SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 11 April 2012 at 9.30 am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors M Dewsbury, (Chairman), T Blowfield, F Ellis, C Foulger, J Hardinge, T Lewis, A Pond, M Windridge

Apologies: Councillors V Bell, L Neal

Substitutes: Councillor A Palmer (for L Neal)

Cabinet Members in attendance: Councillors Y Bendle, K Kiddie, G Wheatley

Officers in Attendance: The Deputy Chief Executive, the Scrutiny Officer, the Planning Policy Manager, and the Compliance & Risk Manager

1029 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of Scrutiny Committee held on 25 January 2012, 8 February 2012 and 20 February 2012, and the minutes of the joint meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee held on 25 January 2012 were agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1030 MATTERS ARISING

Arising from minute 1028 of the Scrutiny Committee held on 20 February 2012, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that he had been invited to the next meeting of the Grants Panel to clarify the difference between Capital Grants (dealt with by the Grants Panel) and the services to be funded by the Neighbourhood Boards pilot scheme.

Arising from minute 2 of the Joint Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and the Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee held on 25 January 2012, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that following staff consultation in February/March this year, and a number of meetings between the legal staff and Unison, the legal team had now transferred, and were employed by nplaw, but would physically remain in South Norfolk House until later in April. The Chairman confirmed that the Scrutiny Committee would be reviewing how the new arrangements were operating in December 2012.
1031 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICY DPD UPDATE

The Planning Policy Manager updated members on the latest position, confirming that progress had been made, with the latest stage of consultation recently completed. Members were advised that there had been over sixty respondents with approximately 900 comments and that these responses were now being processed.

The next steps would be to take the results of the public consultation to Cabinet on 30 April 2012, and to finalise the list of draft Policies required by members, followed by further consultation and preparation of draft Policies for agreement by members in the summer.

The Planning Policy Manager confirmed that it was too early at this stage to assess whether there would be any major objections to consider as draft wording had not yet been published, but that he would ensure that the draft Policies would be in line with the Council’s objectives.

RESOLVED To note the progress made with regard to the Development Management Policy DPDs

1032 SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairman thanked the Scrutiny Officer for producing the report.

Members considered the report which they were generally very happy with other than two minor amendments.

RESOLVED To endorse the Annual Report and recommend it to Council

1033 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Compliance and Risk Manager presented the report and advised members that the Procurement Strategy would be presented to the Cabinet on 30 April 2012.

Members’ attention was particularly drawn to the objectives for procurement and the activities required to deliver the strategy. Cllr T Lewis suggested that an additional objective should be inserted which would read ‘to seek to obtain best value for the Council’.

Members discussed past problems with the procurement process at the Council and the negative audit report in 2009/10. The Compliance and Risk Manager assured members that significant work had been carried out by officers in the last two years to improve and develop internal systems for procurement, which had been subject to review by the Accounts, Audit and Governance Committee.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised members that although various departments of the Council were very good at making arrangements for their own procurement of goods and services, the Council was aiming for a corporate approach, getting a better deal for the whole Council. The Deputy Chief Executive offered to email all members the Council’s current contract register.
Responding to members’ queries, the portfolio holder, Cllr G Wheatley, advised members that the strategy document would provide the principles for the procurement process while the budget process would deal with the details. He advised members that the new performance reporting system (CorVu) would enable further scrutiny of the procurement process and give additional feedback to members, enabling further challenge to procedures if necessary.

The Chairman expressed concern at the practical arrangements and whether compliance by officers could be ensured. The Deputy Chief Executive responded by assuring members that compliance was already much improved, and for example the Contract Standing Orders and a more detailed procurement manual had been developed. The Contract Standing Orders are now subject to further refinement, which are due to go to Council for approval in May 2012.

In response to members’ concerns, Cllr Wheatley assured members that managers take a prudent attitude to their budgets, and wherever possible, savings are made, and budgets reduced.

Members voted by 8-0 (with two abstentions)

RESOLVED To endorse the Procurement Strategy subject to the inclusion of the additional objective ‘to seek to obtain best value for the Council’

1034 CABINET DECISION FOLLOWING SCRUTINITY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Members noted the Cabinet decision

1035 SCRUTINITY, OVERVIEW SUB-COMMITTEES’, ACCOUNTS, AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES AND THE CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the work programmes. The Scrutiny Officer advised members that an additional item would be added to the Scrutiny Committee work programme for May in respect of ‘New Residents Welcome Packs’

(The meeting concluded at 10.20 am)

Chairman