SPECIAL MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 20 February 2012 at 2.00p.m.

Committee Members Present:
Councillors  M Dewsbury, (Chairman), T Blowfield, F Ellis, C Foulger, T Lewis, B McClenning, L Neal, A Pond and G Watt

Apologies:
Councillors  J Hardinge and M Windridge

Substitute:
Councillor  L Dale

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

Also in attendance:
Councillors  M Edney, D Goldson, R Savage, B Spratt and K Weeks

Officers in Attendance:  The Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive and the Scrutiny Officer.

1027 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared an interest in the matters listed below. Unless indicated otherwise, they remained in the meeting.

<table>
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<th>Councillor</th>
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<td>Cllr L Dale</td>
<td>1028</td>
<td>Personal Interest – Member is a Trustee of Hethersett Youth Club.</td>
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1028 CALL IN OF “COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT” DELIVERING THE LOCALISM AGENDA IN SOUTH NORFOLK

The Chairman outlined the details of the call-in and explained the procedure for the meeting, referring Members to page 178 of the Cabinet agenda. She advised the Committee that the suspensive and non-suspensive call-ins would be treated as two separate issues so that the debate could be focussed.
Suspensive Call-In

Cllr T Lewis introduced the suspensive call-in and outlined the specific reasons for the call in which were:

1. A sum of £560,000 is allocated for 2012-13. The report (page 196) foresees that this is in fact unlikely to be spent in that year, and that carry-forwards will arise (and should be permitted). Thus, if the pilot scheme survives into a second year, the sums available will be £800,000 plus any sums carried forwards. It is submitted that it is doubtful that the capacity will exist at neighbourhood level to deliver worthwhile projects of these values in that time.

2. While a justification is made to the division of funds between boards, other criteria could be suggested - in particular, a deprivation element has been suggested. However, it is submitted that, in the early stages, the process should be more demand-led. If one board can put forward a supportable scheme that would take it beyond its funding allocation, while other boards are unable to use their allocations on supportable schemes, then that is how it should be. The price of local participation is that response may well be slow and patchy - for instance, to try to compel volunteering is self-contradictory.

Therefore, the callers-in propose instead:
(a) that the sum allocated for 2012-13 is reduced from £560,000 to £440,000.
(b) that each board be allocated the same amount of certain funding of £60,000, totalling £300,000.
(d) that a reserve of £140,000 be set up for in-year use, for use on a competitive basis by the boards (as a change to recommendation 2(b) of the Cabinet's decision on Agenda item 8 regarding the Revenue Budget and Council Tax for 2012-13).
(e) that the basis for allocations for 2013 onwards be decided as part of the next budget process should the scheme continue.

The Chairman reminded Members that the report had been scrutinised by the Committee in early December and several briefings had taken place before it had been agreed by Cabinet.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the intention of the scheme was not to grant funding for projects, but to provide funding to commission services, the majority of which would be utilising existing bodies and attracting more volunteers.

In response to a query as to how the figures stated in Appendix B were calculated, the Chief Executive advised Members that the calculations were based on 30% of the New Homes Bonus. She advised that a higher percentage had been lobbied by Members but 30% had been deemed safe and fair, and would meet expectations in a balanced way.

During discussion, the Deputy Chief Executive clarified the ground rule that there would be a cap of 50% of neighbourhood funding being committed beyond one year at any one time.

Cllr Lewis spoke of his concerns regarding the allocation of funding, and the ability to spend the funding available in the pilot year. He stated that it would be better to respond to needs rather than to allocate set funds to areas. He also queried the pilot status of the scheme, concerned that services could be set up as part of the pilot which would then need to end if the scheme was not successful.
The Chief Executive assured Members that some parish clerks, community representatives, and parish councillors had attended a meeting where the scheme had been positively received. She confirmed that the feedback had been one of excitement that parish councils might be enabled to influence services in their local areas, further adding that all parish representatives had been invited to attend Neighbourhood Board meetings to discuss their own localised needs. She confirmed that it had been set up as a pilot so that ground rules could be set and the scheme tested.

In response to the suggestion that a deprivation element could be taken into account, Members were advised, and noted, that the difference in allocation would be minimal. A brief discussion followed during which Members agreed that using the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) figures would give the most useful calculation of allocation, and would also allow for forward planning.

Members voted 7 votes to 3 to reject the recommendations of the call-in. It was noted that the basis for allocations for 2013 onwards be decided as part of the next budget process should the scheme continue, as a matter of course.

RESOLVED

To support Cabinet’s recommendation regarding funding allocation as set on the revised version of Appendix B on page 190 of the 6 February 2012 Cabinet agenda.

Non-Suspensive Call-In

Cllr T Lewis introduced the non-suspensive call-in and outlined the specific reasons for the call in which were:

The callers-in submit that the matters still unresolved concerning the pilot are substantial enough to make it sensible for issues to be brought back to the Scrutiny family for debate before submission to May Council, rather than being delegated to the Chief Executive and the portfolio holder. Any constitutional change should first go before Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee, as should any other governance issue. Given the objective of finalisation at the May 22nd Council meeting and the lack of any planned meeting of Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee between 15th March (which may be too early) and 22nd May, a special meeting may be needed.

Discussions at Cabinet, Group Meetings and the 'launch meeting' on 8th February have teased out issues that would benefit from clarification and debate at either the OSC or main Scrutiny. These include the following (and other issues may arise):

- Clarification re Appendix C, One-off payments of the different routes and different criteria for capital grants
- Clarification re Appendix C, One-off payments, as to how the example given of the purchase of a lawnmower could be 'of a revenue nature'
- Discussion as to whether the Grants panel should retain a separate identity
- Procedures and entitlement where a proposal affects more than one (but not all) Board area (the suggested in-year reserve may be helpful)
- Clarification regarding projects that seek to compensate for the withdrawal of a service by another provider, especially the County Council
Clarification of the ability for a project to be funded in year 1 for year 2 as well, noting that it is expected that many projects will not get to the stage of funding release until towards the end of year 1.

Further to the above, suggesting that, even though the scheme is a pilot, schemes should be allowed to seek security of funding (possibly subject to reviews) for up to three years.

Officers clarified each of the points raised in the call-in and Members were satisfied with the responses.

Members discussed the need for a special meeting of the Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee and agreed that there were no current issues around governance which would require a special meeting. The Chairman assured Members that Localism was on the agenda of every scheduled meeting of the Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee so was satisfied that any issues would be addressed as they arose.

In response to a query concerning the differences between Capital Grants dealt with by the Grants Panel and the Neighbourhood Boards pilot scheme, it was confirmed that the pilot scheme was not a grant scheme where applicants bid for capital, but a scheme to commission services. It was agreed that there should be a thorough understanding of the two concepts so that confusion could be avoided, and that literature giving information on the scheme should be scrutinised by volunteers from the Scrutiny Committee outside of the formal committee process.

After a brief discussion, it was:

RESOLVED To endorse the Cabinet decisions C and D, that further amendments that become necessary be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the portfolio holder until final arrangements are agreed at full Council in May 2012.

(The meeting concluded at 3.35 p.m.)

Chairman