Localism Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Localism Committee of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Tuesday 24 July 2012 at 2.00 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors M Wilby (Chairman), P Allen, D Bills, M Edney, B Riches

Apologies: Councillors J Overton, B Spratt

Substitutes: Councillors L Neal (for J Overton) and A Pond (for B Spratt)

Officers in Attendance: The Communities Manager, the Consultant (IM), the Compliance and Risk Manager and the Communications Manager

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following member declared an other interest in the matter listed below.

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<th>Minute No.</th>
<th>Councillor</th>
<th>Reason for Declaration</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>P Allen</td>
<td>Chair of SNYA Executive Board</td>
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2 YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD, YOUR CHOICE

The Council’s Consultant introduced the report, advising members that the purpose of the Localism Committee would be to look ahead to the localism work planned across the Council. The current focus, however, was the recent community empowerment work – Your Neighbourhood, Your Choice. The Chairman asked each of the Neighbourhood Board Chairmen (or their substitutes) for their thoughts.

Cllr D Bills (Chairman of the Northern River Valleys Neighbourhood Board) advised the Committee that he was pleased that the Cabinet had agreed the funding to the service enhancements and social action projects as proposed by the five Neighbourhood Boards as a result of the Your Neighbourhood, Your Choice programme. He advised members that the Northern River Valleys Board had been working on the home help scheme, and also working towards the development of a footpath at Queens Hills. Cllr Bills confirmed that he was the Cabinet member involved with the Hethel Engineering Centre, and would be involved in meetings with them in the coming weeks. Members were advised that the Northern River Valleys Neighbourhood Board was currently without representatives from Bawburgh and Marlingford.
Cllr M Edney (Chairman of Tiffey Valley Neighbourhood Board) confirmed that the Board had recently been joined by two new members: Mr D Myers of Wymondham College, and Mr M Webb of Runhall Parish Council. Cllr Edney added that he was looking forward to the coming year and delivering the community empowerment programme.

Cllr L Neal (substituting for Cllr J Overton, Chairman of the Eastern River Valleys Neighbourhood Board) advised the Committee that she was pleased with the Cabinet’s resolution to agree the package of proposals and commitment of the necessary resources to enable delivery of the service enhancements and social action projects. Cllr Neal informed members that the Board had a good relationship with Framingham Earl High School and had received some good feedback following the use of the SAM machine outside the school.

Cllr B Riches (Chairman of the Waveney Valley Neighbourhood Board) confirmed that the recent meeting of the Board went very well, and that they were looking forward to the meeting of the Harleston Business Forum in September.

Cllr A Pond (Vice-Chairman of the Tas Valley Neighbourhood Board) reported to the Committee that the Board had a full complement of members at this time. The Board had been asked by some of the Parish Council members for training on the SAM machine, which was encouraging and the equipment was very exciting.

Cllr P Allen advised the Committee that she was a member of the Neighbourhood Board Review Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and had attended seven of the last ten Boards. Cllr Allen felt that the quality of the meetings had improved during the time she had been attending, and she congratulated the Neighbourhood Officers in this regard. She advised members that the Task and Finish Group would be meeting for the last time shortly and would be recommending a number of changes which she hoped would be agreed by the Cabinet and welcomed by the Neighbourhood Team and members of the Boards.

The Council’s Consultant confirmed that the recommendations of the Neighbourhood Board Review Task and Finish Group would be taken to a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of 5 September, and would then be presented to the Cabinet on 17 September 2012. He informed the Committee that the members of the Task and Finish Group had worked hard and received a lot of evidence and that their intention, when making the recommendations, was to make membership of the Boards more representative, to make the Boards more relevant and to enable them to deliver on the new neighbourhood agenda. Cllr Allen added that the Task and Finish Group had been made up of ‘fast-thinkers’ and had been a positive experience.

Members discussed the issue of young people within the approximate age range of 14-20 in the District and the problems when catering for, and engaging with, this group. Whilst members appreciated that the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and Suffolk and Norfolk Youth Action (SNYA) worked with young people in this age group, there was still much to be done in terms of engagement with the Council. The Communities Manager advised members that young people were not likely to be drawn to the Neighbourhood Boards but there were other ways to engage with this group including attending schools and community groups (scouts etc) as well as meeting those young people out and about in the evenings. Cllr Allen informed members that SNYA’s service level agreement with the Council required its engagement with Neighbourhood Boards, and further it was planned that there would be a meeting of young people in each Neighbourhood Board area at around the same time as the Neighbourhood Boards. Funding was also in place for ten central meetings at Diss Business Centre. It had been recommended that these meetings should not always be made up of the same young people.
With regard to the membership of Neighbourhood Boards, the Committee was advised by the Compliance and Risk Manager that it was necessary for Declarations of Interest to be made by community representatives. She assured members that such declarations would not be made public but it was important that the forms were completed and held by the Council for the sake of transparency. The Compliance and Risk Manager confirmed that she would be available if any members or community representatives wished to seek advice in this respect.

There was a general discussion about the branding of the Neighbourhood Boards generally with some members feeling that many members of the public did not know the name of the Neighbourhood Board in their area. Some Committee members questioned whether the names of the Neighbourhood Boards should be changed. There was a general consensus that although the Neighbourhood Boards had been working well, they would benefit from an improvement in marketing. The issue of engaging with and motivating parish councils was also discussed as this was considered to be a problem for some areas. The Communications Manager suggested that following the outcome of the Neighbourhood Board Review, the branding of the Boards could be looked at with an aim to making improvements.

Members went on to discuss the success of the community empowerment pilot scheme and were advised that it had gone well, with only a very small number of ‘hiccups’ which had been resolved along the way. The Committee generally felt that in future it would be beneficial for Neighbourhood Boards to have more freedom to concentrate on their own areas rather than being constrained by the confines of the categories prescribed this year – one suggestion being that the Participatory Budgeting questionnaires should be area-specific. It was also suggested that the scheme could include ‘projects’ as well as service enhancements as certain services were difficult to enhance, and it would not be desirable to keep spending on the same services every year. The Council’s consultant referred to the need to use the current profile information for each neighbourhood, together with local knowledge and other survey information, to build a picture of the neighbourhood. That should give a fair and objective view of the key issues within the neighbourhood, to help make decisions on priorities.

The Committee discussed the funding of capital projects through the Grants Panel, and the relationship between these applications and the services being funded by Neighbourhood Boards. There was some support for the concept of absorbing the work of the Grants Panel into the Neighbourhood Boards, providing that consistency across the Boards could be ensured.

The Chairman summarised the discussion, advising members that the Your Neighbourhood, Your Choice pilot scheme had worked well, had made a good start, and he hoped that this could be continued and ‘opened up’ next year, with more freedom and flexibility for the Neighbourhood Boards in terms of engaging, spending and delivering. The Chairman noted that all the Board Chairmen were keen to start working on proposals for next year, and proposed that the Committee should meet in October, to make an early start on that work.

RESOLVED:

To note the progress made so far on Your Neighbourhood, Your Choice, and make suggestions for future improvements as detailed above.
3 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme was noted. Members agreed that there should be an additional meeting to be held on Tuesday 2 October 2012 at 1.30 pm.

The meeting closed at 3.35 pm

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Chairman