CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 18 January 2016 at 2.00 pm

Members Present:

Cabinet: Councilors J Fuller (Chairman)
M Wilby, Y Bendle, L Hornby, M Edney and K Mason Billig

Non-Appointed: Councilors B Bernard, D Bills, P Broome, L Dale, F Ellis, D Goldson, M Gray, J Hornby, C Hudson, C Kemp, N Legg, G Minshull, J Mooney, GWheatley and J Wilby

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Business Improvement (D Lorimer), the Director of Community Services (P Boyce), the Director of Growth and Localism (T Horspole), the Head of Environmental Services (B Wade) the Head of Growth and Economic Development (J Munson) and the Senior Planning Officer (C Raine).

2422 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 7 December 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Director of Community Services, which presented Cabinet with the Council's Digital Engagement Strategy for approval.

The Director of Community Services presented her report, explaining that the Strategy set out how the Council would embrace digital engagement as a central pillar for customer interaction and service delivery, to meet the needs of residents, businesses and visitors. This was an opportunity to provide a more cost effective service whilst improving customers' satisfaction, through a more streamlined website, that allowed users to access services at a time convenient for them.

The Director of Community Services referred to the workstreams that would flow from the Strategy, transforming how the Council engaged with its customers, putting them in control, and making online services so straightforward and convenient that customers would prefer to use them. Supporting the growth in the local digital economy was a key element to its successful delivery, and members noted that the Council's Economic Strategy (to be discussed elsewhere on the agenda), supported this through its focus on the digital economy and the provision of superfast broadband.

Cllr M Edney expressed his support for the Strategy, and was pleased to note that the Council recognised that some residents would still wish to contact the Council using traditional communication methods, such as face to face, and by telephone. Members stressed the need for a more user-friendly website, which would not only provide a cost effective service and a more convenient way of contacting the Council, but also create a channel to generate more income. The Chairman agreed that a complete review of all aspects of the existing site was required, in terms of what worked well, and what did not.

In response to a query, the Director of Community Services confirmed that some areas of work, such as that carried out by the Early Help Hub, was a bespoke tailored 1:1 service where transactions on line would not be appropriate or very limited, however the website could be used as a tool to signpost services. There were other areas of work where transactions on-line could be increased, or the customer experience enhanced and members noted that Leisure Services had made considerable improvements in this area over the last 3 months.

The Decision

RESOLVED To approve the Digital Engagement Strategy as part of the wider ICT Strategy and to delegate any final amendments to the Director of Community Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.
The Reasons for the Decision

To provide a more cost effective service and improve customer satisfaction, whilst supporting the Council’s corporate priorities.

Other Options Considered

None

2424 SOUTH NORFOLK ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY 2016-21

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Growth and Economic Development, which presented to Cabinet the Draft Economic Growth Strategy 2016-21, which provided a framework and basis for supporting economic development activity in South Norfolk until 2021.

The Head of Growth and Economic Development presented his report, explaining that the Strategy aimed to drive economic growth, inward investment, business support and employment creation within the District. He went on to explain that the delivery of the Strategy would be through a focus of four core themes; People, Place, Innovation and Enterprise, and he briefly outlined the work streams involved in each.

The Chairman commended the report to members, highlighting the need for a collaborative approach through partnership working with bodies such as the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, and the Greater Norwich Growth Board. He also drew attention to the knock-on effect of business growth on the Council, referring to the retention of business rates.

During discussion, members stressed the need to push for improved broadband connection across the District. Reference was also made to European funding, and officers agreed to ensure that the Strategy emphasised opportunities for funding from Europe and the Local Action Group (LAG).

The Decision

RESOLVED: To:
1. Approve the Draft Economic Growth Strategy 2016-21, subject to minor amendment;
2. Endorse the consultation as outlined in the report.
The Reasons for the Decision

The aims of the Strategy will provide greater employment and learning opportunities for residents, contributing to the delivery of the Council’s Corporate priorities.

Other Options Considered

None

2425 PROPOSED CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Head of Environmental Services, which presented Cabinet with a Corporate Environment Policy for approval.

The Head of Environmental Services presented his report, explaining that the Council played a key role in the shaping of the local environment, through the conduct of its own business and its work with local communities. Members noted that the Policy followed on from the Council’s Corporate Environment Strategy 2008 -2012 and the Carbon Management Plan 2010-2014, and would be supported by an Action Plan, the development of which was still in progress.

Cllr M Gray considered the document to be very brief when compared with other Council strategies, and felt the timescale of one year to be too short sighted. He was disappointed that there had been no consultation with stakeholders, and was concerned that the document failed to indicate the Council’s commitment to environmental issues.

In response, Cllr K Billig explained that the Policy set out the wider remit for ensuring that the management and the enhancement of the local environment were aims that were imbedded in all Council business and this did not necessitate a lengthy document. She felt that an annual review of the document was appropriate, and she suggested that the Action Plan, when complete, would provide more detail.

During discussion, the Chairman made reference to the built and unbuilt environment, and suggested that these could be listed as separate aims. In response to Cllr Gray’s concerns, he explained that this was a policy document, with key objectives, and he stressed that the Council was committed to managing and enhancing the local environment.
The Decision

RESOLVED: TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL approves the Corporate Environment Policy.

The Reasons for the Decision

To produce a policy in line with the Council’s vision and priorities.

Other Options Considered

None.

2426 ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION: CRINGLEFORD

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Director of Growth and Localism, which sought Cabinet’s views with regard to a request from Cringleford Parish Council, to suspend permitted development rights at Cringleford Business Centre, using an Article 4 Order.

The Director of Growth and Localism outlined the background to the report, and drew attention to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance; that an Article 4 direction should only be used in exceptional circumstances. He explained that whilst officers considered the arguments put forward by Cringleford Parish Council to be logical, legal advice had confirmed that any application for an Article 4 Order in this instance, would not satisfy the requirements of exceptional circumstances.

Cllr G Wheatley, speaking as local member, urged members to approve the request, suggesting that there was no justification for a further 35 dwellings in Cringleford in addition to those already allocated. He also expressed concerns with regard to parking issues, explaining that this was an existing problem in the area that would only get worse if the change of use was permitted. He considered there to be no economic argument for the Business Centre to close, and he made reference to the aims of the Economic Growth Strategy, considered and supported by members elsewhere on the agenda.

Cllr C Kemp, also speaking as local member, was sympathetic to the views of Cringleford Parish Council, but had reluctantly concluded that the legal advice received could not be ignored. He did not believe that the car parking issue would be exacerbated
by the change of use, and he drew attention to paragraph 3.6 of the report and the likely compensation payable, should the permitted development be withdrawn. Referring to future requests for the Council to issue Article 4 Orders, he suggested that these matters might best be considered by the Development Management Committee.

Cabinet sympathised with the views of Cringleford Parish Council, and the local residents, but concluded that on balance, due to the legal advice received, that it had no alternative but to refuse to issue an Article 4 Direction on this occasion. The Chairman suggested that the Monitoring Officer should consider further the appropriate committee to consider future requests to issue Article 4 Directions.

The Decision

RESOLVED:

1. To refuse to issue an Article 4 Direction with respect to the change of use of Cringleford Business Park;
2. That the Monitoring Officer reports to full Council on 23 February, with regard to the appropriate committee to determine future requests to issue Article 4 Directions.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure decisions are made in line with statutory requirements.

Other Options Considered

To issue an Article 4 Direction.

2427 WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY, COUNTER FRAUD, CORRUPTION AND BRIBERY STRATEGY, AND ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING POLICY - UPDATES

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Audit Consortium Manager, which presented members with updates to the Whistleblowing Policy, the Counter Fraud, Corruption and Bribery Strategy, and the Anti-Money Laundering Policy, for approval.

The Director of Business Improvement explained that the documents had already been reviewed by the Finance Resources Audit and Governance Committee and the Joint Consultative Committee, and she briefly outlined the feedback received from members at these meetings.
Cabinet endorsed the updated documents, subject to an amendment to correct a typographical error at paragraph 5.1 (second bullet point) to the Anti-Money Laundering Policy.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To:

1. Note the changes to the Whistleblowing Policy, the comments made by FRAG, the amendments suggested by JCC and formally accept and endorse the Policy.
2. Note the changes to the Counter Fraud, Corruption and Bribery Strategy, and formally accept and endorse the Strategy.
3. Note the changes to the Anti-Money Laundering Policy and endorse the amended Policy, subject to a minor change.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure that policies are up to date and comply with regulations.

Other Options Considered

Memories noted the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting
for the following item 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).

2430 PURCHASE NOTICE – KING’S HEAD, PULHAM ST MARY

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the exempt report of the Director of Growth and Localism, which sought the views of Cabinet with regard to a Purchase Notice received from the owner of the King’s Head, Pulham St Mary.

The Director of Growth and Localism outlined the background of the report and made reference to the requirements for the determination of a Purchase Notice. He explained that it was the opinion of officers that the Purchase Notice should be declined, as the owner of the King’s Head had failed to demonstrate that the property was incapable of reasonable beneficial use following the carrying out of permitted development.

Members noted the independent valuation of the property provided by the District Valuer, and that the timescales for determination had not allowed for any significant negotiations with the community regarding a back to back agreement with the Council. It was noted however, that this did not impact upon the validity of the Purchase Notice.

Cllr C Hudson, speaking as local member, agreed that although unfortunate, the Council was not in a position to accept the Purchase Notice. He hoped that given the level of community support, and the apparent willingness of the owner to sell, that the Council would seek to acquire the property through an alternative route.

Cabinet agreed with the recommendations of the report and stressed their support for continued negotiations with the owner of the property and the local community. The Director of Growth and Localism stressed that only if this proved not to be feasible, would the potential compulsory purchase of the site be explored.

The Decision

RESOLVED: To:

1. Authorise the Director of Growth and Localism to decline to accept the Purchase Notice on the King’s Head, Pulham St Mary.
2. Agree that Officers should continue to seek discussions with the owner of the King’s Head, Pulham St Mary to purchase the premises, and should an agreed valuation be obtained, authorise officers to acquire the site from the owner on the condition that a back-to-back agreement be formed with an appropriate Community-led body who would recompense the Council for the cost of the purchase.

3. Request that should these discussions not prove feasible, a further report be brought before Cabinet to consider the potential Compulsory Purchase of the site.

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure compliance with Planning Regulations

Other Options Considered

To accept the Purchase Notice.

(The meeting concluded at 3.31pm)

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Chairman