SPECIAL COUNCIL

Minutes of a special meeting of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 2 November 2015 at 11.00 a.m.

Members Present:  Councillors, Bell, Bendle, Bills, Blundell, Broome, Dale, Easton, Edney, Foulger, Fulcher, Fuller, Goldson, Gray, J Hornby, L Hornby, Hudson, Kiddie, C Kemp, Legg, Lewis, Mooney, Neal, Overton, Palmer, Pond, J Savage, R Savage, Stone, Thomas, Wheatley, J Wilby and M Wilby and Worsley.

Apologies:  Councillors, Amis, Bernard, Dewsbury, Duffin, Ellis, Gould, Hardy, W Kemp, Larner, Mason, Billig, Minshull, Riches and Thomson

Officers in Attendance:  The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Growth of Localism (T Horspole) the Director of Business Improvement (D Lorimer) and the Director of Community Services (P Boyce)

3314  DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following member declared an other interest in the matter detailed below:

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<th>Minute Number</th>
<th>Councillor</th>
<th>Nature of Interest</th>
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<td>3015</td>
<td>Cllr M Gray</td>
<td>Member of the Broads Authority</td>
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Members considered the report of the Chief Executive, which sought to clarify a number of issues with regard to the Norfolk and Suffolk devolution bid, to be considered by a Government Challenge Panel on 4 November 2015.

Cllr J Fuller introduced the report, reminding Council of its decision on 19 October 2015, that further clarity was required with regard to various aspects of the deal and the need to ensure that any governance arrangements thoroughly reflected a democratic anchorage. He also made reference to the informal scrutiny-led briefing session, held 29 October, which provided members with the opportunity to gain a wider understanding of devolution, and the Norfolk Suffolk deal.

Referring to the document “The Rising East: A Devolution Deal for Norfolk and Suffolk”, Cllr Fuller apologised for the lateness of the Council report, explaining that the above said document had only been released the previous Friday. He did feel that the document had made steps towards resolving some of the matters raised at the previous Council meeting, however was concerned that more detail was needed regarding a number of areas. He expressed particular concern with regard to financial modelling, the appropriate leadership model in light of recent announcements that the ability to raise additional business rates to fund infrastructure may be restricted to a directly elected mayor, issues relating to double devolution, and the need for clarity regarding “new statutory functions for planning and housing delivery”. He stressed the need to ensure that any new authority did not trespass on those powers the Council wished to reserve.

Cllr T Lewis explained that he felt it right that the Council continued to support the bid in principle, however, he had grave doubts as to the outcome, fearing that devolution would only succeed to complicate the structure of Local Government further. He sought further clarification with regard to strategic transport, and queried whether Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had expressed an interest in joining the proposed new combined authority.

In response, Cllr Fuller referred to paragraphs 50 and 53 of the bid, which outlined the aspirations with regard to strategic transport networks and public transport, referring to a more integrated and organised experience for passengers. He explained that the case would have to be made for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to join the proposed combined authority, but suggested that it would be an attractive proposition, especially in the context of strategic transport and the promotion of local economic growth.

A number of members expressed their concerns, mainly with regard to the lack of detail concerning funding and governance arrangements. Some members were enthusiastic at the prospect of a transport authority for the whole of East Anglia, but stressed that such proposals would need to be backed up with appropriate funding. Disappointment was also expressed that Cllr Fuller was not on the Challenge Team, and would not be representing the interests of South Norfolk Council at the meeting with Government on 4 November.
Cllr C Kemp agreed that caution was required, and he moved the following amendment to the recommendations, which was seconded by Cllr G Wheatley:

**At the end of the recommendation at paragraph 5.2 to add, “Such further reports shall include the opinions of the Council’s Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer each assessing the soundness and sustainability of the proposed financial and governance arrangements.”**

Cllr A Thomas expressed her support for the amendment, but explained that whilst she understood the reason for delay, and appreciated that officers had worked hard to produce the paper within a short timescale, she felt it regrettable that the papers were not circulated earlier, allowing members to read and digest the content. She asked that the papers be distributed to members electronically as soon as possible.

Cllr M Gray gave mention to a recent article in the Eastern Daily Press, which referred to the Broads Authority as the “life blood to the region’s economy”, and he expressed his disappointment that the Broads Authority had not been included in the bid. The Chief Executive explained that Government guidance had previously indicated that National Parks would be considered separately, however, it seemed that they were now becoming more involved in the process. She further explained that the Chief Executive of the Broads Authority had been kept fully informed and had been consulted and involved in negotiations. Cllr Gray then moved the following amendment, which was duly seconded by Cllr T Lewis:

**To add an additional recommendation: “To seek clarification on the engagement and role of the Broads Authority within these proposals.”**

Cllr T Lewis then proposed a further amendment as detailed below:

**In recommendation 5.2, first sentence, to delete “further”, delete “satisfactorily”, replace “obtained” with “sought”, and to replace “the next” with “any further”. As amended the sentence would read: “Following the Challenge Panel Session on 4th November, that this Council receives a report addressing the issues outlined in paragraph 4.3 of the report, prior to further endorsement being sought from South Norfolk Council to move to any further stage.”**

Cllr C Kemp seconded this amendment.

The Chief Executive sought to reassure members, explaining that the Council’s Section 151 Officer, and the Monitoring Officer had both been party to the report, and that she herself, along with these officers believed that the Council was not exposing itself to any risks through its support (in principle) to the devolution bid. Officers did however endorse the need for clarification with regard to a number of issues, before moving to the next stage.
With the agreement of the Council, the three proposed amendments were voted upon as one single amendment. This amendment was unanimously carried.

With 30 votes in favour, and one abstention, it was then

**RESOLVED:** 1. To note the progress made on the latest drafts of the “Rising in the East – A Devolution Deal for Norfolk and Suffolk” document and to authorise the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council to confirm to Norfolk and Suffolk Councils and NALEP, that South Norfolk Council is supportive in principle to the devolution bid for Norfolk and Suffolk;

2. Following the Challenge Panel Session on 4th November, that this Council receives a report addressing the issues outlined in paragraph 4.3 of the report, prior to further endorsement being sought from South Norfolk Council to move to any further stage. This will help provide greater clarity on what these proposals mean in terms of outcomes and ways of working for government, partner councils / organisations and most importantly for businesses and residents. Such further reports will include the opinions of the Council’s Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer, each assessing the soundness and sustainability of the proposed financial and governance arrangements.

3. To seek clarification on the engagement and role of the Broads Authority within these proposals

(The meeting concluded at 11.55 am)

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Chairman

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**COUNCIL - South Norfolk Council**  2 November 2015

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