MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of Scrutiny Committee held on 11 April 2012 were agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

WELCOME BOOKLET FOR NEW RESIDENTS

Cllr J Fuller introduced the report advising members that it was proposed to recommence the practice of sending a welcome booklet to new residents in the District, a practice which had stopped approximately two years ago due to an oversight. The aim would be for the booklet to ensure that residents were aware of services and amenities provided by the Council such as details about their refuse collection, would encourage take up and more effective methods of payment, e.g. direct debit forms to enable payment of council tax and other amounts due to the Council, and information about added value services in the District, e.g. leisure services.

The Corporate Business Manager confirmed that the booklet was likely to be produced in A5 size, and the intention was for it to be sent out to the resident with their first council tax bill (which would usually be a few days after advising the Council of the change of address). If the resident chose to receive their bill in electronic format, the booklet would be sent as an electronic attachment. Members were advised that one of the main aims of the booklet would be to direct residents to the Council’s website, where information about all the Council’s services could be easily accessed. The Corporate Business Manager informed members that the booklet would be produced and printed in-house meaning that the document could be easily and regularly updated.

Responding to members’ questions, the Corporate Business Manager confirmed that the booklet would be sent out to residents where whole households moved within the District, as well as those who were new to the District. Members were advised that the booklet was likely to be printed in colour and would contain a contacts page.
There was a suggestion by some members that advertising space should be included within the booklet to assist with its funding. The Chief Executive advised members that the cost of arranging advertising for this publication would outweigh any benefit. It would be difficult to attract advertising for the booklet because the Council would be unable to advise potential advertisers of a definite number of recipients (unlike the South Norfolk Link magazine which goes out to every household in the District three times a year, where a new advertising regime was currently being trialled).

Members welcomed this clarification and were in agreement that it would not be appropriate for advertising to be included within the booklet, preferring that it remain factual/reference based. Cllr J Fuller added that the increased revenue gained from new residents paying by direct debit, using leisure facilities, and ordering brown bins, as a result of the booklet should make it self-funding.

Cllr V Bell raised concerns about the amount of paperwork already received by residents when they moved house. She pointed out that the Link magazine contained a lot of the information a new resident would need and that households also received publications from parish councils and Norfolk County Council. She was concerned that the cost of this booklet, although small, was not necessary as the booklet was not required.

Cllr Fuller advised members that the sending of welcome packs was good practice that should be reinstated and that the booklet would increase Council resources, enabling the authority to expand the level of services.

Members were generally in agreement that the proposed welcome booklet would be of benefit to residents when they moved house, and would benefit the Council in the long term.

RESOLVED To endorse the approach of welcoming new residents to the District by sending a welcome booklet.

1038 REVIEW OF SCRUTINY

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report, advising members of the improvements made to the scrutiny process in the last year. Members were advised that the new report template had been successful and that officers had been praised for the quality of their reports.

Cllr B McClenning advised members that he felt the scrutiny process had worked well over the last year, with effective chairmanship and supportive officers. He was of the opinion that some reports made ‘heavy reading’ and that clear presentation and plain English should be the goal for report authors. Cllr F Ellis concurred, mentioning that while many reports were clear and concise, occasionally a report would be unnecessarily ‘wordy’ incorporating jargon which was unhelpful.

The Chief Executive advised members that the Council would shortly be launching a round of report writing training for officers to address some of members’ concerns, to focus officers on why their report had been asked for, and to avoid the situation where reports had to be re-written. The Chief Executive also confirmed that more briefing sessions were to be arranged for members in order that they were well equipped to make informed
decisions on difficult subject areas. Member training continued to be a priority, and the Chief Executive welcomed members' views on what should be included as part of the formal committee environment, and what could be dealt with in additional, more informal briefing sessions.

Cllr K Weeks reminded members that Scrutiny Committee should be member-led and that members needed to take responsibility for the process.

RESOLVED To note the report.

1039 RECOMMENDATION FROM THE LOCALISM AND NEIGHBOURHOODS OSC TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members were advised that the Localism and Neighbourhoods Overview Sub-Committee recommended that the Scrutiny Committee establish a task and finish group to carry out a review of the five Neighbourhood Boards.

Members discussed generally the membership and attendance at Neighbourhood Boards and it was noted that the police representatives fulfilled a valuable role and their attendance was much appreciated and should be encouraged.

The Chairman confirmed that the members making up the task and finish group would be Cllr M Dewsbury (Chairman), Cllr M Gray, Cllr K Billig, and Cllr T Blowfield.

RESOLVED To establish the Neighbourhood Board Review Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.

1040 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICY DOCUMENT

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report and reminded members of progress made so far. Members’ attention was drawn to the list of draft policies within the report, and were asked for their thoughts and comments on these. Members were informed that the next stage would be to present the draft policies to the Cabinet in June 2012.

The Chief Executive reminded members of the importance of clear, precise policies to ensure future consistency in decision making. This point was also made by the Planning Policy Manager who reinforced the need for certainty in the Council’s future policies. This would help both developers and the Council at application stage, but would also benefit the Council when decisions were appealed.

Members went through the table of topics and policies proposed and commented on areas of concern.

- There was some discussion as to whether there was a need for a specific policy for those wishing to make changes to a dwelling to enable working from home, or whether this could be covered under a more general, generic policy. Concern was expressed that a specific policy could actually deter people from working at home, while other members felt that such a policy would demonstrate that the Council wanted to encourage starting up a business from home. The general consensus reached by members was that such a
policy would be desirable to demonstrate that the Council encouraged and promoted working from home.

- Members discussed the proposed policy for consideration of proposals for ‘main town centre uses’ which could not be accommodated in or adjacent to town centres. It was generally considered that such a policy should be included.

- Members were in agreement that the proposed policy relating to dwellings in the countryside necessary for rural enterprises should be included in the document.

- The issue of housing quality and design guidelines and standards was briefly discussed with members confirming that such a policy should be included.

- The housing needs topic area was discussed, specifically with regard to the provision of a mix of housing to meet housing need. Members stressed the importance of ensuring that the next housing needs assessment should include information regarding the possible need for single storey dwellings.

- Members were in agreement that a policy regarding Gypsies and Travellers was desirable to add a local dimension to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) position.

- After discussion members concluded that policies for extensions/conversions etc of dwellings both within settlement boundaries and in the open countryside should be included in the document. Members felt it was necessary for such applications to be more impact assessed, and for more consideration to be given to the size of the application site.

- Members considered it would be appropriate to have a policy to control advertisements, signs and shop fronts.

- With regard to the provision of telecommunications networks and equipment, members were satisfied that the NPPF was clear on these issues, and that a Development Management Policy would not be necessary.

- Members considered it necessary to include a policy to deal with surface water drainage for certain areas of the District.

- Members were in agreement that a policy regarding assessment of the impact of development proposals on the wider landscape should be included in the document. Members were particularly concerned with the issue of maintenance of strategic gaps where appropriate.

**RESOLVED** To endorse the Table subject to the comments above, and to recommend it to the Cabinet.
SCRUTINY, OVERVIEW SUB-COMMITTEES', ACCOUNTS, AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES AND THE CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the work programmes.

(The meeting concluded at 11.54 am)

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Chairman