COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 24 September 2012 at 7.30pm


Apologies: Councillors Foulger, Hardinge, C Kemp, N Legg, Palmer, Riches and Tilcock

Officer in Attendance: The Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive


The minutes of the meetings held 16th and 30th July were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3141 CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred to one of his engagements, a Gala Dinner held at Dunston Hall in aid of the Mind Charity, at which former boxer Frank Bruno was in attendance.

Cllr B Spratt thanked the Chairman for a most enjoyable civic service, held 16 September at Ashwellthorpe church.

3142 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET:

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

Cllr Y Bendle introduced the recommendations of the Cabinet, regarding the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme. She explained that a cross party working group of members had been set up to work with officers in designing a new scheme, in response to an anticipated 10% cut in funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The working group had looked at a number of scenarios and after examining a number of options, and an extensive consultation process, an option was selected which she believed to be affordable to both the Council and its partners, protecting pensioners and families with children under 5, incentivised work and was efficient to manage. She drew attention to the
proposed hardship fund, explaining that the Council was currently taking the lead in working with other Councils to ensure a common approach from all Norfolk Districts, which would secure financial support from Norfolk County Council.

In response to queries from Cllr T Lewis, Cllr Wheatley advised Council that the 10% cut in funding would leave a shortfall of approximately £800,000, £68,000 to be borne by South Norfolk Council, £103,000 by the Police and £598,000 by Norfolk County Council. Members were advised that the hardship fund would be a discretionary amount awarded by officers. South Norfolk Council would be providing some of the funds for the discretionary pot.

Cllr T Lewis, explained that as a member of the working party, he had been involved in developing the fairest approach to implementing the CLG’s cuts. However, he had always made it clear that the Liberal Democrats reserved its position with regard to the principle of passing these cuts on to claimants. He wished to propose two amendments to the recommendations, the first of which was:

To add

“That this Council writes to Government to associate itself with the concerns of Norfolk County Council agreed at its meeting of 24 September 2012”

Cllr Lewis explained that at its Council meeting earlier that day, Norfolk County Council members had resolved to lobby government, urging it not to press ahead with its plans for a 10% cut in council tax support.

Cllr G Wheatley stressed that the reality of the situation was that a 10% saving had to be made and there was no time left to play “silly games”. Cllr A Pond reminded members that sometimes tough decisions had to be made and unfortunately cuts were necessary.

Cllr J Mooney, also a member of Norfolk County Council, confirmed that it had been agreed at the Norfolk County Council Meeting, earlier that day, that a letter would be sent to Government from Norfolk County Council regarding funding implications on the County Council. The letter would not interfere with the proposals of any new scheme.

Seconding the amendment, Cllr M Gray advised that Norfolk County Council had unanimously voted to call on the government to re-think its plans to require local authorities to implement its proposed cuts in council tax benefits. He understood that many other conservative councils had also written to the Government, asking it to reconsider its plans and he could not see any reason why South Norfolk Council could not support these sentiments.

Supporting the amendment, Cllr T East felt it was an opportune moment to lobby the Government as the proposals had not yet been passed as an Act of Parliament. He was very disappointed that some of society’s most vulnerable were expected to “pick up the tab” to fund the Government’s deficit reduction programme. Referring to the proposed hardship fund, he viewed this as an admission that there was a problem. He quoted Cllr Fuller: “it will give people the time to adjust to new circumstances”. This was only a short term mechanism and he questioned how people would be able to adjust to not having enough food and shelter. He assumed the fund would be means tested which he felt could be destructive to self-esteem and would discourage applications, something he felt was not acceptable in the 21st century.
Cllr K Billig felt Cllr East’s remarks to be over stated and clearly an attempt to score political points.

Cllr Fuller stressed that if cuts were not made as part of the council tax benefit scheme, they would be passed on elsewhere, affecting other vulnerable areas of society. He could not see any benefit in delaying progress with the new scheme at this stage. Referring to Cllr East’s comments on the hardship fund, he explained that the Council already operated such a fund under the existing council tax benefit scheme. He added that the chief executives and Leaders in Norfolk had recently met, looking for a common approach towards the hardship fund. There needed to be a fair allocation of the funds which would recognise people’s individual circumstances, which he felt would need to be means tested in some form. He suggested that the operation of the hardship fund was a possible future item for Scrutiny Committee.

With 6 votes in favour and the majority against, the amendment was then lost.

Cllr T Lewis then referred to his second amendment:

Replace recommendation 1 with:
“That the Council Tax Support Scheme as in Appendix 1 of the 17 September Cabinet papers be not adopted, and instead that Council Tax Support be given until further notice on the same basis as council tax benefit, funded by virement of new Homes Bonus money from Neighbourhood Funding.”

Seconding the amendment, Cllr M Gray suggested that council tax support could be considered to be a district wide social action project and suggested that £68,000 could be transferred from the New Homes Bonus money to fund the deficit. The proposed scheme would see many people lose benefits, and the hardship fund was only to be a short term mechanism which he did not consider to be sufficient.

A number of members felt Cllr Lewis’ amendment to be flawed as consideration had not been given to Norfolk County Council and the Police Authority’s share of the deficit. After brief debate, the amendment was lost with only 6 votes in favour and the majority against.

The Chairman then referred members back to the substantive motion.

With 29 votes in favour and 6 against, it was

RESOLVED: To approve the Council Tax Support Scheme as shown at Appendix 1

It was then unanimously
RESOLVED:

That any implications arising from the legislation are to be reviewed and implemented by the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Council Tax Support Scheme Working Group.

3143 MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

Members considered the report of the Compliance and Risk Manager, which highlighted changes to the Constitution required as a result of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and updated members on a number of other constitutional related matters.

Cllr J Fuller briefly outlined the contents of the report.

Cllr T Lewis had noted the requirement to give 28 days notice if the Cabinet was likely to exclude the press and public from a meeting or part of a meeting. Cllr Lewis hoped that this would not lead to a presumption that more reports would be made exempt, only to be to be rescinded later on in the process.

Cllr Fuller confirmed that the current format of the Forward Plan would be amended to accommodate the new requirements.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To:

1. Endorse the proposals as set out in section 2 of the report;
2. Delegate to the Monitoring Officer to make the necessary constitutional amendments

3144 SOUTH NORFOLK PLACE-MAKING GUIDE: SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

Cllr K Kiddie was proud to present the final draft of the South Norfolk Place Making Guide for approval by Council. He thanked officers and Cllr D Blake for their involvement in the process.

Cllr M Gray endorsed the comments of Cllr Kiddie, referring to the guide as a magnificent piece of work. He confirmed that officers had submitted the document for a Royal Town Planning Institute award and an Urban Design Award, which was welcomed by all members.

Cllr D Blake, thanked members for their kind comments; he was very proud to be associated with the production of the document and he thanked officers for their support.
Cllr V Bell added her congratulations to all those involved, although she had been disappointed that at a recent planning appeal, the Inspector had been rather dismissive of the document.

RESOLVED: To formally adopt the South Norfolk Place-Making Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

3145 CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISALS & MANAGEMENT PLANS: STOKE HOLY CROSS, TROWSE-WITH-NEWTON AND DISS:

Cllr K Kiddie urged Council to agree to adopt the Character Appraisals and Management Plans for Stoke Holy Cross, Trowse-with-Newton and Diss Conservation Areas. Members noted that the documents had been amended following the consultation exercise and comments made by the Cabinet.

Cllr P Allen informed Council that further work on conservation area character appraisals in areas within the South Norfolk District was currently being undertaken by the Broads Authority.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To formally adopt the Character Appraisals and Management Plans for Stoke Holy Cross, Trowse-with-Newton and Diss Conservation Areas.

3146 CHAIRMEN’S REPORTS

a) Cabinet - Report of the Leader

Cllr Fuller briefly outlined the matters considered by the Cabinet since the last meeting of the Council, making particular reference to the Business Rate Retention Scheme. Cllr Fuller explained that the scheme would not be as beneficial as previously thought and whilst there was still an incentive to promote growth, it was not as advantageous as previously envisaged.

Referring back to minute 3136 arising from the meeting held 16 July 2012, Cllr Fuller explained that he had communicated the sentiments of the Council to the Chairman of the Saffron Housing Trust Board, regarding the proposed deletion of South Norfolk representatives on the Board. Cllr Fuller was yet to be informed of the Board’s response.

Cllr M Gray thanked Cllr Fuller for ensuring the recent circulation of a briefing note which provided clarity to members with regard to the five year supply of housing land. Cllr Gray stressed that it was important to note that the five year supply was not determined solely by the past completions and he expressed his frustration with the lack of control on the rate of completions by developers. Moving forward, Cllr Gray asked Cllr Fuller to clarify which of the figures, the combined Norwich Policy Area (NPA), the NPA for the South Norfolk area or the separate figure for the rural area of South Norfolk would carry the most weight. In response, Cllr Fuller stressed the importance of monitoring all figures on a monthly basis. Although the combined
figure was the official figure, it was important to maintain the figures more relevant to South Norfolk. He suspected that that weight of these figures would be subject to legal argument in the near future.

Cllr Gray referred to a recent letter in the Eastern Daily Press from Cllr L Dale, which suggested that the Liberal Democrats, back in 2007 had planned to allow for 4000 new homes for Hethersett and 4000 new homes for Wymondham, as part of the Joint Core Strategy. Cllr Gray asked whether Cllr Fuller could supply evidence of this. Cllr Fuller believed that the Liberal Democrat Group had provided a steer to officers at that time which had led to the figures referred to. Cllr Gray strongly denied the allegations, explaining that no figures had been discussed before May 2007, when the Conservatives took over the administration.

Cllr M Wilby announced that the Pub of the Year award had been most successful and standards had been extremely high. He suggested that the winner, The Fox and Hounds at Great Moulton, and the other four finalists, The Artichoke at Broome, The Waterfront at Diss, The Buck at Morley and The Worlds End at Mulbarton were all well worth a visit. He thanked the panel of judges and officers involved for their contributions.

Cllr Gray asked Cllr K Kiddie for his views regarding the Government’s proposals to allow extensions of up to 8 meters without the need to apply for planning permission, drawing attention to a recent planning application in Poringland, 3.3 meters long, which was refused. He referred to Eric Pickles’ recent comments, encouraging the public to take on any Local Authorities wishing to block the proposals. In response, Cllr Kiddie explained that he could not support the proposals as in his experience the smallest of extensions could cause the greatest of grief. He understood the proposals would be out to consultation, when he felt it would be appropriate to make representations.

b) Scrutiny Committee – Report of the Chairman

Members noted the report of the Scrutiny Committee Chairman.

c) Licensing, Appeals and Complaints Committee / Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee – Report of the Chairman

Members noted the report of the Chairman of the Licensing Committee.

d) Development Management Committee – Report of the Chairman

Members noted the report of the Chairman of the Development Management Committee.

Cllr J Mooney announced that the Special Meeting of the Development Management Committee scheduled for Wednesday 26 September, had been postponed. He explained that the information provided by the Council’s Independent retail consultants required expanding and updating and it was felt appropriate that the consultants commented on the late objections lodged on behalf of the Co-op. Cllr Mooney stressed that it was unfortunate that postponement was necessary, and he apologised for any inconvenience that may have been caused.
Cllr J Fuller, seconded by Cllr J Mooney, suggested that the Council formally recorded its thanks to Paul Whitham, the Council’s Development Control Manager, who had recently retired, having worked for South Norfolk Council for over 40 years. This was unanimously supported by members.

3147 REPRESENTATIVES ON STRATEGIC OUTSIDE BODIES

Cllr C Gould advised Council that the Broads Authority would be moving to Thorpe House, on Thorpe Road in Norwich, some time in November.

Cllr J Fuller reported that the LGA General Assembly had not met since the last meeting of the Council. He explained that he had been appointed to the LGA Finance Committee and the District Council Network.

In response to a query from Cllr K Weeks, Cllr Fuller explained that his appointment to the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was through the LGA. The LEP undertook a wide range of activities; its immediate priorities were to look closely at tourism, energy sectors and provide support for businesses, enabling them to grow. The LEP was strongly committed to leading the UK transition to a green economy. He suggested that if members were interested, they sign up to the newsletter on the New Anglia LEP website.

Members noted the written report, submitted by Cllr C Kemp, regarding the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.

Cllr K Kiddie reported that the Norfolk Waste Partnership was currently involved in a procurement exercise to award a contract to market dry recyclables for the County. He hoped to be able to report progress on this by the end of the calendar year.

Cllr J Savage explained that he had unfortunately missed the Rural Commission Conference due to the ill health of his wife. He referred to a future LGA conference regarding the Green Deal, the Government’s environmental programme, suggesting that it would be appropriate for a district councillor to attend.

Cllr M Wilby explained that the South Norfolk Alliance had met on 11 September and agreed that its next meeting would be held 14 December 2012.

The Council concluded at 9.00 pm

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CHAIRMAN