CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 16 February 2015 at 9.00 am.

Members Present:

Cabinet: Councillors J Fuller (Chairman) Y Bendle, D Bills, K Kiddie, and M Wilby (for part of the meeting)

Apologies: Councillor G Wheatley

Non-Appointed: Councillors Ellis, Goldson, Hornby, Legg, Lewis, Neal, Riches, R Savage, K Weeks

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Environment and Housing (A Jarvis), the Director of Growth of Localism (T Horspole), the Acting Director of Business Development (D Lorimer), the Accountancy Manager (M Fernandez-Graham), the Business Improvement Manager (W Salmons), the Communities and Democratic Services Manager (L Mickleborough) the Planning Policy Manager (A Nicholls), the Scrutiny and Information Rights Officer (E Goddard), and the Senior Planning Officer (S Marjoram).

Also in Attendance: Cllr J Joyce from Mulbarton Parish Council

2351 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr D Bills declared an “other” interest in agenda item 14, the Member Grants Scheme (minute 2358), as the Chairman of the Northern River Valleys Neighbourhood area.

2352 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 26 January 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
RESPONSE TO MULBARTON PARISH COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT MULBARTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Planning Policy Manager, which proposed a response to the Mulbarton Parish Council Consultation on the draft Mulbarton Neighbourhood Plan.

The Planning Policy Manager welcomed the progress made by the Parish Council on developing the Neighbourhood Plan, explaining that in general, officers were very supportive of its contents. Officers did however suggest that the current wording of policies needed adjustment to ensure that they best delivered the Parish Council’s aspirations and would pass the Basic Conditions tests at Examination stage. He further stressed the importance of ensuring all wording was precise as there would be very little scope to make changes later on; the Examiner had very little power to make any changes other than those that related to a failure in policy.

The Chairman applauded Mulbarton Parish Council for its achievements, it being only the second parish in the District to develop a Neighbourhood Plan. He hoped that South Norfolk Council’s comments would be viewed as positive and constructive, and that Mulbarton Parish Council would continue to engage with South Norfolk to agree amendments that were satisfactory to both parties.

Cllr N Legg, local member for Mulbarton, and a member of the Mulbarton Neighbourhood Plan Committee, explained that he felt the comments to be fair, recognising that amendments were required to the Plan, to ensure that it passed the Basic Conditions.

Cllr J Joyce, Mulbarton Parish Councillor and Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Committee, then addressed the meeting, acknowledging the issues raised by South Norfolk and expressing his gratitude for the assistance provided by officers in working through the required amendments. He was keen that the Plan continued to encapsulate the key messages received from local residents; that whilst recognising the need for development, Mulbarton continued to retain its “village feel”, and traffic was deterred from the centre of the village.

The Decision

It was

RESOLVED: To agree the response as set out in Appendix 1 of the report and to delegate authority to Director of Growth and Localism to:

a) submit the Appendix as South Norfolk Council’s formal response to the consultation on Mulbarton Parish Council’s draft Neighbourhood Plan;

b) work with the Parish Council to agree amendments that are mutually satisfactory (if any of South Norfolk Council’s amendments are not thought satisfactory by
the Parish Council) and;
c) should the Neighbourhood Plan be submitted for Examination, to pursue the Council’s representations at the Examination (if appropriate modifications have not been made and/or to make appropriate representations on any other new/amended text).

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure that the plan best delivers the parish’s aspirations and meets the five Basic Conditions at the Examination stage of the process.

Other Options Considered

- Not to respond to the consultation

2354 Performance, Opportunities/Risks and Revenue Budget Position Report April to December 2014/15

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Scrutiny and Information Rights Officer, the Accountancy Manager and the Business Improvement Manager, which detailed the Council’s risk position at the end of the third quarter of the financial year, the revenue budget position for quarter three and the performance of the Council from April to December 2014.

The Business Improvement Manager began by explaining that performance levels had been good throughout Quarter 3, with no indicators falling below acceptable levels. Seven measures had been awarded amber status, but there were no real causes for concern.

Members expressed their satisfaction with performance and were particularly pleased to note the exceptional performance in relation to LI 758, External Funding identified and brought in to the Local Economy, and LI 013 Building Control Fee Earning Income.

With regard to LI 263, the number of missed bins for all waste per 100,000 collections, Cllr K Kiddie explained that this indicator had recovered well from an amber status in quarter two. He added that only 200 bins out of three quarters of a million had been missed, which he felt to be a commendable achievement.

Turning to risks, the Chairman referred to the recent incident at South Oxfordshire Council where its offices were destroyed by fire. The Scrutiny and Information Rights Officer explained that traditionally the risk of this happening was considered to be low. This would, however, be reviewed once the outcomes of a recent audit of the Disaster Recovery Plan were known, but she was hopeful that there would be no change to the level of risk.
The Accountancy Manager briefly summarised the position for the revenue budget for the Council. Referring to income, he made reference to the increased income at the Wymondham Leisure Centre, but also the losses made at the Diss Swim and Fitness Centre, due to planned and unplanned pool closures. Members also noted that there were a reduced number of voids in investment properties and that those voids at Loddon had recently been filled.

With regard to the request to write off a bad debt, outlined a paragraph 9 of the report, members noted that there were no more avenues open to the Council to ensure its recovery.

The Decision

RESOLVED:

To

1. Note the performance for quarter 3, 2014/15 and the combined efforts across the Directorates to deliver the Vision of the Council;
2. Note the current position, particularly the organisational capacity, with regard to opportunities and risks and accepts the actions to support risk mitigation and opportunity development.
3. Note the revenue position and the reason for the variances on the General Fund and the forecast outturn.
4. Approve the write-off of unrecoverable bad debt as outlined in section 9 of the report.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure processes are in place to improve performance that the management of risks are sound, and to ensure that reserves and revenue budgets are in place to meet the Council’s corporate objectives

Other Options Considered

None

2355 CAPITAL AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT QUARTER 3 2014/15

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Accountancy Manager, which reviewed the position of capital expenditure for April to December 2014, and the treasury management activity during the same period.

The Accountancy Manager drew attention to the key areas in his report, explaining capital expenditure to be slightly behind profile at £2.5 million. During discussion,
attention was drawn to the re-profiling of a number of schemes and members noted that the purchase of land adjacent to the Ketteringham Depot was no longer going ahead.

With regard to treasury management, the Accountancy Manager explained that interest earned on cash investments was forecast to be more than budgeted, but still down on last year. This was due to lower interest rates available on new investments. The Chairman stressed the importance of diversifying investments due to such low returns on cash. He felt it to be a remarkable achievement that despite these low returns, the Council continued to invest in an extensive capital programme, whilst planning to freeze council tax for the seventh time in eight years.

The Decision

| RESOLVED: | 1. To note progress on the Capital Programme during the first nine months of 2014/15. |
| | 2. To approve the request to: |
| | a) Re-programme the capital schemes for Ketteringham Depot, Website Development and Play Areas into 2015/16. |
| | b) Allocate £70,000 from the Transformation Grant to fund work on the Citrix Walled Garden |
| | c) Bring forward £135,000 to fund enhancement work at Diss and Long Stratton Leisure Centres |

3. **TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL**

   a) Approves the 2014/15 prudential indicators for the quarter.

   b) Notes the treasury activity in the quarter and that it complies with the agreed strategy.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure that the capital programme is aligned to the Council's priorities and is fully funded

Other Options Considered

None
The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Senior Accountant, which outlined the key messages from this year’s budget consultation exercise, to inform members’ consideration of the budget proposals for the financial year 2015/16.

The Accountancy Manager introduced the report, broadly summarising the results of the exercise.

Members noted that the exercise indicated that the most important services to residents were waste and recycling and that car parking was considered to be the least popular area where fees should be increased.

Cabinet was pleased that the main key messages generally reflected the investment proposed in the Council’s Directorate Plans, and the budget proposals for 2015/16.

The Decision

| RESOLVED: | To note the feedback received during the consultation exercise. |

The Reasons for the Decision

To take in to account the issues raised when determining the budget and level of Council Tax for 2015/16

Other Options Considered

None

2357 BUSINESS PLANS 2015/16

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Business Improvement Manager, which presented Cabinet with the Directorate Business Plans for 2015-16.

The Business Improvement Manager briefly outlined the process undertaken in producing the directorate plans.

Referring to the Housing and Public Health service, Cllr K Weeks referred to proposals to launch a loan assistance scheme, and queried whether the Council required a licence to carry out such activities. The Acting Director of Business Improvement confirmed that such a licence was not necessary. Cllr Y Bendle drew attention to the achievements of the Housing and Public Health service, suggesting that the Plan reflected the services’ ambition for continuous improvement.

The Decision
It was

**RESOLVED:**

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<th>1. To approve the Business Plans for 2015/16;</th>
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<td>2. To continue with the current set of strategic measures</td>
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**The Reasons for the Decision**

To ensure that a sound business planning process is in place, as a mechanism for the vision and priorities set by members.

**Other Options Considered**

None

**2358 MEMBER GRANTS SCHEME 2015/16**

**The subject of the decision**

Members considered the report of the Communities and Democratic Services Manager, which sought approval for the operation of the member grant scheme for 2015/16, which included changes to the Ground Rules, and how the additional funding from the Neighbourhood Fund Reserve, should be allocated.

The Communities and Democratic Services Manager outlined the background to the report, explaining the options for the allocation of funding, and the views expressed at the Growth and Localism Committee meeting held 22 January 2015.

Cllr M Wilby expressed his support for Option 2, which would see a universal increase to the Community Action Fund. Members noted that this could still help to supplement funding given by individual members through the Member Ward Budget.

**The Decision**

It was

**RESOLVED:**

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<th>1. To agree that Option 2 is the favoured option for the allocation of the Community Grant Scheme, from those identified within paragraph 2.3 of the report;</th>
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<td>2. To approve the recommended changes to the Ground Rules for the Community Grant Scheme as highlighted within paragraph 2.7 of the report to the Growth and Localism Committee and paragraph 2.7 of the Cabinet report</td>
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**The Reasons for the Decision**

To ensure the maximum impact and support to communities, helping them realise their potential.
Other Options Considered

- To use the additional funding to increase the member ward budget
- To use the additional funding to increase both the member ward budget and the Community Action Fund

2359 REVENUE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2015/16

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Acting Director of Business Development, which examined the Council’s revenue budget for 2015/16, and proposed a freeze on council tax levels.

The Chairman explained that he was proud to be leading the Council, referring to the excellent quality of services, high satisfaction levels, ambitious capital programme, high level of reserves and the proposed freeze on council tax levels which was the seventh freeze in 8 years. All this, he felt, was a remarkable achievement.

The Acting Director of Business Development outlined the key areas of her report to members. She advised members that since writing the report, the Local Government Finance settlement figures had been finalised and that there was no need to make any adjustments to the proposed budget. She drew attention in particular to the proposed freeze in council tax, the uncertainty over the New Homes Bonus, the level of reserves, and the proposed new Infrastructure Reserve, which would support local infrastructure schemes and projects such as the use of Compulsory Purchase powers to deliver the Long Stratton bypass. As Section 151 Officer, she confirmed that in her opinion, the budget had been constructed on a prudent basis.

Referring to the Medium Term Plan, outlined at Appendix C of the report, the Acting Director of Business Improvement explained that savings or income of £1.5 million would need to be made in 2018/19, 2019/20, if reserves were not be utilised. She added that it was anticipated that the Revenue Support Grant would be reduced to nil by 2019/20. The Chairman felt it prudent to plan for the worst case scenario.

The Decision

RESOLVED:

1. TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL
   a) approval of the revised discretionary rate relief guidance as set out in appendix F of the report;
   b) approval of the base budget; as shown in para 8.1 of the report;
   c) the use of the revenue reserves as set out in para 9.2 and 9.3 of the report;
   d) that the Council’s demand on the Collection Fund
for 2015/16 for General Expenditure shall be £5,820,226 and for Special Expenditure be £72,597;
e) that the level of Council Tax be £130.68 for General Expenditure and £1.63 for Special Expenditure.

2. To note:
   a) the advice of the Section 151 Officer with regard to section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003;
   b) the position regarding parish precepts;
   c) the future budget pressures contained in the Medium Term Plan.

The Reasons for the Decision

To provide a budget which meets the Council’s priorities and to set a level of Council Tax affordable to residents.

Other Options Considered

None

2360 CAPITAL PROGRAMME APRIL 2015 TO MARCH 2020

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Accountancy Manager, which proposed a capital programme for the period April 2015 to March 2020.

The Chairman referred to a number of projects within the programme, including the investment in the leisure centres, affordable housing, and aids and adaptations. He drew attention in particular to the Investment in Better Broadband project, which was a major initiative to ensure that villages in South Norfolk could access superfast Broadband.

Cabinet noted that it was an aspirational but achievable plan, which would make stepped changes in improving the lives of people in the District.

The Decision

RESOLVED:

1. TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL
   a) that the assumptions on which the funding of the capital programme is based are prudent.
   b) approval of the capital programme for 2015/16
to 2019/20.

2. To delegate

a) to the S151 Officer the amendment of the capital budget and financing for Equity Home Loans as and when these loans occur during the financial year.

b) to the S151 Officer the amendment of the capital budget and financing for Green Deal improvement grants as and when expenditure occurs during the financial year.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure a Capital Programme for 2014/15 to 2016/17 that is affordable and complies with Council policies.

Other Options Considered

None

2361 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY APRIL 2015 TO MARCH 2018

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Accountancy Manager, which outlined the proposed Treasury Management Strategy, the Prudential Indicators, Minimum Revenue Provision, and the Treasury Management Policy Statement for 2015/16 to 2017/18.

The Acting Director of Business Development presented the report, and drew attention to the main change proposed to the Investment Strategy for 2015/16, to include a greater number of non-UK institutions domiciled in AAA rated sovereigns in order to diversify the Authority’s investments and therefore mitigate bail-in risk. Members noted that the Council would continue to only invest in sterling, in non-UK counterparties for a maximum of two years.

Cabinet was informed that the Council had changed banking provider in January, from the Co-operative to Barclays Bank, and that the transition had gone well. Barclays had requested that the Council become a testimonial site.

The Decision

RESOLVED: TO RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL:


b) The Prudential Indicators and Limits for the next 3
years contained within Appendix A of the report, including the Authorised Limit Prudential Indicator.
c) The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement (section 8 of the report) setting out the Council’s policy on MRP.
d) The Annual Investment Strategy 2015/16 (section 5 of the report) contained in the Treasury Management Strategy, including the delegation of certain tasks to the Acting Director of Business Development

The Reasons for the Decision
To ensure that security of the Council’s cash above both the rate of return and the liquidity of investment.

Other Options Considered
None

2362 USE OF COMPULSORY PURCHASE POWERS TO DELIVER THE LONG STRATTON AREA ACTION PLAN

The subject of the decision

Members considered the report of the Director of Growth and Localism, which sought authorisation from Cabinet to commence work related to pursuing a compulsory purchase order for land in Long Stratton, in order to implement the proposals set out in the Long Stratton Area Action Plan (LSAAP).

The Chairman reminded members of the background to the report, expressing his disappointment that no further progress had been made in relation to the promotion agreement between the largest land owner and a site developer/promotor. He felt it prudent to authorise officers to begin the preparatory work for a compulsory purchase order, so that the Council was in a position to make an early decision on whether to proceed, once the LSAAP was adopted.

During discussion, the Director of Growth and Localism stressed that the Council would need to demonstrate that it had taken all reasonable steps to engage with the landowners to bring the land forward and he referred to the four actions identified within the report. In response to queries, he confirmed that the compulsory purchase order process could be stopped at any stage, even after the order was granted.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To authorise officers to undertake the work required in the actions set out in section 3 of the report.
The Reasons for the Decision
To ensure that the Council is in a position to proceed with the necessary action, if necessary, when the Long Stratton Area Action Plan is adopted.

Other Options Considered
Not to commence with the preparatory work.

2363 CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

Cllr Fuller suggested that the Member Training Plan post-election, be considered at the next Cabinet meeting.

(The meeting concluded at 10.41 am)

Chairman