CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 26 November 2012 at 9.00 a.m.

Members Present:

Cabinet: Councillors J Fuller (Chairman)
K Kiddie, G Wheatley,
M Wilby (for part of the meeting)

Apologies: Councillors Y Bendle, D Bills

Non-Appointed: Councillors F Ellis, C Foulger, D Goldson, M Gray, N Legg,
T Lewis, J Mooney, B Riches, R Savage, B Spratt,
K Weeks

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive, the Director of Development and Environment, the Head of Asset Management, the Head of Environmental Services, the Head of Localism and Growth, the Accountancy Manager, the Economic and Tourism Development Manager, the Revenues and Benefits Manager, the Planning Consultant and the Policy Officer

2138 MINUTES

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Monday 17 September 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2139 NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES – MANDATORY AND DISCRETIONARY RELIEFS

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Policy Officer, which sought member approval of the revised Mandatory and Discretionary Rate Relief Guidelines.

The Policy Officer explained that a working group of elected members had been reviewing the existing approach to Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rate Discount and Reliefs. He outlined the proposed changes and explained that relief would only
be awarded for a period of one year at a time, which would allow the scheme to be more flexible. There would be no need for organisations to re-apply in full each year; they would be asked to complete renewal forms on an annual basis.

During discussion, the Chairman suggested that the threshold for bar takings for sports grounds and clubs was not realistic and that this should be increased to £10,000. In response to queries regarding the need for additional support for shops in market towns, the Chairman stressed that whilst he understood the difficulties facing larger businesses, it was important to continue to support over 200 clubs and societies throughout smaller villages.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To approve the Non-Domestic Rates Mandatory and Discretionary Rate Relief Guidelines, subject to the threshold for bar takings for sports grounds and clubs increasing to £10,000.

The Reasons for the Decision

To support rural businesses, charities and other non-profit making organisations, in line with the Council’s corporate priorities

Other Options Considered

As outlined in the report

2140 REVIEW OF THE EMPTY HOMES WORK PROGRAMME

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Housing Standards Manager, which reviewed the progress made in reducing the number of long term empty homes, and sought Cabinet approval for a revised approach which would result in an increase in the number of empty homes contacted each year and the Council making use of the regulatory provisions available.

Cllr Y Bendle explained that the proposals of the report wished to build on the processes already in place. Empty Homes were not only a wasted asset which could contribute to meeting South Norfolk’s housing need, but also lost revenue. With the introduction of the New Homes Bonus, additional funding was available for the Council for every home put back in use.

Cllr T Blowfield, Chairman of the Housing and Public Health Policy Committee, explained that the Policy Committee had fully endorsed the recommendations of the report. He was very supportive of the proposals which would enable officers to deal more effectively with problematic properties.

Cllr M Gray, referring to a property that had been empty for over 26 years in his own ward, fully supported the proposals of the report.
The Decision

RESOLVED:

1. To agree the proposed revised approach to long term empty properties and that those properties be engaged with, in accordance with the flow chart outlined at Appendix 2 of the report;
2. To delegate to the Director of Development and Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Public Health, the authority to commence Compulsory Purchase and Enforced Sale action where it has been determined the best course of action to resolve a long term empty home.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure empty homes are brought back in to use, which in turn will contribute to the housing supply, meeting local needs, helping tackle homelessness and prevent neighbourhood decline.

Other Options Considered

- To move away from a proactive approach

2141 A POSSIBLE CITY DEAL FOR GREATER NORWICH

(at this point in the meeting, Cllr M Wilby left the meeting and did not return)

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Localism and Growth, which informed members of the opportunity to develop a City Deals Bid for the greater Norwich Area.

The Head of Localism and Growth introduced the report, explaining that the bid would be a joint bid co-ordinated through the Greater Norwich Development Partnership. The main focus of the bid would be the opportunities arising from the life sciences research and development at the Norwich Research Park.

The Chairman stressed that the deal would not directly result in new money, but would involve redirecting funds, achieving better value for money and generating more income. A City Deal would involve devolving greater powers to the local area, giving access and more control over current Government funding. It would also allow the retention of funds generated locally and for these funds to be reinvested in the area.
The Decision

RESOLVED:

1. To delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to work up a bid in partnership with others to the submission stage;
2. That a further report be presented to Cabinet when further details are available, including potential governance arrangements and commitments required.

The Reasons for the Decision

To create a successful bid and partnership to generate economic growth and high-value jobs

Other Options Considered

None.

2142 DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION – PARTNERSHIP WITH VISIT NORWICH LIMITED

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Localism and Growth, regarding discussions with Visit Norwich concerning South Norfolk Council’s participation in a new enlarged Visit Norwich Destination Management Organisation (DMO).

The Chief Executive outlined the background to the proposals, explaining that Visit Norwich Ltd was a Destination Management Organisation (DMO), a non profit company made up of both public and private partners, to promote the Norwich area. The Council had previously felt that Visit Norwich had focussed too much on Norwich City centre, however, now with a much broader agenda, participation in the DMO would be more advantageous to the South Norfolk area. The Chief Executive referred to the alternative option, to form a new rural DMO with Great Yarmouth Tourist Authority, however, she believed that the Visit Norwich DMO was the favoured option and would provide maximum impact.

In response to queries regarding funding, members were pointed to paragraph 6.1 of the report and were advised that monies could be saved by streamlining current activities. The Chief Executive stressed that not all of the £33 k, currently spent on tourism promotion, would be directed to Visit Norwich, explaining that the terms of the contract were still subject to negotiation.

In response to a query from Cllr M Gray, the Economic and Tourism Development Manager explained that the DMO currently produced literature and promoted material for the Broads Authority. The Chief Executive added that discussions were currently taking place with the Broads Authority, to see if it wished to become a more active member.
The Decision

RESOLVED: To authorise officers to negotiate a partnership agreement for participation in an enlarged Visit Norwich Destination Management Organisation.

The Reasons for the Decision

To provide benefits for local tourism businesses, attracting new customers and encouraging longer and repeat trips, whilst being associated with Norwich’s heritage and shopping attractions.

Other Options Considered

- To form a new rural DMO
- Continue to work with no access to DMO services

2143 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES DOCUMENT – PREFERRED OPTION POLICIES

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Localism and Growth, which sought Cabinet approval for draft development management policies to be included in the ‘preferred option’ document for public consultation.

The Head of Localism and Growth introduced his report, stressing that the development management policies were very important, providing the basis for managing the majority of planning proposals. Cabinet noted that an extensive consultation had taken place with all members regarding the formation of the policies.

The Planning Consultant outlined the general format for each policy, explaining that although the policies themselves would be fixed and approved following Independent Examination, the intention was to amend the notes section of each policy as and when required.

The Decision

RESOLVED:

1. To agree the proposed South Norfolk Development Management Polices, as the basis for a Regulation 18 “preferred option” public consultation;
2. To delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree editorial and other necessary minor amendments to the policies, and to approve the Sustainability Appraisal and key public consultation material.
The Reasons for the Decision

To create policies that conform to the national planning policies and the Spatial Vision and Objectives found in the adopted Joint Core Strategy.

Other Options Considered
None

2144 DELIVERING AFFORDABLE HOUSING THROUGH ENABLING ACTIVITY

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Director of Environment and Regulation, which advised Cabinet of the details of a proposed new scheme to enable financial support to be given to assist in the delivery of viable affordable housing projects that would help to meet local need.

Cllr Y Bendle referred to the background of the report and the Council's excellent record at delivering affordable housing, and she briefly outlined the proposed plans which would involve bids for an affordable housing grant being considered by the Grants Panel.

Cllr T Blowfield, Chairman of the Housing and Public Health Policy Committee indicated his support for the proposals. He stressed the need for more 1 and 2 bed roomed properties and the importance of research to identify areas of need.

During discussion, Cllr D Goldson, Chairman of the Grants Panel, expressed his support for the proposals. In response to a query regarding design, the Director of Environment and Regulation agreed that the evaluation process could make reference to the Place Making Guide, although it was stressed that it could only be an influencing factor at this stage.

Some members expressed concern with regard to the risks outlined at paragraph 7.2 of the report, however Cabinet concluded that the continued provision of affordable homes for local people, outweighed any of the risks involved.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To approve the new scheme for delivering the Council’s affordable housing enabling role.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure continued provision of affordable homes for local people, meeting key corporate priorities.

Other Options Considered
As detailed in the report.
2145 CAPITAL STRATEGY

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Finance, which presented members with the Council’s Capital Strategy.

The Accountancy Manager presented the report, drawing attention to the focus of the Strategy, to use capital resources available to the Council to invest in projects in order to deliver on-going revenue savings or additional revenue income. He highlighted paragraph 3.4 of the report regarding the financing of the capital programme, and members noted the healthy position of reserves as a potential tool for financing capital expenditure, and the continued investment in commercial property to achieve revenue income.

During discussion, the Chairman explained that an announcement regarding the Local Government Finance Settlement was expected on 18 December. He also stressed the need to ensure that the Council’s level of reserves was protected.

Referring to paragraph 4 of the report concerning borrowing, Cllr K Weeks expressed his concerns, suggesting that the Council would lose the liquidity of its assets if it continued to invest in property. Cllr T Lewis stressed the need to profile any borrowing requirements and to identify all the risks involved. The Chairman agreed that it was a complicated issue which required much consideration.

Cllr M Gray drew attention to paragraph 2.2 and members noted that the current capital programme for Capital Grants including funding of £100,000 for 2012/13 and 2013/14 (not 2013/14 as indicated in the report). Cllr Gray suggested that some applications for grants in the current year had not been rigorous enough, believing some of the reasons for this being due to the short time scale given to applicants to produce their application. He suggested that as soon as capital grants were fixed, invitations for bids should be advertised. The Chief Executive agreed that applicants should be given as much notice as possible, but warned that applicants were sought through a commissioning process and if it became an open bidding operation, more resources would be required to manage the process.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To approve the Capital Strategy, in order to guide the formulation of the new three year capital programme.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure the delivery of on-going revenue savings and income, and a capital programme that is realistic and deliverable.

Other Options Considered

None
2146 REVIEW OF RULES OF FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE AND CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Finance, which proposed a number of changes to Contract Standing orders and the rules of Financial Governance.

Members were advised that minor amendments had been proposed, in order to reflect the changing environment in which the Council operated and to clarify areas which could previously be construed as ambiguous.

RESOLVED: TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL:
(a) Agrees the revised Rules of Financial Governance, as set out in Appendix A of the report;
(b) Agrees the revised Contract Standing Orders as set out in Appendix B of the report

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure officers and members are clear of what is required of them in carrying out their financial duties.

Other Options Considered

None.

2147 CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

2148 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

2149 UNIT 13 WYMONDHAM BUSINESS PARK PROPOSED LEASE

The subject of the decision

Members considered the exempt report of the Property Consultant, regarding the proposed lease of Unit 13, Wymondham Business Park.
The Deputy Chief Executive outlined the salient points of the report to members. Cabinet supported the recommendations on the terms details in paragraph 3 of the report.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To approve the lease of the unit as detailed in paragraph 3 of the report.

The Reasons for the Decision

To maximise the return of the asset, in line with the Council’s Asset Management Plan.

Other Options Considered

- To continue to market the property

2150 UPDATE ON CNC

The subject of the decision

Members considered the exempt report of the Deputy Chief Executive, which provided an update on the progress in the evolution of the joint CNC Building Control function.

The Deputy Chief Executive outlined the salient points of his report to members. Cabinet noted that the business case, financial implications, governance changes and delegation arrangements for the joint venture company would be reported to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

The Decision

RESOLVED: (1) To approve the transition of CNC to a model hosted by South Norfolk Council, under the terms identified by Cabinet in July 2012;

(2) To delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder, the authority to negotiate the terms of the joint venture company with the 3 districts and Norse Group Ltd, under section 95 of the local Government Act 2003, in accordance with the principles contained within the report;

(3) That the business case, financial implications, governance changes and delegation arrangements be presented to a future Cabinet or Council meeting for full and final approval.
The Reason for the Decision

To create economies of scale for all participating councils, whilst offsetting the Council’s fixed overheads.

Other Options Considered

As detailed in the report

2151 PROCUREMENT OF WASTE COLLECTION VEHICLES

The subject of the decision

Members considered the exempt report of the Head of Environmental Services, which sought approval for the leting of a contract to supply refuse vehicles as part of a rolling programme of replacement.

The Director of Development and Environment advised members that the Council had been unsuccessful in a bid for grant money from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to instigate a food waste collection service. The procurement exercise therefore required standard refuse compactor vehicles only.

The Head of Environmental Services outlined the outcomes of the evaluation of tenders received.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To agree that the vehicle supply contract be awarded as detailed in paragraph 7.1 of the report.

The Reason for the Decisions

To ensure value for money in accordance with the Council’s standing orders and EU procurement law.

Other Options Considered

- Not to procure all or any of the vehicles

(The meeting concluded at 11.21 am)