Minutes of a meeting of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 8 July 2013 at 7.30pm


Apologies: Councillors Billig, Blake, Foulger, Fuller, Hornby and Riches

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen) The Deputy Chief Executive (A Radford), the Director of Environment and Housing (A Jarvis) and the Director of Growth and Localism (T Horspole).

3189 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 13 MAY 2013

Members noted that the minutes had failed to indicate that Cllrs Bell, Bills, Dale, Edney, Ellis, Herbert, R Savage and Smith were in attendance at the last meeting.

Referring to Appendix 1 of the minutes, the Appointments to Committees, members noted that the Vice-Chairmen of the Neighbourhood Boards were yet to be appointed. The Vice-Chairmen shown in Appendix 1 referred to the previous year’s appointments.

Subject to the above changes, the minutes of the meeting held 13 May 2013 were agreed as an accurate record.

3190 CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman was very sorry to report the deaths of two former members, Mr S Taylor and Ms E Playle.

Cllr J Savage paid tribute to Mr Taylor who had represented the Redenhall with Harleston ward on South Norfolk Council from 1987 to 1999. He was Chairman of the Council from 1995-96 and was appointed as Honorary Alderman in 2011. He referred to him as a great servant to both the people of Harleston and South Norfolk, and would be particularly remembered for planting over 3000 trees in and around Harleston. Cllr P Allen referred to Mr Taylor’s kind and warm personality, stating the he would be sorely missed.
Cllr M Gray then paid tribute to Ms Playle who had served the Marshland ward between 1990 and 2003. She had served on a wide range of committees during her term, including Health, Planning and Licensing, and had also represented the Council on the Broads Authority. She had a quiet, but determined personality and was a great servant to the community and South Norfolk Council.

The Council then stood and observed a minute’s silence in their memory.

Members then noted the Chairman’s list of engagements at page 23 of the agenda.

The Chairman also referred to the recent spell of warm weather and queried the absence of air conditioning in the Council Chamber. Officers agreed to pursue the matter outside of the meeting.

3191 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(a) Cllrs J F Mooney, DJ Blake and CJ Kemp

Cllr G Wheatley moved the following motion:

“That this Council, recognising the continuing commitment of its officers and staff to the provision of quality and affordable local services to the people of South Norfolk as evidenced by:

[1] the award to the Council of Gold Standard accreditation by Investors in People, the Council being the first public body in Norfolk ever to achieve this award;

[2] the winning of the Best Social or Affordable Housing Project award at the East of England Building Control Excellence awards for 2013 in respect of the delivery by the Hastoe Housing Association of 14 affordable homes at Ditchingham;

[3] the completion within the District of 132 new affordable homes in the District in 2012-13 making South Norfolk the highest performing District in that regard in the County outside Norwich;

[4] the maintenance of the Council’s standard of performance in the processing of benefit claims as among the best in England and by far the best in Norfolk, it taking the Council an average of ten days to process new claims whereas the other six Norfolk councils each average in excess of 25 days;

[5] the maintenance by the Council of a Council Tax collection rate of 98.5% or better (currently 98.7%) over the past six years; and

[6] the receipt by the Council of the highest amount of New Homes Bonus in Norfolk in 2012-13, gaining £14.05 for every £1.00 reduction in Revenue Support Grant;

endorses the decision of the Leader of the Council to award to all staff of one additional day of annual paid leave in the year 2013-14 (to be taken on 27th December 2013)."
Cllr G Wheatley was proud to present this motion to members. He acknowledged that pressures on Council resources, including its staff, had never been greater than that over the last 7 years, and this had resulted in an ever changing working environment. Yet despite this, the Council had managed to achieve the Gold Standard accreditation in Investors in People, had maintained its exceptionally high council tax collection rates, and annual council tax levels had been frozen 5 times over the last 6 years. All this he felt, had been achieved as a direct result of the commitment of staff.

Cllr Y Bendle, seconding the motion, referred to the staff as the “backbone to the Council”. She drew attention to affordable housing projects, referring in particular to the scheme at Ditchingham that had won Best Social Housing Project (LABC Awards 2012) and had achieved passivhaus performance standards. Over 46 new homes had been completed over that last quarter and with 465 new affordable homes to date, the Council was on target to deliver 500 new homes by April 2014. Cllr Bendle was also proud of the strong performance in preventing cases of homelessness and she referred to the performance of the Revenues team as highly commendable.

Cllr M Gray expressed his support for the motion. He felt that many talented staff had been lost in recent years, but the officer core was still made up of a dedicated and talented team, resulting in many successes for the Council.

Cllr K Weeks also expressed his support of the motion.

Supporting the motion, Cllr B Spratt was particularly pleased to note that the council tax collection rate currently stood at 98.7%, suggesting that some credit needed to be given to tax payers. Cllr Wilby suggested that staff were also held in high regard by residents and external agencies, and he fully supported the motion in recognition of staff achievements.

The Chairman referred to an email he had received from Mr P Grant, South Norfolk UNISON Branch Secretary, thanking members for the motion and the award of an additional days leave. The Chairman conveyed his thanks on behalf of the Council to Mr Grant, for his commendable support to staff over the years.

The motion was then unanimously carried.

RESOLVED: That this Council, recognising the continuing commitment of its officers and staff to the provision of quality and affordable local services to the people of South Norfolk as evidenced by:

[1] the award to the Council of Gold Standard accreditation by Investors in People, the Council being the first public body in Norfolk ever to achieve this award;

[2] the winning of the Best Social or Affordable Housing Project award at the East of England Building Control Excellence awards for 2013 in respect of the delivery by the Hastoe Housing Association of 14 affordable homes at Ditchingham;
[3] the completion within the District of 132 new affordable homes in the District in 2012-13 making South Norfolk the highest performing District in that regard in the County outside Norwich;

[4] the maintenance of the Council’s standard of performance in the processing of benefit claims as among the best in England and by far the best in Norfolk, it taking the Council an average of ten days to process new claims whereas the other six Norfolk councils each average in excess of 25 days;

[5] the maintenance by the Council of a Council Tax collection rate of 98.5% or better (currently 98.7%) over the past six years; and

[6] the receipt by the Council of the highest amount of New Homes Bonus in Norfolk in 2012-13, gaining £14.05 for every £1.00 reduction in Revenue Support Grant;

endorses the decision of the Leader of the Council to award to all staff of one additional day of annual paid leave in the year 2013-14 (to be taken on 27th December 2013).

(b) Cllrs M Gray and T Lewis

Cllr M Gray moved the following motion:

“That this Council believes that England should follow Wales (in 2011), Northern Ireland (in April 2013) and Scotland (in June 2013) in requiring shops to charge for the supply of plastic bags, and requires the Chief Executive to notify central government and local members of parliament accordingly.”

Cllr Gray explained that reducing plastic bag usage was extremely important in terms of protecting the environment. The UK used over 8 billion plastic bags each year and this figure was rising. He felt that there was a need for England to come in line with the rest of the UK and require shops to charge for bags, with the income from these charges to be given to charities. The requirement had had a positive impact in Wales where plastic bag usage had dropped by 22% since charges were introduced.

Cllr C Kemp, whilst agreeing with the sentiment of the motion, could not accept the element of compulsion. He considered that a reduction in usage should be achieved through education and persuasion, and he was surprised that the Liberal Democrat Group would support a “bag tax”.

Cllr J Mooney, referring back to his “say no” campaign during his Chairmanship of the Council, explained that he was proud to have been part of the campaign which had resulted in many shops in the market towns using reusable bags. He understood that the Government was planning to review plastic bag usage and he felt it inappropriate for the Council to take action before the outcome of this review was known.
Cllr P Allen had recently assisted in helping to clear Ellingham playing field of litter, and had been astonished at the number of plastic bags that had been discarded so irresponsibly. She did not view the introduction of a charge as an infringement of rights; people would have a choice as to whether or not they chose to purchase bags; the idea was that people should retain old bags so that they could be re-used.

Cllr B Spratt could not support the motion; he was concerned that some vulnerable people would not be able to afford a charge, and he suggested that supermarkets needed to take more action. This view was supported by Cllr J Savage, who also felt that supermarkets should do more to reduce the packaging containing their goods.

Cllr B McClenning was surprised that this motion was not attracting more support. He referred to the wearing of seatbelts and crash helmets as examples of when legislation was required to ensure a change in behaviours.

In seconding the motion, Cllr T Lewis expressed his surprise at Cllr C Kemp’s comments; there would always be occasions when persuasion would fail and compulsion was a necessity. Persuasion in this case had clearly failed; since 2006 plastic bag usage had increased by 50%, with an increase of 7.5% in England since 2010. He urged members to support the motion, following the excellent example set by the rest of the United Kingdom.

With 8 votes for and 24 against (with 2 recorded abstentions), the motion was then lost.

3192 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET 17 JUNE 2013:

(a) Revenue Outturn Report 2012/13

It was unanimously

RESOLVED:

To:

a) Approve the budget virements which exceeded £100,000 in accordance with the rules of financial governance;

b) Approve the slippage requests as outlined in paragraph 4 of the report;

c) Approve the movements in reserves as outlined in paragraph 5 of the report.

d) Agree the creation of a Communities and Localism reserve as outlined in paragraph 5 of the report.
(b) Capital Outturn Report

It was unanimously

RESOLVED:

To:

a) Agree the slippage requests as summarised in paragraph 3.1 of the report;

b) Agree the financing of the amended Capital Programme for the next three financial years.

(c) Annual Treasury Management Outturn Report 2012/13

It was unanimously

RESOLVED:

To:

a) Approve the actual 2012/13 prudential indicators;

b) Note the treasury activity in Quarter 4 and that it complies with the agreed strategy;

c) Note the breach relating to the upper limit for variable interest rates exposure, as detailed in paragraph 5.3 of the report;

d) Note the breach relating to the limit for investments with a single institution within Lloyds banking group, as detailed in paragraph 5.4 of the report.

3193 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES

Cllr M Wilby nominated the following 6 conservative members to serve on the Environment, Regulation and Planning Policy Committee: Cllrs Dale, Dewsbury, Foulger, Gould, Hornby and Mooney. These nominations were duly seconded.

Cllr M Gray considered that an explanation was required from the Leader of the Council as to why he had failed to nominate 6 members to this Committee within the 21 days stipulated in the regulations. Cllr M Wilby agreed to raise the matter with the Leader of the Council, on his return.

It was then unanimously

RESOLVED:

1. That Councillors Dale, Dewsbury, Foulger, Gould, Hornby and Mooney be appointed to the Environment Regulation and Planning Committee;

2. To ratify the appointment of Cllr N Legg to the Development Management Committee;

3. To ratify the appointment of Cllr L Webster to the Development Management Substitute Pool.
3194  CHAIRMEN’S REPORTS

a) Cabinet - Report of the Leader

Members noted the report of the Leader of the Council.

Referring to Eric Pickles’ recent comments where he suggested that citizens had a right to attend and record meetings, Cllr K Weeks sought clarity on how the Council proposed to respond to this. The Deputy Chief Executive agreed to consider the matter and to report back to members.

Cllr T Lewis, referring to the letter sent by the Leader of the Council to the Secretary of State during 2011 in support of the incinerator at Kings Lynn, asked whether in light of recent events at Norfolk County Council, South Norfolk Council continued to support the development of the incinerator. In response, Cllr Wilby explained that members at Norfolk County Council had supported an independent review of the contract; South Norfolk Council would reconsider its position on the outcome of the review.

In response to a further query from Cllr T Lewis, Cllr Wilby confirmed that there were no current plans to change the Cabinet system at South Norfolk Council back to the old style Committee system, as was planned at Norfolk County Council.

Cllr P Allen explained that she had recently met with residents who had raised funds to convert an old church in Flordon into a community centre. The project was now complete, and fundraisers had expressed their gratitude to the Council for awarding them the final £14,500 needed to complete the venture. Cllr Allen wondered if projects such as this would “slip through the net” now that a new funding regime was in place, which would allow applications up to a maximum of £2,000 through the Neighbourhood Boards and a capital pot of £45,000, to support 1 or 2 much larger projects. Cllr Wilby advised Council that projects such as that referred to by Cllr Allen, would receive support from the Council’s funding officer, who was equipped to assist in sourcing funding available from external organisations.

Cllr V Bell advised that she had recently attended the AGM of the Tower Hill Caravan Park Residents’ Association where a number of residents had expressed their frustration with a number of issues, involving both the Council and Saffron Housing Trust. Cllr Bendle agreed to look into the issue as a matter of urgency.

Cllr B Spratt raised the issue of business rates, referring to a garden centre where rates had increased by 32% due to the installation of air conditioning. He asked what the process was and whether the Council informed the Valuation Office of improvements to premises. Cllr Wheatley explained that improvements to business premises would often lead to an increase in business rates. He suggested that Cllr Spratt forwarded him more details of the premises in question, and he would look into the matter further.

Referring to a query from Cllr B McLenning regarding the amount of recycling removed from individual bins, Cllr Kiddie explained that the rules were constantly
changing regarding recycling credits and the constant changes made it very difficult to compare figures year on year. Responding to further queries regarding the Norwich Waste Partnership, he explained that the group was chaired by William Nunn, the Leader of Breckland District Council, and continued to consist of Norfolk County Council and the seven district authorities. The Partnership had just completed a procurement exercise to deal with kerbside collected dry recyclables, with a detailed report and recommendations for the award of a contract to be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 22 July 13. Cllr K Weeks was concerned that the issue should have first been discussed at Scrutiny Committee, however Cllr Kiddie stressed that the Partnership had undertaken a very detailed procurement exercise that had taken over 18 months to conclude.

In response to a query from Cllr T East regarding an agreement between the Council and Bright Green concerning the provision of land, Cllr Kiddie confirmed that he would look in to the matter further and report back to Cllr East at a later date.

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 Licensing Committee Chairman.

Cllr S Thomson informed members that the committee scheduled to take place on 4 July did not go ahead as the applicant withdrew his application for a private hire licence. The homelessness appeal scheduled for 31 July was also cancelled, as the appellant was able to find suitable accommodation before the hearing took place.

Cllr Thomson stressed the need for members of the Committee to attend training, explaining that nplaw would be providing homelessness training on either 7th or 8th October. The date and time would be confirmed shortly.

d) Development Management Committee – Report of the Chairman

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

Cllr J Mooney explained that the date of the Quality Tour would be announced shortly.

Cllr B Spratt referred to supermarkets being able to sell clothes, toys and electrical goods, in addition to food, which created what he felt to be unfair competition for smaller shops in market towns. Cllr Mooney explained that policies were in place and he suggested that Cllr Spratt spoke with relevant officers to obtain a detailed explanation.
e) Annual Report of the Standards Committee

Members noted the annual report of the Standards Committee.

Cllr C Kemp, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, considered the new regime to have bedded in well. He was pleased to report that there had been over a 50% attendance at the recent training session for members.

3195 REPRESENTATIVES ON STRATEGIC OUTSIDE BODIES

Members noted both Cllr C Gould’s report (tabled at the meeting), regarding the Broads Authority and Cllr C Kemp’s report regarding the Police and Crime Panel for Norfolk. Cllr Kemp advised that he had been appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Panel, at its last meeting on 5 July. There was nothing to report regarding the appointment of a new Chief Constable or Chief of Staff. An additional meeting of the Panel would take place in August.

Cllr N Legg explained that approval was given to close Dickleburgh doctors’ surgery by the NHS Commissioning Board. Unfortunately the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not been consulted on this occasion. It was suggested that members should contact Cllr Legg who would ensure that the proper procedures were adhered to, should similar changes be taking place in their wards. Significant discussion followed regarding the length of time patients were having to wait to see a doctor, when making an appointment at their local surgery. Cllr Legg agreed that this was unacceptable and he would enquire as to whether the Commissioning Board had received many complaints of this nature. He stressed that all practices would have patient consultation groups which could be contacted with complaints such as this.

The Council concluded at 9.05 pm

CHAIRMAN