3311 URGENT ITEM - DEVOLUTION; UPDATE ON PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS

The Chairman agreed that given the current status of the negotiations across Norfolk and the Government Challenge session on 4 November, that this item should be considered as a matter of urgency.

Cllr J Fuller began by outlining the background to the report, reminding members that back in September, Council had agreed that the Council should undertake work to maximise the opportunity presented by the Government’s commitment to devolution. Since then, the Leaders from Norfolk and Suffolk had met to discuss an approach and it was agreed at this meeting that a small “Challenge Session team” would represent the interest of the Councils and business to Government. At a further meeting on 14 October, Norfolk and Suffolk Leaders met with the Chairman of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to consider a paper prepared by officials (attached at Appendix 1 of the report), outlining a proposed approach. The Leaders all agreed that prior to the challenge session with Government on 4 November, this paper required strengthening, with particular clarification regarding six points:
- A demonstration of a better understanding of financial implications surrounding the bid as a whole and to define whether certain elements could be afforded
- Given the Chancellor’s announcement at the Conservative Party Conference that only Devolved areas with a Directly Elected Mayor would be able to charge an Infrastructure Surcharge on business rates, whether the absence of a Directly Elected Mayor for Norfolk & Suffolk would be financially too constraining;
- More detail around how strategic transport related matters would be covered, not only for road & rail infrastructure but over bus franchising and passenger transport including through ticketing and concessionary fares;
- A definition as what is meant by “double devolution” of certain powers and finances to a more local level of clusters of districts and how it could operate (taking examples from models in operation in the two counties) within the context of a wider Combined Authority (with/without a directly elected mayor);
- A clear and concise explanation as to what the key benefits of a combined authority could deliver if powers and budgets were devolved from central government over and above what it is possible to deliver at the moment;
- An explicit statement that, whilst it is felt that the Norfolk & Suffolk Combined Authority bid was credible, it would be strengthened, especially in the context of strategic transport and for the promotion of local economic growth, if Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were to join in due course noting the global economic and academic leadership in key industrial sectors in the three counties.

Cllr Fuller explained that he supported devolution in principle; he understood it to be a big opportunity to drive economic growth and generate income for the region. However, he was concerned that the current proposals had failed to outline what devolution would mean to the “man on the street”, with no detail regarding what was on offer, whether proposals were financially sustainable for Norfolk and Suffolk, and a lack of detail on future governance arrangements. The document contained high level principles, but lacked any real detail or shape.

Cllr M Gray suggested that devolution was introducing a new tier of government, similar to that of the recently abolished Regional Assembly. He felt there to be too many unanswered questions regarding finance, cost and governance arrangements. He stressed the importance of not losing sight of the key issue, which was whether or not the public would benefit from this change. He feared that devolution would only add a new level of complexity to local government.

In response, Cllr Fuller explained that he shared the concerns of Cllr Gray. He too had been dissatisfied with the content of the paper, and he had been disappointed that there had been no reference made to successful joint initiatives such as the Greater Norwich Partnership and Greater Norwich Growth Board. He also made reference to the CNC Building Control and the Flood Defence Partnership, all achieved without devolution. In response to queries, he confirmed that any new body would be a statutory body with tax raising powers.

Cllr M Gray suggested that any decisions to progress the matter should be on a cross party basis and he moved an amendment to the recommendations (shown below in bold):
“that the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council, and Leader of the Opposition be authorised to progress this approach…”

Considerable discussion followed, during which members expressed concerns regarding governance arrangements and resources, and whether an elected mayor would be a suitable option for Norfolk and Suffolk. Some members expressed disappointment and surprise that Cllr Fuller was not a member of the “Challenge Team”, and would not be representing South Norfolk Council at the Challenge Session with Government on 4 November.

Cllr C Kemp then moved the following amendments to the recommendations of the report:

Replace the recommendations with

1. That the Council agrees the next steps for devolution as outlined in Appendix One, subject to receiving satisfactory assurances on all the additional points set out in paragraph 2.3;

2. In particular, any proposed governance arrangements for devolution should thoroughly reflect its democratic anchorage — both by elections and accountability — in the communities which it is both to represent and to serve;

3. That the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council be authorised to progress this approach on the understanding that any formal commitment to devolution would be subject to further Council resolution;

4. That to that end 2nd November 2015 be reserved as a date for a further special meeting of the Council to enable it to give informed instructions to its delegates at the meeting of the Challenge Panel on 4th November 2015 in the light of progress achieved in the interim; and

5. That the terms of this resolution be communicated to the Leader and Chief Executive of each principal authority in Norfolk and Suffolk, the Chairman of the New Anglia LEP, each Member of Parliament for a Norfolk or Suffolk constituency, the members of the Challenge Panel and the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Cllr Kemp had been disappointed with the lack of detail in the proposals, stressing the need for any new organisation to be democratic and accountable to the people.

(The meeting was then briefly adjourned to allow Cllrs Kemp and Gray to discuss the possibility of merging their amendments)

Following a brief adjournment, Cllr C Kemp withdrew his previous amendment, as did Cllr Gray. Cllr Kemp then proposed a new amendment as follows:
Replace the recommendations with:
1. That the Council agrees the next steps for devolution as outlined in Appendix One, subject to receiving satisfactory assurances on all the additional points set out in paragraph 2.3;

2. In particular, any proposed governance arrangements for devolution should thoroughly reflect its democratic anchorage — both by elections and accountability — in the communities which it is both to represent and to serve;

3. That the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council (following consultation with the Leader of the Opposition Group) be authorised to progress this approach on the understanding that any formal commitment to devolution would be subject to further Council resolution;

4. That to that end 2nd November 2015 be reserved as a date for a further special meeting of the Council to enable it to give informed instructions to its delegates at the meeting of the Challenge Panel on 4th November 2015 in the light of progress achieved in the interim; and

5. That the terms of this resolution be communicated to the Leader and Chief Executive of each principal authority in Norfolk and Suffolk, the Chairman of the New Anglia LEP, each Member of Parliament for a Norfolk or Suffolk constituency, the members of the Challenge Panel and the Department of Communities and Local Government.

This was seconded by Cllr Gray and then unanimously carried.

Cllr Fuller also suggested that an informal meeting / briefing of the Scrutiny Committee be arranged before 4 November, to give members the opportunity to discuss the issues further and ask questions, outside of a formal setting.

It was then unanimously

RESOLVED:
1. That the Council agrees the next steps for devolution as outlined in Appendix One, subject to receiving satisfactory assurances on all the additional points set out in paragraph 2.3;

2. In particular, any proposed governance arrangements for devolution should thoroughly reflect its democratic anchorage — both by elections and accountability — in the communities which it is both to represent and to serve;

3. That the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council (following consultation with the Leader of the Opposition Group) be authorised to progress this approach on the understanding that any formal commitment to devolution would be subject to further Council resolution;
4. That to that end 2\textsuperscript{nd} November 2015 be reserved as a date for a further special meeting of the Council to enable it to give informed instructions to its delegates at the meeting of the Challenge Panel on 4\textsuperscript{th} November 2015 in the light of progress achieved in the interim; and

5. That the terms of this resolution be communicated to the Leader and Chief Executive of each principal authority in Norfolk and Suffolk, the Chairman of the New Anglia LEP, each Member of Parliament for a Norfolk or Suffolk constituency, the members of the Challenge Panel and the Department of Communities and Local Government.

3312 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

ADOPTION OF SOUTH NORFOLK LOCAL PLAN DOCUMENTS: SITE SPECIFIC ALLOCATIONS AND POLICIES, DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES, WYMONDHAM AREA ACTION PLAN AND ASSOCIATED POLICIES MAP UPDATES

Cllr J Fuller introduced the recommendations from the Cabinet, regarding the adoption of the Site Specific Allocations and Policies Document, the Development Management Policies Document, the Wymondham Area Action Plan, and the associated amendments to the Policies Maps. Members were pleased to note that the Inspector had concluded that subject to a number of main modifications being made to the text, and the associated amendments required to the Policies Maps, that the three documents were legally compliant and sound.

Cllr Fuller expressed his gratitude to the Development Management Committee and gave special mention to former Councillors Blake and Wynne, and Cllr Mooney, all of whom had played a key part in the long and sometimes difficult journey to adoption. He praised staff for what he felt to have been a tremendous achievement, and he also thanked the Inspector and his assistant. It gave him great pleasure in commending the recommendations of the report to members, which would provide clarity and a planned and co-ordinated approach to the economy, employment and new homes in the District over the following 20 years.

Cllr Gray echoed the comments of Cllr Fuller with regard to the hard and efficient work of the staff. He also made reference to former Councillor, D Blake on what would have been a very proud occasion for him, to see the plans through to adoption. Cllr Gray stressed that this was a key landmark for the Council, and he congratulated all those involved.

Cllr M Mooney expressed his satisfaction with the recommendations of the report, which would assist in putting an end to large scale speculative development throughout the District.
It was then unanimously

RESOLVED: TO

1) Note the Inspector’s report (Appendix A), including the recommended Schedule of Main Modifications – Text and Schedule of Main Modifications - Policies Map (Appendices 1 and 2 of the Inspector’s report respectively)
2) Adopt, with effect from 26 October 2015, the South Norfolk Site Specific Allocations and Policies Document as modified by the Inspector’s report and with additional (minor) modifications (Appendix B)
3) Adopt, with effect from 26 October 2015, the Development Management Policies Document as modified by the Inspector’s report and with additional (minor) modifications (Appendix C)
4) Adopt, with effect from 26 October 2015, the Wymondham Area Action Plan as modified by the Inspector’s report and with additional (minor) modifications (Appendix D)
5) Adopt the updates to the Policies Map, as modified by the Inspector’s report and with additional (minor) modifications (note that these maps form part of all three Local Plan documents and are not a standalone document)
6) Delegate authority to the Director of Growth and Localism to undertake all necessary post-adoption legal and procedural steps
7) Delegate authority to the Director of Growth and Localism to make minor factual updates, corrections and formatting and layout changes to each Local Plan document.

3313 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr K Mason Billig was pleased to announce that the Council had won a “Best Waste Minimisation or Prevention Award” at a recent LARAC (Local Authorities Recycling Advisory Committee) conference, held in Nottingham. She commended all staff involved, giving special mention to Joseph Webb, the Council’s Waste and Environmental Strategy Officer.

(The meeting concluded at 4.03 pm)
Chairman