SPECIAL COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Thursday 17 November 2016 at 7.30 pm

Members Present: Councillors, Wheatley (Chairman), Duffin (Vice-Chairman), Bendle, Bills, Dewsbury, Easton, Edney, Ellis, Foulger, Fuller, Gould, Gray, Hardy, J Hornby, L Hornby, Hudson, C Kemp, W Kemp, Kiddie, Lewis, Mason-Billig, Minshull, Mooney, Neal, Palmer, Riches, R Savage, J Savage, Stone, Thomson, J Wilby, M Wilby, Worsley.

Apologies: Councillors, Amis, Bell, Bernard, Blundell, Broome, Dale, Fulcher, Goldson, Larner, Legg, Overton, Pond and Thomas

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Business Development (D Lorimer), the Director of Community Services (P Boyce), the Director of Growth and Localism (T Horspole), and the Monitoring Officer (L Mickleborough).

(a member of the press was also in attendance)

3358 URGENT ITEM – MEMBERSHIP OF THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Members noted that Cllr P Broome had decided to step down as a member of the Development Management Committee. Cllr J Fuller confirmed that he had appointed Cllr B Duffin as his replacement.

3359 NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK COMBINED AUTHORITY

The Chairman referred to the report of the Chief Executive concerning devolution for Norfolk and Suffolk.
Cllr C Kemp proposed, seconded by Cllr T Lewis, that in accordance with Standing Order H3, that standing orders be temporarily suspended to allow a full question and answer session with regard to devolution.

It was unanimously

**RESOLVED:** That standing orders be temporarily suspended to allow for a full question and answer session with regard to devolution

The Monitoring Officer informed Council that the Department for Communities and Local Government had made two minor amendments to the draft Norfolk and Suffolk Combined Authority Order:

- Schedule 1 para 4 (1) – that “two thirds majority” be amended to “qualified majority”
- Schedule 1 para 4 (6) – that “non-voting” be amended to “non- constituent” in relation to the Local Enterprise Partnership

The Monitoring Officer further reminded members that any amendments to the recommendations of the report (other than to correct any typographical errors), would only succeed to negate the motion, and were therefore not appropriate.

Cllr J Fuller then presented the report to members, explaining that this was an opportunity for Norfolk to secure huge investment in to the area, leading to greater control over its economic destiny. Local taxes would stay in Norfolk, which in turn would support local people and businesses. This deal was about more than money; it was about the economy, jobs, skills, transport, health and housing, all which impacted on the everyday life of those living in the area. He acknowledged that there had been some opposition to the election of a mayor, but he drew members’ attention to the IPSOS MORI survey where 65% of those surveyed had indicated that they were in favour, or strongly in favour of devolution. He urged members to support the recommendations of the report and grasp the opportunity to bring more prosperity to Norfolk and Suffolk.

Cllr T Lewis asked what the impact would be, should one of the participating councils withdraw from the deal. In response, Cllr Fuller referred members to Appendix D of the report, and the letter received from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, where it clearly stated that the deal was on the basis of the twelve participating councils giving consent. The Monitoring Officer advised that she understood that the current deal would fall, should any one of the participating councils vote against. She was unable to confirm whether a further offer would be forthcoming from the Secretary of State, should the current deal fall through.

With regard to a further question from Cllr Lewis regarding the political make-up of the Scrutiny Committee of the new combined authority, the Monitoring Officer explained that the details would form part of the final Order. However, she understood that political balance would be required, based on the political control of each of the participating authorities. Cllr C Kemp explained that this system had been adopted for the appointment of members on the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
Cllr T Lewis asked how the combined authority would operate, when dealing with issues such as transport and roads, where they would inevitably overlap in to those areas in Norfolk where councils had opted out of the deal. Cllr Fuller acknowledged that it would be more advantageous to all, if all councils in Norfolk were part of the deal, but they currently were not. It would not be easy, but under the strong leadership of the Mayor, the new authority would need to look beyond administrative boundaries, and concentrate on delivering what was good for the people in area.

The question and answer session then closed, and the Council agreed that standing orders be reinstated.

Cllr M Gray then addressed the Council. He recognised that there were many benefits to the deal, but he felt there to be flaws too. He referred to the proposed combined authority as a piece meal approach, and he considered a full review of local government to be preferable. He was disappointed that the proposals made no mention of the environment, or sustainable growth, and with eleven of the participating councils being conservative controlled, he felt that the makeup of the new combined authority would not reflect the political opinion of local people. He considered the proposals to be unstable, unsustainable and unrepresentative, and he could not support the report recommendations.

Cllr Lewis stated that he would not be supporting the progression of the deal. He expressed concern with regard to the proposed political make up of the new authority, in particular the Scrutiny Committee, and was concerned for those residents living in areas where the local council had opted out of the deal, noting that these residents were deprived of the opportunity to vote for any new regional mayor. He had noted the results of the MORI IPOS survey, but he felt that this had failed to raise relevant issues and had avoided difficult questions. Despite this, he stressed that the Liberal Democrat Group was not against devolution, and would be willing to play a part in moving forward to an alternative deal / system, should the current proposals fall through.

Cllr P Hardy explained that he would be supporting the recommendation to proceed with the deal, as it was in the best interests of the people and businesses in Norfolk to do so. Cllr K Mason Billig also expressed support for the deal, and stressed the importance of doing what was best for the residents of South Norfolk. She urged members not to be influenced by the decision of King’s Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council that had, it was reported, voted against the recommendations earlier that evening. Cllr C Kemp also expressed his support for the proposals and Cllr J Savage felt that as member for Harleston, which fell in the Waveney Valley and bordered Suffolk, it would be a derogation of duty to vote against the proposals. Cllr J Hornby spoke of the great benefits devolution would bring to the region and he commended the proposals to Council.

Cllr Fuller was disappointed to learn that members in King’s Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council had voted against the proposals, earlier that evening. But he felt there to be a moral purpose in continuing to support the deal, a moral case for growing the economy, providing jobs, and building homes and infrastructure for the residents of South Norfolk. He called upon the Government to recognise and reward those authorities that were still in the “coalition of the willing”, so that Norfolk was not left in the slow lane.

With 31 votes in favour, and 2 against, it was
RESOLVED: To

1. Conclude that the establishment of a Mayoral Combined Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk is the option which most fully permits the effective discharge of the functions that Government is prepared to devolve to this area, on the basis of the earlier Governance Review (Appendix B to the 30th June Council papers), Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and the results of the consultation.

2. Authorise the Chief Executive to consent to the Council being included in an Order that will be laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to create the Norfolk and Suffolk Combined Authority, such Order to:
   • Establish a Norfolk and Suffolk Combined Authority and specify the high level constitutional arrangements;
   • Confer functions on the Norfolk and Suffolk Combined Authority; and
   • Specify those functions exercisable by the Mayor

3. Agree that in the event that any minor drafting changes are required to reflect legislative requirements and the contents of the Deal Agreement, to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and agreement with the other Chief Executives/Managing Directors of the Constituent Councils across Norfolk and Suffolk to make the necessary changes to the Order

4. To continue to consider and receive further reports as the Devolution process progresses

(The meeting concluded at 8.17 p.m.)