COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 9 December 2013 at 7.30pm


Apologies: Councillors Blowfield, Pond, Thomson and Webster

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).

3204 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared other interests as listed below:

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3205 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2013

Cllr C Kemp suggested that under minute 3203, ‘Representatives on Strategic Outside Bodies’, last paragraph, line two, the word “deputy” be deleted. In line 4, to insert after “seen”, the words “by the Police and Crime Commissioner”. In line 5, to insert after “were”, “nonetheless”.

Referring to the attendance list for the Council meeting on 23 September, Cllr G Walden wished to clarify that he had not been present at that meeting.

Subject to the above changes, the minutes of the meeting held 23 September 2013 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.
3206 CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman was sad to report the death of former district councillor, Frank Clark. Cllr M Wilby paid tribute to Mr Clark, who had served as a district councillor for the Dickleborough and Tivetshall ward from 1981 until 1991. Cllr T East endorsed Cllr Wilby’s comments, referring to Mr Clark as a man of integrity. Members stood and observed a minute’s silence in Mr Clark’s memory.

Cllr T East advised Council, that former district and county councillor, Diana Hockaday, had recently suffered a stroke and was in hospital. Council agreed that the Chairman, on behalf of the Council, should write and send Mrs Hockaday flowers, wishing her a speedy recovery.

Members noted the Chairman and Vice-Chairman’s list of engagements, attached at page 20 of the agenda.

3207 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(a) Cllrs C Kemp and G Wheatley

Cllr C Kemp moved the following motion:

“South Norfolk District Council applauds the initiative and application of Cringleford Parish Council in producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan that sets out the Parish’s aspirations and objectives for their community over the intended lifetime of the Plan. Noting that the final stage of this process is the consideration of the Plan in a Parish referendum, this Council urges all electors in Cringleford to participate in that referendum early in 2014.”

Cllr Kemp advised Council that 18 months ago, Cringleford Parish Council was one of only ten parish councils to receive a grant from the Government, to enable it to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan that would enable the local community to develop a planning policy document, which set out local planning aspirations and objectives. He paid tribute to the work of the Parish Council, explaining the process to have been lengthy and complex, and he pointed to the fact that only three other parish councils had progressed to the next stage of a fully adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan. He stressed that the purpose of the motion was not to guide the residents of Cringleford which way to vote in the referendum, but to encourage them to exercise their right to vote.

In response to queries, Cllr Kemp explained that the referendum would be organised and undertaken by South Norfolk Council, and all the normal processes of an election would apply. Voting would be restricted to all those registered to vote within the parish of Cringleford.

Secondering the motion, Cllr G Wheatley referred to the difficult and fraught process undertaken by the Parish Council, and he applauded its determination in reaching the current stage. He viewed the process as an excellent example of the Council enabling success in others and he urged members to support the motion.
Cllr M Gray expressed his support for the motion, also paying tribute to Cringleford Parish Council, referring to the difficult issues it had faced and the need to ensure that the plan was in context with the wider planning of the District.

Cllr J Herbert expressed his support for the motion, but queried the effect on larger projects, should more parishes adopt their own parish plans which would enable them to acquire a percentage of CIL funds. Cllr Fuller responded that there would be an onus on parishes to spend CIL funds on required infrastructure, and a mechanism would be in place to ensure that infrastructure priorities (as outlined in the Local Investment Plan and Programme) were adhered to.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: South Norfolk District Council applauds the initiative and application of Cringleford Parish Council in producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan that sets out the Parish's aspirations and objectives for their community over the intended lifetime of the Plan. Noting that the final stage of this process is the consideration of the Plan in a Parish referendum, this Council urges all electors in Cringleford to participate in that referendum early in 2014.

(b) Cllr J Savage

Cllr J Savage moved the following motion:

“This Council regrets that the Government formula for Local Government funding support allocates urban local authorities 50 per cent more funding per head of population than for rural authorities, despite the well-known facts of the extra cost of delivering services in rural areas and that average incomes are lower in rural areas. Accordingly, this Council urges the Government to move toward reducing this imbalance in the funding it offers to Local Government and instructs the Chief Executive to inform all three MPs with South Norfolk constituencies and the Department of Communities and Local Government of the terms of this resolution.”

Cllr Savage felt his motion to be timely, in view of the pending Local Government finance settlement for 2014/15, due to be announced later that month. He advised that it was estimated that urban areas received 50% more funding than their rural counterparts. This issue was already subject to debate across the country; a petition had already attracted support from at least 25 Members of Parliament. He further explained that on average, council tax payers in rural areas paid £76 a year more than those who lived in urban area, yet average incomes were lower and the cost of services higher. The petition had called for the Government to re-address the balance between rural and urban areas in staged steps and at least by 10% by 2020. He urged members to support the motion, which he felt to be one small step in helping to address the imbalance.

Cllr M Gray seconded the motion, explaining his support in the interest of cross party co-operation.

Cllr J Fuller explained that a number of cities had collaborated to form a group to push proposals to reconfigure the Local Government Association, ensuring that the
interests of cities were at its forefront. He also made reference to the Minister of Cities and he expressed his concern that rural areas were getting left behind. He strongly agreed that it was time for rural authorities to make a stand, and he fully endorsed the comments of Cllr Savage.

Cllr B Spratt also expressed his support for the motion, referring to deprived areas and pockets of poverty within rural areas.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: This Council regrets that the Government formula for Local Government funding support allocates urban local authorities 50 per cent more funding per head of population than for rural authorities, despite the well-known facts of the extra cost of delivering services in rural areas and that average incomes are lower in rural areas. Accordingly, this Council urges the Government to move toward reducing this imbalance in the funding it offers to Local Government and instructs the Chief Executive to inform all three MPs with South Norfolk constituencies and the Department of Communities and Local Government of the terms of this resolution.”

3208 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET 28 OCTOBER and 2 DECEMBER 2013

(a) Capital and Treasury Report Quarter 2 2013/14

Referring back to a query made by Cllr T Lewis at the last meeting of the Council (minute 3200), Cllr G Wheatley explained that breaches to the prudential indicators needed to be reported to full Council. He explained that the CIPFA Treasury Code of Practice recommended that it was good practice for any breaches be reported to full Council, as this body had originally approved the Strategy.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To

a) Approve the 2013/14 prudential indicators for the quarter.

b) Note the treasury activity in the quarter and that it complies with the agreed strategy.

c) Approve the increases in the counterparty limits for UK clearing banks as proposed in 7.3.

d) Note the breach in the prudential indicators relating to external debt set out in 8.2.
(b) Business Rate Pooling

Cllr G Wheatley introduced the recommendations from Cabinet, regarding the proposals to establish a business rate pooling arrangement for the Council, jointly with Norfolk County Council and other district councils in Norfolk.

Cllr J Fuller referred to the ways in which the Council was already supporting small businesses, through for example, discretionary rate relief. He felt that there were announcements in the Autumn Statement which would benefit businesses in market towns.

Referring to paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 of the report, Cllr T Lewis asked for clarification regarding membership. The Chief Executive explained that there were two types of membership; full and associate members. Associate members could sit on a body, but could not pool their business rates within that group.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To agree, subject to the negotiation of the detailed financial and governance arrangements, that the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Head of Finance and the Leader of the Council, be given delegated authority to enter the Council into a business rates pooling arrangement for Norfolk with Norfolk County Council and other Norfolk district councils.

(c) Development Management – Proposed Revised Scheme of Delegation

Cllr K Kiddie introduced the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held 28 October 2013, and referred members to the Monitoring Officer report, which detailed the proposed changes to the Scheme of Delegation.

Cllr M Gray voiced concerns that officers would be determining applications where the Environment Agency, a statutory consultee had objected; he felt such applications were better determined by Committee, and he proposed an amendment to the recommendations.

Some debate followed, during which Cllr K Weeks agreed that the Council needed to be cautious when considering such applications. Cllr B McClenny suggested that the weight of such decisions should be carried by members, not officers.

Cllr J Mooney reminded members that the purpose of the revision of the Scheme of Delegation was to speed up the planning process; members needed to concentrate on the larger strategic applications, not minor ones. He could not support any amendment to the recommendations.
Cllr C Kemp referred members to proposed paragraph 4.1.1.4 of the revised scheme (page 33 of the agenda) and he suggested that this adequately covered the concerns expressed by some members. Cllr J Fuller suggested that Cllr Gray’s proposal required more thought, reminding members that there were other statutory consultees to consider.

Cllr M Gray then agreed to withdraw his proposed amendment, explaining that he would give it further thought outside of the meeting.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the proposed Revised Scheme of Delegation (with an implementation date of 1 January 2014), subject to:

a) the clause referring to the potential to generate employment being retained;

b) The word “significant” in the penultimate sentence of 3.1 is replaced with a more appropriate form of words.

(d) Council Tax Support Scheme;

Cllr Y Bendle presented the recommendations from the Cabinet regarding the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/15.

Cllr Bendle outlined he background to the proposals, explaining that the new scheme sought to protect newly unemployed people for 13 weeks by awarding full Council Tax Support.

Following consultation, two amendments had been made to the proposed scheme, and all areas which had failed to attract at least a 50% satisfaction rate amongst responses had been looked at again. Cllr Bendle stressed it was a fair scheme, that was both operationally effective and affordable.

Cllr M Gray sought clarification on the support given to Parish Councils for 2014/15. Cllr Fuller explained that the transitional grant provided by the Government last year and passed on to parishes from South Norfolk Council, was for one year only. The Council would therefore not be providing parishes with any additional transitional relief for 2014/15. Members noted that there would be an increase in tax base, but this would not be sufficient to offset the cost.

Cllr T Lewis thanked Cllr Bendle for allowing him to comment on the proposed scheme, before it was presented to Cabinet.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the proposed Council Tax Scheme for 2014/15.
3209 Adoption of the Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk, the Broadland part of the Norwich Policy Area Local Plan

Members considered the report of the Planning Policy Manager, which summarised the Inspector’s conclusions into the soundness and legal compliance of the Joint Core Strategy for Broadland, Norwich and South Norfolk.

Cllr J Fuller outlined the background to the report, and reminded members of the reasons for the remitted parts of the Joint Core Strategy. Cllr Fuller was pleased that the Inspector had been very clear and specific, and that his report had concluded that with certain modifications, the plan satisfied the legal requirements and met the criteria for soundness in the National Planning Policy Framework. Members noted the comments of the Inspector which emphasised the importance of the Northern Distributor Road and had concurred with the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP), that the shortfall in the 5 year land supply should be added to the housing delivery target over the plan period (the ‘Liverpool’ approach). Cllr Fuller hoped that this would now lead to a period of more certainty and clarity, preventing future speculative planning applications. Members noted that the construction of the Northern Distributor Route was likely to start in April 2015.

With 40 votes in favour, 0 against and 1 abstention, it was

RESOLVED: To:
1. Note the Inspector’s report (as set out in Appendix 1) including the required changes;
2. Adopt the part Joint Core Strategy and changes to the existing Joint Core Strategy (as set out in Appendix 2);
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Growth and Localism to proceed with the necessary legal and administrative process to secure adoption of the revised Joint Core Strategy, so that it becomes part of the development plan for South Norfolk Council, subject to Broadland District Council and Norwich City Council also resolving to adopt.

3210 MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

Members considered the report of the Compliance and Risk Manager, which informed Council of proposed changes to the structure of Saffron Housing Trust, and sought Council consent regarding the revised Scheme of Delegation for the Development Management Committee and formal structure for Committee Accreditations.

Cllr J Fuller first referred to the proposed changes to the structure of Saffron Housing Trust, and he reminded Council of the strong positive outcomes achieved by Saffron against the list of promises made at the time of transfer. He felt it inevitable that Saffron now wished to move forward to a position where it could act as a lead player in a social housing market area which was now looking to consolidate. He understood the reasons behind moving towards a skilled based Board and he felt it
to be in the interests of residents in South Norfolk, to allow Saffron to progress these proposals further.

Cllr C Kemp then drew members’ attention to the proposal to introduce a formal framework in to the Constitution regarding member accreditations. He referred members to Appendix 2 of the report and advised that members of the Licensing Committee were accredited for a two year period following attendance at training sessions. This had unfortunately been omitted from the proposals and he suggested that paragraph 11.4.2 be amended to read: “Formally organised training events – 12 months (Development Management Committee) and 24 months (Licensing Committee) from the date of their last training event attended”, and this was subsequently agreed by members. Members noted that they could also be deemed “accredited” through a professional qualification exemption, to be approved by the Monitoring Officer or Deputy Monitoring Officer.

After Cllr T Lewis had proposed a number of minor changes to the proposed scheme of delegation (which were subsequently approved by Council), it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To:

1. Support in principle the proposed changes to the Board of the Saffron Housing Trust;
2. Agree the revised Scheme of Delegation for Development Management subject to minor amendments, to apply from 1 January 2014;
3. Agree the inclusion of the Committee Accreditation section in part 5.5 of the Constitution, subject to amendments;
4. Appoint the Monitoring Officer as the Proper Officer for Neighbourhood Plan Referenda

3211 CHAIRMEN’S REPORTS

a) Cabinet - Report of the Leader

Members noted the report of the Leader of the Council.

Referring back to the Cabinet meetings held 28 October and 2 December, Cllr J Fuller gave particular mention to the Market Towns Initiative. He stressed that the market towns played an important part in securing the future growth and economic and social vibrancy of the district as a whole. He had been particularly impressed with the planned Retail Skills Workshops, which gave retailers the opportunity to attend training events to help increase footfall in to their shops and towns.

He looked forward to the Local Government Finance Settlement which was due to be announced on 20 December and he was pleased that the Government, thanks to lobbying by the LGA, had decided against pooling a percentage of funds from the New Homes Bonus in to the Local Growth Fund in 2015.

In response to a query from Cllr M Edney regarding the Greater Norwich City Deal, Cllr Fuller advised that he anticipated an announcement shortly regarding the
success of the Greater Norwich City Deal bid. He believed that as soon as Thursday 12 December, Leaders of the participating councils would be asked to sign the final bid documents. He stressed that the City Deal would provide support to businesses, the development of skills and the delivery of crucial infrastructure which would be of significant benefit to South Norfolk residents. Council agreed to allow the Leader to sign the City Deal, noting that detailed governance arrangements would be presented to Cabinet in due course for approval.

Cllr J Mooney asked Cllr Fuller if he would consider allowing funds to provide a much needed update to the Council’s Council Chamber. He suggested that the Chamber needed to become a more flexible venue to make more effective use of such a large space, and needed to provide modern equipment and technology to create a more professional approach to outside organisations and the public, and to allow for a smooth transition to paperless agendas come 2015. Cllr Fuller agreed that this was necessary and he suggested that Cllr Mooney led and drove the project forward.

Cllr M Gray noted that the Your Neighbourhood Your Choice project had “died” and wondered if this was also true of the Neighbourhood Boards; he had noted that three meetings had been cancelled in the last round. In response, Cllr Wilby explained that two of the meetings had still gone ahead. The Boards would still have an important role to play which would involve identifying local initiatives that could build capacity within communities and reduce demand on Council services.

Cllr P Allen was pleased to note proposals from the Cabinet report on 2 December, for Norfolk and Norwich Festival (NNF) to commission a programme of events and activities across the District’s market towns in 2014/15. Cllr Allen asked how the NNF had been commissioned and whether other providers had been considered. She also wondered if the Britten Sinfonia Orchestra, members of which had worked with local school children throughout the District would feature in the programme. Cllr Wilby agreed to provide a response regarding the NNF outside of the meeting. He too had been particularly inspired by the work undertaken by the orchestra and had been very impressed with a recent performance at the Theatre Royal in Norwich.

Cllr Y Bendle was pleased to report that the target set back in 2011 to provide 500 new affordable homes by April 2014, had been achieved. She had recently attended an event in Wymondham to unveil the 500th low cost home, in association with Orbit East. Members noted that 32% of the new homes built in the District over the last year had been affordable.

Cllr B McClennning asked Cllr K Kiddie whether Ketteringham depot was prepared for the forthcoming winter. Cllr Kiddie explained that the usual winter checks on vehicles had taken place. Referring back to the previous winter, he explained that he had been extremely proud of performance, with South Norfolk being the only Council to continuously collect refuse throughout the extreme wintry conditions. Cllr Kiddie also gave mention to the flood risks the previous week, explaining that the Emergency team had been fully engaged and on standby to support other Districts. He thanked all those involved in the operation, including officers and community representatives. Cllr k Billig also conveyed her thanks, explaining that her ward had been at real risk from flooding.

b) Scrutiny Committee – Report of the Chairman

Members noted the report of the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee.
Cllr M Dewsbury drew members’ attention to a Directorate Plan workshop scheduled for Thursday 12 December and the meeting planned for Wednesday 18th December where a representative from the Electoral Commission would be in attendance to speak regarding the pending move over to individual electoral registration. She suggested that members would find both sessions interesting and she welcomed attendance from all members.

Cllr T East referred to paragraph 2.4 of the report and asked for more clarification regarding those areas of satisfaction and areas requiring improvement, with regard to nplaw. Cllr Dewsbury agreed that she would provide a response to Cllr East outside of the meeting.

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

Members noted the report of the Licensing Committee Chairman.

d) Development Management Committee – Report of the Chairman

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

3212 REPRESENTATIVES ON STRATEGIC OUTSIDE BODIES

Cllr J Fuller advised that a special meeting of the LGA Assembly would be taking place in January regarding the reconfiguration of the LGA.

Referring to the LGA Rural Commission, Cllr J Savage explained savings were being sought and meetings of the main board were being reduced from every 4 to every 6 weeks. He was very concerned at proposals to delete the Commission altogether, although there were still plans to hold the annual conference. He feared that the proposals would dilute representation with rural interests.

Cllr N Legg referred back to previous meetings where members had aired their concerns regarding waiting times for appointments in local doctors’ surgeries. Since the last meeting of Council, there had been an informal meeting of the Norfolk Health and Scrutiny Committee at Norfolk County Council to discuss the matter and this had been attended by some members of South Norfolk Council. It appeared that some of the problems stemmed from difficulties in recruiting doctors in General Practice. Cllr M Gray was pleased to have been able to attend this meeting. He commented that in addition to the difficulties experienced recruiting GPs, patient lists had more than doubled over the last 30 years.

Cllr K Kiddie was pleased to report that after an 18 month project, the participating authorities of the Norfolk Waste Partnership had now signed the new Materials Recycling Facility contract. He thanked Cllr Gray for his assistance in examining the contract.

In response to comments from Cllr T East regarding his opposition to the proposals for Norfolk County Council to begin charging £2.00 for visits to recycling waste centres, Cllr Fuller explained that South Norfolk had made representations to the
Leader of Norfolk County Council, as part of the recent budget consultation exercise. He agreed to pass this correspondence on to Cllr East. Cllr W Kemp wondered if fly tipping had increased in those areas close to the Suffolk border, where such charges had already been introduced. Cllr K Kiddie agreed to look into the matter and report back to Cllr Kemp after the meeting. Cllr J Herbert queried Cllr Fuller’s view that a £2.00 charge was unreasonable, referring to the “pay as you throw” charges at DIY Recycling Centres. Cllr Fuller stressed that these charges had been set in a different context and would be in relation to DIY waste that might otherwise be deposited in a skip. The £2.00 charge might however deter residents from recycling other forms of waste.

Cllr M Wilby reported that there had been no meetings of the South Norfolk Alliance since the last meeting of the Council. He thanked all those involved in what had been a successful Local Democracy Week involving 400 youngsters.

Cllr T Palmer explained that he and Cllr Overton had been fully involved and consulted regarding the changes in strategic direction at Saffron Housing Trust. He still felt that he played a valuable role, explaining that Saffron had recently appointed him to the Crocus Construction Board, a private arm’s length company, set up by Saffron.

Turning to the report regarding the Police and Crime Panel for Norfolk, Cllr J Herbert referred to the recent media interest in expenses and he asked Cllr C Kemp how he felt the Commissioner should be held to account. Cllr C Kemp explained that an external accountant had been appointed to carry out an external review as to the governance issues arising and a sub-committee made up of four members of the Panel had been selected to consider the subsequent findings. Cllr Kemp did not feel it appropriate to comment further at that stage. He anticipated a similar line of questioning at the forthcoming public question and answer session, to be held on 13 December 2013.

The Council concluded at 9.40 pm

CHAIRMAN