SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 11 July 2012 at 10.30 am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors M Dewsbury, (Chairman), V Bell, T Lewis, A Pond, S Thomson, G Watt, K Weeks, J Wilby, M Windridge

Apologies: Councillor N Ward

Substitute: Councillor N Legg

Cabinet Members in attendance: Councillors Y Bendle, K Kiddie

Also in attendance: Councillor M Gray

Officers in Attendance: The Deputy Chief Executive, the Director of Development and Environment, the Scrutiny Officer and the Environment Manager

1043 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held on 15 May 2012 were agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1044 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared an ‘other interest’ as they had a (brown bin) contract with South Norfolk Council for the collection and recycling of garden waste:

V Bell
S Thomson
G Watt
K Weeks

1045 REVIEW OF PROPOSED EFFICIENCIES AND REDUCED COSTS OF THE WASTE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING SERVICE

Cllr K Kiddie introduced the report advising members that significant progress had been made in efficiency improvements and identifying savings in the area of waste collection and recycling and that plans were in place to continue this progress as the service moves forward. He stated that overall the amount and quality of recycled waste had increased, while complaints about waste collection generally had decreased.
Cllr Kiddie thanked Cllr T Lewis for scrutinising the report in advance of the meeting and providing questions, confirming that this had given the officers the opportunity to produce figures and information for members to supplement the report which was circulated at the meeting.

The Director of Development and Environment advised members that there had been a change in culture throughout the teams dealing with waste collection, with a determination by all staff to ‘chase every pound’. As a result of this new way of thinking, not only had efficiencies been identified, but also new ideas for capturing more recycling, to maximise income. One example of this was the recycling of street sweepings. These would previously have been put into landfill, which would have been a cost to the Council. Now, the sweepings were being recycled, producing some revenue. The Environment Manager advised members that the reason street sweepings could not currently be counted towards this year’s recycling figures was that new guidance had been issued by the Environment Agency in May as to how such waste should be recycled, and the Council was awaiting formal confirmation that it’s street sweeping waste had been dealt with in accordance with these new guidelines before it could officially be counted in with the other recycling figures for this year.

Members briefly discussed the recent improvement in efficiency of the plant used in the recycling process and were informed that as well as improvements to plant, the quality of the recycling collected was very good and meant that South Norfolk had very low level of rejected material. Householders in South Norfolk were referred to as ‘good recyclers’.

The Committee discussed the mini recycling centres, and the Director of Development and Environment drew members’ attention to two benefits of these centres. The first was the meeting of public expectation, and the fact that if such a service was made easy for the public to use, they would use it. The second benefit was that additional materials could be collected here that were not collected by the green bin collection, such as glass, clothing and books. Members were informed that the charities collecting items for recycling advised the Council of the tonnages collected and these figures were added to the Council’s total recycling figures.

Cllr A Pond felt that businesses should be encouraged to recycle more, and it should be made easier for them to do so. He added that the issue of waste could be a valuable area for job creation in the District.

In response to Cllr Week’s comment that South Norfolk had only 121 mini recycling centres compared to neighbouring authorities that had more than this, the Director of Development and Environment advised members that these centres were usually developed in response to public demand, and that there was definitely scope for more growth in the District.

Cllr M Windridge questioned whether householders in the District were given enough information about what can/cannot be put into the green bins. The Environment Manager confirmed that new hangers were being produced to be left on the bin of each household in the District giving a guide as to what should be disposed of in the green bins. The South Norfolk Link magazine also provided information about waste disposal and increased awareness about recycling.

Whilst discussing the figures for the amount of garden waste recycled, the Director of Development and Environment confirmed that weather conditions were a factor due to the increased weight of grass cuttings etc in wetter weather. With regard to the garden waste
collection service the number of customers compared with vehicle capacity was discussed and members were advised of the methods employed to manage the increase in numbers. Members were advised of the additional flexibility available because the Council retained an in-house work force. The Committee was informed that the yearly cost of a brown bin was £39 for those residents who paid by direct debit.

Members were advised that the current contract with the Costessey Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) comes to an end in March 2014 and the Council was currently involved in a collaborative procurement exercise with the other local authorities in Norfolk. During the procurement exercise additional materials, not currently collected (such as glass and rigid plastics), would be considered.

The Committee also heard from the Director of Development and Environment that the Council was currently involved in an outline bid to pilot a food waste collection scheme. There was some discussion as to the merits of such a scheme. Members were advised that there were no figures available yet.

Members discussed the issue of trade waste, and the Director of Development and Environment advised members that this issue would be looked at once the outcome of the food waste bid was known. In response to members’ questions the Environment Manager confirmed that there was no formal benchmarking for commercial waste and that the market in this respect was very fluid.

In summarising the report the Director of Development and Environment advised members that the review of the waste management service was started approximately 18 months ago when South Norfolk Council’s costs were significantly higher than some other comparable authorities. The Council’s officers had ‘risen to the challenge’ looking at initial savings that could be made such as the consolidation of rounds and staff redeployment as well as many other efficiencies. A significant number of changes had been made with approximately £400,000 in savings achieved so far and many further savings expected in the future.

Cllr M Gray thanked officers for their hard work in maximising performance. He asked where the Council was rated on performance amongst all other district authorities. The Environment Manager confirmed that he would provide this information to members, whilst reminding members it was important to note that with such tables you would not always be comparing like with like.

The Chairman congratulated officers on their hard work and achievement so far regarding waste management. It was

**RESOLVED** To endorse the report and the issues and actions arising from it, in particular,

- the key strategic issues facing the service
- the ongoing review of processes to cut out waste and decrease costs further
- the aims to maximise income from the sale of collected recyclables, including increasing take up of the garden waste service, revitalising the trade waste collection service on a sound competitive basis.
• the introduction of an efficient food waste service, subject to the Cabinet approval and the DCLG bid outcome.

• the need to identify and obtain approval for future vehicle purchase and replacement, including that linked to any food waste collection service should Cabinet approval be given and the Council’s funding bid be successful

1046 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND THE CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the work programme.

It was agreed that a paper would be presented at the next meeting regarding the way in which the Committee would look at Directorate Plans in the future.

(The meeting concluded at 12.27 pm)

Chairman