COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday
12 December 2016 at 7.30 pm

Members Present: Councillors, Wheatley (Chairman), Duffin (Vice-Chairman), Amis, Bell, Bendle, Bernard, Bills, Blundell, Broome, Dale, Dewsbury, Edney, Ellis, Foulger, Fuller, Fulcher, Goldson, Gray, Hardy, L Hornby, Hudson, C Kemp, W Kemp, Kiddie, Legg, Mason Billig, Minshull, Neal, Overton, Palmer, Pond, R Savage, Thomas, Thomson and Worsley

Apologies: Councillors Gould, J Hornby, Lewis, Mooney, J Savage, Stone, J Wilby and M Wilby

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Business Development (D Lorimer), the Director of Growth and Localism (T Horspole), the Director of Community Services (P Boyce), and the Monitoring Officer (L Mickleborough).

Also in Attendance: One member of the public

3360 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr L Dale declared an “other” interest in minute number 3364 ii, Council Tax Discounts for Empty Homes, by virtue of owning a property to let.
The minutes of the meetings held on Monday 19 September and Thursday 17 November 2016 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman referred members to his list of engagements at page 17 of the agenda. He advised the meeting that unfortunately he had been unable to attend the Christmas Quiz hosted by the Mayor of Thetford, and the Carol Concert, hosted by the Chairman of Forest Heath, held 9th and 11th December. He was however, looking forward to the Past Chairmen's Lunch, and his visit to the Royal Mail Wymondham Delivery office, in the coming days.

(a) Cllr K Worsley

Cllr K Worsley moved the following motion:

"That this Council expresses its support in principle for the Royal British Legion's "Count Them In" campaign which calls for the inclusion in the 2021 Census of a question allowing ex-service personnel to identify themselves as having that status. To that end, the Council authorises the Leader of the Council to sign on its behalf a suitable pledge of support."

Cllr Worsley explained that there was very little information available to determine where ex service personnel were living, which made it very difficult to ensure that they were receiving the help that they deserved. He urged members to support the motion, which would allow data to be collected, which in turn would help to ensure that the needs of these personnel were being met.

Cllr Y Bendle was pleased to second the motion. She explained that sometimes ex service personnel found it difficult to readjust and integrate with society, and they tended not to ask for help, preferring to solve their own issues. She hoped that this information would help to ensure that help was easily accessible at an early stage.

Some members expressed their support for the motion, and it was unanimously
RESOLVED: “That this Council expresses its support in principle for the Royal British Legion's "Count Them In" campaign which calls for the inclusion in the 2021 Census of a question allowing ex-service personnel to identify themselves as having that status. To that end, the Council authorises the Leader of the Council to sign on its behalf a suitable pledge of support.”

(b) Cllrs P Hardy, L Neal and B Stone

Cllr P Hardy moved the following motion:

“In the light of the collapse of the Norfolk/Suffolk Devolution deal, this Council notes the article by George Freeman MP published in the Eastern Daily Press asking for Councils to consider more effective forms of governance for Norfolk and instructs the Chief Executive to produce a paper setting out potential alternative governance options. The paper should consider a high-level assessment of the potential benefits & risks for local residents and businesses in South Norfolk and the wider Greater Norwich economic geography.”

Cllr Hardy explained that he had been totally committed to devolution, but in the light of the recent collapse of the Norfolk/Suffolk Devolution deal, he accepted that there was a need to look for more effective forms of governance, which delivered quality outcomes for residents, whilst reducing operational costs. He referred to the current 3 tier system, which had, he felt, served a purpose, but was now antiquated and in need of reform. He made reference to the optimum number of residents to ensure an effective unitary council, and therefore suggested that the geographical nature and population of Norfolk would need careful consideration.

Cllr L Neal, whilst seconding the motion, suggested that the importance of the Greater Norwich Area should be emphasised as part of this analysis. She felt that this was an opportunity for South Norfolk Council, to be at the forefront of developing new opportunities to improve the quality of life for residents.

Cllr C Kemp explained that he had studied Governance and Leadership at the University of Birmingham, and that he done a lot of research in to governance options, which he was happy to share with fellow councillors and officers. He stressed that unitary was not the only alternative option, and that it was important that the Council went forward on an informed basis.

Cllr M Gray suggested that the motion may be a little premature, and he referred to the report of the Leader of the Council (agenda item 9), which suggested that a devolution deal might still be possible. He felt that it might not be an appropriate time for the Chief Executive to carry out a detailed analysis, especially in light of the recent departure of the Director of Communities, and he stressed the importance of working with other Norfolk Local Authorities, whilst looking at options. He then moved the following amendment:
“To discuss the way forward regarding the future of Local Government in Norfolk, with other Local Authorities in the County”

The amendment was seconded by Cllr V Bell.

Cllr J Fuller stressed the importance of being prepared for any Local Government Reorganisation. Both he and Cllr Hardy, expressed their support for Cllr Gray’s proposal, to work with other authorities when considering the options.

Discussion followed regarding the wording of the amendment, and with the agreement of Cllrs Gray and Bell, the amendment was reworded, to read:

“In the light of the collapse of the Norfolk/Suffolk Devolution deal, the Council notes the article by George Freeman MP published in the Eastern Daily Press, asking Councils to consider more effective forms of governance for Norfolk, and asks the Chief Executive to discuss with nearby local authorities the potential alternative governance options, and to report back to Council in due course.”

With 21 votes for, 3 against and with 9 abstentions, the amendment was carried.

With 23 votes for, 2 against, and with 8 abstentions, it was then

RESOLVED: In the light of the collapse of the Norfolk/Suffolk Devolution deal, the Council notes the article by George Freeman MP published in the Eastern Daily Press, asking Councils to consider more effective forms of governance for Norfolk, and asks the Chief Executive to discuss with nearby local authorities the potential alternative governance options, and to report back to Council in due course.

3364 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

(i) Treasury Management Report Quarter 2 2016/17

Cllr M Edney presented the recommendations from the Cabinet, arising from the Treasury Management Report Quarter 2 2016/17.

It was unanimously
RESOLVED: To:

a) Note the treasury activity between April and September and that it complies with the agreed strategy.

b) Approve the 2016/17 prudential indicators for the first six months of the year.

c) Approve the increase in the Affordable Borrowing Limit and the Operational Boundary as set out in section 5.3 of the report.

(ii) Council Tax Discounts for Empty Homes, Second Homes and those undergoing / requiring Major Repair Works

Cllr Y Bendle presented the recommendations from the Cabinet, with regard to Council Tax Discounts for Empty Homes, second Homes, and those undergoing major repair works.

Cllr Bendle stressed that the discounts played a vital role in encouraging owners of empty properties to bring them back in to use.

With 32 votes in favour, and 1 abstention, it was

RESOLVED: To

a) Amend the class C empty property discount to 100% to operate for a period of one month
b) Retain the class D major repair works discount at 50% for twelve months
c) Retain the class B second home discount at 5%

(iii) Council Tax Support Scheme

Cllr Y Bendle presented the recommendations from the Cabinet, concerning the Council’s Council Tax Support Scheme. She explained that it was a legal requirement to review the scheme annually.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To make a Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18 to operate in the same way as the 2016/17 Scheme.
(iv) Conservation Area Appraisals and Boundary Amendments for Harleston, Hingham and the Loddon and Chedgrave Conservation Areas

Cllr L Hornby presented the recommendations from the Cabinet, regarding Conservation Area Appraisals and Boundary Amendments for Harleston, Hingham and Loddon and Chedgrave Conservation areas.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: 1. To approve and adopt the amended conservation area boundaries for Harleston, Hingham and Loddon and Chedgrave Conservation areas;
2. To approve and adopt the conservation area appraisals and conservation management guidelines for the conservation areas of Harleston, Hingham, and Loddon and Chedgrave.

3365 MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

Members considered the report of the Monitoring officer, regarding various minor changes to the constitution.

Cllr J Fuller outlined the recommendations of the report to members. He welcomed Peter Catchpole, the new Head of Finance and Human Resources to the Council, explaining that it was proposed that he took on the role of Section 151 Officer.

Members also noted the proposed short-term arrangements for the delegation of responsibilities, following the departure of the Director of Community Services. Cllr Fuller advised that more long term proposals would be sought following the Peer Review, to be held in late January.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To
1. Appoint the Head of Finance and Human Resources as the Section 151 Officer;
2. Amend the Scheme of Delegation as set out in paragraph 2.4 and 2.5 of the report with immediate effect;
3. To change the name of the Planning Policy and Regulation Policy Committee to Regulation and Planning Policy Committee;
4. Appoint Kay Mason-Billig as the Council’s substitute on the Norfolk Parking Partnership Joint Committee
3366 QUESTIONS TO CHAIRMEN AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a) Cabinetc

Cllr J Fuller presented his report, which updated Council regarding devolution for Norfolk and Suffolk. He stressed the importance of continuing the work to secure a deal across Norfolk and Suffolk, to ensure the best possible benefits for residents.

Turning to the departure of Paula Boyce, the Director of Community Services, Cllr J Fuller wished to formally thank her for her work during her time at the Council. He wished her every success in her new post at the Norfolk Waste Partnership.

RESOLVED: To endorse the ongoing exploratory work on a successor devolution deal amongst the “Coalition of the Willing” and to note that further reports will be presented to Councillors for review and comment as discussions progress.

The Chairman then invited questions to Cabinet members.

Cllr M Gray explained that he was pleased that the Council had recognised that it had made the wrong decision with regard to the Harleston toilets, and he hoped that lessons would be learned for the future. He asked Cllr K Mason Billig, who took the decision to install self-cleaning toilets in Harleston, rather than refurbishing the old ones? He also asked why the principle of installing them was never taken to Cabinet, or any other public meeting. Cllr Mason Billig explained that this had been a Chief Officer decision, in consultation with the Board. She added that the cost of all options was a key consideration, when coming to the decision.

Cllr Gray also asked what steps were taken to verify that the toilets, that were of French design, would work satisfactorily in South Norfolk? Referring back to a Scrutiny meeting on 5 March 2015, and comments made by Cllr M Wilby regarding the success of the toilets, he asked what had changed since, which had led to the recent decision to remove them?

Cllr Mason Billig explained that a procurement exercise was undertaken and all options were discussed with the manufacturer. It had seemed to be a cost-effective solution, in order to avoid high maintenance costs. She had used the facilities herself, which were very clean, modern and efficient. She accepted however, that whilst the system worked well on the continent, it was unpopular with some. She stressed that the Council had not anticipated the level of vandalism that had taken place. She reminded Council that the decision to install the toilets had not been imposed on Harleston; however, she fully accepted that the toilets had not proven to be suitable for the town.
Cllr Gray then asked for a breakdown of the costs relating to:

1. The visit to France to consider the toilet design
2. Purchase cost of the toilet block
3. Installation costs
4. The estimated removal costs
5. Design work for altering the old toilets
6. Estimated cost of refurbishing the old toilets

Cllr Mason Billig explained that she would forward these to Cllr Gray, once they had been collated. Members noted that the toilet block would be dismantled and sold on to another user.

Cllr J Fuller stressed that it was important to remember that the toilets had been an investment in the economy of the town. The Council viewed the market towns as shopping centres, and wanted toilet facilities that were clean, modern and accessible.

Cllr Gray agreed that this was what was needed, but stressed that this had been the wrong solution on this occasion. He then asked Cllr Fuller, did he agree that lessons needed to be learned from this exercise?

In response, Cllr Fuller emphasised that this had been a pilot scheme only, and that no one could have anticipated the repetitive vandalism that had taken place.

b) Scrutiny Committee

Cllr L Neal, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, reminded members that the “Year Ahead” workshop would take place the next day at 2.00pm. The next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on 21 December 2016.

c) Licensing Committee

Cllr D Goldson, the Chairman of the Licensing Committee, explained that he had recently attended conferences on Gambling and Taxi Licensing, and that training for other members of the Committee was soon to be arranged.

d) Development Management Committee

Cllr V Thomson, the Chairman of the Development Management Committee, advised members that the agenda for the meeting scheduled for 4 January, would soon be published.
e) Electoral Arrangements Review Committee

Cllr C Kemp reminded members that the deadline for responses to the Local Government Boundary Commission’s proposed changes to ward boundaries and names, was Monday 9 January. In response to queries, he explained that the final report of the Commission would be issued in March or April.

3367 OUTSIDE BODIES – FEEDBACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES

Members referred to the report regarding the Police and Crime Panel for Norfolk, received from Cllr C J Kemp. Referring to paragraph 6 of the report and the consultation on the Police Budget for 2017/18, he explained that the deadline for responses had been extended to 16 December.

(The meeting concluded at 8.52 p.m.)

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Chairman