SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 2 October 2012 at 9.45 am.

Committee
Members Present: Councillors M Dewsbury, (Chairman), V Bell, A Pond, K Weeks, J Wilby, M Windridge

Apologies: Councillors T Lewis, S Thomson, N Ward, G Watt

Substitutes: Councillors M Gray (for T Lewis), F Ellis (for S Thomson), D Goldson (for N Ward), P Allen (for G Watt)

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

Also in attendance: Councillor M Edney, L Neal

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive, the Compliance and Risk Manager, the Project Consultant, the Deputy Locality and Communities Manager, and the Head of Business Improvement

Also in attendance: Inspector C Congreve

1047 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr P Allen declared an ‘other’ interest as the Chairman of SNYA

1048 CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman introduced Hannah Ralph to members of the Committee, explaining that she had recently joined the Council to undertake the Graduate Training Programme, and welcomed her to the meeting.

1049 MINUTES

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

Arising from minute 1045 Cllr M Gray informed the Committee that he was still awaiting waste performance statistics from officers. He was informed that these figures might not be available at the present time.
FINAL REPORT OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD BOARDS REVIEW SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Council's Project Consultant introduced the report, and commended the Task and Finish Group for the work involved in this task, praising all members of the group for their contribution and dedication.

Members were directed to the key elements considered by the Task and Finish Group, namely membership of the Neighbourhood Boards, the conduct and effectiveness of the meetings, suggested improvements to marketing and promotion, and an examination of suggested improvements for further development of the Boards to ensure their fitness for the future. The Project Consultant confirmed that revised ground rules were being worked on and would be presented to the Cabinet with the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that the report and the recommendations (relating to the functionality of the Neighbourhood Boards) would form part of a bigger evaluation of the Neighbourhood Boards and the Your Neighbourhood, Your Choice pilot scheme in the near future.

Members expressed their gratitude to the members of the Task and Finish Group and went on to discuss the main areas of recommendation.

With regard to the recommendations contained in 6.1 of the report, Councillor M Windridge expressed concern that whilst examining membership of the Boards, the Task and Finish Group did not seem to have fully considered the role of the Council's strategic partners, and in particular the role of the South Norfolk Alliance. The Project Consultant confirmed that arrangements for the Alliance were currently under consideration and would be examined shortly at a meeting of the Localism Policy Committee, agreeing that the Alliance's role and the way in which it would tie in with Neighbourhood Boards would be very significant. Inspector C Congreve informed members that the police authority had a statutory obligation to conduct a certain number of meetings with the public, and that Neighbourhood Boards had successfully been used as a vehicle for that purpose.

Cllr P Allen expressed her support for recommendation 6.1 c), feeling strongly that all District members should have the opportunity to be voting members on the Neighbourhood Board(s) for their ward. She considered this would lead to a more balanced and consistent approach to decision making within the Boards. Cllr M Wilby was concerned with this view and the recommendation, and he reminded the Committee that all District members were already encouraged to attend the Boards, and ‘have their say’. He felt that making all District members full voting members of the Boards would make them ‘top-heavy’ and would not be popular with the general public. This view was supported by Cllr M Edney, Chairman of the Tiffey Valley Neighbourhood Board, who added that if this recommendation were to be implemented, it would mean that District members would outnumber community representatives which in his view was not desirable.

Cllr V Bell made a suggestion that all District members could be appointed to the Boards but with only a limited number having voting rights (possibly in rotation).

Further discussion followed regarding recommendation 6.1 c), with support for the recommendation as drafted from Cllr M Gray who considered that such an approach would lead to collective accountability and responsibility for the decision of the Boards. A number
of members did not support this view, considering instead that this would lead to a disproportionate number of District members being given voting rights.

The Project Consultant advised members on the practical aspects of taking this approach forward, where the result would be that each Board would have an average of 16-18 members. Cllr L Neal expressed concern that this would result in too many Board members and would be ‘off-putting’ to members of the public. She felt that the current arrangement where all members were welcome to attend and speak at the Boards was satisfactory.

The Chairman put recommendation 6.1 c) to the vote and members voted 7-3 in favour of the recommendation as drafted in the report.

Members discussed the other recommendations relating to membership of the Boards. Cllr Allen was concerned with the recommendation at 6.1 h). The issue of the nomination and election of community representatives was discussed, with Cllr M Wilby confirming to members that more work would be done to ensure the fair selection of community representatives in future, with a revised recommendation to be taken to Cabinet shortly.

With regard to recommendation 6.1 j) Cllr K Weeks was concerned at the wording and members were in agreement that the recommendation be amended to state that a proportionate level of training and development would be provided.

Members discussed Cllr P Allen’s concern with regard to 6.1 l) and concurred with her suggestion that this recommendation be amended to include the shadow portfolio holder also, and to reflect that this would apply at all meetings excluding the Board of which they were a member.

Members considered the proposals at paragraph 6.2 of the report and were in agreement with the recommendations as drafted.

Discussion around the recommendations at 6.3 focussed on the identity of the Neighbourhood Boards and the issue of logos/branding. The Committee was agreeable to Cllr M Wilby’s suggestion to delete recommendation 6.3 d).

Cllr M Gray directed members’ attention to recommendation 6.4 b) suggesting that this was the crux of his concern about Neighbourhood Boards. He advised the Committee that he considered that the purpose of the Boards, and the ‘bigger picture’ had become blurred recently because of the focus on Your Neighbourhood, Your Choice. The Project Consultant confirmed that the purpose of the Neighbourhood Boards had not changed. He suggested that members should focus their discussion on the delivery and operation of the Boards.

Further discussion followed regarding the operation of the Neighbourhood Boards generally and Cllr M Windridge expressed concern that the report did not contain specific detail or information about monies spent or the numbers of people attending the Boards. The Chief Executive reminded members that the Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference had been agreed by the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in May 2012. With regard to monies allocated by the Boards, members were reminded that this information had been reported to the Cabinet in full in July. Such issues were not in the remit of the Task and Finish Group, nor the report under consideration.

The Chairman thanked the members of the Task and Finish Group for their efforts in this matter and it was
RESOLVED: To Recommend to Cabinet that the recommendations of the Neighbourhood Boards Review Scrutiny Task and Finish Group be agreed, subject to the following changes:

(a) Recommendation 6.1(j)
A proportionate level of training and development will be provided to Chairmen and all Board members, for example presentation skills, chairing skills. Consideration to be given to mentoring.

(b) Recommendation 6.1 (I)
Portfolio holder and shadow portfolio holder will have observer status at all Board meetings excluding the Board of which they are a member.

(c) Recommendation 6.3 (d)
That this recommendation be deleted and the following items be renumbered accordingly.

1051 LOCAL COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP PLAN UPDATE

Cllr M Wilby, the portfolio holder for Communities and Localism introduced the report, advising members that this was a good example of the Council working in partnership with its strategic partners to improve the life of South Norfolk residents.

The Deputy Locality and Communities Manager informed the Committee that following the merger of Norfolk’s seven district Community Safety Partnerships, many authorities had taken the opportunity to reduce resources, however, due to the South Norfolk’s commitment to localism, it had been the only District to produce its own plan and was keen to deliver on local priorities with the focus on partnership working.

Responding to members’ questions Inspector C Congreve confirmed that although crime in South Norfolk and Norfolk generally was falling, there would always be small pockets of higher levels of crime and that these were analysed to establish the root causes. This would enable the partners to decide on the best way to tackle the problems.

The Deputy Locality and Communities Manager reminded members that although crime was an important issue, the partnership plan also dealt with many other issues including anti-social behaviour, juvenile issues, and matters affecting vulnerable people in the community.

Cllr K Weeks raised the issue of the theft of heating oil in rural areas, and the Committee was informed that alarms were being sold locally. It was suggested by the Chairman that information publicising the alarms could be advertised in an issue of the South Norfolk Link magazine.

Members were advised that in the United Kingdom one in four women would experience domestic abuse in some form. The Chairman asked for the figures for South Norfolk and officers confirmed they would provide this information after the meeting.
Members discussed the issues around the possibility of CCTV being installed in public town centre areas (such as in Diss and Wymondham). The Deputy Locality and Communities Manager confirmed that CCTV would only ever be considered as a result of public demand.

**RESOLVED**

To commend the Community Safety Partnership Plan

### 1052 DIRECTORATE PLANNING PROCESS

The Head of Business Improvement introduced the report and advised members that the Directorate Planning process had proved to be an important tool for the Council, allowing significant savings to be made whilst helping to deliver service improvements.

Members were advised that in previous years the Overview Sub-Committees (OSCs), Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet had supported the process, firstly, with the OSCs looking at the first draft and headline budgets in October, followed by the Scrutiny Committee reviewing the final drafts in January, with final presentation to the Cabinet in February. Following the disbanding of the OSCs it was now proposed to present the draft plans to an internal workshop made up of the Scrutiny Committee, Directors, service heads, and lead officers. This workshop would take place on 14 November 2012, immediately prior to the next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

It was suggested to members that the workshop could be split into two groups to look at the two draft plans separately, or that the time allotted to the workshop could be divided into two – half for each draft plan.

The Chief Executive advised members that although the workshop would not be a formal meeting it was very important to engage members in the formative process of the directorate plans. As such, and to enable full participation at the workshop, the Chief Executive emphasised the importance of members examining the draft plans at an early stage prior to the meeting to enable them to prepare fully. Members were advised that the draft plans would be available at the end of October, and that the workshop would be open to all members. It was suggested that it would be helpful if members could inform officers, in advance where possible, of issues they wanted to raise or concerns they wanted to discuss at the workshop. This would ensure that the relevant officers would attend the workshop enabling discussion about any areas of concern.

**RESOLVED**

That all Scrutiny members review both draft directorate plans.

### 1053 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND THE CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted that the formal meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 14 November may be cancelled if no other items were added to the work programme, however the Directorate Plans Workshop would still take place on this date.

(The meeting concluded at 11.50 am)