  
(Appendix enclosed separately)

There are a significant amount of challenges this Council will need to meet in the next year, many of which are related to finance.

The introduction of the New Homes Bonus in this financial year signalled the start of the transformation in how Local Government services will be financed. Further fundamental changes will be introduced in the coming financial year and from the 1 April 2013. These include the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Localisation of Business Rates and the Localisation of Council Tax Benefit. The Council has already identified the need to create two new reserves to assist with any in year volatility of the latter two schemes. The Council faces major changes with the introduction of the Universal Credit system.

There are a number of things we can plan for to ensure we maximise the opportunities and minimise the risks. The purpose of this report is to highlight some key areas for members to consider. A challenge we must meet, is to ensure all the interconnecting issues are considered in a holistic way, to ensure we target our resource and services at those in greatest need.

8. **Marketing Strategy:**  
(report attached – page 38)

The Marketing Strategy attached to this report for the period 2012-15 has an overall aim of ensuring that the way we communicate and present ourselves is clear, accurate, consistent and recognisable. The overarching objective is aligned with the vision and it is:

“To ensure that South Norfolk Council (SNC) is seen as a prime mover in retaining and improving the quality of life in South Norfolk, for now and future generations, to make it one of the best places to live and work in the country.”

The Strategy is intended to guide the work of the Council over the next three years in ensuring we utilise all the available opportunities to promote our services, position ourselves as the provider of choice, ensure the benefits of our services to the community are clear, ensure our services are recognisable and contribute to achieving a high profile for South Norfolk Council on the national, regional and local stage.

Members are asked to approve this Strategy.
9. **South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme;**

This report brings to Cabinet the South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme (known as South Norfolk Home Options) for approval and recommendation to Council for formal adoption.

The South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme builds on the success of the Greater Norwich scheme and will continue to offer choice and transparency to customers with a housing need and local connection. It has been developed to take into account changing national priorities and local needs. The new scheme will improve the service to customers through a more efficient and customer-focused approach.

Local partners, stakeholders and members have had the opportunity to be fully involved in the development of the scheme and customers have been invited to respond to consultation.

10. **Diss Business Centre;**

The Council leases Diss Business Centre, with the objective of providing small business units at affordable rents. The centre breaks even and in some years has made a surplus. The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval under the Rules of Financial Governance in relation to officer's recommendations to continue with the lease agreement for Diss Business Centre until 2023 therefore not effecting the break option in the lease that would result in the lease terminating in 2013.

11. **Recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee;**

This report details the recommendation of Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet, arising from the consideration of a call-in at the meeting of Scrutiny Committee on 20 February 2012.

12. **Cabinet Core Agenda;**

13. **Exclusion of the Public and Press;**

To exclude the public and the press from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended)
14. **Contract for the Disposal of Green Waste;**  
   (report attached – page 111)  
   
   (NOT FOR PUBLICATION by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)  
   
   The purpose of this report is to advise Cabinet of the process and outcome of the retender of the Green Waste Disposal contract. The existing contract ends in March 2012 and Cabinet is therefore also asked to accept the most financially advantageous bid.

15. **Harleston – Proposed Purchase of Investment Property;**  
   (report attached – page 114 )  
   
   (NOT FOR PUBLICATION by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)  
   
   The report details the proposed purchase of investment property in Hareston and seeks Cabinet approval under the Rules of Financial Governance.
AGENDA ITEM 3

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AT MEETINGS

When declaring an interest at a meeting Members are asked to indicate whether the interest is a personal one only or one which is also prejudicial. The declaration should indicate the nature of the interest and the agenda item to which it relates. In the case of a personal interest, the member may speak and vote. If it is a prejudicial interest, a member has the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public but must then withdraw from the meeting. A member can participate fully where the interest is shared with the majority of residents in that particular ward. Members are also requested when appropriate to make any declarations under the Code of Practice on Planning and Judicial matters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is (or should) the Interest be registered in the Register of Members' Interests?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If not, whose well being or financial position is affected to a greater extent than the majority of other people in the ward?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any person or body who has employed or appointed your family member/close associate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any firm in which your family member/close associate is a partner or company of which they are directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any company in which your family member/close associate has shares with a face value more than £25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any of the following in which you hold a position of general control or management: outside organisations, other public authorities, charities, pressure groups, political parties or trade unions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does the interest:

(a) affect your financial position or the financial position of a person or body described above? *(If Yes the interest may be prejudicial)*

(b) relate to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or any person or body described above? *(If Yes the interest may be prejudicial)*

(c) relate to scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny committee of a decision you were party to? *(If Yes the interest is prejudicial)*

(d) relate to the functions of the council in respect of housing (except your tenancy), statutory sick pay, an allowance, payment or indemnity given to members, any ceremonial honour given to members, or setting the council tax or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992. *(If Yes the interest is NOT PREJUDICIAL)*

PREJUDICIAL INTEREST

If you answered Yes to (a) or (b) is the interest one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest? *If Yes the interest is PREJUDICIAL*

If you answered Yes to (c) the interest is PREJUDICIAL

If prejudicial do you intend to attend the meeting to make representations, answer questions or give evidence?

FOR GUIDANCE REFER TO THE FLOWCHART OVERLEAF
DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

What matters are being discussed at the meeting?

Do any relate to my interests?

A Does it affect my entries in the Register of Interests?

B Does it affect the well being or financial position of me, my family or close associates; or my family’s or close associates’
- employment, employers or businesses;
- companies in which they are a director or where they have a shareholding of more than £25,000 face value;
- business partnerships; or

C Does it affect the well being or financial position of the following organisations in which I hold a position of general control or management:
- other bodies to which I have been appointed or nominated by the council;
- other public authorities;
- charitable bodies;
- bodies whose main purpose is to influence public opinion or policy

More than the majority of other people in the ward?

D Is Overview and Scrutiny considering a decision I made? If so you have a prejudicial interest.

Yes

NO

Disclose the existence & nature of your interest

You have a personal interest in the matter

Is the interest financial or relating to a regulatory issue e.g. planning permission?

NO

YES

The interest is not prejudicial you can participate in the meeting and vote

This matter relates to
- housing (except your tenancy)
- statutory sick pay from the council
- an allowance, payment or indemnity given to members
- any ceremonial honour given to members
- setting the council tax or a precept

Yes

NO

You may have a prejudicial interest

The interest is prejudicial withdraw from the meeting by leaving the room (after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence). Do not try to improperly influence the decision

Would a member of the public – if he or she knew all the facts – reasonably think that personal interest was so significant that my decision on the matter would be affected by it?
South Norfolk Council’s Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document: Preferred Options (part 1)

Planning Policy Manager

The Site Specific Policies and Allocations Development Plan Document is an important part of the Council’s Local Development Framework as it sets out the areas of land being proposed for development as well as areas for which there are specific policies governing development proposals. Having completed two periods of public consultation and having assessed sites, this report recommends publishing the sites that have the best results as the Council’s preferred options to meet the requirements of the Joint Core Strategy for a further period of six weeks consultation.

Cabinet member(s): John Fuller

Ward(s) affected: All

Contact Officer, telephone number, and e-mail: Tim Horspole 01508 533806 thorspole@s-norfolk.gov.uk

1. Background

1.1. This report seeks Cabinet’s agreement to the preferred options for selected categories of settlement, which will form part the next consultation stage of the Council’s site specific policies and allocations development plan document (DPD). This DPD identifies sites and areas that the council considers to be the best options for meeting the objectives of the Joint Core Strategy.

1.2. To have the full weight in determining planning applications, the DPD must be prepared in accordance with the regulations. These regulations require extensive public consultation to be undertaken, and the proposals before Cabinet this morning take account of the two previous public consultation exercises held in 2010 and 2011.

2. Current Position and Issues

2.1. Following the two periods of extensive consultation officers have assessed over 1,500 proposed sites. Assessment has been undertaken using the framework agreed by Cabinet in 2010, and was included as part of the 2010 consultation. The assessment framework is based on the objectives of the adopted Joint Core Strategy and the Sustainability Appraisal Framework.
2.2. This assessment work has led to the recommended sites that are considered to be the best option of the sites proposed, and represent those sites that perform best when judged against the assessment framework. These assessments are based on evidence that has been collected through the consultation period as well as from direct contact with providers of essential services.

2.3. The number of sites that had to be assessed has meant the preferred options have been split into two tranches. The first tranche before you today contains the preferred options for settlement in the “Service Village”, “Other Village” and “Small Rural Communities” categories of the Joint Core Strategy’s settlement hierarchy for the rural area. The second tranche, to be brought to the April meeting of Cabinet, will include settlements in the Norwich Policy Area, including the main growth locations of Costessey, Easton and Hethersett, and the Main Towns and Key Service Centres in the Rural Area. Growth proposed at Long Stratton and Wymondham will be dealt with through Area Action Plans, which will be considered at subsequent Cabinet meetings, while Cringleford Parish Council is preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan, which will include the housing growth proposed in the Joint Core Strategy.

2.4. Following the April Cabinet meeting it is proposed to publish the preferred options version of the DPD for public consultation.

3. Proposal and Reasons

3.1. The categories of settlement reflect the Joint Core Strategy’s (JCS) settlement hierarchy.

- “Service villages” are defined by Policy 15 of the JCS. Settlements have been defined in this category based on the level of services and facilities in the settlement. The policy proposes allocating land to accommodate between 10 to 20 new homes, subject to detailed analysis of character and servicing constraints.
- “Other villages” are defined by Policy 16 of the JCS. Settlements in this category have a proposed development boundary, within which small-scale, infill development can be accommodated.

3.2. The proposed preferred options and the reasons for their selection are set out in the appendices to this report. The appendices include:

- A draft format for the consultation document
- Service Villages: Proposed draft for section 5 of the preferred options consultation document
  (Covering the settlements of Alburgh, Ashwellthorpe, Aslacton and Great Moulton, Barford, Barnham Broom, Bergh Apton, Brooke, Broome, Bunwell, Carleton Rode, Dickeburgh, Ditchingham, Earsham, Geldeston, Gillingham, Hales (inc. part in Heckingham Parish), Hempnall, Kirby Cane (inc. part in Ellingham Parish), Norton Subcourse, Pulham Market, Pulham St Mary, Rockland St Mary, Roydon, Scole, Seething, Tacolneston and Forncett End, Thurlton, Wicklewood, Woodton (inc. part in Bedingham Parish), Worwell, Wreningham, Yelverton (inc. part in Alpington Parish).
- Other Villages: Proposed draft for section 6 of the preferred options consultation document
(Covering the settlements of Aldeby, Bressingham, Brockdish, Burgh St Peter (including part within Wheatacre parish and the adjacent developed area in Aldeby parish, Burston, Claxton, Denton, Fornclt St Mary, Fornclt St Peter, Haddiscoe, Hardwick, Hedenham, Langley Street, Morley, Needham, Shelfanger, Shotesham, Starston, Tibenham, Tivetshall St Margaret, Tivetshall St Mary, Toft Monks, Topcroft Street, Winfarthing)

- Small rural communities: Proposed draft for section 7 of the preferred options consultation document.

3.3. In the cases of the settlements of Alburgh, Gillingham, Pullham St Mary and Roydon it is recommend that, given constraints, such as flood risk, access to services and form and character considerations, there are no suitable sites for allocation. These are detailed in the parish section of the appendices.

3.4. In April, Cabinet will be presented with recommendations for preferred options for the second tranche of settlements including those in the Service Villages and Other Villages in the Norwich Policy Area, the main growth locations of Costessey/Easton and Hethersett, and the Main Towns (Diss and Harleston) and Key Service Centres (Hingham, Loddon/Chedgrave and Poringland). This meeting will also consider the full text of the consultation document and the sustainability appraisal.

3.5. Consultation on the preferred options will take place for six weeks in June and July 2012; although we have done our upmost to select the best sites, members, Parish and Town Councils, other statutory bodies, site owners, the public etc. will all have the opportunity to put forward evidence to support or reject the preferred sites. This evidence will then be taken into account in preparing the version of the DPD to submitted to Secretary of State for Examination in Public.

4. Other Options

4.1. The options that have not performed well against the assessment criteria and are recommended to be rejected are in the appendices to this report.

4.2. The Council could decide not to progress the DPD to adoption; this would lead to future development being unplanned and uncoordinated and would lessen the Council’s ability to meet its objectives and would deny residents the opportunity to be involved in shaping their communities.

5. Relevant Corporate Priorities

5.1. Enhancing our quality of life and the environment we live in. One of the guiding principles of the Council’s planning policy, as contained in the JCS, is to accommodate future development needs in a way that protects and retains the distinctive character of settlements in South Norfolk. This has been an important consideration in assessing the sites and is reflected in the objectives of this DPD.

5.2. Promoting a thriving local economy. Providing suitable and available land for economic development is one of the future needs identified in the JCS and contained in the objectives for this DPD.

5.3. Supporting communities to realise their potential. The DPD process allows for residents to participate and influence the content of the DPD.
6. **Implications and Risks**

6.1. **Financial** – the work associated with the production of the council’s planning policy documents is included within the current budget.

6.2. **Legal** – there is a legal requirement for local planning authorities to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF) for their area. This DPD will form an important part of the LDF and must be prepared in accordance with development plan regulations. Once published, the preferred options will be a material consideration in determining planning applications but will carry very limited weight. The judgement on the legal challenge to the JCS does not impact on this work, and the Council has an adopted JCS that for South Norfolk carries the full weight of a statutory planning policy document.

6.3. **Environmental** – the DPD will use the sustainability appraisal to ensure the impact on the environment is taken into account.

6.4. **Crime Reduction** – the DPD will take account of the Council’s duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act

6.5. **Risks** – Not having an adopted DPD will leave the Council vulnerable to speculative and predatory planning applications for development. It will also severely limit the Council’s ability to coordinate development to ensure the necessary infrastructure is provided.

7. **Conclusion**

7.1. Having assessed the sites that have been submitted for consideration as allocations in the council’s Site Specific Policies and Allocations DPD the preferred options for the Rural Area ‘Service Villages,’ ‘Other Villages’ and ‘Smaller Rural Communities’, and the reasons for their selection, are contained in the appendices to this report.

8. **Recommendations**

8.1. It is recommended Cabinet agree the sites shown as preferred options in the appendices to this report as the Council’s preferred options for settlements in the “service village”, “other village” and “small rural communities” categories of the Joint Core Strategy’s settlement hierarchy for the rural area. These sites will be included in the preferred options consultation document, which will be published in June 2012.
South Norfolk Place-Making Guide : Draft for consultation

Conservation, Design & Landscape Manager

This report summarises the work undertaken in the preparation of the South Norfolk Place-Making Guide, along with the proposed contents and format of the guide. Cabinet is asked to approve the illustrated draft for consultation.

Cabinet member(s): Keith Kiddie
Ward(s) affected: All
Contact Officer, telephone number, and e-mail: David Edleston 01508 533811 dedleston@s-norfolk.gov.uk

1. Background

1.1. The purpose of the South Norfolk Place-Making Guide is to promote and secure good quality design in new development. The Guide will make a major contribution to the Council’s priority of Enhancing our Quality of life and the environment we live in” by promoting locally distinctive design which respects and enhances the character of the district. It will also encourage contemporary, innovative and sustainable approaches to design where evidence from appraisal and analysis of the site and its context demonstrates that such an approach is appropriate.

1.2. Following consultation, the guide will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which will expand upon policies in the Greater Norwich Development Partnership, Joint Core Strategy 2011, in particular Policy 2 ‘Promoting Good Design’.

2. Current Position and Issues

2.1. The preparation and contents of the guide have been informed by comments and feedback from various groups and individuals who were engaged in the early stages of the project. An initial stakeholder workshop involved developers & house builders, architects, planning agents, Council members, planning and highways officers. The purpose of this workshop was to review and discuss the findings of the outline draft character assessment and to provide an opportunity to contribute to the priority areas and topics for detailed design guidance.
2.2. A second workshop was attended by Council members and planning officers where two schemes were used to test the practicality, clarity and use of the first draft design guidance.

3. Proposal and Reasons

3.1. The illustrated draft guide has now been completed and is set out in four sections supported by an Appendix.

3.2. Section 1: Introduction, sets out the purpose, status and use of the guide. Particular emphasis has been placed on the key objectives of the document and who it is intended for and how the guide will be used in the design and decision-making process. Specific advice is also provided on the design approaches which will not be acceptable.

3.3. Section 2: The Special Character of South Norfolk, defines the distinctive character of the district, based on the landscape character areas set out in the South Norfolk Landscape Character Assessment published in 2006. Key defining characteristics of settlements and vernacular architecture have been extracted from this study for each area and a set of design principles established to guide the form and appearance of new development. Similar information has been provided for the five key areas for growth at Wymondham, Long Stratton, Hethersett, Costessey/Easton and Cringleford and the four market towns of Diss, Harleston, Loddon and Hingham.

3.4. Information is also provided on typical building materials and details which make up the vernacular architectural character of the district along with background information on ecology and biodiversity. This will ensure that Members, officers, the different professional disciplines and a wide range of other people: contractors, developers, statutory authorities, local groups, residents and businesses all of whose views and decisions matter have a proper understanding of the local context and distinctive character of South Norfolk.

3.5. Developers using the Guide will be able to identify the area of the District within which their site is located and the defining characteristics and design principles for that area. They will then need to evidence in their application that they have been taken into consideration in developing their design proposals.

3.6. Section 3: Place-Making & Design Principles, sets out a number of key generic design topics, including the ‘Building for Life’ criteria. For each topic, there is an explanation of the key principle, why it is important, general design guidance based on recognised good practice, how relevant evidence should be provided and how it will be evaluated. A worked example is also included to assist applicants.

3.7. Applicants will be required to provide sufficient evidence on those design principles which are relevant to their particular development, within the Design & Access Statement supporting their application.

3.8. Section 4: Place-Making & Design Process, explains the design process including appraising a site and its context and provides advice on how to develop a design concept in response to local character, the application process and the preparation of Design & Access Statements.
3.9. Appendix A: Case Studies, supports the guide and will form a library of examples of good design within South Norfolk to illustrate how the design principles have been put into practice. This will be expanded as schemes are approved or completed on site.

3.10. The guide will be promoted for use in electronic format via the Council’s website. This will include an interactive format where it will be possible to navigate around the document via the list of contents and an interactive map of the district which will link directly with the character description for each area. There will also be a low resolution printable format for each section of the guide.

4. Other Options

4.1. None relevant

5. Relevant Corporate Priorities

5.1. Enhancing our quality of life and the environment we live in. The guide promotes high quality design which respects and reinforces the locally distinctive character of the built and natural environment within South Norfolk and creates a strong sense of place and identity.

5.2. Promoting a thriving local economy. High quality design will encourage inward investment and the desire for businesses to be located within the district.

5.3. Supporting communities to realise their potential. Guidance within the document, on the design process, encourages and promotes the value of early engagement with the local community on development proposals.

5.4. Driving services through being businesslike, efficient and customer aware. The guide provides clear advice on the design and planning process for the benefit of customers to ensure an efficient and effective decision making process and delivery of the service. There will be particular benefits derived from use of the guide in pre-application discussions. Promotion of the guide in electronic format will minimise expenditure on printing costs.

6. Implications and Risks

6.1. Financial: funds are included in the budget for the preparation of the guide including the consultation exercise and the preparation of exhibition and publicity material.

6.2. Legal: following adoption as SPD, the guide will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and appeal cases.

6.3. Environmental: the guide promotes a range of sustainable approaches to design as an integral part of the design process including the consideration of energy conservation, renewable energy technologies, minimising embodied energy, sustainable drainage systems etc.

6.4. Equalities: the consultation exercise will comply with the requirements of the Statement of Community Involvement including engagement with hard to reach
groups. The guide promotes the principles of ‘Lifetime Homes’ where dwellings are designed to be capable of adaptation to suit changing circumstances and the needs of elderly residents amongst others.

6.5. Crime Reduction: the guide supports the principles of ‘Secured by Design’ through appropriate building design and for example site layout, natural surveillance of public space which creates a sense of belonging, promotes neighbourly behaviour, feeling safer and more secure, thereby reducing the risk of anti-social behaviour.

7. Conclusion

7.1. The completed draft guide will now be subject to a public consultation exercise, in accordance with Regulation 25 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008.

7.2. Following consultation, the guide will be updated as required, to take account of comments received and adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document by Council in July 2012.

8. Recommendation

8.1. That Cabinet approves the illustrated draft guide for the purposes of consultation.

Background Papers
Greater Norwich Development Partnership: Joint Core Strategy
CLG: Draft National Planning Policy Framework
Update on changes to Local Government Financing

Financial Services Manager

There are a significant amount of challenges this Council will need to meet in the next year, many of which are related to finance.

The introduction of the New Homes Bonus in this financial year signalled the start of the transformation in how Local Government services will be financed. Further fundamental changes will be introduced in the coming financial year and from the 1 April 2013. These include the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy, the Localisation of Business Rates and the Localisation of Council Tax Benefit. The Council has already identified the need to create two new reserves to assist with any in year volatility of the latter two schemes. The Council faces major changes with the introduction of the Universal Credit system.

There are a number of things we can plan for to ensure we maximise the opportunities and minimise the risks. The purpose of this report is to highlight some key areas for members to consider. A challenge we must meet, is to ensure all the interconnecting issues are considered in a holistic way, to ensure we target our resource and services at those in greatest need.

1. Background

1.1. There are a number of issues out emerging where there is a lack of clarity on potential implications to this Council, which are due for implementation in April 2013 and this report highlights some of the key areas so that members can plan ahead and ensure all interconnecting issues are considered as a whole.

1.2. Funding is one of the main issues. Currently Local Government receives its funding from three sources:
- Government Grants (The largest of which are the re-distribution of National Non-Domestic Rates and the Revenue Support Grant)
- Council Tax
- Fees & Charges

1.3. In 2011/12 Local Authorities received their first payment under the New Homes Bonus. This was the first of a number of initiatives which will fundamentally change the face of local government financing.

1.4. The Localism Act which received royal assent in November 2011, has wide ranging implications for local authorities. The Act devolves greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and gives local communities more control over housing and planning decisions.

1.5. The Government introduced the Local Government Finance Bill on the 19 December 2011. The Bill is designed to encourage local economic growth, reduce the financial deficit and drive decentralisation of control over local government finance and represents a radical change to the local government finance system. The main features of the bill are to:

- Enable local authorities to retain a proportion of the business rates generated in their area, providing a strong financial incentive to promote local economic growth. This will form the major source of government financing in the future.
- Enable local authorities to carry out Tax Increment Finance, giving them the ability to undertake borrowing against future business rates growth, supported by the forecast tax increment that accrues from additional development.
- Provide a framework for the localisation of support for council tax, giving increased financial autonomy to Council’s whilst ensuring a stronger link with the economic performance of the local area but also recognising and protecting the most vulnerable in society, including pensioners by continuing to offer these groups council tax support. The localisation of council tax support will save around £500 million throughout England compared with the current Council Tax Benefit scheme.
- Change the council tax rules to permit greater flexibility on the level of council tax local authorities can charge for empty properties, and to make other small changes to Council Tax schemes.

2. Government Initiatives & South Norfolk Council’s responses

2.1. Localisation of Council Tax Support

The localisation of Council Tax support is a new scheme which will operate from April 2013. The Government’s aim of localising Council Tax support is to give local authorities:

- a greater stake in the economic future of their local area
the opportunity to reform the system of Council Tax support to working age claimants and encourage those able to work, back into jobs

- local control over Council Tax
- a significant control over how a 10% reduction in expenditure on Council Tax benefit will be achieved
- a financial stake in the provision of support for Council Tax

The principles behind the new scheme are clear, and it is important that any possible risks are carefully managed

The localisation of Council Tax support also brings the potential for an increased risk of greater costs if there are increases in the number of claimants, for example should a major employer cease trading in the area. This will be managed through the Collection Fund and the Council would have to fund its share of the increase with the majority funded by Norfolk County Council. To assist the Council with coping with this volatility in year a new earmarked reserve of £500,000 called the Council Tax Support Reserve has been created.

A working group has been established with five nominated councillors, to devise a localised scheme for business rates and Council Tax Discounts that meets legislative requirements, supports corporate priorities and is affordable.

### 2.2. New Homes Bonus

This scheme is intended to ensure that more benefit is seen by the local community if a local authority enables the building of new homes. The Government has top sliced the level of grant support in 2012/13 to finance this and will continue to do so from the business rates under the localisation of business rates scheme. Therefore local authorities who provide a greater number of new homes above the national average will benefit, but those who build less will see a reduction in their funding. This additional income was not built into the Council’s base budget for 2011/12. This funding is not ringfenced and can be used for either revenue or capital purposes. For 2011/12 the Council has received £787,157 and achieved growth above the national average. For 2012/13 the Council will receive a total of £1,707,169. This is made up as follows:

- £50,400 Affordable Housing Premium (144 properties)
- £787,157 Year 2 payment for the Growth in 2010-11
- £869,612 Year 1 payment for the Growth in 2011-12

The budget for 2012/13 includes 70% of the New Homes Bonus received (excluding the Affordable Housing Premium) in the base budget to support existing services and new housing built in the District. The remaining 30% has been allocated to fund priorities for growth as identified through Neighbourhood Boards
SNC has done well under the New Homes Bonus scheme and ranks 75 out of 362 authorities when comparing the amount to be received for 2012-13, well above the majority of other districts and is expected to continue to do so. By achieving high level of growth which is far above the national average the Council enjoys a large percentage of the funding available. This will help to relieve pressure on the revenue budget and assist with keeping Council Tax low.

The Affordable Housing Premium element will be used to support the Council’s support to affordable housing. A one-off a sum of £300,000 from the New Homes Bonus received in 2011/12 will be used to pump prime this project, with future allocations of New Homes Bonus being recycled into funding new affordable housing in the future.

2.3. Localism

The Localism Act covers four main areas:

- new freedoms and flexibilities for local government, including the General Power of Competence
- new rights and powers for communities and individuals
- reform to make the planning system more democratic and more effective
- reform to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally

The key area of work under the Localism Act which is being taken forward is enabling our Neighbourhood working arrangements to expand to fulfil a large part of the opportunities given under the Act.

This will be achieved by utilising 30% of the funding from the New Homes Bonus, together with 50% of the second homes funding from Norfolk County Council to support the localism agenda within the District. The Neighbourhood Boards will work with residents to influence spend in the community, representing and reflecting people’s priorities. The Boards will consult with the community, identifying local priorities and working with the communities to prioritise activities through the use of participatory budgeting. The funding will then be used to enhance the prioritised “list” of existing services in the Neighbourhood area. There will also be an element of CIL funding but this will only be available to fund capital projects.

As mentioned above, the Localism Act has wide ranging implications for the Council - for example on planning policy, housing and administration of business rates. It provides authorities with a general power of competence, changes the rules on pre-determination in decision making, formalises the abolition of Standards for England, and gives new powers to communities to bid to run Council functions.

Work is already progressing in regard to some aspects of the Act – in particular, the Council are working with Cringleford to develop a Neighbourhood Development Plan (as part of DCLG’s Neighbourhood Planning Front Runners Scheme), whilst the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme, contained elsewhere on this agenda is aligned to the principles within the Act.
Many of the elements contained within the Act are yet to come into force, or guidance is still to be provided as to how implementation should proceed. A report on all aspects of the Act, which affect the Council, together with a timetable for delivery was presented to the previous Cabinet meeting on 6 February and to full Council on the 22 February.

2.4. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy on every property built in the district. The introduction of the CIL will raise significant funds for the infrastructure identified in the local infrastructure programme plan (LIPP). The Council has estimated it could receive around £105 million over the next fifteen years from this source of funding. The Localism Act assumes that a percentage (between 5%-10%) will be set aside for local communities to use for their infrastructure requirements. The remainder will be spent on the infrastructure requirements outlined in the LIPP. CIL will be used to finance capital projects.

The Council continues to work in partnership with Norwich City Council, Broadland District Council and Norfolk County Council in delivering CIL because it is integral to the delivery of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS). Following the high court challenge the South Norfolk “parts” of the JCS remain untouched and will continue to be used in all the Council’s planning decisions; that is determining planning applications and in preparing the site specific planning documents that identify areas for development.

The GNDP business plan for delivering the JCS highlights a funding gap between the income levels available from CIL and other sources to fund the level of infrastructure identified in the LIPP. It is therefore likely that a level of borrowing will be required. At present, the 2012/13 budget does not include any borrowing provision because additional information is required on when the need for borrowing will arise and how much and work is ongoing around this. If it does arise, that borrowing must be affordable. In the meantime systems are being put into place on how the CIL will be collected and administered ready for the adoption of the Charging Schedule by full Council.

2.5. Localisation of Business Rates

The Government’s key principles in formulating the localisation of Business Rates system, which comes into place from April 2013, are:

- To build into the local government finance system an incentive for local authorities to promote local growth over the long term;
- To reduce local authorities’ dependency upon central government, by producing as many self sufficient authorities as possible;
- To maintain a degree of redistribution of resources to ensure that authorities with high need and low taxbases are still able to meet the needs of their areas; and
- Protection for businesses and specifically, no increases in locally-imposed taxation without the agreement of local businesses.
The Government have released their response following the consultation process which sets out a clear central proposition for the business rates retention scheme and commits the Government to a certain direction of travel which is reflected in the legislation. However, there is lot of detail that still needs to be decided upon and the Government will be working with the local government sector in developing policy and in drafting any necessary second legislation.

The introduction of the new funding regime through the localisation of business rates can bring rewards if the Council can encourage new businesses to establish themselves and existing businesses to expand in the district. But it also brings risks. There is the risk that should a major employer, or a number of businesses decide to relocate or cease to trade, then this too will affect the level of business rates collected and the level of funding received by the Council. Changes such as those described will also affect any growth the Council has achieved. Under the proposals South Norfolk Council would have to pay a “tariff” to the Government as the amount of income it would collect from business rates would exceed its baseline funding level. However this baseline would become fixed (inflated with RPI) and the Council would then retain 80% of any growth above this level. In the ten year period between “resets” of the system, it is likely that the growth will mean the Council will be at greater risk of volatility as the percentage of income above its baseline funding level increases. To enable the Council to cope with this volatility in funding in year, a new earmarked reserve of £1 million has been created. Members may want to revisit this amount during the FY 2012/13 when there is more clarity over the baseline funding requirement the Council will be set and the final design of the scheme.

Under the Localism Act the Council will also have the ability to offer business rate discounts - to help attract firms, investment and jobs. However the cost of any discounts will have to be funded by the Council in the same way that discretionary reliefs currently are.

2.6. Universal Credit

From 2013 the Government is introducing the Universal Credit which will simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits in to a single streamlined payment. This single streamlined payment will be principally administered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and will include Housing Benefit but not Council Tax Benefit. It is likely that local authorities will be required to carry out some element of Universal Credit administration and we will continue to lobby to be part of the pilot programme.

The Universal Credit will be phased in over a number of years. As a result there will be a gradual reduction in the work carried out on Housing Benefits as it transfers to the DWP and therefore a reduction will be required in the establishment for the Revenues and Benefits Team from 2013 through to 2017. This is being managed so to protect existing service levels and reduce the financial commitment in a phased way.

Resources are being reorganised and realigned in the team to prepare for these changes. There will also be an effect on the Council’s cash flow as around £24 million is currently received as housing benefit subsidy and paid over to claimants
however the impact of this will be spread over the four year period from April
2013.

The Government will invite proposals for a small number of local authorities to
become ‘pilots’. Officers are reviewing opportunities which might benefit SNC
and our residents through becoming a pilot and being able to influence how
Universal Credits is established in a community like South Norfolk.

3. **Timetable**

3.1. The outline timetable for the implementation of localisation of Council Tax Benefit
scheme as provided by the DCLG is for the design of local schemes to begin in
the summer with consultation with other precepting authorities and members of
the public being undertaken in the autumn/winter of 2012/13. Although the
scoping of the IT changes required can begin in the summer the final
implementation cannot be started until after the consultation is complete and any
revisions to the scheme have been made. This does not leave much time for
testing or to rectify any issues which may arise, especially as all Council Tax
billing authorities will be calling upon their software suppliers during this time.

3.2. The timetable for the other main issues and how these fit together are contained
in the attached appendix. The timetable for the CIL has already been approved
by Council. The timetable for the localisation of business rates will be developed
through the Member Steering Group. The timetable for Universal Credit is at this
stage limited to considering and submitting a bid as a ‘pilot.

4. **Other Options**

4.1. There are a broad range of opportunities and risks presented in this report.
Being proactive enables the Council to plan effectively; to ensure resources and
priorities are targeted to critical areas of work; and to influence and shape
aspects of government policy.

5. **Relevant Corporate Priorities**

5.1. The issues contained in this report support all corporate priorities, and our
positioning of policies and services will affect how we seize the opportunities and
manage risks.

6. **Implications and Risks**

6.1. Financial – significant, and contained in the Medium Term Plan.

6.2. Legal – Compliance with legislative requirements.

6.3. Risks – are shown throughout this report.
7. **Conclusion**

7.1. Local authorities face unprecedented change in their sources of funding; their risks and ability to locally influence expenditure and income. The policy framework will need re-addressing so all of our policies are contributing to clear corporate priorities. Evaluating and influencing opportunities is critical if we are to maximise the benefits.

8. **Recommendations or Action Required**

8.1. It is recommended that Cabinet endorses the approach being taken and provides any policy direction for developing proposals.
Marketing Strategy

Corporate Business Manager

The Marketing Strategy attached to this report for the period 2012-15 has an overall aim of ensuring that the way we communicate and present ourselves is clear, accurate, consistent and recognisable. The overarching objective is aligned with the vision and it is:

“To ensure that South Norfolk Council (SNC) is seen as a prime mover in retaining and improving the quality of life in South Norfolk, for now and future generations, to make it one of the best places to live and work in the country.”

The Strategy is intended to guide the work of the Council over the next three years in ensuring we utilise all the available opportunities to promote our services, position ourselves as the provider of choice, ensure the benefits of our services to the community are clear, ensure our services are recognisable and contribute to achieving a high profile for South Norfolk Council on the national, regional and local stage.

Members are asked to approve this Strategy.

Cabinet member(s): John Fuller  
Ward(s) affected: All  
Contact Officer, telephone number, and e-mail: Joanna Kitchener 01508 533601 jkitchener@s-norfolk.gov.uk

1. Background

1.1. Delivering the vision of the Council underpins everything we do and consistent use of our brand and effective marketing campaigns, will ensure staff understand their role in communicating how their work helps to deliver our vision to external audiences. The Marketing Strategy will provide the framework within which all our marketing activity will be delivered.

1.2. The aim is that on every occasion a customer sees a South Norfolk Council service, they recognise it as such and we maximise every opportunity available to us to ensure that we continue to be recognised as an effective and innovative rural district council on the national, regional and local stage and our consistency
and placement of message will ensure we are at the forefront of local government.

1.3. This strategy also sets out to change the perception of the council as a service provider to encourage our residents and customers to see us more as an enabling body and help promote key initiatives such as the Community Empowerment Scheme. By understanding our customers better, and utilising the communication channels they prefer, we can engage with residents so they can help shape the services they need.

1.4. For some of the services delivered by the Council, from pest control to leisure centres, our customers have a clear choice between us and other providers, and this strategy will help position us as providers of choice in the market. We are often the most sustainable low cost option so we need to ensure our customers are made aware of this.

2. Proposal and Reasons

2.1. The Strategy is attached as Appendix A to this report and members are requested to consider the key aims and objectives as outlined in that strategy. Attached to the main report are the main marketing mechanisms by which the Council will deliver the marketing aims.

2.2. Underneath the Marketing Strategy will be an annual plan which will set out the proactive marketing campaigns planned with the service managers for that year. Approximately 80% of the marketing work will be pre planned within the annual marketing plan to deliver the key messages and priorities for that year with the remainder being the reactive work needed as and when throughout the year.

3. Other Options

3.1. Members may decide not to adopt the attached strategy but this could lead to inconsistent messages and ineffective marketing campaigns.

5. Implications and Risks

5.1 Financial

There are no specific financial implications as there are sufficient existing staff resources to implement the strategy.

5.2 Equalities

The Strategy aims to ensure all sections of the community are able to access council services through good information channels and effective marketing.

6. Risks

6.1. The main risk associated with the Strategy is that if the Council fails to promote its services in consistent and effective manner, then residents will not be aware of the full range of services, take up of income generating services will be low
and key stakeholders such as national government will not look to us to help influence policy.

7 Recommendations

7.1 Members are requested to approve the Marketing Strategy attached as Appendix A.
1. **Members** – Our members are a very important part of how we the Council is perceived. Members are a key link between residents and the council and must therefore be kept informed of and clearly understand our key messages. The members must also act in a way that promotes the council and our values.

2. **Employees of SNC** – Our staff are an important marketing mechanism for the Council. They must clearly understand the key messages so that whenever employees come in to contact with our residents they act in way that promotes the council’s vision and priorities.

3. **Website** – the website is a key tool for showcasing our services to our residents. The website must be kept up to date with news on services and promotions. The SNC website is a portal through which residents and staff can easily and efficiently interact with SNC and its services. It will also act as a hub for the free exchange of information, ideas and priorities, and actively promote resident engagement.

4. **Events** – From street consultations to music festivals, the Council leads or supports events attended by thousands of people each year. Whilst we can utilise media such as banners and posters to get messages out at these events we must combine this with engaging people on the ground who are on message and can build positive relationships with attendees.

5. **Branding** – SNC branding will be used on all materials produced by SNC and more detail will be provided within the Style Guide, primarily used by the Marketing and Graphics team.

6. **Flyers** – Flyers are used for a wide range of marketing promotions. The flyers are double-sided, to maximise advertising opportunities. Flyers will be distributed, depending on promotion, at various locations. These can be school book bags, Leisure Centres, Tourist Information Centres or by Neighbourhood Officers/Staff dropping at key venues.

7. **Posters** – Posters are used to advertise promotions/services through our Leisure Centres, key village locations (parish councils, doctors, libraries, post offices etc).

8. **Banners/Pull-Ups** – these are used to advertise key messages. The banners/pull-ups will be used for generic promotion and can be re-used.

9. **Book Bags / School Network** – Flyers are used in School book bags to target parents and promote activities/services that will benefit the children.

10. **Press Advertising** – press advertising is used to promote services to a wide audience. The adverts will adhere to the Style Guide.

11. **Press Releases** – Good news stories will be sent as a press release by the Communications Manager.
12. **What's On Guides** – These will be used to promote activities in the local press.

13. **Parish Magazines** – The parish magazines are used to advertise local events, e.g. consultations on local development, neighbourhood meetings, bin calendar changes etc.

14. **Big Screens** – The big screens are a free source of advertising at South Norfolk Council venues. They are used to advertise latest promotions, services and our priorities.

15. **Businesses and Residential email** – New customers will be asked for their email addresses. These can be used to advertise promotions and provide information on services.

16. **Direct Mail** – This tool will be used to target customers in a certain area.

17. **Local Meetings** – Meetings are arranged for local residents to discuss issues affecting them. It gives residents a chance to voice their opinions. Local meetings will be used for Neighbourhoods and local planning and housing needs.

18. **Link Magazine** – The Link Magazine is published three times a year, and reaches at least 96% or our residents. The Link Magazine is produced by us, which means we have complete control of the messages we are delivering. The Link Magazine is used to promote our services, showcase the work we are doing in the community and also to promote current offers and opportunities.

19. **Council Tax Booklet** – This is distributed in April to each household. This will be used to advertise services that may appeal to the majority of residents.

20. **Facebook and Twitter** – Social media websites are used to provide instant two-way communication to residents. The facebook and twitter logo will be displayed on all our promotional material. We maintain our own facebook and twitter accounts but the priority is to build a positive presence through contribution to relevant other streams on issues that matter.

21. **Vehicles** – The Council has a number of vehicles, including Bin Lorries, Play Ranger van, Countryside Ranger van etc. These vehicles are a valuable asset for promoting our values and services.

22. **South Norfolk Council Assets** – the Council has a number of buildings within our communities, these include the three Leisure Centres, Tourist Information Centre, Business Centres and South Norfolk House. These buildings are valuable marketing tools and will be used to promote our priorities and the services we provide.
SOUTH NORFOLK COUNCIL
MARKETING STRATEGY
2012 - 2015
1. Introduction

South Norfolk Council is a rural district in East Anglia. It has a population of around 110,000 people, of whom 44% live in rural locations with the remainder living in market towns or on the fringe of Norwich. SNC has around 350 staff delivering services to its residents and customers.

The authority is responsible for more than 80 different services, ranging from collecting bins to providing activities for children and adults, from food safety to elections. Many of these services will not be instantly recognisable as South Norfolk services by the majority of our residents.

There can be a general feeling that the Council is only responsible for bins and council tax. The 80/20 rule applies to the relationship of the council and its residents. 20% of residents take up 80% of the council officers' time dealing with their problems and answering their queries. 80% of residents will believe that they only have contact with the council through having their bins emptied and by payment of their Council Tax. It is this 80% that we need to ensure are made aware of the many positive things that the council does.

2. Aim

Communication is a vital tool when interacting with the public and it is therefore important that the way we communicate and present ourselves is clear, accurate, consistent and recognisable. The overarching objective is aligned with the vision and it is:

“To ensure that South Norfolk Council (SNC) is seen as a prime mover in retaining and improving the quality of life in South Norfolk, for now and future generations, to make it one of the best places to live and work in the country.”

So on every occasion a customer sees a South Norfolk Council service, they recognise it as such and we maximise every opportunity available to us to ensure that our key messages are seen and recognised by all our customers, residents, businesses and partners with the key aim of ensuring the positive impact our services have on residents and the wider community is clear.

For some of the services delivered by the Council, from pest control to leisure centres, our customers have a clear choice between us and other providers, and this strategy will help position us as providers of choice in the market. We are often the most sustainable low cost option so we need to ensure our customers are made aware of this.

We need to continue to be recognised as an effective and innovative rural district council on the national, regional and local stage and our consistency and placement of message will ensure we are the forefront of local government.

For many years the council has been seen as a service provider. This strategy also sets out to change that perception and to encourage our residents and customers to see us more as an enabling body. We are seeking to change the behaviour and expectations of our communities so that the council is seen to provide the knowledge and expertise that will allow our communities to help themselves, which is the principle of the Community Empowerment scheme launched under the Localism Act. Effective marketing will be a key mechanism by which communities understand this key role of the Council.
3. Strategic Context

Delivering the vision of the Council underpins everything we do and consistent use of our brand, will ensure staff understand their role in communicating how their work helps to deliver that vision to external audiences.

South Norfolk Council’s vision is:

“To retain and improve the quality of life in South Norfolk, for now and future generations, to make it one of the best place to live and work in the country.”

Backing up that vision, are the priorities which convert the vision into performance areas:

- Enhancing our quality of life and the environment we live in.
- Promoting a thriving economy
- Supporting communities to realise their potential
- Driving businesses to be businesslike, efficient & customer-aware

Everything we do at the Council should help deliver or facilitate one or more of the priorities and how we market the Council should reflect that aim.

In addition, the impression and feeling that all of our audiences should be left with after coming into contact with the Council is that we approach everything we do in the following way:

- Businesslike and efficient;
- Customer focussed
- Consistently can do

The Marketing Strategy is one of the key strands of the Communication Strategy and the different mechanisms to help us deliver the strategy are attached as Appendix A. These are the way we will ensure all of the Council’s strategies and priorities are delivered in a consistent and recognisable way from encouraging customers to use the on line services we have available to delivering services in partnership with the Council.

Underneath the Marketing Strategy will be an annual plan which will set out the proactive marketing campaigns planned with the service managers for that year. Approximately 80% of the marketing work will be pre planned within the annual marketing plan to deliver the key messages and priorities for that year with the remainder being the reactive work needed as and when throughout the year.

4. Objectives

Our challenge is to ensure that all of our stakeholders understand the ethos of SNC as being committed to delivering our vision and priorities with them. We will do this by keeping stakeholders informed of and engaged in outcome delivering activity, listening to their views and providing them with clear messages running though all of our communications.

For the first year of this strategy, the focus will be on understanding our customer (see Customer Insight below) to enable targeted, effective marketing campaigns to be designed and implemented in year two and three.
Throughout this strategy will be consistently linked with key strategies such as IT and meet the following objectives.

- We will translate our vision and behaviours into positive visual images and communicate these in a subtle, clear and consistent way.
- We will improve two way communication with our stakeholders, understand what they want and listen to their views.
- Increase awareness of consultations and ensure the public have their say on matters affecting them.
- Ensure the benefits of the services we deliver are clear to our residents and the wider community.
- Provide consistency of message throughout services and directorates.
- Promote awareness of our services. What we do and what we DON’T do.
- Use clear threads through all of our communication channels.
- All communications to be clearly identifiable as SNC.
- We will use marketing tools to communicate the Council’s personality.
- Promote Income generation.
- Encourage a shift in residents’ behaviours, e.g. more online services being accessed, more people paying by Direct Debit.
- Promote our website as the hub of all information relating to South Norfolk, their first click for all things South Norfolk.

5. Audiences

South Norfolk Council has many stakeholders. They are all of key importance to SNC, and need to be taken into account individually when promoting our services and values.

Internal audiences within the Council can be identified as:

- Elected members. Enjoy a unique position in the community. They are elected to support Council work but will also need to be recognised as working for their wards as local member. We need to ensure these key stakeholder’s actions continue to support the key messages.
- CMT and senior management. Successful strategies are led from the top of any organisation.
- Customer-facing staff. It is estimated that up to 75% of staff have some contact with members of the public. They represent the ‘front-line’ of shaping residents’ perceptions of the Council. The way they respond to and communicate with residents is crucial to the achievement of the Council’s objectives. Activities and exercises must be made relevant to all staff.
- Other staff that have no contact with customers. They may not have direct contact with residents in a work capacity but as residents they will have the opportunity to influence opinions about South Norfolk Council.

External audiences include:

- Residents and customers. All residents will have a view on the extent to which the Council is on track to achieve its objectives. Individual perceptions will be shaped by
the nature of the interaction they have with the Council. We believe there is a broad 80:20 rule at play where:
  o 20% of residents account for 80% of the Council’s work and the Council needs to be seen as working in tandem with this group
  o 80% of residents account for 20% of the work – where the issue is primarily about associating the Council with the positive work they do on behalf of the residents
- Local businesses. The Council needs to have a marketing strategy that is credible and supportive for national businesses based in South Norfolk as well as Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the region.
- Influencers. South Norfolk has a number of interdependent and overlapping relationships with national government, Norfolk County Council, local media and adjacent district Councils. All these have the capacity to influence the way people view the district and will therefore impact South Norfolk’s ability to achieve their vision.
- Suppliers. South Norfolk Council will need to treat all its suppliers in a way that reinforces the vision.

6. Customer Insight

By understanding characteristics of residents within localities we will undertake targeted marketing rather than using a blanket approach. We may alter media or even messages according to the insight this data gives us. We can build customer insight in two key ways

- External Sources – buying / acquiring data that has been gathered by other organisations
- Internal Sources – utilising the data we build through customer transactions, events and planned consultations.

6.1 External Sources

Through Norfolk Insight, SNC has access to ACORN geodemographic data built from a combination of census data, millions of lifestyle survey records and other consumer data sets. Classifications show households in three main groups:

- Well off
- Comfortably off
- Hard pressed.

Well off and hard pressed are broken down again into sub groups. In South Norfolk 62% of households are classified as well off compared to 45% across the County and 37% nationally.

Only 7% of household in South Norfolk fall into the hard pressed categories compared to 16% across the County and 20% nationally.

The other 30% of households fall into the comfortably off group compared to 38% in Norfolk and 43% nationally.

Importantly, against each of these groups and sub groups, ACORN shows levels of education, interest in issues such as the environment or health, hobbies, how they access services and preferences for communication, media used, even papers and books read.
6.2 Internal Sources

SNC gathers data at every transaction we make and from this we can build a picture of our customer’s preferences which we can use for targeted campaigns such as Direct Debit take up or invitation to Neighbourhood Boards.

At present our customer data is held in many different back office databases which makes accessing and analysing it challenging. In 2012/13 we are installing a common platform in our biggest customer facing directorate and integrating our remaining systems into a single customer record which will make accessing transactional data much easier.

We regularly survey customers and other stakeholders through consultations and we must utilise this data more effectively. We have learnt through our citizen panel how customers prefer to get information from the Council. Newspapers and leaflets are currently used by 59% of respondents to access information while the Link Magazine and the Council Website are currently used by 54% and 51% respectively. However the same survey revealed that if our web services were improved, a far greater number would prefer to access information using that channel.

From 2012/13 we will replace the citizen panel with Your Voice which means we can send surveys independently of our County partners allowing us to focus more on South Norfolk as an entity.

Once we are clear about who our customers are, and the most effective methods of engaging with them, then the next stage is to work closely with our communities to understand how they would prefer our services to be delivered to them. This is the key principle behind the new Community Empowerment Scheme and can be summed by “Working with you, working for you” which we intend to use in the first annual marketing campaigns for 2012/13.

7. Approach

By implementing these objectives we will achieve a more positive recognition of the Council and its various roles and the services we provide. By developing and enhancing the reputation of the council as innovative, customer focused, businesslike and trustworthy we will become a hub for local communities and maximise income generation.

The emphasis will be on enabling communities to fulfill their potential and helping communities and community groups to help themselves. There will be a movement away from the council “doing” things and a movement towards the council enabling and facilitating.

In order to achieve the Marketing objectives, we need to promote how we are turning our priorities into actions and how those actions are helping residents improve their lives.

To achieve this we will:

7.1 To change the behavior and expectations of our communities. We will encourage a shift in residents' behaviour by enabling communities to fulfill their potential and help community groups to help themselves.

7.2 Link all marketing of activities to the vision or a relevant priority, showing how the two are linked. This will not be explicitly stated, rather the words and message in the activity will lead the customer to understand what we are trying to achieve.
7.3 **Incorporate the priorities in to our day-to-day branding:** The priorities are colour coded so they are easily identifiable. The priorities will be incorporated in-line with the Brand Strategy on all promotional material.

7.4 **Promote the priorities and values within South Norfolk Council.** Our priorities will be promoted throughout South Norfolk Council by using poster campaigns, the website and learning hours. The priorities will be displayed with examples to illustrate how we are working towards each priority. Each promotion will be colour coded with the relevant priority.

7.5 **Build strong associate brands where appropriate.** Where appropriate associate brands will build relevance and positive perception for key services, campaigns and projects. In areas like tourism ‘Discover South Norfolk’ and ‘Waveney Valley’ project have promoted the district and the local economy. In health ‘Active Norfolk’ has encouraged behavioral change leading to healthier lifestyles. Whilst campaigns like ‘Pub of the Year’ have developed into associate brands that make them more identifiable but still build the overall South Norfolk Brand.

7.6 **Use images appropriately and in a consistent way.** The Style Guide will contain agreed criteria around what images should be used and when. The imagery used in our campaigns will, where possible, be of or representative of our residents and district. The use of stock images will be kept to a minimum.

7.7 **Engage with our customers through consultations, making sure we use various media outlets to advertise the consultations to a wider audience.** We will seek to involve our residents on any issues that may affect them. We will use consultations and meetings arranged at times that will attract the largest audience and make use of existing events and locations e.g. festivals, supermarkets, market days etc.

7.8 **To engage with customers through our website and social media.** The website allows our residents to access Council services more quickly and more cost effectively. We will encourage our residents to pay by Direct Debit and use more online services. We will promote the website and our social media sites on all promotional material that is produced by South Norfolk Council.

7.9 **To improve internal communications with staff, by keeping them informed and listening to their views.** Staff will be informed, involved and consulted on matters affecting South Norfolk Council. E-link, Blogs and learning hours will be used to facilitate effective and accessible two-way communications between staff and management.

All advertising is controlled by the Council, via the Marketing, Graphics and Communications Teams. The message that we deliver will be simple, easy to understand, consistent and recognisable through our brand.

8. **Marketing Mechanisms**

In order to promote the Council’s priorities we will use an array of marketing mechanisms and methods. The materials will always contain a positive message, subtly but clearly showing how our activities and priorities are linked. Different tools will be used to reach different audiences to achieve the best and most cost effective results. New media, such as text messaging, social media and other media as they become more widely used will be used as appropriate. For example, an event aimed at young people as the principal audience, the marketing would utilise facebook and similar channels.
The detail on the methods to be used is attached as Appendix A.

9. Conclusion

By improving two-way communication between SNC and our residents through social media, our website, consultations, meetings and other methods we will be able to increase engagement, improve relations and promote our services to our community.

By using the marketing tools we will develop and communicate the Council’s vision and priorities to our customers as a Council that is businesslike, customer focused and “can do”, providing excellent value for money.

Once the marketing strategy has been implemented the people who live and work in South Norfolk will be clear about the Council’s role, engage with the Council in defining the services they need, understand what the Council stands for and will be kept informed about the Council’s plans and activities.

All marketing channels will be exploited to their full potential and used in the most cost effective way.

March 2012
South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme

Gill Duffy, Housing & Advice Services Manager

This report brings to Cabinet the South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme (known as South Norfolk Home Options) for approval and recommendation to Council for formal adoption.

The South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme builds on the success of the Greater Norwich scheme and will continue to offer choice and transparency to customers with a housing need and local connection. It has been developed to take into account changing national priorities and local needs. The new scheme will improve the service to customers through a more efficient and customer-focused approach.

Local partners, stakeholders and members have had the opportunity to be fully involved in the development of the scheme and customers have been invited to respond to consultation.

Cabinet member(s): Yvonne Bendle
Ward(s) affected: All

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1. Background

1.1. The Housing Act 1996 (part VI) places a duty on local housing authorities to have a published housing allocations scheme. This must contain the authority’s policy on how social housing for rent is allocated in its district and how applications for an allocation are assessed. It must also detail the processes for application, assessment and allocation.

1.2. As reported to Cabinet in October and November 2011, the Greater Norwich Home Options Partnership, with its joint allocations scheme, is ending on 31st March 2012. South Norfolk Council, therefore, needs to have its own housing allocations scheme in place.

1.3. Prior to the Greater Norwich Home Options scheme in 2007 social housing in South Norfolk was allocated to applicants by a process of direct nomination. The Council held a register of applicants and awarded them points for different
criteria. Applicants expressed a preference for the areas in which they would like to live in and the Council nominated those with the highest points for vacancies when they arose. The disadvantages of a nominations scheme were:

- Customers did not understand their priority in relation to other applicants.
- Customers did not know what properties were available and couldn’t consider those that weren’t in the area(s) they originally chose.
- There was a lack of transparency that led to a lack of trust.
- Customers regularly contacted the Council about properties they thought were becoming available or to ask how they could increase their points.
- There was considerable work and communication between the Council and the landlords, especially each time a nominated applicant refused a property.
- Customers could not understand or fully recognise when they should consider other housing options as they did not know the priority of the applicants who were offered properties.

1.4. In 2004 the government introduced a target that all local housing authorities introduce a different method of allocating homes by 2010 that was considered to be fairer and more transparent. This method is known as Choice Based Lettings (CBL) and the majority of authorities had introduced this before the target was removed in 2010.

1.5. CBL normally uses a method of assessing housing need within clear bands. Housing Associations advertise their vacancies on a weekly basis and applicants can apply for up to two properties per week. The applicant in the highest band is normally offered the tenancy. If there is more than one applicant in that band, then the applicant who has been registered the longest in that band is considered first.

1.6. In 2007 the Greater Norwich authorities received a grant from central government to introduce a CBL system and entered into a full partnership approach between the three local authorities and fifteen local housing associations (Registered Providers).

1.7. In moving to a CBL scheme the priorities for the Council were to have a scheme in which:

- Customers understand their priority in relation to other applicants.
- Customers are aware of all vacancies and whether they would qualify to apply for them.
- The letting of the properties is transparent and customers know the priority of the successful applicants.
- Customers are not restricted in applying for properties in certain areas; they can make reasoned judgements about where they would be most successful in applying for a property and think about areas that they may not have previously considered.
• It is easier to discuss and pursue other housing options with customers when it is clear and can be evidenced that they are unlikely to be successful through the housing register.

1.8. The Greater Norwich Home Options scheme is considered to have been a largely successful partnership and South Norfolk residents have benefitted from a common housing register for the district, through which the partner landlords have advertised all their vacancies. In December 2009 an independent review of the scheme concluded that…… “The scheme is significantly better than the previous methods of allocating social housing across the Greater Norwich Sub Region, it is well regarded locally and nationally and there are elements of particular good practice.”

1.9. However, whilst delivering a Social Housing Allocations scheme in partnership has had benefits it has progressively become clear to the partners that further efficiencies can be gained by each delivering their own CBL scheme. The South Norfolk scheme described below has therefore been designed to further improve delivery through a more personalised and streamlined service.

2. Current Position and Issues

2.1. The development of a South Norfolk Council Housing Allocations Scheme has been timely for a number of reasons:

2.1.1. As part of the Council’s programme of LEAN reviews improvements to processes and some elements of policy were identified that will result in both a more targeted service for customers with a housing need and also efficiencies for the Council.

2.1.2. The Localism Act 2011 enables local authorities to shape an allocations scheme to give greater priority to locally identified needs, removing the requirement to have an ‘open’ housing register.

2.1.3. The government released draft Statutory Instruments for consultation that would require local authorities to amend their housing allocation schemes to take into account the nature of armed forces deployment and stationing.

2.1.4. The Welfare Reform Bill has been going through Parliament with housing benefit changes having an impact on the size and type of property that claimants will be able to afford.

2.1.5. The Department for Communities and Local Government has issued a draft Code of Guidance on the allocations and lettings of affordable homes for consultation, bringing together the existing Codes and the Localism Act requirements and powers.

2.2. These developments have all been taken into account in the drafting of the new Scheme.
2.3. The Housing Act 1996 requires a local authority to consult with its partner landlords (housing associations) when writing or amending its allocations scheme. It is also good practice to consult with other stakeholders and customers. Accordingly, working groups have been held monthly with stakeholders and partners since October 2011 to discuss new policy ideas and develop a South Norfolk scheme that takes into account national requirements and local needs.

2.4. In December 2011 a workshop was also held with 10 Members, 6 Landlords, 6 other stakeholders and 7 officers to discuss the main proposed changes and to reach consensus on the details. A further workshop was held with 5 Members only.

2.5. A draft version of the South Norfolk housing allocations scheme was approved for public consultation by the Localism and Neighbourhoods Overview Sub Committee in January 2012 and it was agreed that the final draft, post-consultation, be circulated to Overview Sub Committee members for final comment. The consultation closed on 29th February 2012. Despite letters being sent to 3,500 applicants only 5 responses from members of the public were received. Two formal responses from housing associations (Registered Providers). Saffron Housing Trust responded on behalf of the Norfolk Housing Alliance but recognised that the landlords have been part of the scheme development so their response was minimal.

2.6. Consultation and workshop feedback indicated that the scheme policy and processes have been developed to be sensible and fair although it has been recognised, during the workshops, that allocations legislation is complex and it is difficult to fully meet the needs of all applicants.

3. South Norfolk Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme

3.1. The final draft of the housing allocations scheme can be found at Appendix A. This is a technical, working document that must be available to the public and, once approved, it will be published on the Council’s website. A simpler scheme guide will be available to customers at their housing options interview.

3.2. Early on in the review of the Allocations scheme it was recognised that there was significant scope to streamline and focus the service for customers who have a housing need and a local connection to South Norfolk. In particular it became clear that many applicants without a housing need do not actively engage in applying for properties yet the initial and subsequent assessments of their applications involved significant resource. The proposed new arrangements will reduce the number of applicants who do not have a housing need, consequently reducing the resources required to administer the scheme and will introduce a new triage approach to requests for housing advice. As a result an application to the housing register will be one of a number of options in response to real housing need; others will continue to include assistance to access the private rented sector or other suitable housing and intervention to remain in a suitable home.

3.3. A summary of the main policy changes are:
3.3.1. Applicants without a housing need or a local connection will not qualify for an allocation. This is to reflect the fact that social housing is a scarce resource that is required for those with the greatest need;

3.3.2. Applicants who do not take a proactive approach and apply for properties will have their applications cancelled after a year. This will affect a number of applicants initially but very quickly will encourage greater responsibility and engagement;

3.3.3. Priority will no longer be awarded for applicants in house shares. This is because house sharing is increasingly a more affordable and acceptable form of housing for single people;

3.3.4. Priority will no longer be awarded for applicants with children who are living in upper floor flats. This is because social housing is a scarce resource and 2 or 3 bedroom flats are an acceptable home for of housing for families.

3.3.5. A local connection is redefined as wider than 6 months residency, reflecting the different and more realistic connections that our customers have with the district;

3.3.6. Residents of supported accommodation (hostels) will have a lower priority of silver band, rather than gold when they are assessed as ready to move into independent accommodation. This gives equal priority to those who are homeless but do not have a ‘priority need’;

3.3.7. Children of opposite sexes will be expected to share a bedroom until the age of ten, rather than age six. This reflects the housing benefit rules and ensures that those who require assistance with the rent will not have a shortfall in payments;

3.3.8. Young people in local authority care will be provided with a housing advice and options service before they are required to leave their placement and be assessed in the same way as supported accommodation residents;

3.3.9. Applicants will not be able to reapply within a year of being housed through the scheme or if they have been lent a rent deposit for a property in the private sector, unless a new housing need arises. This will assist in challenging the current culture of repeat applications.
3.3.10. Former members of the armed forces will have a local connection to the district whereas they have previously been disadvantaged by the inability to form local residential connections members of the armed forces will be considered to.

3.4 As a result of the combined policy and process changes described above the numbers of applicants on the housing register will reduce to reflect (a) housing need, (b) housing demand of customers with a local connection to South Norfolk and (c) cost savings to be realised. A record of approaches for housing advice and wider demand will be kept separately.

4. Operation and monitoring of the scheme

4.1. It is important and sensible that our partners and stakeholders continue to be involved in the operation and monitoring of the housing allocations scheme. An operational and policy development group will continue to meet quarterly to review the scheme implementation and performance. It will consider the impact of the scheme changes and propose policy and process development where relevant. Future formal reviews of the scheme will be brought to OSC for discussion and Cabinet for approval.

4.2. A multi agency panel currently meets monthly to consider customer requests for reviews of decisions, ensuring a fair assessment and judgement. It is proposed to continue with this arrangement.

4.3. South Norfolk’s housing and advice team has had the lowest rate of customer requests for reviews of decisions made relating to housing register applications during the Home Options partnership. In the last full financial year, reviews were requested in less than 1% of new applications compared with 4 to 5% in the partner local authorities. This indicates that the South Norfolk team make accurate decisions and communicate them well to the customers. Informal feedback also indicates that our housing partners have trust in the Council to operate fairly and consistently.

5. Adoption of the South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme

5.1. Cabinet is requested to approve the South Norfolk Allocations Scheme, known as South Norfolk Home Options, and to recommend it to Council for adoption. If adopted the Scheme will be implemented from 1st April 2012 and will run on the new software system from 1st June 2012.

5.2. A period of implementation will be required as the majority of the current 3,500 applications will need to be reassessed against the new criteria. Although some changes will be able to be implemented using IT resources, the majority will be manual and this will be resource intensive, initially. All new applications will be assessed according to the new scheme. It is estimated that it will take up to 3 months until all applications have been reassessed.

6. Other Options

6.1. Members could choose to:
6.1.1. return to an approach of direct nominations rather than choice based lettings, this would have the disadvantages set out in Section 1.3 above; or

6.1.2. continue with the existing scheme and policy this would make difficult to respond to the issues described in Section 2.1

7. Relevant Corporate Objectives

7.1. Enhancing our quality of life and the environment we live in.

Through receiving quality advice on housing options and being enabled to make reasoned choices about where they live, customers are more likely to enjoy a greater quality of life in a home and location suitable to their needs.

7.2. Promoting a thriving local economy

Through receiving quality housing, money, welfare advice customers are enabled to make maximise their income and make reasoned choices about where they live to facilitate access to current or future employment, training and education.

7.3. Driving services through being businesslike, efficient and customer aware.

The policy and process changes are intended to improve the service to the customer and reduce the resources required to administer the scheme.

8. Implications and risks

- Legal: There is a legal requirement to have an allocations scheme in place. With the Greater Norwich Home Options Partnership ending the Council will require its own scheme. There is a minor risk that the final Code of Guidance on Allocations, when it is issued later in the year, will require further policy changes.

- Equalities: The duties under the Equalities Act have been taken into account and the scheme details these at section 3.2.10.

- Crime Reduction: The scheme takes into account the Council’s duties in preventing and reducing crime by ensuring allocations are made suitably in conjunction with partner criminal justice agencies. Also, through offering customers choice over where they apply to live, the chances of successful and sustainable tenancies and neighbourhoods increase.

- Financial: As reported to Cabinet in November 2011, the policy and process changes intended to be introduced are predicted to reduce the resources required to administer the scheme.

- Risk: As some applicants will have their applications cancelled or their priority reduced as a result of the intended changes, there is a risk that requests for reviews increase initially. This will be minimised by the use of clear communication with customers.
9. Conclusion

9.1. The South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme builds on the success of the Greater Norwich scheme and will continue to offer choice and transparency to customers with a housing need and local connection. It has been developed to take into account the changing national climate and local needs. The scheme also incorporates legislative changes that will improve the service to the customer and reduce processes and resources.

9.2. Local partners and stakeholders have had the opportunity to be fully involved in the development of the scheme which increases the chances of it being successful; all perspectives have been considered and implementation will be consistently understood.

10. Recommendations

10.1. Members are requested to approve and adopt the South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme.
South Norfolk Home Options

South Norfolk Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme
1. Introduction

The South Norfolk Home Options Scheme contains the Housing Allocations Policy for South Norfolk Council. It also sets out the procedures that South Norfolk Council (known throughout this document as ‘the Council’) follows in the allocation of affordable housing in its district.

The Registered Providers (Housing Associations) that are part of the scheme are known throughout this document as the scheme landlords. These are listed at Appendix A. A copy of the South Norfolk Home Options Scheme is available free from the Council or one of the scheme landlords and is also available on the Council’s website at www.south-norfolk.gov.uk.

1.1 What is an allocation?

The allocation of housing by a housing authority is defined in s.159 of the 1996 Housing Act as:

- Selecting a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of housing accommodation held by them (ie by that housing authority)
- Nominating a person to be a secure or introductory tenant of housing accommodation held by another person (ie another housing authority)
- Nominating a person to be an assured tenant of housing accommodation held by a Private Registered Provider (Housing Association)

1.2 Statement on Choice

The Council and the scheme landlords are fully committed to enabling customers to play an active role in choosing where, and in what property type and tenure they live, while continuing to house those people in the greatest housing need and complying with all relevant legislation.

It is important to realise that the demand for accommodation is higher in some areas than others. In making a decision about the choices available, applicants need to consider their housing need priority against the availability of properties in any given area.

1.3 Overview of the Policy and Processes

The Council assesses applications from customers who would like to rent affordable homes in order to determine:
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

- Whether they are eligible for an allocation
- Whether they qualify for an allocation
- The level of their housing need, assessed against 5 bands.

The Council stores the information about eligible and qualifying applicants on an electronic data base known as its Housing Register. This information is shared with the scheme landlords.

Scheme landlords advertise their vacant properties in South Norfolk to those on the Housing Register, including photographs and a description, on a weekly basis. Applicants may apply/bid for their choice of properties as long as they meet the qualifying criteria for a particular property.

The successful applicant is the one who meets the stated qualifying criteria and has the highest assessed housing need (band). If there is more than one applicant in the highest band then the application with the earliest date (this is known as the band effective date) will be considered first.

Feedback is provided to applicants on the level of demand for vacant properties previously advertised. This helps applicants to make more informed choices, including looking at the other housing options promoted through the scheme.
2. Applications and assessment

2.1 Policy

2.1.1 Eligibility

Certain people from abroad, including some who are subject to immigration control, are not eligible for an allocation of affordable housing. These regulations are set by Government and updated regularly. The Council follows these regulations which are available on request.

2.1.2 Qualification

Applicants, who are eligible for an allocation, must meet one or more of the following criteria to qualify for an allocation and join the Housing Register.

- Have a housing need that places them in the Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze Bands (see section 2.3.3), and/or
- Have a South Norfolk local connection through one or more of the following:
  - Have lived in South Norfolk for 6 of the previous 12 months
  - Have lived in South Norfolk for 3 of the previous 5 years
  - Have a current contract of permanent employment where the job is mostly located in South Norfolk
  - Have a need to move to the South Norfolk area where failure to meet that need would cause extreme hardship to themselves or others.
  - Be homeless or threatened with homelessness (within 12 weeks and who are assessed as probably having a priority need) when the local connection criteria as laid down in the Housing Act 1996 would apply
  - Have been ‘placed’ or relocated outside the district due to illness, military service or other exceptional circumstances and lived in South Norfolk for at least 6 months prior to the placement.
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

- Are living in accommodation based support services outside the district to which they were referred by or with the agreement of the Council and they lived in South Norfolk for 6 months immediately prior to the placement.

- Be a current or former member of the British Armed Forces, having left service within the preceding 5 years, as defined by s.374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

- Be a gypsy (as defined in the Caravan Sites Act 1968) who has habitually resided in the South Norfolk area.

2.1.3 Non qualification

An applicant will not qualify for an allocation where:

- They have been housed by a scheme landlord, through the South Norfolk Home Options Scheme within the preceding year, unless their circumstances have changed and this leads to a new housing need that would be assessed as Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze.

- They have been housed through the Council’s RADs (Rent Advance & Deposit scheme) within the preceding year, unless their circumstances change and this leads to a new housing need that would be assessed as Emergency, Gold, Silver or Bronze.

- They are under 18 and do not have a guarantor and cannot show they will be supported in a tenancy where the Council assesses that support is needed to sustain a tenancy.

- They, or a member of their household, have been evicted from a tenancy and has neither had a settled period of a minimum of six months nor met the criteria for reassessment, since the eviction.

- They, or a member of their household, have been evicted from a property for mortgage arrears and has neither had a settled period of a minimum of six months nor met the criteria for reassessment, since the eviction.

- They, or a member of their household, is/was responsible for paying full rent directly to a landlord and they have rent arrears and/or court costs greater than 14 weeks rent, if the rent is charged weekly or greater than 4 months if the rent is charged monthly and they have not met the criteria for reassessment.
• They, or a member of their household, is/was responsible for paying a ‘top up’ or service charge in addition to housing benefit payments that are made direct to the landlord and has ‘top up’ or service charge arrears equivalent of greater than 14 weeks top up amount if rent is charged weekly or greater than 4 months of the top up amount if it is charged monthly and they have not met the criteria for reassessment;

• They, or a member of their household, has/had their full rent paid by Housing Benefit direct to the landlord and there are rent arrears/court costs of over 14 weeks rent, if the rent is charged weekly or over 4 months if the rent is charged monthly and the arrears are caused by the applicant either not providing the information required to assess a housing benefit claim or making a fraudulent application and they have not met the criteria for reassessment;

• They, or a member of their household, has caused damage to a property and been charged for damages and/or court costs of over £1000.

Each application will be assessed individually and mitigating circumstances will be taken into account. Guidance on this is contained in Appendix B.

In order to be reassessed, applicants will be required to show how they may qualify. This will relate to the reasons for non-qualification and each applicant will be told their criteria for reassessment and possible qualification. Guidance is contained in Appendix C.

Where applicants do not qualify due to debt or anti-social behaviour, when they meet the criteria to be reassessed and then qualify, they will be assessed as Bronze Band initially. They will be informed of their criteria for reassessment.

2.2 Processes

An application can be made as part of a housing advice interview. Interview appointments can be made at the Council’s offices but the Housing and Advice team will also provide immediate advice and assistance in cases of urgent housing need. The team will provide housing advice to any South Norfolk resident, people with a local connection to South Norfolk or any person who needs to move to South Norfolk. Advice will cover the full range of housing options and will be realistic in terms of chances of success.

One interview outcome could be an application to the housing register. All supporting and verification documentation will need to be provided at the interview before an application to the Housing Register is assessed. If a
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

vulnerable customer is unable to attend at the offices, alternative arrangements will be made.

Eligible applicants have the right to ask for any information that will help them understand how their application is likely to be treated, what preference they are likely to be given, what kind of accommodation is likely to be made available, and when it is likely to become available.

2.3 Assessment of housing need

2.3.1 Policy

All applicants who are eligible and qualify to join the Housing Register will be assessed and placed in the appropriate housing needs band that represents their household’s needs.

The law requires that reasonable preference for an allocation must be made in the following cases

(a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996);

(b) people who are owed a duty by any local housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2), or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985, or who are occupying accommodation secured by any such authority under section 192(3);

(c) people occupying unsanitary (unhealthy) or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;

(d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, including grounds relating to a disability; and

(e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or others).

Preference can also be given to other categories of applications to meet local priorities.

2.3.2 Individual assessment

Applications are assessed individually to try and ensure that the scheme is not applied so rigidly as to produce a manifestly unfair outcome in a particular case.

2.3.3 The housing need bands
Each application, including applications from current or former members of the armed forces, will be assessed to determine the level of housing need of the household and placed into one of five bands:

**EMERGENCY:** Urgent Priority

**GOLD:** High Priority

**SILVER:** Medium Priority

**BRONZE:** Urgent/High/Medium but with reduced preference

**LOW NEED:** No Priority

The criteria for being assessed in each band are:

**EMERGENCY BAND**

- Those required to move by the Police for witness protection reasons
- Applicants who, following a homelessness application to the Council, are owed the full housing duty (s193) and are currently living in temporary accommodation
- Applicants requiring urgent hospital discharge where their current accommodation is totally unsuitable for their needs
- Applicants with a combination of high (Gold Band) needs within the household
- Other circumstances, considered extreme by the Council

It is important to note that Emergency Band could be reduced to Bronze Band if the applicant(s) meet one or more of the criteria specified in the Bronze Band (reduced preference) category.

Emergency band will only be valid for 6 weeks. This can be extended where the applicant has not placed a bid because no suitable vacancy has arisen during that period. If the applicant does not meet the extension criteria, their priority will be reduced to Bronze Band and they will be directly offered the next available property suitable to their needs. If they refuse the offer of that property the Council will view any housing duty as having been discharged.

**GOLD BAND**

- Applicants threatened with homelessness who are likely to lose their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal
redress, in the next 12 weeks, who are assessed as probably having a priority need and who are actively engaging with housing advice to prevent their homelessness.

- A high medical need which results in an urgent need to move because current accommodation is not suitable and cannot be made suitable. If there is an imminent risk of health deteriorating as a result of the unsuitability of the applicant’s accommodation should they remain or the unsuitability is such that daily living is severely affected and a change of accommodation could be reasonably expected to alleviate the problem. There is a clear expectation, supported by relevant health professionals where appropriate, that a change in their accommodation will have a significant impact on their health or wellbeing. While taking into account information from other organisations and professionals, the assessment of housing need in relation to the scheme’s bandings is made by the Council’s officers.

- A high welfare need where there is an urgent need to move and where a change of accommodation could be reasonably expected to alleviate the problem. In the case of an applicant being a victim of domestic abuse or anti-social behaviour this high priority would normally be guided through multi-agency information sharing and assessment.

- The current home is in serious disrepair and/or is considered to be unsafe by the Council’s Housing Standards Team and this cannot be remedied by the applicant or the landlord within a reasonable timescale.

- Applicant(s) lack two or more bedrooms. The impact of the household’s living situation and ability to manage may be taken into account and legislation will be used as an aid in assessment. The Council will use the following guidelines to assess the level of overcrowding:
  - A single person aged 16 or over requires one bedroom.
  - A couple require one bedroom.
  - Two children of a different sex, where one is aged 10 or over, require 2 bedrooms.
  - Rooms measuring less than 50 square feet will not be counted as a bedroom.
  - A bedroom is classed as any habitable room, excluding a single living room for family use.
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

- Tenants of scheme landlords, living within South Norfolk, with two or more spare bedrooms or occupying a substantially adapted property that they no longer require.

- Applicants who have a combination of medium (Silver Band) needs within the household.

It is important to note that Gold Band could be reduced to Bronze Band if the applicant(s) meet one or more of the criteria specified in the Bronze Band (reduced preference) category.

**SILVER BAND**

- Applicants who are homeless and have lost their accommodation through no fault of their own or are threatened with homelessness and are likely to lose their accommodation through no fault of their own, for which there is no legal redress, in the next 12 weeks, who are assessed by the Council as not likely to be in priority need and who are actively engaging with housing advice to prevent homelessness.

- A medical need to move where the current home is not suitable and cannot be made suitable. The accommodation is causing the applicant significant problems, but they are managing to some extent. A change in accommodation could reasonably be expected to alleviate or significantly improve the problem. While taking into account information from other organisations and professionals, the assessment of housing need in relation to the scheme's bandings is made by the Council's officers.

- Medium welfare needs where there is not an urgent need to move but a change of accommodation could be reasonably expected to alleviate the problem. In the case of an applicant being a victim of domestic abuse or anti-social behaviour this medium priority would normally be guided through multi-agency information sharing and assessment.

- A recognised and established household is unable to live together as there is no suitable accommodation available to them.

- Applicants lack a bathroom, kitchen or inside toilet and this cannot be remedied by the applicant or landlord within a reasonable timescale. Applicants lack cold or hot water supplies, electricity, gas or adequate heating and this cannot be remedied by the applicant or the landlord within a reasonable timescale.

- Applicants lack one bedroom. The impact of the household's living situation and ability to manage may be taken into account and
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

legislation will be used as an aid in assessment. The Council will use the following guidelines to assess the level of overcrowding:

- A single person aged 16 or over requires one bedroom.
- A couple require one bedroom.
- Two children of a different sex, where one is aged 10 or over, require 2 bedrooms.
- Rooms measuring less than 50 square feet will not be counted as a bedroom.

- Tenants of scheme landlords, living within South Norfolk, with one spare bedrooms.

- Applicants in accommodation based support services (see Appendix D for a list) who are assessed as ready to move on, following an interview and assessment with a housing officer and the required evidence and risk assessment being submitted from a supported housing provider. If it is deemed necessary by the Council’s housing officer, a suitable support package must be arranged and there must also be a reasonable expectation that any tenancy will be sustained. Other housing options, including private rented tenancies, will also be expected to be explored. Applicants must have a clear rent account with the supported housing provider.

- Young people in local authority care who are referred for a housing advice interview as part of their pathway plan for leaving care, normally expected to be at least 6 months prior to their 18th birthday, and who are assessed as ready to move into independent accommodation, following an interview and assessment with a housing officer. The housing officer must be satisfied that, if deemed necessary, there is a suitable support package in place and that it is reasonably expected that any tenancy will be sustained. Other housing options, including private rented tenancies, will also be expected to be explored.

It is important to note that Silver Band could be reduced to Bronze Band if the applicant(s) meet one or more of the criteria specified in the Bronze Band (reduced preference) category.

**BRONZE BAND (Reduced preference)**

An applicant will be assessed as Bronze Band (reduced preference) if they have been assessed, initially as Emergency, Gold or Silver Band but the Council is satisfied of one of the following:

- The applicant does not have a South Norfolk local connection (see section 2.1.2); or
• The applicant or a member of their household is/was responsible for paying full rent directly to a landlord and they have rent arrears and/or court costs equivalent to between (and including) 8 and 14 weeks rent, if the rent is charged weekly or between (and including) 2 and 4 months if the rent is charged monthly; or

• The applicant or a member of their household is/was responsible for paying a ‘top up’ or service charge in addition to housing benefit payments that are made direct to the landlord and has ‘top up’ or service charge arrears equivalent to between (and including) 8 and 14 weeks top up amount if rent is charged weekly or between (and including) 2 and 4 months of top up amount if it is charged monthly; or

• The applicant or a member of their household has/had their full rent paid by Housing Benefit direct to the landlord and there are rent arrears and/or court costs equivalent to between (and including) 8 and 14 weeks rent, if the rent is charged weekly or between (and including) 2 and 4 months if the rent is charged monthly and the arrears are caused by the applicant either not providing the information required to assess a housing benefit claim or making a fraudulent application; or

• The applicant or a member of their household has caused damage to a property or failed to maintain a property and been charged for damages and/or court costs of between £500 or £1000 inclusive; or

• The applicant or a member of their household has committed acts causing, or likely to cause, nuisance or annoyance to their neighbours or others in the locality of where they live or have previously lived; or

• The applicant or a member of their household did or failed to do something which, in consequence, led to their housing circumstances becoming worse; or

• The applicant or a member of their household has significant financial resources and would be able to secure alternative accommodation at market rent. Financial resources include equity in a property, savings and income. Any lump sum received by a member of the Armed Forces as compensation for an injury or disability sustained on active service will not be taken into account. The levels of these that trigger an assessment of ability to purchase or rent a property privately are set and reviewed by the Council according to the current housing market; or

• The applicant, following a homelessness application, has been found to be intentionally homeless.
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

• The applicant, following a homelessness application, has been found to be owed the full housing duty but are not considered to be ready or able to live without support.

• The applicant is currently living in temporary accommodation whilst a homelessness application is being assessed

• The applicant was previously assessed as not qualifying for an allocation due to debt or anti social behaviour and has been re-assessed as able to qualify.

In order to be reassessed, applicants will be required to show how they have met the criteria required. This will relate to the reasons for bronze band and each applicant will be told their criteria for reassessment. Guidance is contained in Appendix G.

This is not a blanket policy. In exceptional circumstances, applicants may not have their preference reduced despite meeting one of the criteria outlined above. See Appendix B for guidance.

A reduction of preference (Bronze band) will not be applied where a tenant agreed a ‘safe surrender’ of their tenancy with their landlord and the Council if they were not able to manage their tenancy effectively at the time. At the point of the applicant being ready for their own tenancy again priority will be assessed according to current need and circumstances. See Appendix E for guidance.

LOW NEED BAND

All other eligible and qualifying applicants including applicants in supported housing/hostels who are either not yet ready to move on or are not engaging fully with the support programme.

2.3.4 Determination of band effective date

Where two or more people from the same band apply/ bid on the same property the date that will be used to determine priority within that band is called the band effective date. This date is determined as follows:

• Statutorily homeless applicants to whom the Council has accepted the full housing duty – the date the homelessness application was made.

• All other applicants - the date their application was assessed and added to the Housing Register. This will not be until all necessary supporting evidence has been provided (this will also, usually, be their application date)
Following a reassessment, if the applicant moves into a higher band then their band effective date will be considered as the date that the Council was notified of their change of circumstances and supporting evidence provided. Alternatively, if an applicant moves into a lower band then the effective date will be the date of the original application.
2.3.5 Property size and type eligibility

Each applicant will be assessed to determine what size and type of property they are eligible for. The table at Appendix F shows how this will be assessed.

Once proof of pregnancy of at least 20 weeks is provided the unborn child will be classed as a child for the purposes of property size eligibility only. Where a household already has another child (other children), the unborn child will be classed as the same sex as the youngest child.

Please note:

- Assessment will be based on the suitability of the property for the size of the household.
- Only children who live with the applicant for four or more nights a week will be considered as part of the household. We need proof of this.
- Students who live away from home at college or university will not be considered as part of the household.
- Some upper floor properties will be restricted for households without children and some will be open to all applicants who meet the criteria for the property size. This decision will be made by the landlord at the point of advertising the property.
- A person can only be on one housing application.
- Some disabled applicants who require a 3 bedroom or larger property may be eligible for larger properties or those with 2 reception rooms where this will meet the needs relating to their disability. Guidance can be found at Appendix K.

2.3.6 Cancellation of applications

Applications will be cancelled for one or more of the following reasons:

- The applicant requests cancellation
- The applicant’s circumstances change and they are no longer eligible or no longer qualify
- The applicant does not renew their application within 28 days of the anniversary of their application
- The applicant is found to have made a false or deliberately misleading statement, or to have withheld information in connection with their application
- The applicant has not placed a bid for the preceding 12 month period
- The applicant has not responded to contact from the Council within 28 days
2.4 Processes

2.4.1 Informing customers of their assessed housing need (Band) and other information

Once an application has been assessed the applicant will be notified of the following:

- The band in which they have been assessed
- The size and type of property they qualify for
- How to access the Scheme Guide
- Their bidding number
- Their right of review of their band and property size/type eligibility

Applicants assessed as Bronze band (reduced preference) will be notified by the Council of how their application can be reassessed. Guidance can be found in Appendix C. Each case will be treated individually.

2.4.2 Change in circumstances

A change in circumstances must be notified to the Council immediately together with any supporting evidence. Failure to do this could result in an applicant not being considered for a property. This is because priority is based on the applicant’s current situation. A change in circumstances will mean that the application has to be re-assessed.

Each time an applicant logs on to the Home Options website they will be prompted to check their personal details and to inform the Council of changes. Applicants who do not use the website and use other methods of bidding for properties are also expected to inform the Council of any change in their circumstances.

2.4.3 Assessments for applicants who are members of staff or elected members

Applications from elected Members and former elected Members or their close relatives will be dealt with by a relevant manager of the Council. The award of a housing need band (priority) will need to be authorised by the Council’s Chief Executive Officer.

Applications from employees or former employees of the council or partner landlords or their close relatives will be dealt with by a relevant manager of the Council. The award of a housing need band (priority) under the scheme will be authorised by the Council’s Director with the responsibility for housing
2.4.4 Revision of applications

Every application will be reviewed periodically to check that the applicant is using the Home Options system to good effect and is pursuing any other suitable housing options. Where this is not apparent a housing officer will contact the applicant to discuss their situation and priority. If the applicant does not respond to officer contact within 28 days their application may be cancelled.

The set revision periods are as follows:

- Emergency Band: 6 Weeks
- Gold and Silver Band: 6 Months

2.4.5 Decisions and reviews

Where the Council decides that an applicant is ineligible or does not qualify for an allocation and to join the Housing Register, it will notify the applicant of that decision and the grounds for it in writing and also verbally where the Council believes the applicant may have difficulty understanding the implications of the decision.

Eligible applicants have the right to ask the Council to inform them of any decision about matters to be taken into account in processing their application.

An applicant can ask for a review of certain decisions made regarding their application for an allocation. These are:

- if the applicant has not been given preference (ie has been assessed as Bronze Band, reduced preference); or
- any decision about the facts of the applicant’s case which has been taken into account in considering whether to make an allocation to them (this would include the banding given to an applicant and the type of property that they qualify for).

A request for a review of a decision should preferably be made in writing and can be made by an applicant or a representative on behalf of the applicant. The request should be made within 21 days of the decision being received by the applicant and should include information that the applicant believes has not been taken into account already or which further supports the original application or new information.

The review will be carried out by the Council’s Home Options Review Panel which consists of senior officers from the Council, scheme landlords and support agencies. A list of these organisation can be found at Appendix H.
Reviews will be carried out within 28 days of the request being received and the applicant will receive a written review decision within a further 14 days.

An applicant does not have the right to ask for a review of a decision reached by an earlier review. If an applicant is still unhappy following the review of a decision, they can make a complaint through the Council’s complaints procedures, contact the local government ombudsman, or seek further advice from an organisation such as Shelter or Citizens Advice Bureaux.

2.5 False information

If an applicant knowingly gives false information, or withholds information, in order to secure a home it is likely that they will lose that home. It is also likely that they will be prosecuted and if found guilty could be liable to a fine and/or imprisonment.
3. Allocations and lettings

3.1 Policy

3.1.1 Proportion of properties for transfer tenants

Affordable properties for rent are advertised in two main categories. These are:

- Those which all applicants can bid/apply for (this will account for a minimum of 80% of available social rented properties)
- Those which only existing (transfer) tenants of scheme landlords (living within South Norfolk) can bid/apply for (this will account for up to 20% of available social rented properties, with no more than 20% of each property type in a year).

3.1.2 Direct lets

In certain circumstances the Council will allocate properties directly to applicants without the property being advertised.

Illustrative examples of direct lets are as follows:

- where a property is needed urgently to deal with an emergency or to provide temporary accommodation for a homeless family.
- where an allocation is required to ensure protection of the public, for example, following a decision made by a Multi-Agency Public Protection Panel meeting or to fulfil agreements made with offender management services, or where a customer has been referred as part of the witness protection scheme;
- where a customer's home is being repaired and they need to be moved from the property on a temporary or permanent basis.

A tenancy may also be offered directly regardless of other priorities, where the applicant has enjoyed an established occupancy of the property, has a reasonable expectation of a property of that type and would be a suitable tenant (e.g. former tenants of the property, non-secure or introductory tenants or carers or family members with no succession rights.)

In deciding whether to make an offer of a tenancy the Council and the landlord will consider whether the property is of a suitable size and type for the applicant’s household (if it is not, then another property of a more suitable size and type may be offered) and the conduct of the applicant in terms of rent payments and tenancy conditions.

Any grounds put forward by the applicant for offering him or her the property regardless of its suitability will also be considered and in exceptional
circumstances (taking into account the length of residence, age of applicant and whether the allocation would contribute to maintaining a sustainable property) the tenancy may be offered even if this results in under occupation of the property.

Direct lets require approval by the lettings panel, made up of senior officers from the Council and partner landlords. A list of these organisations are at Appendix I.

3.1.3 Pitches for Gypsies and Travellers

Applications for these pitches are initially assessed in the same way as applications for social housing and awarded a banding.

There may be an additional assessment of any site specific factors. The assessments will be in accordance with the latest good practice as published by the Government and will include consideration of the balance and mix in the community, therefore prioritising the long term cohesion of the site.

Extra support with the process is offered to applicants where it is needed. The application will be identified to indicate that it is for a site pitch. The pitches are not advertised on the website. The landlord will have the final say as to who to offer a pitch to and may request more than one nomination for a pitch. Appendix J provides further guidance.

3.1.4 Sensitive Lets

Sometimes landlords will request that the advertising of a vacant property is treated as a sensitive let. An example of this would be where the previous tenant has caused anti social behaviour and it is important to get the right mix of tenants in the area. This is agreed by the lettings panel and the property is advertised for transfer applicants only. The landlord and the local authority may agree that the applicant at the top of the shortlist is not suitable to be offered the property and agree to offer it to a more suitable applicant.

3.1.5 Local Lettings

Sometimes local lettings agreements are agreed for an existing property or group of properties and may allow different priorities for allocating properties. Local lettings agreements can be requested for new developments and, if agreed, be applied in addition to any local authority planning restrictions that have been put in place but will not override them. These types of local lettings will be approved by the partnership’s lettings panel and reviewed annually.
3.2 Process

3.2.1 Advertising of properties

Affordable properties for rent are advertised for a seven day period from Thursday to Wednesday. Private rented properties, shared ownership properties and other housing options are advertised at all times.

Social rented properties can sometimes have 2 different rent levels of ‘social rent’ and ‘affordable rent’ and each landlord has their own criteria for which rent level applies to which type of property. This should be clearly explained on each advert, where this is relevant.

Properties are advertised on the South Norfolk Home Options website.

Vulnerable applicants who are unable to access the website will be offered a service appropriate to them to ensure that they are aware of relevant properties.

The scheme guide explains in detail how and where to access the advertised properties.

3.2.2 Property descriptions

Property adverts carry a photograph of the property or similar and always have a full description of the property. This description usually includes the following information:

- Type (House, Flat etc)
- Tenure (social rented, private rented, shared ownership etc)
- Number and max occupancy of bedrooms
- Location
- Level of accessibility for those with mobility issues/wheelchair users
- Services provided (sheltered housing scheme manager, caretaker etc).
- Heating type
- Age restrictions
- Whether pets are allowed
- Availability of outside space (garden etc) and parking
- Rent and service charges (split weekly/monthly), including whether the rent is charged at social or affordable rent levels.
- Special information (location of bus routes/ other amenities etc)
- Property size category (known as the PPGC code)
- Whether it is for transfer applicants only
- Whether customers with a ‘local connection’ get priority
- Is the property part of a local development where under occupation might be allowed
3.2.3 Housing for over 55s

Some accommodation is designed specifically for older people, with schemes normally for over 55s or over 60s. Residents pay an additional charge as well as the basic rent, for support services. In exceptional circumstances, younger people may be considered if they require support, and other types of accommodation are not suitable. This would be achieved through the direct let process.

The minimum age for such properties will be clearly stated when they are advertised.

Scheme landlords normally carry out a needs and risk assessment for customers to assess whether they are eligible to bid for sheltered housing properties, to ensure the services provided are appropriate to their needs.

3.2.4 Bidding/applying for properties

Provided the applicant meets the stated qualifying criteria and is on the Housing Register they can bid/apply for the property by the deadline given. Applicants can bid/apply for a maximum of two affordable properties for rent each week. All property adverts clearly state a deadline by which bids for those properties must be received.

Applicants can bid/apply in the following ways:

- Phone
- Text
- Website

The scheme guide provides these contact details and explains in detail how and where to bid.

Where it is identified that applicants are vulnerable and/or unable to bid/apply for properties themselves, the Council will agree the form of assistance that they will offer.

3.2.5 Retrospective Bidding

A retrospective bid request is a request from a registered applicant, or their authorised representative, to include a bid in a bidding cycle that has already closed. This will include requests to withdraw an existing bid and replace it with another.

A request for a retrospective bid will only be considered if;

- it is received prior to close of business on the day after the bidding cycle in question has closed, and
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

- any of the Home Options electronic bidding methods have been unavailable from midday, for a period of more than 30 minutes, on the last day of the bidding cycle, and

- this unavailability can be substantiated by the Home Options IT

Requests for retrospective bids must be made in one of the following ways:

- By telephone to the Housing and Advice team
- In person to the Housing and Advice team

Acceptance of a retrospective bid does not guarantee an offer of a tenancy. If a retrospective bid is received and accepted it will be entered onto the system by a member of the Housing and Advice team on the same day. The bid will then take its correct position in the short list for the property concerned and be processed in the normal way.

It is the responsibility of a Housing Options Team Leader, to ensure that the shortlisting process is suspended in the event that the criteria above have been met, and that all Partners are alerted to this fact.

The Housing Options Team Leader will alert all partners when short listing can resume. This will usually be two working days after the close of the bidding cycle in question.

A message will be added to the Home Options website once downtime has been confirmed alerting applicants to their right to request a retrospective bid.

3.2.6 Selection of the successful bids/applications:

At the end of the advertising period, applicants who have bid/applied for an affordable home for rent will be shortlisted. The successful applicant for each property will normally be the one who qualifies for the property, in the highest band and with the earliest effective date subject to the following provisions:

- Some properties have had adaptations made to them to make it easier for someone with a disability to live in them. These properties have an accessibility rating and applicants with a need for adapted properties may be given priority over other applicants even if they have a lower band, in order to make the best use of the adaptations.

- Some properties are built to either meet the housing needs of a particular parish in South Norfolk and/or have lettings criteria stipulated in planning agreements which give priority to applicants who have a connection to specific parishes or sometimes the district. This is highlighted in the advert and applicants who meet these criteria will be given priority over other applicants even if they have a lower band. In
the case of gypsies (as defined in the Caravan Sites Act 1968) ‘residents’ includes persons who have habitually resorted to the particular parish. Where a social property for rent, that does not have these local connection restrictions applied to it, is vacated by an applicant who has successfully bid for and moves into a property in the same parish that does have local connection restrictions applied to it, the same local connection restrictions will be applied to the initial subsequent let of the vacated property.

3.2.7 Making the offer

The successful applicant will be contacted by the landlord to arrange an accompanied viewing. They will then be offered the property, if it is considered suitable and affordable and when the customer’s application criteria have been verified. The landlord may request photographic identification from the applicant.

Applicants will usually be contacted within three working days of the shortlist for the property closing. If an applicant cannot be contacted following multiple attempts the next person on the shortlist will be contacted. It is the applicant’s responsibility to keep the Council aware of changes to their contact details.

Applicants have up to two working days from being offered a property to decide whether to accept an offer of accommodation. If no response has been received after two days, the next person on the shortlist will normally be considered for the property.

If an applicant refuses the offer, the property will normally be offered to the next on the shortlist, and so on until the property is let.

Scheme landlords reserve the right to carry out an assessment of applicants to ensure the particular property is appropriate for their needs before contacting them or making an offer. This can include the applicant’s ability to afford the rent charged. If, following such an assessment, the scheme landlord considers the property not to be suitable for the applicant they will contact the Council to discuss the situation. If it is agreed that the property is not suitable for the applicant it would then normally be offered to the next applicant on the shortlist. If agreement cannot be reached the final decision lies with the scheme landlord.

Offers of accommodation may be withdrawn if it is found that the information supplied by the applicant was incorrect or if the customer has not informed the Council of any changes and their current situation is not accurately reflected in their Band.
3.2.8 Feedback

On each week’s pages of property advertisements the Council gives feedback on the results of the social rented properties that have been advertised.

The information provided for each property will be:

1. The location
2. Number of bids
3. Band of the successful applicant
4. Effective date of the successful applicant

The Council will never include any personal details of successful applicants in the feedback.

3.2.9 Properties not included in the scheme

Certain properties and housing schemes are not included in the Home Options scheme, for example, Housing with Care Schemes for the elderly.

However, the vast majority of vacant social housing properties in South Norfolk are let through the Scheme.

3.3 Equality

In drawing up this scheme the Council has had due regard to issues of equality and in particular to the Equality Act 2010.

The Council and scheme landlords are committed to equality of opportunity and are opposed to all forms of direct or indirect unlawful discrimination. We aim to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Specifically, but not exclusively, to meet these aims through this scheme we will:

- Make reasonable adjustments, for example the use of INTRAN, carrying out home visits, and providing extra support in using the scheme through our assisted applicants list;
- Allow some disabled applicants to bid for larger properties;
- Make all literature available in a large font and written in plain English. The Home Options website is also compatible with screen readers and has browse aloud capability;
- Recruit staff with a good awareness of equality issues and a non judgemental attitude;
• Ensure all relevant staff are well trained so they can assist vulnerable clients to access and use the scheme;
• Offer choice to applicants over where they live and in what type of home they live, enabling them to move closer to support where it is required.
• Carry out individualised assessments that focus on the needs within the household;
• Flag identified vulnerabilities on the IT system so that staff are aware of them;
• Work closely with support agencies and advocates and take their views into account;
• Recognise that a protected factor or other vulnerability might be a mitigating factor relevant in the consideration of a penalty;
• Monitor bidding to try and ensure all groups are using the scheme successfully, and offer help where needed;
• Be clear in our decision making and aim to dispel myths where we can;
• Collect feedback on the scheme specifically relating to equality issues;
• Revise the scheme when needed to meet our Equality Duty;

3.4 Force Majeure

The Council will not be liable for any delay in performing its obligations under this policy if the delay is caused by a Force Majeure (chance occurrence or unavoidable accident for example), provided that reasonable action and notification to customers is taken by the Council.

More fully, this means, circumstances beyond reasonable control of that party, including without limitation, strikes, lock outs, acts of God, the act or omission of any governmental or other competent authority, war or national emergency.

3.5 Complaints procedure

If an applicant is dissatisfied with any aspect of the management of their application, other than where a review can be made, they should follow the Council’s published complaints procedure, available on the Council’s website at www.south-norfolk.gov.uk or on request.

The Local Government Ombudsman
The Local Government Ombudsman investigates complaints of injustice arising from maladministration by local authorities and others. They can be asked to investigate complaints about most council matters including housing.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the action the Council takes, he or she can send a written complaint to the Ombudsman. A complainant must give the organisation an opportunity to deal with a complaint first, using its complaints procedure.

The Local Government Ombudsman can be contacted at:
Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry CV4 0EH
Tel: 0300 061 0614
Website: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

If an applicant wishes to make a complaint against a scheme landlord they should contact:
Housing Ombudsman Service
81 Aldwych
London
WC2B 4HN
Tel: 0300 11 3000
E mail: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

### 3.6 Changes to the scheme

The Council reserves the right to expand, change or alter any element of the scheme, as and when required, to meet changes in housing need, capacity, resources and legislation. Any major changes to the scheme will be consulted on with scheme landlords and agreed by the Council’s Cabinet.

The Council will ensure the changed scheme is then made available to the public through its website at [www.south-norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.south-norfolk.gov.uk).

### 3.7 Monitoring

The Council holds quarterly meetings with partners and stakeholders who represent vulnerable applicants. The aims of this meeting are to:

- monitor the overall effectiveness of the scheme;
- address operational issues and agree operational changes;
- consider policy development.
South Norfolk Home Options Scheme Landlords

The scheme landlords are, at April 2012:

- Broadland Housing Association
- Cotman Housing Association
- Guinness Trust
- Hastoe Housing Association
- Metropolitan Housing Trust
- Orbit Housing Association
- Orwell Housing Association
- Flagship Housing Group
- Places for People Housing Association
- Saffron Housing Trust
- Sanctuary Hereward
- Wherry Housing Association
Appendix B

Guidance on the Application of Mitigating Circumstances

The following are factors to be taken into account in determining non qualification or reduction of preference.

- Physical disability
- Mental illness
- Physical illness or frailty
- Financial problems
- Support/floating support needs
- Rooflessness/homelessness
- Inability to find alternative accommodation
- Low income/benefit recipient
- Size of family (including young children)
- Special educational needs
- Learning disabilities
- Domestic/neighbour/other forms of violence which are known to have occurred
- Severe depression
- Substantial problems of debt

This is not necessarily an exhaustive list and could apply to an applicant or a member of the family. Depending on the number of factors present, the severity and their relevance to the overall situation, the effect could be:-

- To lead to a non-qualification or reduction of preference on the register not being made
- To lead to a non-qualification being changed to a reduction of preference.
Appendix C

Reassessment of applications where the applicant has been assessed as not qualifying for an allocation

Where an applicant has been assessed as not qualifying for an allocation the evidence must be provided by the applicant in order to be re-assessed. This will relate to the reason for non-qualification and the following guidelines apply:

**Cause:** Eviction from a tenancy for rent arrears

**Evidence:** Minimum six month settled accommodation with up to date rent account. Repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months.

**Cause:** Eviction from a property for mortgage arrears

**Evidence:** Minimum six month settled accommodation with up to date rent account. Repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months.

**Cause:** Responsible for paying full rent directly to a landlord and they have rent arrears and/or court costs greater than 14 weeks rent, if the rent is charged weekly or greater than 4 months if the rent is charged monthly

**Evidence:** Up to date rent account (where relevant) and repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months or the debt has been cleared by regular payments, whichever is sooner.

**Cause:** Responsible for paying a ‘top up’ or service charge in addition to housing benefit payments that are made direct to the landlord and has ‘top up’ or service charge arrears equivalent of greater than 14 weeks top up amount if rent is charged weekly or greater than 4 months of the top up amount if it is charged monthly
**Evidence:** Up to date rent account (where relevant) and repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months or the debt has been cleared by regular payments whichever is sooner.

**Cause:** Full rent paid by Housing Benefit direct to the landlord and there are rent arrears/court costs of over 14 weeks rent, if the rent is charged weekly or over 4 months if the rent is charged monthly **and** the arrears are caused by the applicant either not providing the information required to assess a housing benefit claim or making a fraudulent application.

**Evidence:** Up to date rent account (where relevant) and repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months or the debt has been cleared by regular payments whichever is sooner.

**Cause:** Damage to a property and been charged for damages and/or court costs of over £1000.

**Evidence:** Repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months or the debt has been cleared by regular payments whichever is sooner.

**Cause:** Eviction from a tenancy for ant-social behaviour

**Evidence:** Minimum six month settled accommodation with no complaints relating to behaviour.

Where the Council assesses that, in the cases above, that an applicant qualifies for an allocation, they will be assessed as Bronze Band, reduced preference. They will need to provide the same evidence again for a further six month adherence before they can be reassessed.
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

Appendix D

Accommodation based support services

Residents of the following services qualify to be considered for Silver Band assessment when they are ready to move on to independent accommodation.

Solo Housing
Victoria Road, Diss,

Stonham
Wilkinson House, Wymondham,

Genesis
Baynard House, Chedgrave
Cannell Court, Costessey
Irene Jacoby House & Rush House, Diss,

St Anne’s, Ditchingham

Ashcroft (Break)
Wicklewood, Ashcroft

YMCA

Supported Lodgings scheme placements

Other supported accommodation providers

Outside the district, to which the applicant was referred by or with the agreement by South Norfolk Council and they lived in South Norfolk for 6 months immediately prior to the placement.
Appendix E

Safe Surrender

A Safe Surrender may be agreed between a tenant of one of the scheme landlords in South Norfolk, the scheme landlord and the Council.

The safe surrender needs to be agreed before the tenancy is ended.

The tenant will need to give notice in the usual way. A shorter notice period may be agreed at the landlord’s discretion.

The tenant must be unable to manage the tenancy satisfactorily due to illness, support or other needs which can not be met at that time.

Where possible support will be arranged to enable the tenant to remain.

A safe surrender agreement can be reached:

where the property is in danger of deterioration but substantial deterioration (under £500) has not yet occurred and does not occur before vacant possession is given.

and/or the tenant is struggling to pay the rent, but the rent account is not yet more than 8 weeks in arrears (net) and does not become so before vacant possession is given.

and/or the tenant is in breach of other terms of the tenancy but this has not yet reached the level where a reduction of preference would usually be applied and does not become so before vacant possession is given.

and/or other similar circumstances as agreed between the scheme landlord and the Council.

Where a Safe Surrender is agreed, if the tenant subsequently applies to the South Norfolk housing register their priority will not be reduced for matters relating to that tenancy, unless there were issues that have subsequently become known.

Their priority will be assessed according to current need and circumstances.

If a subsequent homelessness application is made, the fact that a safe surrender was agreed together with all the circumstances at that time would be taken into account. However the Council cannot fetter a possible future homelessness decision.
Appendix F

Property size and type eligibility

Please note:

- Assessment will be based on the suitability of the property for the size of the household.
- Only children who live with the applicant for four or more nights a week will be considered as part of the household. We need proof of this.
- Students who live away from home at college will not be considered as part of the household.
- Some upper floor properties will be restricted for households without children and some will be open to all applicants who meet the criteria for the property size. This decision will be made by the landlord at the point of advertising the property.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Detail</th>
<th>Property Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single applicant with no other household members</td>
<td><strong>Bedsit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 bed flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 bed bungalow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 bed house</td>
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| Applicant with 2 children of the same gender both under 16 and both 10 or over | 2 bed ground floor flat/maisonette  
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| Applicant with 2 children of the same gender at least one 16 or over and one under 10 | 3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette  
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| Applicant with 2 children of the same gender at least one 16 or over and both 10 or over | 3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette  
3 bed bungalow  
3 bed house  
3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor |
| Applicant with 2 children of mixed gender at least one of whom is aged 10 or over and one under 10 | 3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette  
3 bed bungalow  
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| Applicant with 2 children of mixed gender and both 10 or over | 3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette  
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**Applicant with 4 children of the same**

3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette
| gender all under 16 and one under 10 | 3 bed bungalow  
|                                      | 3 bed house  
|                                      | 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette  
|                                      | 3 bed (2 receptions) bungalows  
|                                      | 3 bed (2 receptions) house  
|                                      | 4 bed bungalow  
|                                      | 4 bed house  

| Applicant with 4 children of the same gender all under 16 and all 10 or over | 3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette  
|                                                                               | 3 bed bungalow  
|                                                                               | 3 bed house  
|                                                                               | 3 bed flat/maisonette above ground floor  
|                                                                               | 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette  
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| Applicant with 4 children of same gender at least one 16 or over and one under 10 | 3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette  
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|                                                                               | 3 bed house  
|                                                                               | 3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette  
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|                                                                               | 3 bed (2 receptions) house  
|                                                                               | 4 bed bungalow  
|                                                                               | 4 bed house  
|                                                                               | 5 + bed house  

| Applicant with 4 children of the same gender at least one 16 or over and all | 3 bed ground floor flat/maisonette  
| 3 bed bungalow
### Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3 bed house</th>
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<th>3 bed (2 receptions) ground floor flat/maisonette</th>
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<td>Applicant with 5 or more children</td>
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Appendix G

Reassessment of applications where the applicant has been assessed as Bronze Band

Where an applicant has been assessed as Bronze Band (reduced preference) the evidence must be provided by the applicant in order to be re-assessed. This will relate to the reason for reduced preference and the following guidelines apply:

**Cause:** Responsible for paying full rent directly to a landlord and they have rent arrears and/or court costs equivalent to between (and including) 8 and 14 weeks rent, if the rent is charged weekly or between (and including) 2 and 4 months if the rent is charged monthly

**Evidence:** Up to date rent account (where relevant) and repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months or the debt has been cleared by regular payments, whichever is sooner.

**Cause:** Responsible for paying a ‘top up’ or service charge in addition to housing benefit payments that are made direct to the landlord and has ‘top up’ or service charge arrears equivalent of between (and including) 8 and 14 weeks top up amount if rent is charged weekly or between (and including) 2 and 4 months of top up amount if it is charged monthly

**Evidence:** Up to date rent account (where relevant) and repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months or the debt has been cleared by regular payments, whichever is sooner.

**Cause:** Caused damage to a property or failed to maintain a property and been charged for damages and/or court costs of between £500 or £1000 inclusive.

**Evidence:** Repayment plan in place and adhered to for a minimum of six months or the debt has been cleared by regular payments whichever is sooner.
Cause: Committed acts causing, or likely to cause, nuisance or annoyance to their neighbours or others in the locality of where they live or have previously lived

Evidence: Minimum six month settled accommodation with no complaints relating to behaviour.
Appendix H

South Norfolk Home Options Scheme Review Panel

The panel meets monthly and considers:

- Requests for reviews of band assessment
- Requests for reviews of band effective dates
- Requests for reviews of property size and type eligibility
- Requests for reviews of eligibility
- Requests for reviews of qualification
- Complex medical cases
- Complex welfare cases
- Other complex decisions

The panel members are:

- 2 senior officers from South Norfolk Council
- 1 Senior officer from Saffron Housing Trust
- 1 Senior Occupational Therapist
- 1 Senior officer from Julian Support
- 1 Senior officer from Stonham Homestay
Appendix I

South Norfolk Home Options Scheme Lettings Panel

The Lettings Panel considers requests from partners for the following:

- Direct Lets
- Sensitive Lets
- Local Lettings Plans

The panel members are:

- Housing & Advice Services Manager, South Norfolk Council
- 1 Senior officer, Saffron Housing Trust
- 1 Senior officer, Wherry Housing Association
- 1 Senior officer, Cotman Housing Association
- 1 Senior officer, Orbit Housing Association
- 1 Senior officer, Flagship Housing Group
- 1 Senior officer, Stonham Homestay

Members cannot consider requests from their own organisation.

Requests are submitted to a named officer at South Norfolk Council by a senior officer of one of the partner organisations, using the agreed pro-forma.

Requests are circulated to the panel members by email and a response is requested within 5 working days.

Members do not see the responses of the other panel members.

Approval decisions are made in accordance with the majority vote and recorded by South Norfolk Council.

South Norfolk Council informs the submitting partner and the panel of the panel's decision.
Appendix A South Norfolk Housing Allocations Scheme Cabinet March 2012

Appendix J

Guidance for the Allocation of Pitches for Gypsies and Travellers

The policy will be operated in accordance with the Gypsy and Traveller Site Management Good Practice Guide (Published by Communities and Local Government July 2009).

The system of prioritisation allows the landlord to retain

1. A degree of limited discretion in allocating pitches and should not be automatically bound to the household with the highest priority.

2. Discretion to offer other pitches than those applied for (eg where these may also meet the needs of the applicant, or where the household would otherwise have no choice but to reside on an unauthorised encampment).

Sites are often occupied by extended family groups and this can help to ensure good community relations on the site. In some exceptional circumstances the Council may, in consultation with the site manager, want to take account of factors which a pitch allocation may have in adversely affecting the suitability of the site as a social unit.

If as a result of an assessment of their application, the landlord has good reason to be concerned about the risk of conflict with existing residents, they should take up this issue with the applicant, and carry out a risk assessment. Refusal to allocate a pitch must be based on the merits of the application, without undue influence from those already on a site.

The landlord will also need to ensure the person nominated has provided satisfactory references. References from any previous landlord should be provided to satisfy the new landlord that the applicant and their household had left any previous accommodation in good order and settled all rent and other charges which were outstanding. Where this is not available, for example where a young applicant is applying for a pitch for the first time, the authority should ask the applicant to nominate a contact from whom a reference may be obtained. Even if a vacant pitch is available the Council should not permit occupation of a pitch until a satisfactory reference has been obtained.

The landlord reserves the right to withdraw any offer which may have been granted on the basis of incorrect information.
Appendix K

Guidance on property size and type eligibility to Meet Disability Need

It is acknowledged that there is a shortage of 3 bed accommodation suitable for those that need single level access.

Where such an applicant is identified, discretion can be used to increase their PPGC code by one bedroom to enable them to bid for a larger property that would meet their disability needs. For example a 3 bed parlour house with all necessary facilities on the ground floor. This discretion would only usually be used where the property identified will meet the household’s needs without alteration.

Where it is decided to exercise this discretion it should be explained to the applicant and confirmed in writing. The following points should be made:

- their code will only be altered for the relevant bidding cycle when a particular property has been identified as potentially meeting their need
- they will only be considered for properties outside their usual eligibility that have been specifically agreed by the home options team and relevant landlord, this will need to be recorded (including the property ref.) on their application before their code is altered
- if after viewing it is considered that the property would not be suitable, it will not be offered to them.

The exercise of this discretion is to be used to meet the needs of applicants with a disability who could otherwise be unfairly disadvantaged by the lack of suitable properties. The short listing will still be carried out according to band and time in the usual way.
Diss Business Centre

The Council leases Diss Business Centre, with the objective of providing small business units at affordable rents. The centre breaks even and in some years has made a surplus. The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval under the Rules of Financial Governance in relation to officer’s recommendations to continue with the lease agreement for Diss Business Centre until 2023 therefore not effecting the break option in the lease that would result in the lease terminating in 2013.

Cabinet member(s): Garry Wheatley
Ward(s) affected: All
Contact Officer, telephone number, and e-mail: Renata Garfoot 01508 533749 rgarfoot@s-norfolk.gov.uk

1. Background

1.1. South Norfolk Council leases Diss Business Centre from J S Alston & G M Alston. The lease runs until 14 December 2023, however there is a break clause that allows only SNC to terminate the lease in 2013 should it wish to.

1.2. The current rent payable to the owner is £21,732.37 pa and this is reviewed every 3 years alternating between Retail Price Index (RPI) and Market Rent. The next rent review is due on 15 December 2012 and this will be by RPI and will therefore it is likely to see an increase in the rent.

1.3. The Council is responsible for repairs to the whole building with the exception of the main structure of the building including the external fabric of the main walls and the structure and covering of the roof. In recent years the Council has undertaken a programme of window replacement, improvements to the toilets and drainage works. These works have been funded through the capital programme, rental account maintenance budget and the business centres service charge which generates an additional budget in the region of £12,000. The property is generally in a good state of repair.

1.4. The centre is a former agricultural building built in 1840 which was converted in late 1980’s and comprises; one main building which houses 26 units ranging from 16.31 to 133.25 sq m, a separate self-contained suite of offices at the rear of the building and parking is available for 49 cars and 2 disabled spaces.
1.5. Conference and meeting rooms are available to hire to tenants, the Council and external customers.

1.6. The Council employs 2 part time reception staff and 1 cleaner. The reception staff provide admin assistance to both the tenants at the centre and various teams within the Council.

1.7. Asset Management Group (October 2011) and CMT (January 2012) have both considered the proposal and support the continuation of the lease.

2. Current Position and Issues

2.1. The rental income for 2010/11 was £78,619 and the expenditure excluding rent account recharges was £58,711. The asset is valued on an existing use basis and as a leased property. It was valued in 2009 as part of the Councils rolling programme of Asset Valuations at £140,000 and therefore the profit gives an investment return of 14.2% gross. This is the calculation used when acquiring investment assets. The Council expects to achieve a minimum of 5% return on its property investments.

2.2. The Council recharged a proportion of its corporate overheads of £46,530 (£20,197 Central, £26,333 Support) for 2010/11 against the business centre, which overall shows a loss is being made. Officers are undertaking an exercise to review recharges apportionment to ensure they accurately reflect the corporate overheads associated with each budget. If the break option is exercised, the annual corporate overheads/recharges would still remain and will simply be apportioned across other budgets.

2.3. If the centre had been fully occupied for the full 12 months the income for 2010/11 would have been £93,756.

2.4. Current there are 4 units and 1 separate suite of offices available to rent. There is interest in one unit from an existing tenant who is considering expanding and another unit is let on a temporary basis to hold Pilates classes.

2.5. Due to the high supply of offices and limited number of tenants in the area we are finding that current negotiations finalise with an incentive of a reduction in rent. The main competition for the business centre is the new office accommodation at Sawmills Road; these premises are purpose built to modern specification, however we find business are attracted to Diss Business Centre due to the character, quiet location and proximity to the A140.

3. Proposal and Reasons

3.1. It is proposed not to effect the break option to terminate lease in 2013 but to continue with the lease until 2023. The reason for this:

3.1.1. The centre supports the Economic Strategy by providing accommodation that is typically required by start up and small businesses offering easy “In/Out” flexible terms.
3.1.2. Produces a return of 14.2% in 2010/11 (based on asset valuation against rent) which is above the 5% return the Council requires from its investment portfolio.

3.1.3. Provides a balance to the Council’s investment portfolio and gives opportunities for the Council to benefit financially in any growth of income when markets improve.

3.1.4. To allow opportunity for officers to generate additional income from increased marketing with new Economic Development posts and improvements to and increased promotion of conference and meeting room hire.

4. Other Options

4.1. Effect the Break at 2013

4.1.1. Costs - If the Council decided to terminate the lease in 2013 or 2023 there would be additional expenditure to cover dilapidation costs such as, redecorating the internal areas and minor repairs that the landlord would expect to be carried out prior to returning the building. It has been anticipated to be in the region of £10,000 to £15,000.

4.1.2. Redeployment or redundancy costs should also be taken into account for the staff at the business centre in case the landlord does not want to continue providing the service and we are unable to find them suitable positions at the Council. The projected costs for redundancy are £6k.

4.1.3. There would also be a saving in officer time in both Property and Finance Teams on managing the assets and budgets. The amount of time saved would be relatively small and other areas of work such as trees and commons management would fill any shortfall.

4.1.4. Loss of income from rents received with recharges of circa £46,000 falling as an increase in net costs to the Council.

4.1.5. There is a potential loss of accommodation for small/start up business if the Landlord/owner does not continue operating the business centre in its current form.

4.2. Acquisition - In 2009 the Council approached the owner of the business centre to enquire if he would be willing to sell the freehold, however we were unable to reach agreement on the price. If the Council acquired the building we would save the current annual rental expenditure of £21k, although we would then be responsible for the costs for the maintaining the roof and main structure of the building. As the roof was replaced in 2003 significant expenditure on this in the near future is not expected. By the nature of the buildings age and form of construction there will always be a need for ongoing maintenance, although externally this has been minimal. The owner of the building was open to sell the building to SNC so this could be considered again in the future.
5. **Relevant Corporate Priorities**

5.1. Promoting a thriving local economy.

5.2. Driving services through being businesslike, efficient and customer aware.

6. **Implications and Risks**

6.1. Financial – not implementing the break clause, may involve additional future costs in maintenance such as replacing heating (night storage heating) and lighting systems (does not meet today’s standards).

6.2. It is typical for a business centre of this type to have voids that will impact on the level of income. Due to the high level of return, the business centre can sustain some level of voids before falling below the 5% rate of return expected by the Council.

6.3. Effecting the break clause will result in some expenditure to finalise the dilapidations. This could result in high costs to cover the dilapidations required and possible staffing costs in terms of redundancies. These costs will also be an implication at the end of the lease.

6.4. Legal – if decided to effect the break option and this is not undertaken correctly, it could mean the Council is committed to the lease until the expiry of the lease in 2023.

6.5. Other – Owner may not operate the premises as a business centre and therefore there is risk with regards to a potential loss of start up units if the Council chose to effect the break.

7. **Conclusion**

7.1. Whilst the Council is experiencing (at the current time) higher level of voids, the centre has during the period of the lease been fully let or had minimal voids. Due to the flexible terms offered to tenants (easy in/out), business centres are often susceptible to a more frequent turnover of tenants and therefore voids are inevitable. As the centre has provided accommodation to a wide range of start up and small businesses, produces a rental income and investment return, it is concluded therefore that the Council should continue with the lease.

8. **Recommendations**

8.1. Cabinet is recommended to approve the continuation of the lease to the end of the term in 2023.