

CABINET

Minutes of a remote meeting of North Norfolk District Council's Cabinet held on Monday, 30 March 2020 at 10.00 am

Committee

Members Present:

Mr A Brown	Mrs S Bütikofer (Chair)
Mr C Cushing	Mr J Rest
Mrs A Fitch-Tillett	Ms V Gay
Mr G Hayman	Mr R Kershaw
Mr N Lloyd	Mr E Seward

Officers in Attendance:

Democratic Services Manager, Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer and Head of Finance and Asset Management/Section 151 Officer

Also in attendance:

Press and Public

61 UPDATE FROM THE MONITORING OFFICER

The Chairman invited the Monitoring Officer to outline the format of the meeting. She began by explaining that whilst the provision to allow remote meetings had been included in the Coronavirus Act 2020, regulations had not yet been made, so whilst we these were awaited, decisions were being taken using officer delegated powers under Chapter 6 of the Constitution using two main delegations (5.1 and 5.2). These delegations could be exercised by any Member of the Strategic Leadership Team.

To put as much engagement with Members around that decision making as possible, and to provide accountability and transparency in decision making, Cabinet meetings would take place remotely, acting as an 'advisory committee' to the officers making the decisions. Those decisions would be recorded and then be reported through to all Members via the Members' Bulletin and also publicised on the website. It was intended that this 'hybrid' approach to Cabinet meetings would continue until the regulations were in force.

62 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2020 were agreed as a correct record (subject to formal approval at the next meeting of Cabinet)

63 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None

64 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

65 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

66 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

None.

67 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MATTERS

The Democratic Services Manager referred Members to the recommendations from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 11th March and the subsequent covering statement from the Chairman of the Committee.

The Chairman said that she was generally supportive of the recommendations but in relation to recommendation 1, she felt that it would be preferable to keep the current situation under review rather than specify a 5 year period. Cllr G Hayman, Portfolio Holder for Commercialisation and Assets, agreed saying that he would not support the disposal of the property now as the market was so volatile. However, it should be acknowledged that it was a drain on resources and the situation should be carefully monitored and regularly reviewed. Cllr J Rest added that it should be reviewed sooner rather than later. He said that the 5 year period started from the date the property was purchased which was 2.5 years ago.

68 BIG SOCIETY FUND - REVIEW AND REFOCUS

Cllr V Gay, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Wellbeing, introduced this item. She explained that the renaming of the Fund to the North Norfolk Sustainable Communities Fund would provide clarity by aligning more closely with the key priorities identified in the Corporate Plan as well as broadening its purpose.

1. Cllr J Rest said that he supported the proposal to no longer provide 100% of funding for projects and the requirement that match funding should be identified. Cllr Gay agreed, saying that match funding would be required for all applications – this could be in all forms, including 'in kind'.
2. Cllr A Fitch-Tillett sought confirmation that Option 2 was the preferred outcome. Cllr Gay confirmed that it was, saying that it clarified the future direction of the fund.
3. Cllr C Cushing queried the thinking behind the changes as the Big Society Fund was well established and known throughout the District. Cllr Gay replied that the intention was to broaden the fund. Its focus would be based on local communities but with a broader remit than previously.

The proposal by Cllr V Gay, seconded by Cllr N Lloyd was put to the vote and it was agreed that the view of Cabinet was:

To request that the Head of Economic & Community Development should exercise his delegated authority and rename and refocus the Big Society Fund and make any consequential changes to the Fund's prospectus in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Culture & Wellbeing.

Reasons for the decision:

To ensure the fund reflects Council priorities, enables more organisations and

communities to apply for funding to make their communities sustainable.

To utilise the fund to build sustainable communities and demonstrate the Council's commitment to respond to the Climate Emergency it declared in 2019.

69 ADVICE AND INFORMATION CONTRACT

Cllr V Gay, Portfolio Holder for Culture & Wellbeing, introduced this item. She began by thanking the Health and Communities Manager for her hard work in preparing the report. She explained that the current funding arrangements for the provision of advice and support via the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) were drawing to a close and consideration needed to be given as to the best way to provide this service in the future. She said that it was a crucial service for residents and a review of the current arrangements would help shape future provision.

It was proposed by Cllr V Gay, seconded by Cllr R Kershaw and agreed by Cabinet to request:

- 1. That officers review the advice and information service being delivered by Norfolk Citizens Advice**
- 2. That, having regard to the review, the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Culture & Wellbeing exercises his delegated authority to award a conditional grant (of no more than the current sum of £66,323) to Norfolk Citizens Advice towards the continuation of advice and information services in North Norfolk at dedicated offices and agreed outreach locations for the period 01 April 2020 to 31st March 2021.**
- 3. That over the coming year, officers review the various operational options for meeting the advice and information needs of the District in future years (after the proposed new contract period)**

Reasons for the decision:

To enable the continuation of established advice and information services by Norfolk Citizens Advice in North Norfolk for the period 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021.

To ensure the funding awarded by the Council to Norfolk Citizens Advice enables residents across North Norfolk to benefit from the provision of advice and information services in North Norfolk including at designated and outreach locations as appropriate.

To ensure that sufficient preparations are made to secure appropriate provision to meet the needs of users of the service in the future.

70 SPONSORSHIP AND ADVERTISING POLICY

Cllr G Hayman, Portfolio Holder for Commercialisation and Assets, introduced this item. He explained that this policy was the first step towards making the Council more financially sustainable. He added the policy would ensure that Members were happy with the advertisers that were used.

Cllr J Rest referred to section 8 of the report which outlined the risks associated with the policy. He said that there should be a disclaimer to protect the Council in the case of anything negative happening to any of the advertisers.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett commented that the timing was unfortunate as it was not a good time to take money off local businesses. Cllr Hayman said that he acknowledged this, the Council should have the policy in place so that it could be progressed once the situation improved.

The Chairman said that the agenda was published before the current crisis began and they would be put on hold until such a time that they could be progressed.

It was proposed by Cllr G Hayman, seconded by Cllr R Kershaw and agreed by Cabinet to request

- 1. That the Head of Finance and Assets exercise his delegated authority to approve the Sponsorship and Advertising Policy**
- 2. That a further report is produced covering the potential opportunities**

Reason for the decision:

To enable officers to try and drive additional income for the Council from sponsorship and advertising opportunities and to agree the policy in line with objective 2.3 of the Delivery Plan.

71 REVENUES AND BENEFITS IT SYSTEM PROCUREMENT

The Chairman and Leader of the Council, Cllr S Butikofer, introduced this item. She said that the procurement of a new Revenues & Benefits software system was extremely important. The service areas involved had undertaken a considerable amount of research and had come to the conclusion that the re-procurement of the current system offered enhanced features that would support improved customer service provision, integrate well with other Council services, provide value for money and involve minimum downtime. By making a Direct Award, the Council would balance the need to achieve value for money with a system that was suitable, whilst minimising disruption and additional cost in implementation.

Cllr R Kershaw queried the timing of implementation, given the current workload of the teams, who were dealing with a high level of claims as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Chairman replied that it would be from October 2020.

The Head of Legal, Democratic Services and Benefits added that by re-procuring the existing system, new functionality – such as online claim forms - could be brought in earlier. This would reduce the workloads of the officers working to process the claims.

It was proposed by Cllr S Butikofer, seconded by Cllr E Seward and agreed by Cabinet to request

- 1. That the Head of Legal, Democratic Services and Benefits agree the procurement of the Revenues & Benefits IT system through a Direct Award via the Crown Commercial Framework (RM3871) to Civica (Open Revenues) for a contract period of 5 years from October 2020 at a total cost of £301,000 and**
- 2. That a capital provision of £101,000 is made for the software licences to be financed from capital resources.**

Reason for the decision:

A direct award balances the need to achieve value for money for the Council, with a system that is suitable for the needs of both services, with minimal risk of disruption and additional cost in implementation

72 PURCHASE AND OPERATION OF CAR PARK AT NORTH WALSHAM RAILWAY STATION

Mr G Hayman, Portfolio Holder for Assets and Commercialisation, introduced this item. He explained that it was an update to a previous Cabinet report which outlined an opportunity to for the Council to acquire a car park within North Walsham. He said that once the current crisis resulting from the pandemic was over, the purchase could proceed, subject to further negotiations.

Cllr N Lloyd said that he would like to add his support for the project, as local member.

Cllr J Rest asked whether the Council was still intending to pursue the issue of access to the car park. Cllr Seward acknowledged that this remained a challenge. He said that one option would be to approach Greater Anglia to see if they could assist with the issue. He added that if parking charges were set at a good level then it would encourage use.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett raised concerns about the contamination of the site and asked if it was a concern. The Asset Strategy Manager replied that it was contaminated and a validation report had been requested. She said that the car park would require a sealed surface and that would essentially provide remediation. She added that if the site was developed in the future then a remediation plan would be required.

It was proposed by Cllr G Hayman, seconded by Cllr R Kershaw and agreed by Cabinet to request the Head of Finance and Assets

- A. Purchase the car park at the cost plus legal fees and associated capital costs and revenue budgets. To be funded from the Local Property Investment Fund as identified within exempt Appendix C;
- B. Purchase the car park subject to satisfactory site investigations.
- C. Reviews the viability of charging against our commercial and environmental objectives.
- D. Allocates funding of approximately £5,000 for a Traffic Regulation Order to protect Hornbeam Road and the adjacent strategic network from displaced parking

74 PRIVATE BUSINESS & EXEMPT REPORTS

75 PROPERTY TRANSACTION

Mr G Hayman, Portfolio Holder for Assets & Commercialisation introduced this item. He acknowledged that external factors may influence the outcome but it was important that the Council moved towards seeking agreement. Cllr Seward agreed, saying that it was the right outcome and that the site needed to be developed as soon as possible. Cllr Hayman said that this was a purely commercial transaction and a decision was required to ensure that progress could be made.

Cllr C Cushing asked whether a deadline could be imposed. The Leader agreed that this should be looked at and added that another valuation of the property was needed. The Asset Strategy Manager replied that a request for a valuation had been submitted and this was likely to come back in the next 2-3 weeks. Cllr Gay said that she would feel more comfortable in supporting the proposals if a timeframe was imposed. The Asset Strategy Manager said that a deadline of 6 weeks – essentially within a month of the valuation being received, would be reasonable.

Cllr Seward said that it was also important to establish whether the proposals would accord with the Council's planning policies.

It was proposed by Cllr G Hayman, seconded by Cllr N Lloyd and agreed by Cabinet to request that the Head of Finance & Assets:

- A. To dispose of the property subject to Officer advice, as provided in the exempt appendix and following assurance that the proposals are in accordance with the Council's planning policies.**
- B. A budget is provided for the removal of the portakabins and associated works.**
- C. An independent valuation of the site for disposal is obtained by a specialist surveyor and once this is obtained, a deadline of 6 weeks for a response is imposed.**
- D. To ascertain that the proposals accord with the Council's planning policies**
- E. To impose a deadline of 6 weeks for a response**

Reasons for the decision:

The disposal would bring the property back into use.

The disposal supports key corporate priorities.

76 PROPERTY TRANSACTION

Cllr G Hayman, Portfolio Holder for Assets and Commercialisation introduced this item. He said that various options had been explored. The asset was a huge drain on the Council's resources and no longer supported the objectives of the Corporate Plan. Cllr Rest agreed. He said that he knew the site well. He asked whether it was possible to ring-fence any income from the sale for the local area. The Leader said that a firm commitment could not be made on this as any receipts should be invested across the whole of the District. The Head Finance and Assets confirmed this but added that if an opportunity came up in the vicinity then the business case would be considered.

It was proposed by Cllr G Hayman, seconded by Cllr N Lloyd and agreed by Cabinet to request that the Head of Finance & Assets

- 1. To seek pre application advice on the planning acceptability of additional plots on the site in order to maximise the value of the asset prior to disposal.**
- 2. Dispose of the freehold of the site on the open market through the appointment of a specialist Estate Agent.**
- 3. To dispose of the site subject to overage clauses.**

4. To recommend reinvestment of the receipt in a suitable income generating asset in line with the Council's adopted Commercial Property Strategy.

Reasons for the decision:

The current use of the site does not currently directly support any of the key themes contained with the Corporate Plan.

The Leader thanked all officers for working so hard under difficult circumstances.

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified.

Chairman