Scrutiny Committee

Members of the Scrutiny Committee:

Mrs M Dewsbury (Chairman)
Mr T Lewis (Vice Chairman)
Mr T Blowfield
Mrs F Ellis
Mr C Foulger
Ms J Hardinge
Mr R McClenning
Mrs L Neal
Mr A Pond
Mr G J Watt
Mr M Windridge

Group Meetings

Conservatives:
Blomefield Room 9.00 am

Liberal Democrats:
Kett Room 9.00 am

If any member of the public wishes to speak on a non-confidential item, they may do so at the discretion of the Chairman

Agenda

Date
Wednesday 11 April 2012

Time
9.30 am

Place
Colman & Cavell Rooms
South Norfolk House
Long Stratton
Norwich
Norfolk
NR15 2XE

Contact
Caroline Heasley tel (01508) 533685
South Norfolk District Council
Swan Lane
Long Stratton Norwich
NR15 2XE

Email: democracy@s-norfolk.gov.uk

If you have any special requirements in order to attend this meeting, please let us know in advance

Large print version can be made available

10/04/2012
AGENDA

At the discretion of the Chairman, a short break will be taken after the meeting has been running for approximately two hours.

1. To report apologies for absence and to identify substitute members;

2. Any items of business which the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act, 1972. Urgent business may only be taken if, "by reason of special circumstances" (which will be recorded in the minutes), the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion that the item should be considered as a matter of urgency;

3. To Receive Declarations of Interest from Members;
   (Please see guidance form and flow chart attached – page 5)

4. To confirm the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 25 January 2012, 8 February 2012 and 20 February 2012 and also the minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and the Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee held on 25 January 2012 (both public and exempt minutes);
   (attached – page 7)

5. Development Management Policy DPD
   (oral update)

9.40 am

6. Scrutiny Annual Report
   (report attached – page 21)

9.55 am

7. Procurement Strategy
   (report attached – page 35)

10.10 am

8. Cabinet Decision following Scrutiny Committee recommendations

10.30 am

At its meeting on 26 March 2012, Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee arising from the call-in (both suspensive and non-suspensive) of the “Community Empowerment” Delivering the Localism Agenda in South Norfolk. Scrutiny made the following recommendations:

Regarding the suspensive call-in:

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.

Regarding the non-suspensive call-in

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.
Cabinet made the following decision:

**RESOLVED:** To endorse the resolution of the Scrutiny Committee regarding the call in of “Community Empowerment” Delivering the Localism Agenda in South Norfolk.

9. **Scrutiny, Overview Sub-Committees’, Accounts, Audit & Governance Committee Work Programmes and Cabinet Core Agenda** (attached – page 40) (10.40 am)
Working Style of the Scrutiny Committee and Overview Sub-Committees

Independence
Members of the Scrutiny Committee and Overview Sub-Committees will not be subject to whipping arrangements by party groups.

Member leadership
Members of the Committees will take the lead in selecting topics for and in questioning witnesses. The Committees will expect members of Cabinet, rather than officers, to take the main responsibility for answering the Committee's questions about topics, which relate mainly to the Council's activities.

A constructive atmosphere
Meetings of the Committees will be constructive, and not judgmental, accepting that effective overview and scrutiny is best achieved through challenging and constructive enquiry. People giving evidence at the Committees should not feel under attack.

Respect and trust
Meetings will be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and trust.

Openness and transparency
The Committees’ business will be open and transparent, except where there are sound reasons for protecting confidentiality. In particular, the minutes of the Committee’s meetings will explain the discussion and debate, so that it could be understood by those who were not present.

Consensus
Members of the Committees will work together and, while recognising political allegiances, will attempt to achieve consensus and agreed recommendations.

Impartial and independent officer advice
Officers who advise and support the Committees will give impartial and independent advice, recognising the importance of the Scrutiny Committee and the Overview Sub-Committees in the Council’s arrangements for governance, as set out in the Constitution.

Regular review
There will be regular reviews of how the overview and scrutiny process is working, and a willingness to change if it is not working well.

Programming and planning
The Scrutiny Committee will have a programme of work, in conjunction with the Overview Sub-Committees. The Committee will agree the topics to be included in the work programme, the extent of the investigation to be undertaken in relation to resources, and the witnesses to be invited to give evidence.

Managing time
The Committees will attempt to conclude the business of each meeting in reasonable time. The order of business will be arranged as far as possible to minimise the demands on the time of witnesses.
AGENDA ITEM 3

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AT MEETINGS

When declaring an interest at a meeting Members are asked to indicate whether the interest is a personal one only or one which is also prejudicial. The declaration should indicate the nature of the interest and the agenda item to which it relates. In the case of a personal interest, the member may speak and vote. If it is a prejudicial interest, a member has the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public but must then withdraw from the meeting. A member can participate fully where the interest is shared with the majority of residents in that particular ward. Members are also requested when appropriate to make any declarations under the Code of Practice on Planning and Judicial matters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is (or should) the Interest be registered in the Register of Members’ Interests?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If not, whose well being or financial position is affected to a greater extent than the majority of other people in the ward?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any person or body who has employed or appointed your family member/close associate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any firm in which your family member/close associate is a partner or company of which they are directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any company in which your family member/close associate has shares with a face value more than £25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any of the following in which you hold a position of general control or management: outside organisations, other public authorities, charities, pressure groups, political parties or trade unions</td>
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<tr>
<th>Does the interest:</th>
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<tr>
<td>(a) affect your financial position or the financial position of a person or body described above?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) relate to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or any person or body described above?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) relate to scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny committee of a decision you were party to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) relate to the functions of the council in respect of housing (except your tenancy), statutory sick pay, an allowance, payment or indemnity given to members, any ceremonial honour given to members, or setting the council tax or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PREJUDICIAL INTEREST

If you answered Yes to (a) or (b) is the interest one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest? \(\text{If Yes the interest is PREJUDICIAL}\)

If you answered Yes to (c) the interest is PREJUDICIAL

If prejudicial do you intend to attend the meeting to make representations, answer questions or give evidence?

FOR GUIDANCE REFER TO THE FLOWCHART OVERLEAF
DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

What matters are being discussed at the meeting?

Do any relate to my interests?

A  Does it affect my entries in the Register of Interests?

B  Does it affect the well being or financial position of me, my family or close associates;
   my family's or close associates' employment, employers or businesses;
   companies in which they are a director or where they have a shareholding of more than £25,000 face value;
   business partnerships; or

C  Does it affect the well being or financial position of the following organisations in which I hold a position of general control or management:
   - other bodies to which I have been appointed or nominated by the council;
   - other public authorities;
   - charitable bodies;
   - bodies whose main purpose is to influence public opinion or policy

More than the majority of other people in the ward?

D  Is Overview and Scrutiny considering a decision I made?
   If so you have a prejudicial interest.

Yes

- Disclose the existence & nature of your interest

- You have a personal interest in the matter

- The interest is not prejudicial you can participate in the meeting and vote

No

- You may have a prejudicial interest

- This matter relates to
  - housing (except your tenancy)
  - statutory sick pay from the council
  - an allowance, payment or indemnity given to members
  - any ceremonial honour given to members
  - setting the council tax or a precept

- The interest is prejudicial withdraw from the meeting by leaving the room (after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence).
  Do not try to improperly influence the decision

- Would a member of the public – if he or she knew all the facts – reasonably think that personal interest was so significant that my decision on the matter would be affected by it?
The Seventh Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee
May 2011 ~ April 2012
Foreword by the Chairman

I am pleased to present my first Annual Report as Chairman of South Norfolk Council’s Scrutiny Committee.

We began the year with new chairmen for both Scrutiny and the two Overview Sub-committees and, although we were ‘finding our way’ and the responsibilities and titles of the committees changed, I think that all the committees that make up the scrutiny group have made relevant contributions to the delivery of the council objectives during the year.

Improving services, whilst looking at ways of reducing overall costs in this difficult economic climate, has been challenging for the whole council and all members and staff are to be commended for what has been achieved.

Apart from reviewing the work of other committees we have also considered changes to our own working processes and made our own systems more efficient by introducing report templates and guidelines for our new pre-scrutiny process. I believe that members have appreciated the opportunity to scrutinise reports and draft Directorate Plans before they are considered by Cabinet or Council and that the pre-scrutiny process will in future reduce the number of call-ins.

I would like to thank all the officers who contribute the information and research needed for our work, particularly our Scrutiny Officer, Emma Nangle and Mike Nott our Performance and Business Planning Manager, who retired recently, for providing clear and concise quarterly reports plus a wealth of supporting information. I’m sure we will miss his contribution to our work.

I commend this Report to the Council.

Cllr. Margaret Dewsbury  
Chairman, Scrutiny Committee  
30th March 2012
Scrutiny Structure

Scrutiny at South Norfolk Council is largely carried out by the Scrutiny Committee and its two sub-committees. The work of these committees is outlined below:

**Scrutiny Committee**
Scrutiny Committee investigates issues that are covered by the External Affairs Portfolio, Organisational Efficiency and Shared Services Portfolio and the Corporate Resources and Governance Portfolio. In addition, Scrutiny Committee considers topics that cross the boundaries of portfolio accountability. The Committee considers issues such as economic development, shared services, IT, property, accountancy and income.

**Public Protection and Environment Overview Sub-Committee**
This Sub-Committee deals with the Cabinet Portfolio of Public Protection and Environment. This Committee covers development control, design and conservation, food safety, environmental health and protection, and recycling and refuse collecting.

**Localism and Neighbourhoods Overview Sub-Committee**
The Localism and Neighbourhoods OSC covers the Cabinet Portfolio of Localism. The Sub-Committee considers topics such as leisure centres, public health promotion, community development, Council tax and benefits.

In addition, the Council’s Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee carries out a scrutiny function and considers the Head of Internal Audit’s annual report and opinion, summaries of specific internal audit reports and agreed recommendations that are not implemented in the agreed timescale. The Committee’s Terms of Reference have been expanded this year to also included Governance arrangements throughout the Council, which was previously carried out by Scrutiny Committee.

The Work of Scrutiny over the Year

There have been a number of areas of work carried out by Scrutiny throughout 2011/12. These include:

- Holding Cabinet to account
- Business Planning and Budget 2011/12
- Performance Monitoring
- Scrutiny Committee
- Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups
- Overview Sub-Committees
Holding Cabinet to account

A summary of decisions made by Cabinet is published immediately after each meeting of Cabinet. Any three members of the Council may “call-in” a decision for Scrutiny to consider, which effectively means the decision is delayed until Scrutiny can examine the decision at its next meeting. After examination, Scrutiny can decide to recommend an alternative option or endorse the decision of the Cabinet.

Members called-in three decisions made by Cabinet in the last 12 months, which related to the waste collection and recycling service, the potential for shared legal services and delivering localism in South Norfolk.

The first call-in was considered in June 2011 and arose from a report that was considered by Cabinet regarding proposed action to improve the efficiency and reduce the annual cost of the waste collection and recycling service. Discussion centred on whether the recycling target of 40% was ambitious enough. Members also discussed the level of satisfaction of the service, which was relatively high. The Committee concluded by endorsing the Cabinet decision, however recommended that Cabinet reviewed the recycling target in light of additional information of potential investment and costs required to achieve higher targets (for example, what it would cost the Council to achieve a figure of 45%). Scrutiny Committee also recommended that Cabinet take steps in order to increase the number of residents that pay for the brown bin recycling service by direct debit, which is less expensive for the Council. Cabinet considered the recommendations of Scrutiny and accepted them. The Public Protection and Environment OSC will consider this issue again at its meeting in mid April 2012, to consider progress towards the recycling target.

The Committee was required to consider its second call-in at its September meeting. This related to the Council’s consideration of the possibility of joining nplaw in order to share legal services. Members were particularly concerned that the Council was only pursuing nplaw and that no alternative options were being investigated. Members were keen for further options to be explored and considered that without a full analysis, the Council should not be favouring one option at an early stage. Scrutiny Committee therefore recommended to Council that it authorised the production of a business case that reflected both keeping and closing the Council’s legal service, stressing that it should review other options in the process. The Committee also recommended that at this early stage the Council simply noted a preference for becoming a member of nplaw. Scrutiny Committee was keen for the business case to be brought to a future meeting, ahead of consideration by Cabinet. The business case
was considered by a joint meeting of Scrutiny Committee and Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee in February, which is detailed later in this report.

The final call-in of the year concerned the Council’s delivery of the Government’s localism agenda. The Cabinet had agreed a new Scheme which proposed to expand the role of the Council’s Neighbourhood Boards in order to get closer to communities to enable them to influence and improve service delivery and increase social capital. The report also set out how the scheme would be funded (by the new homes bonus, second homes monies and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and how this funding would be distributed amongst the Neighbourhood Boards. The callers-in made alternative proposals regarding the funding of the pilot scheme, which would have resulted in a decrease in overall funding. Scrutiny Committee considered the alternative proposals, however, concluded to endorse the decision of Cabinet and retain the level of funding set and its distribution.

The callers-in also sought further clarity regarding the scheme, which was provided at the meeting. Members were satisfied with the clarification that was received and felt that no further action was necessary. Members were keen that officers should ensure that the new concept of the scheme be communicated clearly and officers were asked to consult volunteer members of Scrutiny Committee to approve further communication on the scheme. Cabinet endorsed the resolution of Scrutiny Committee.
Business Planning and Budget 2012/13

Once again, Scrutiny Committee and the OSCs have been involved in the business planning and budget process. Each Committee looks at the specific budgets and performance measures related to its area of the Council. Input from members was sought, after staff were consulted in order to identify key outcomes and potential savings within their own teams.

Scrutiny Committee and the OSCs considered the draft Directorate Plans throughout October and November 2011, and were asked to focus on budgets within each team. Members commented on the outcomes, which reflect the priority areas of the Council, and the savings which had been put forward. Final Plans were placed before Committees during January 2012, when members where asked to comment on the performance measures that had been set for each service that will be used throughout the year to monitor progress towards the key actions and as a mechanism to report back to Committee. Members congratulated officers on the clear and concise plans that had been prepared and made suggestions and amendments as appropriate.

The Scrutiny Committee also commented on the Council's 2012/13 budget at its meeting on 8 February 2012. Feedback obtained from Committee earlier in the year was used to assist the formulation of the 2012/13 Budget and the rationale for savings. Scrutiny recommended to Council that the budget be approved. Members praised officers for the savings that had been identified throughout the year to be incorporated into the budget process. Members noted that staff were continually identifying savings and that this would continue in the next financial year, assisted by Lean Lite reviews.

Performance Monitoring

The process of performance monitoring has changed this year, which has resulted in a greater emphasis on Scrutiny. The scheduling of the Scrutiny and Overview Sub Committees has been altered so that they coincide with the quarterly performance reporting, which means that members are considering information that is up-to-date. This in turn gives Scrutiny greater influence by allowing members to deal with any issues as they arise, which was not always possible when quarterly performance was reported near the end of the proceeding quarter.

In addition, the performance reports are now received by Scrutiny and the Overview Sub Committees before they are considered by Cabinet. The result of which is that scrutiny is able to make Cabinet aware of any issues that they may have arising in relation to performance so that these may be addressed in a timely and efficient manner.
Membership of the Scrutiny Committee 2011/12

Conservatives
Margaret Dewsbury (Chairman)
Terry Blowfield
Florence Ellis
Colin Foulger
Lisa Neal
Andrew Pond (replaced Keith Weeks)
Michael Windridge

Liberal Democrats
Vivienne Bell (replaced Gerry Watt)
Murray Gray
Trevor Lewis (Vice-Chairman)
Bob McClennning

Partnership Overview 2012/13

Scrutiny Committee considered an overview of the partnerships that the Council is involved in and how these would be reviewed in the coming years. Members were asked to consider the future scrutiny of partnership funding on a thematic basis, which would result in Committees receiving a number of partnership reviews on one topic – such as community transport; the local economy and tourism; and welfare. It is hoped that this new approach will enable the public and members to gain a greater understanding of how the Council addresses specific issues in the District. Members endorsed this new approach, which will be implemented later in 2012.

Chairman of the Council

The Committee considered a report that reviewed the role of the Chairman of the Council. Officers had drafted a handbook to be used as a guide for future Chairmen, which explained the complexities of the role, what is expected and the various events attended and organised by the Chairman. Members discussed the handbook in detail and endorsed its use in the coming municipal year. Members made particular comments worthy of noting including supporting the continuation of the Chairman’s charity; expressing a preference that the venue for the Civic Service should be left to the Chairman’s discretion; and noting that it was important that the Chairman was seen as the face of the Council as a whole and not just of his/her own particular ward/parishes.

Review of the South Norfolk Alliance

The Committee received a report which reviewed the South Norfolk Alliance; the Council’s Local Strategic Partnership. Members were advised that the Alliance would need to adapt in light of the changing strategic landscape, a position that all local authorities would have to tackle. Members noted that partnership working had
strengthened, however there were other opportunities outside of the Alliance for this to continue. Bearing this in mind, members discussed what the future role of the Alliance could entail. Members were keen on retaining the brand name of the South Norfolk Alliance and supported officers moving it towards a more informal, networking approach to future meetings.

**Joint Meeting**

A joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee was arranged in February 2012 to pre-scrutinise the business case regarding the Council joining nplaw. Pre-scrutiny was deemed necessary in order to fully evaluate the different options regarding whether to outsource the Council’s legal service before any decision made by Cabinet or Council. The production of a Business Case was requested as a result of a call-in in late 2011.

Members discussed the merits of each of the options available; joining nplaw, keeping the status quo or outsourcing as required. Members favoured joining nplaw as it was the most cost effective solution and members considered that the arrangement would allow the Council to receive a similar level of support to that already received. Overall, members of both Committees supported the Council joining nplaw and recommended the Business Case to Cabinet.
Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups

Scrutiny Committee is constituted to set up Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups. These Groups are set up to investigate specific issues and make subsequent recommendations, with the help of Officers and interested parties outside of the Council.

Tourism Task and Finish Group

The Tourism Task and Finish Group was established in early 2011 to consider the issues affecting the tourism industry in South Norfolk, consult appropriate stakeholders from tourism and related industries, and develop a robust strategic framework to direct the tourism-related work of South Norfolk Council over coming years. The Group consulted various key stakeholders regarding tourism in the District to establish what was required from such a Strategy. A draft Strategy was brought before the Group in June for their comments, after which it received the Final Strategy and accompanying Action Plan in September 2011. The Strategy set out how the Council could assist tourist businesses in partnership. Scrutiny Committee considered the Final Strategy and Action Plan in November 2011 and recommended to Council the Strategy, which was later approved.

The Link Magazine Task and Finish Group

A Task and Finish Group was established to review the Link Magazine, our community magazine for South Norfolk residents, with a view to ensuring that it retained its effective influence among residents, but was produced more economically and at a reduced cost. The Group had its first meeting in July 2011 and set out the scope of the review in relation to the specific aspects of the Magazine that required investigation. These areas included the size and quality of paper used, delivery methods, frequency and advertisements. Officers were tasked to investigate several issues further, including investigating the potential of reducing costs by using alternative paper, reducing the number of pages, using different distributors, and producing a new rate card relating to advertisements in the magazine. Officers reported back to the Group in August 2011 and found that the magazine was already being produced cost effectively, with no real savings to be identified. Members next turned to maximising income and considered the rate card that had been drafted. This sought to charge a higher rate for adverts that were placed in a prominent position in the magazine, such as the first few pages. It was estimated that this could generate up to £12,000 of additional income. The Group’s recommendations regarding the rate card were considered by Scrutiny Committee and accepted.
Overview Sub-Committees

Public Protection and Environment Overview Sub-Committee

Membership

Conservatives
Leslie Dale
Colin Gould
Colin Foulger (Chairman)
Tony Palmer
Beverley Spratt (Vice Chairman)
Laura Webster

Liberal Democrats
Murray Gray
Gerry Watt (replaced Vivienne Bell)

Independent
Keith Weeks

Review

Members considered a review of the Council’s new Planning Committees and Scheme of Delegation. Changes had been made to the Committee structure and Scheme of Delegation in order to streamline the process and decrease the number of applications that had to be determined by Committee. Members considered comparisons with other Norfolk Authorities and noted what further changes would be required in order to further limit the number of applications that went before Committee – a reduction between 40% and 60% was expected. Members welcomed the proposed changes to the Scheme of Delegation and offered a number of additional amendments, including recommending that members should make declarations of interests clearer. Members also stressed the importance of training to Parish Councillors, as they provide comments on planning applications in their Parish – particularly if they consider that the application should be determined by Committee.

Improving Service

The Committee received a report regarding communication between the Council and CNC Building Control, which carries out this function for the Council. The report was requested by members who had become concerned by building works carried out that were not in accordance with planning conditions approved by Committee. Members discussed the options available to the Council and were assured that this did not happen regularly. The Committee
concluded that introducing more site visits would be too costly and officers agreed to monitor the situation and increase the number of officer level meetings.

**Consultation**

The Committee was consulted on the Council’s response to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which considerably reduced the length of existing documentation from over 1,000 pages to 50 – making the planning system less complex and more accessible. Members considered the draft responses to the Department of Communities and Local Government’s consultation questions. Members made a number of amendments to the responses provided by officers; particularly requesting that the commitment to public transport for rural communities be strengthened and that there be an increased focus on sites of specific scientific interest. Member involvement in Council consultations ensures that the wider electorate is represented and enables specialist knowledge of members to be utilised.

**Partnership Reviews**

Members reviewed the partnerships the Council has with regard to tourism support and Tourist Information Centres. Members considered statistical data regarding the Tourist Information Centres at Harleston, Wymondham and Loddon, that the Council provided funding for. Members were generally satisfied with the evidence and asked the Tourism Task Group to consider some of the issues in more depth. Members next reviewed the level of support that the Council gave to Norfolk Tourism. Members agreed that tourism was vitally important and considered the Council should be proactive in attracting tourists and that Norfolk Tourism was an important part of that process. Members concluded that the Council could not achieve what it did alone as it did in partnership and noted the benefits to South Norfolk of the authority’s investment in Norfolk Tourism.
Shaping Policy

The Committee received the County Community Safety Partnership Plan, which outlined the work that would be carried out in the County over the next four years. Members noted that the document was not able to focus on the specific issues in South Norfolk and requested that a South Norfolk Plan be written to tackle the problem areas that were unique to the District. A draft plan was brought to a later meeting of the Committee, which addressed issues of antisocial behaviour, domestic abuse, the fear of crime and safety on roads. Members endorsed the proposed plan, hopeful that a more focussed approach would result in real improvements in the highlighted areas.

Review

The Committee received a report regarding changes to the Council’s Local Democracy Week, during which the Council plays host to hundreds of local school children and gives them a taster of democracy in action and a flavour of what the District Council does. Members were supportive of the changes that were proposed and stressed the importance of engaging with schools well in advance to get them involved. Members were also keen to be given a steer on what was expected of them so that all Councillors who would be involved were consistent in their approach, which officers agreed to do. Members also requested a review to be conducted after the event to evaluate any improvement achieved. This review was due to be considered by Committee at the end of April 2012.

Improving Council Performance

The Committee received a report that reviewed the Council’s provision of services face-to-face. Members were advised that a review of the Council Information Centre
usage had revealed that services could be delivered at a reduced cost. Members were supportive of utilising existing Council resources (eg, leisure centres) and also those of the County Council and partner agencies (eg, libraries and Citizens Advice Bureaux) to offer face-to-face services. The Committee was also keen to offer more face-to-face services through assisted self service and improve availability of services through the Council’s website. Members were supportive of this innovative approach, which they hoped would both provide a better service to the public and offer cost savings.

**Partnership Reviews**

This OSC has also reviewed a number of Council partnerships throughout the year, including INTRAN, community transport, cultural events, and physical activity referral.

Members considered the Council’s partnership with INTRAN, which provides a translation service to many public bodies throughout the region. Members discussed the cost to the Council and appreciated that it could not achieve the value of service if the Council was not in the Partnership. Members were satisfied from the evidence provided that the service was competitive and good value for money.

The Committee also considered the level of funding that the Council gave to community transport schemes. Members were advised that there were several types of community transport scheme that received discretionary funding from the Council. Members discussed the level given to the schemes and were particularly concerned by the proposed reduction in funding to Borderhoppa. Members were keen for the funding provided to Borderhoppa by the Council to be retained at the current level as it was an important service that brought people into the District, despite being recommended to introduce a reduction. Members concluded that funding of £9,000 should remain.
Continual Improvement

This year has seen the introduction of dedicated Scrutiny Report Templates and a new mechanism by which items are added to the Scrutiny Work Programmes in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the scrutiny process. The new ways of working have increased the level of input from members with regard to the content of reports and have enabled members to make informed recommendations that are credible and influential.

In addition, we have developed pre-scrutiny guidelines. Pre-scrutiny is the process by which a committee of scrutiny receives a report that is to be considered by Council or Cabinet, before a decision has been made. The appropriate Committee will make relevant recommendations to Cabinet or Council, who will take these into account when making a final decision. The Guidelines have been introduced to assist officers to determine which Cabinet reports should be pre-scrutinised, in the hope that it will increase member involvement in the matters that really affect the Council and reduce the need for call-ins.

Public Involvement

South Norfolk Council is always keen to involve the public in its Scrutiny process. If you are a member of the public and wish to raise an issue to be investigated by Scrutiny, please let us know. You can do this by contacting the Scrutiny Officer:

The Scrutiny Officer
South Norfolk Council
South Norfolk House
Swan Lane
Long Stratton, Norwich
NR15 2XE

Email: democracy@s-norfolk.gov.uk
Telephone: 01508 533747
The Procurement Strategy

Compliance and Risk Manager

The Council’s previous procurement strategy ran from 2008-2011. It set out the Council’s overall objectives for procurement, in light of the (then) ongoing activities at the Council and wider financial climate.

Since the last strategy was approved, the financial climate for local government has altered significantly. The Council’s priorities have changed, and effective and efficient procurement can act as a key driver to securing these priorities.

It is thus time to review and update the Council’s procurement strategy. This paper seeks the input of the Scrutiny Committee to the objectives and actions contained within the policy, ahead of presentation of the full strategy to Cabinet on 30 April.

1. Purpose of Overview

1.1. As set out in the introduction, the procurement strategy is now due for updating to reflect the Council’s priorities, ongoing activities and the national environment.

1.2. Members of the Scrutiny Committee may be aware that over the past 2 years, the Council has undertaken significant work to develop internal systems for procurement in light of a negative audit report provided by the Council’s Internal Auditors, and qualification of the Council’s Value for Money Conclusion by the Audit Commission for 2009/10. The work undertaken has focused on strengthening the process and internal control systems for procurement; it is now opportune, in light of the local and national environmental factors, to review the strategic approach.

1.3. The purpose of scrutiny overview is to allow the committee to input to the anticipated objectives and activities proposed for the strategy, and thus enable contribution to the design of the strategy before it is formally presented to Cabinet.
2. **Scope of Overview**

2.1. Below, we set out the context for the procurement strategy, the proposed objectives and identify the key actions to fulfil those objectives. Further detail against each area will be provided when the full strategy is finalised.

3. **The National and Local Context for the Procurement Strategy**

3.1. In forming the objectives for the strategy, we have first evaluated the key ongoing developments which impact upon procurement. A key driver for the strategy is the projected financial position for the Council, and the contribution that effective procurement can make to securing long-term financial benefits to the organisation. More specific considerations include:

- The Council’s priorities, with particular reference to promoting a thriving local economy, and driving services through being businesslike, efficient and customer aware;

- The Government’s Open Public Services White Paper and The Code of Practice on Data Transparency encourages authorities to operate procurement in an open and transparent manner, and challenge the way services are delivered;

- Community Right to Challenge within the Localism Act – this allows the community (e.g. voluntary groups) to bid to run services themselves, which would trigger a competitive procurement exercise. As a Council, we need to be able to respond to any challenges, and ensure we run our services in an efficient manner to defend against such challenges;

- The need to ensure compliance with public procurement rules, including current and forthcoming changes to the EU Procurement Rules;

- Developments such as Community Infrastructure Levy and New Homes Bonus funding which could lead to large scale procurement exercises, led by – or in partnership with – other local authority partners and/or the public sector;

- Public Services Social Value Act – this places a duty on Local Authorities to consider the local environment and economy (social wellbeing) when undertaking procurement exercises;

- Council Tax Benefit and Business Rate proposals – the changes to legislation, with schemes for Council Tax Benefit and retention of Business Rates locally, will mean that supporting the growth of the local economy will help to secure the Council’s future funding streams;

- Neighbourhood Boards – enhancing services delivered by South Norfolk – the draft ground rules recognises that this may involve specific procurement
exercises, and there will be a need to ensure such exercises are proportionate and economic to the scheme proposed.

4. Objectives for Procurement

4.1. Having thus reviewed the key developments impacting upon procurement, we have proposed 3 objectives for the strategy itself:

- Support economic development within South Norfolk
- Support change to introduce more efficient forms of service delivery
- An efficient procurement service, including engagement with other bodies

5. Activities to deliver the strategy

5.1. Against each objective, we have recognised areas to focus delivery in order to achieve the objective:

5.2. Support economic development within South Norfolk

- Spending locally – helping local businesses participate in the procurement process and become aware of our procurement process and exercises; ensuring the procurement process takes account of “social value” and local needs; balancing the requirements of localism act and community right to challenge against the need to ensure services can be delivered in an effective manner.

- Sustainability – applying the principles of eliminate – reduce – re-use – recycle – disposal when undertaking procurement; ensuring due regard is given to the local environment when undertaking procurement exercises

- Provide support to community, social enterprise groups, parish councils and voluntary groups to enable them to participate in our procurement exercises, or in undertaking exercises themselves

- Proportionate procurement – recognising the need to balance the procurement process to the goods / services being offered, e.g. through the type of information requested in the tender process. This recognises the community empowerment scheme and engaging with social enterprise

5.3. Support change to introduce more efficient forms of service delivery

- Supporting internal Council change programmes – effective procurement helps underpin our major internal change programmes. For example, the IT strategy is reliant on the procurement of modern and effective applications to deliver services.

- Challenging existing contracts and recognising the full costs of procurement – the draft EU procurement rules give greater clarity on the extent to which contracts can be modified and allow us to recognise the additional costs of
changing suppliers when reviewing tenders. As a Council, we should always seek to be challenging when reviewing existing contracts to ensure we are obtaining value from them.

- Utilisation of alternative service delivery models – taking a strategic approach as to how our services are delivered, and, for example, whether alternative models (such as a charitable trust or company) may be more beneficial

5.4. **An efficient procurement service, including engagement with other bodies**

- E-procurement – effective use of IT in our procurement to deliver savings
- Partnering and consortia arrangements – using these wherever feasible to share the cost and risk of individual procurement exercises
- Working with the third sector and voluntary sector to commission services, potentially as part of joint commissioning exercises, ensuring compliance with relevant legislation in doing so
- Rationalising our supplier base – using a sensible number of trusted and reliable suppliers, whilst maximising opportunities to reduce processes involved in procuring services (e.g. consolidated invoicing).
- Reviewing the time invested in procurement exercises to ensure the cost of undertaking procurement is proportionate; using analysis to understand how the procurement system can be improved and evolve on an ongoing basis.

6. **Relevant Corporate Priorities**

6.1. Promoting a thriving local economy.

6.2. Driving services through being businesslike, efficient and customer aware.

**Implications and Risks**

6.3. Financial – there is no direct cost arising from the procurement strategy; however, delivery of the strategy itself will help to ensure the Council obtains value for money.

6.4. Legal – in undertaking procurement exercises, the Council needs to ensure compliance with relevant procurement legislation

6.5. Environmental – the Council has a duty to consider social wellbeing, including the impact on the local environment, when undertaking procurement exercises.

6.6. Equalities – the Equalities Screening Tool has identified that the Strategy itself does not require a full assessment. Assessment may be required for individual procurement exercises; this will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

6.7. Crime Reduction – helping to promote the local economy and consider social wellbeing would help to ensure the reduction of crime within South Norfolk.
6.8. Risks – the risks associated with procurement derive from individual procurement exercises, and complying with relevant legislation or opportunity risks of failure to undertake effective and efficient procurement – which are separately recognised on the Council’s risk register. The risks with the strategy are associated with the overall corporate risk of failure to deliver corporate objectives.

7. Conclusion

7.1. The Council’s procurement strategy will be presented to Cabinet on 30 April. It includes 3 key objectives for procurement, which have been identified in light of the national and local environment, and identifies key actions to be undertaken to ensure delivery of the strategy.

8. Action Required

8.1. The Committee is requested to review the proposed objectives and actions for the procurement strategy, and assess whether these are supported or alternative / additional objectives or actions would be preferable.