Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 25 January 2017 at 9.30am.

Committee Members Present:
Councillors: L Neal (Chairman), B Bernard, D Fulcher, C Gould, K Kiddie, T Lewis, G Minshull and J Wilby

Apologies:
Councillor: B Duffin

Substitute Member:
Councillor: C Foulger

Cabinet Member in Attendance:
Councillor: M Edney, L Hornby and C Hudson

Other Members in Attendance:
Councillors: J Mooney and T Palmer

Officers in Attendance:
The Director of Business Development (D Lorimer), the Director of Growth and Localism (T Horspole), the Business Improvement Programme Manager (A Mewes), the Head of Growth and Economic Development (J Munson), the Head of Environmental Services (B Wade), the Head of HR and Finance (P Catchpole), the Head of Business Improvement (M Sage), the Property Manager (R Garfoot), the Community Capacity Manager (K Gallagher) and the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard)

One member of the Peer Review Team was also in attendance.
1189 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 21 December 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1190 REVIEW OF THE 2017-18 BUSINESS PLAN

In the absence of Cllr Fuller, Cllr Edney introduced the annual Business Plan for 2017-18. Members were advised that the Plan had, once again, been developed around the Council’s corporate policies as defined in its Corporate Plan, and had been written through iterations by officers and reviewed at Directorate Management and Strategic Leadership Team meetings, and at two staff workshops. It was noted that, as part of the Plan, staff had been engaged in a ‘10% Challenge’ to identify innovative ways to achieve additional income and efficiency savings for the Council. Cllr Edney was pleased to note that an informal Scrutiny-led member workshop had produced enhancements to the Plan but was disappointed to report that few members had attended the workshop.

The Business Improvement Programme Manager provided the Committee with feedback from the member workshop which had been held on 13 December 2016. He explained that, as a key focus of the Plan for 2017-18 had been the 10% Challenge and the Plan had been developed in parallel with the budget, more emphasis had been put on financial matters. The Committee was advised that suggestions from member and staff workshops had been documented and would be reviewed and fed into the next year’s Business Plan. Members were also advised that, following feedback, the Council’s South Norfolk on Show event would be supplemented by a “South Norfolk presence at other events, akin to a “South Norfolk on Show on Tour” which would take place four times a year in different locations throughout the District.

The Committee was invited to consider the draft Business Plan, page by page, to offer comments and suggestions, and provide its recommendations to Cabinet.
**Staffing**

Members queried the level of staffing in the Council and were advised that figures contained within the Plan included staff vacancies. It was clarified that staffing levels overall had increased in comparison to the previous year, due to the conversion of some agency posts into permanent posts, and also due to the increased staffing requirements at Wymondham Leisure Centre. In response to a member’s question, it was confirmed that efficiencies identified through the 10% challenge had resulted in a reduction of 8 full time equivalent (FTE) posts. Members were pleased to note that there were no plans for staff redundancies and that these reductions would be implemented through the re-alignment of posts, by digital transformation, and by improving ways in which the Council’s officers worked. The Committee noted that the Council was constantly looking at opportunities to enhance its services and was currently actively progressing a potential procurement consortium, which would follow the model of the existing audit consortium.

**Citizens Advice Bureaux funding**

The Committee discussed how the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) had been affected by the reductions in funding from the Council. Officers advised that although the Council had reduced it’s funding to the CABx, this was instead being re-directed to Early Help and used to maximise the outcomes for early prevention with FIRST posts. It was agreed that the CABx played a role in helping residents but that in many cases, residents were obtaining further help from the Council resulting in a duplication of work and spending. Due to this, it had, therefore, been agreed with the CABx that its funding would be reduced.

**Commercial property investment and development**

Members discussed the Council’s commercial property investment and development, and were advised by the Property Manager that officers were currently carrying out viability appraisals on its own sites to ascertain whether to develop them, but that the Council would also be considering further sites. In response to a member’s question, it was clarified that, although there would be some rental properties on the two sites currently being built by Big Sky Developments, these would be rented at market rates and managed by Big Sky Property Management. The Director of Growth and Localism added that the Council was also considering Government-funded schemes to secure funding to accelerate the rate of house building.

**Skills requirements**

The Committee considered ‘skills requirements’ and the promotion of employment opportunities and apprenticeships for South Norfolk businesses. Officers advised that this was creating a valuable link between the economic development work of the Council with local businesses, and the users of the Help Hub who might be seeking employment or skills training.
Market Towns Initiative and Visitor Economy Initiative
There was a brief discussion regarding the Market Towns’ Initiative. Officers confirmed that although the Initiative would be ceasing at the end of the financial year, this would be replaced by a Visitor Economy Initiative which would still be staffed by one full time officer. Members were pleased to note that, in addition to the market towns, this new Programme would also cover the rest of the District.

Council website
The Committee discussed the Council’s new website and, although a few members expressed some frustration with the search facility of the site, it was accepted that, with practice, the website would become easier to navigate. It was reported that the search function was also being enhanced and would continually improve with use.

Universal Credit
In response to a member’s question regarding what implications Universal Credit might have upon the Council, the Director of Growth and Localism stated that the current impact was small with only 14 claimants in the District receiving the benefit. Members were advised that a review of Revenues and Benefits was taking place to ascertain how the Council’s staffing, systems and connections with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) would need to be aligned to take on Universal Credit on a larger scale.

Dog bin services
Members expressed concerns regarding the Council’s proposals to implement an increase in the charge to town and parish councils in the District for dog bin services. Whilst it was accepted that some towns and parishes had not been fully charged for the service in the past and an alignment was necessary to bring them into line with other towns and parishes, it was felt that the timeliness of the increase in charges had been unfair as town and parish councils had already set their precepts for the year before becoming aware of the rise. It was put forward that the service was discretionary and at the request of parishes and towns, and there had been discussion at the Town and Parish Clerks’ Consultations regarding the need to increase charges at both the July and December 2016 meetings. Members generally agreed that the increase in fees for some towns and parishes would significantly affect their finances and it was proposed that the Scrutiny Committee recommend that Cabinet introduce the proposed increases to fees and charges in relation to dog bin services in a phased approached: 50% in 2017/18, increasing to 100% in 2018/19. It was suggested that members encourage town and parish councils to review their dog bin requirements to ensure they were obtaining the best value for money with the numbers and placement of dog bins.
Garden waste
The Committee discussed the increase in fees for garden waste bins. The Head of Environmental Services advised that officers had carried out research on costs of the collection and disposal of garden waste, in comparison with other Councils, and considered that the new fees and charges still offered good value for money. In response to a member’s query as to whether the service could be reduced in the winter months to save on funds, officers stated that this would be difficult to implement as residents had different patterns of gardening and it was not always easy to predict weather trends. However, it was noted that during the winter period the crews operated with one less loader, given reduced demand, which helped to manage the overheads. The Head of Environmental Services advised that the Council was working on expansion plans to generate income from commercial customers. It was suggested by Cllr Lewis that the Scrutiny Committee might want to review this in the future.

Community Transport
Members expressed concerns about funding for community transport in the District. The Community Capacity Manager reassured the Committee that there were currently no plans to reduce the Council’s funding to community transport providers. She advised that much work was being carried out with Norfolk County Council and Breckland District Council to review all types of transport providers in the area and to view these in a more holistic way to ensure residents were easily able to access the transport type appropriate to them. Members noted that, once the work had progressed, a report would be produced for consideration by Cabinet.

Mobile working
The Committee briefly discussed the migration from Good to Office 365 and were advised that plans were underway to enable staff to work away from the building. The Head of Business Improvement advised that more information would be provided to members once this was available.

The Committee thanked members and officers for their work in preparing the draft Business Plan and commended staff for their success in identifying additional income and efficiency savings for the Council through the 10% Challenge, and it was then:

RESOLVED: To note the draft Business Plan and commend it to Cabinet, subject to the following recommendation:

- that Cabinet introduces the proposed increases to fees and charges in relation to dog bin services in a phased approach: 50% in 2017/18, increasing to 100% in 2018/19.
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND TRACKER, AND CABINET CORE AGENDA

The Committee noted the Work Programme, Tracker and Cabinet Core Agenda.

(The meeting concluded at 11:13 am)

Chairman