COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 18 September 2017 at 7.30 pm

Members Present: Councillors, Duffin (Chairman), Amis, Bell, Bendle, Bills, Blundell, Broome, Dale, Dewsbury, Easton, Edney, Ellis, Foulger, Fulcher, Fuller, Goldson, Gould, Gray, Hardy, L Hornby, Hudson, C Kemp, W Kemp, Larner, Legg, Lewis, Mason-Billig, Overton, Palmer, Pond, Riches, J Savage, Stone, Thomas, Thomson, Wheatley, and M Wilby

Apologies: Councillors, Bernard, J Hornby, Kiddie, Minshull, Mooney, Neal, R Savage, J Wilby and K Worsley

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Growth and Business Development (D Lorimer), the Director of Planning and Environment (T Horspole), the Assistant Director (P Catchpole) and the Head of Business Transformation (H Ralph)

3402 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr T Lewis declared an “other” interest as a National Grid shareholder (minute 3408 refers).

3403 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 10 July 2017, were agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.
3404 CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred members to his list of engagements, for the period 11 July to 18 September 2017.

The Chairman congratulated Cllr P Hardy on recently being awarded a merit in his Masters Degree in Urban and Regional Planning.

3405 FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES
PARTNERSHIP WORKING – BROADLAND AND SOUTH NORFOLK

Cllr J Fuller introduced the report of the Chief Executive, which sought members’ views on proposed future joint working between South Norfolk Council and Broadland District Council.

Cllr Fuller began by explaining that he was very proud that South Norfolk Council was a strong and high performing authority. There was, he explained, significant opportunities to continue to improve services, drive growth and support the quality of life of residents, through an increase in collaborative working. In addition, as financial pressures for Local Government were increasing, it would be important to look ahead and find more innovative ways of operating. It was likely that in future a reorganisation would be forced upon local authorities and it was clear that the Government was keen for councils to work at a local collaborative level. South Norfolk needed to anticipate these changes, so that it remained fit for the future and resilient to changes that might be forced upon it.

Cllr Fuller acknowledged that the Council had, on two previous occasions, explored the potential for partnership working with a neighbouring authority however those plans had never come to fruition. However, he felt that the necessity for partnership working was now greater, and that there were many similarities across the two local authorities. Devolution had clearly demonstrated that both authorities had an appetite for driving growth and delivering services more effectively at a local collaborative level. Both councils had a strong track record of collaboration and partnership working, through for example, the Greater Norwich Growth Board, CNC Building Control, and the Internal Audit Consortium. He suggested that working in partnership would provide more scale to deliver more homes, and attract more investment in to the area, and could provide opportunities to maximise income and make savings for both councils. He believed that working in partnership would enable both councils to tackle challenges together, improve service delivery, and in turn enhance the quality of life for residents.

Cllr Fuller stressed that plans were still in very early stages, with no clear final proposals being agreed. If the recommendations were approved, officers would then work with Broadland to look at the options and opportunities in more detail.
Turning to the recommendations, Cllr Fuller suggested an amendment, seconded by Cllr A Thomas, so to ensure that the wording would match exactly the recommendations set out in Broadland’s report, to be considered by their members at its Council meeting on 21 September. He proposed that paragraph 5.1 (1) be amended as follows:

“a case to be developed exploring the opportunities” be replaced with “a feasibility study to be undertaken exploring the options and opportunities…”

This amendment was unanimously carried.

Cllr T Lewis advised Council that the Liberal Democrat Group supported the proposals in principle, however, stressed that the Council should proceed with caution. He agreed that Broadland District Council shared a similar outlook with South Norfolk and seemed an appropriate fit for collaborative working. He stressed that his Group wanted to engaged constructively in the process, and hoped that an opposition member would be invited to join the Joint Scrutiny Arrangements and the Joint Members’ Working Group. He also queried the need to appoint consultants to assist in developing the case for working together, noting that the Council had not listed this under paragraph 6.1 of the report, which referred to the suggested next steps.

Cllr Fuller referred members to paragraph 3.3 of the report and explained that it would be difficult to proceed without the expertise of consultants. Whilst South Norfolk would be sharing the costs, it was anticipated that Broadland would be responsible for their appointment. He added that the costs involved might be reduced if the consultants could be sourced through the Local Government Association (LGA).

Regarding the governance arrangements, Cllr Fuller stressed that he fully supported the suggestion that the opposition should be fully engaged in the process. The Chief Executive confirmed that this had already been agreed in principle at officer level.

Cllr V Bell had noted that staff numbers at South Norfolk were over double that of Broadland, and she hoped that this would not result in any staff losses falling unevenly on South Norfolk Council. Cllr Fuller explained that South Norfolk had a higher number of staff mainly due to the internal waste service, leisure service and CNC Building Control staff, whilst there was no similar staff within Broadland. He stressed that the exercise was not all about making savings, but also generating more income and improving service delivery. Shared working would only happen where it made sense to do so. Redundancies would be a very last resort, with natural turnover and options for redeployment being considered. He added that any change could present staff with more opportunities for career development, and widen the skills and expertise within the two organisations, providing more attractive employment opportunities for both current and future staff.
It was then unanimously

RESOLVED: To

1. Mandate the approach as set out in Appendix A to the report and agree for a feasibility study to be undertaken, exploring the options and opportunities for shared management and working;
2. Delegate to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council the authority to agree the governance arrangements for the Members Working Group and joint Council Scrutiny Group for the delivery of the project with the Chief Executive and Leader of Broadland District Council;
3. Agree a working budget of £25,000.

3406 MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

Cllr J Fuller introduced the report of the Monitoring Officer, which sought to make minor amendments to the Council’s Constitution and reported on fraud activity under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA).

Cllr Fuller commended the report to members, referring to the changes to the Scheme of Delegation, the Terms of Reference of the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance (FRAG) Committee, and the update on counter-fraud activity.

Cllr Fuller explained that he had appointed Cllr K Kiddie as a member of the Emergency Committee due to his military background, replacing Cllr N Legg. Members also noted that Cllr J Mooney had stepped down as a member of the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee, and would be replaced by Cllr L Hornby.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To:

1. Agree the changes to the Scheme of Delegation (Enforcement of Development Control) as set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report and detailed in Appendix 1;
2. Agree the amendment to the FRAG Terms of Reference as detailed in paragraph 2.3 of the report;
3. Note the change to the membership of the Emergency Committee and the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee;
4. Note the Council’s position in relation to counter-fraud activity.
3407 ANNUAL REPORT ON STANDARDS ACTIVITY

Cllr K Mason Billig introduced the Annual Report on Standards Activity.

Cllr Mason Billig referred to the considerable number of complaints received during 2016/17, and members noted that most of the complaints were derived from a small number of parishes. She explained that most complaints were fuelled by personality clashes, as opposed to deliberate wrong-doing. She stressed that whilst she felt aggrieved at the time and money spent on some of the more minor grievances, she would not want to discourage genuine complaints.

It was then unanimously

RESOLVED: To endorse the Annual Report on Standards Activity.

3408 QUESTIONS TO THE CHAIRMEN AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a) Cabinet

Cllr T Lewis referred to the Dong Energy Hornsea Offshore Wind Farm Project proposal, which included the construction of a substation, at a site in Mangreen. Cllr Lewis explained that this would be a large structure that could have a significant impact on the landscape. He understood that as a large infrastructure project, this was not a consideration for South Norfolk Council's Development Management Committee, and that the location had been determined for no other reason than the convenience of the National Grid, with no environmental considerations. Cllr Lewis queried whether Cllr Fuller should take the matter up with the LGA and question whether the Council was obliged to accept Mangreen as a development point.

Cllr Fuller agreed that the Council was only a consultee to this project and had no decision-making powers. He suggested that the Director of Planning and the Environment should contact the National Grid to enquire as to the technical reasons for choosing Mangreen as the development site.

Discussion followed during which members raised concerns with regard to the construction of the substation and the associated disruption along the B1113. A suggestion was made that the substation could be built in to the existing quarry at Mangreen, so to limit its impact on the landscape, however, some members had heard that this was not feasible. Members also noted that the Development Management Committee had at its last meeting, agreed a response to the Preliminary Environmental Information
Report, prepared by Dong Energy and part of this response had raised concerns regarding the proximity of cables to properties in Little Melton. The Director of Planning and Environment agreed to contact Dong Energy, with all the concerns raised.

b) Scrutiny Committee

There were no questions from members with regard to the Scrutiny Committee.

c) Licensing Appeals and Complaints Committee /Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee

There were no questions to the Chairman of the Licensing Committee.

d) Development Management Committee

Cllr V Thomson, the Chairman of the Development Management Committee, reminded members that a member training session would take place on 19 October at 5.00pm in the Council Chamber regarding surface water drainage. The training was to be provided by the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). This was an accreditation session for members of the Development Management Committee, but Cllr Thomson suggested that the session would be of interest to all members.

Members noted that there was also a training session scheduled for 29 November at 5.30 pm regarding planning enforcement. This training was to be provided by Nplaw, and all members were welcome.

e) Electoral Arrangements Review Committee

Cllr C Kemp, the Chairman of the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee, urged members to encourage their local town and parish councils, to make any representations they might have with regard to the South Norfolk Community Governance Review, through the consultation process, which was now in its second phase.

3409 OUTSIDE BODIES – FEEDBACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES

Members noted the report from Cllr C Kemp, regarding the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
Cllr A Pond referred to the recent comments made in the press by Chief Constable Simon Bailey, regarding the necessity to cut officer numbers following the Government’s announcement that police officers would receive a 1% one off bonus, in addition to their basic pay rise of 1%. The concern was that should the Government not provide the funding required to cover this additional bonus, it would place additional strain on police budgets, at a time when considerable savings were already being sought. Cllr Kemp explained that the Panel was actively lobbying the Government with regard to this matter. Members noted that it was the role of the Panel to scrutinise the budget, and once the Panel had received a more detailed briefing, it would be able to properly examine the proposals.

Cllr M Gray asked Cllr V Thomson, as the Council’s representative on the Broads Authority, whether he believed that the relationship between members of the Broads Authority and its officers, had broken down, and that there was a growing divide between two factions of members. This was in relation to a recent article in the press, uncovering wide spread concerns at the Authority. Cllr Thomson believed that there was some substance in what was being said, in terms of the number of complaints that members were making against each other. However, he stressed that none of these complaints had been upheld. He advised Council that the Authority was to undergo a Peer Review in October, which he hoped would assist in resolving the issues.

3410 CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

Cllr J Fuller informed members that he had received a further letter from Marcus Jones MP, praising South Norfolk Council on what he called excellent progress in the delivery of three new business rate relief schemes. Cllr Fuller commended Paul Chapman, the Council’s Policy Officer, and his team, for their work in this area.

(The meeting concluded at 8.40 pm)

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Chairman