CONCURRENT SESSION OF THE SCRUTINITY COMMITTEE
AND ACCOUNTS, AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a concurrent session of the Scrutiny Committee and the Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 25 January 2012 at 9.30 am.

Scrutiny Committee
Councillors M Dewsbury (Chairman), T Blowfield, F Ellis, C Foulger, J Hardinge, T Lewis, B McClenning, L Neal, A Pond and G Watt.

Members Present:
J Hardinge, T Lewis, B McClenning, L Neal, A Pond and G Watt.

Apologies:
Councillor M Windridge.

Substitutes:
Councillor W Kemp (for M Windridge).

Accounts, Audit & Governance Committee
Councillors C Kemp, K Billig, D Goldson, T Lewis and R Savage. Mr A Squirrell.

Members Present:

Apologies:
Councillor D Blake.

Substitutes:
Councillor L Webster (for D Blake).

Cabinet Members in attendance:
Councillors Y Bendle, D Bills, K Kiddie and G Wheatley.

Also in attendance:
Councillors K Weeks and M Gray.

Officers in Attendance:
The Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive, the Efficiency and Improvement Manager, the Scrutiny Officer, the UNISON Branch Secretary, and for part of the meeting: the Solicitor to the Council.

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR MEETING

Cllr C Kemp informed the Committee that he was happy for Cllr M Dewsbury to chair the meeting.

Cllr Dewsbury welcomed Members and explained the procedure for the meeting, advising that the Business Case would be discussed in private session.
2 SHARED SERVICES / PARTNERSHIP WORKING – LEGAL SERVICES

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the public part of the report, advising Members that a key factor of the proposal for South Norfolk Council to join nplaw was resilience. He explained that having access to a large legal team would resolve the current issues where the Council’s solicitors, specialised in certain areas, took annual leave or were unavailable when needed. He stressed that joining nplaw would improve the efficiency and flexibility of the service and also would give the Council access to a wider range of skills.

The Efficiency and Improvement Manager reported that she had consulted with the legal team, service users, parish councils and other Norfolk authorities when preparing the Business Case. In addition, research had been undertaken into other authorities who had joined nplaw, which had given a valuable insight into the process and an understanding of the experiences of other service users.

In responding to various matters raised in the report, the Solicitor to the Council felt that the balance of administration and professional work undertaken by his legal team was satisfactory due to the advances in IT. He also commented on the resilience of the service in relation to future retirements, stating that this had been handled well with a previous retirement in the team. He suggested that most services at some time were faced with dealing with retirements of employees.

The Chairman invited Mr P Grant, the UNISON Branch Secretary to give his comments. Mr P Grant explained that Unison were satisfied with the contents of the Business Case.

It was agreed that members of the legal team would leave the meeting before discussion turned to the Business Case. It was then proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following discussion involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

The Efficiency and Improvement Manager presented the Business Case, advising Members of her research and stating the available options for the future of the Council’s legal service provision. Considerable discussion followed, during which Officers responded to various points raised in the Business Case and answered Members’ questions.

After voting, it was (unanimously by both committees)

RESOLVED: To:

i. Endorse the Business Case and recommend it to Cabinet and Council, in light of the comments made by the joint Committees.
ii. To recommend to Cabinet that an effective Change Management Plan be put in place.

(The meeting concluded at 11.32 am)

Chairman