SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 12 December 2012 at 9.30 am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors M Dewsbury, (Chairman), T Lewis, S Thomson, K Weeks, J Wilby

Apologies: Councillors V Bell, C Gould, L Hornby, A Pond, G Watt, M Windridge

Substitutes: Councillors P Allen (for V Bell), D Goldson (for M Windridge), M Gray (for G Watt), C Kemp (for C Gould), N Legg (for L Hornby)

Cabinet Members in attendance: Councillors D Bills, K Kiddie, M Wilby (apologies from G Wheatley)

Officers in Attendance: The Deputy Chief Executive (A Radford), the Compliance and Risk Manager (L Mickleborough), the Scrutiny Officer (E Nangle), the Food and Health and Safety Manager (T Durell)

1054 CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that two changes to the membership of Scrutiny Committee had been confirmed at the meeting of Council on 10 December 2012. Cllrs J Herbert and N Ward were replaced, with immediate effect, by Cllrs L Hornby and C Gould.

1055 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held on 2 October 2012 were agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from minute number 1051 Cllr Weeks queried whether any progress had been made regarding the publicising of alarms to prevent the theft of heating oil. Cllr Weeks was advised that an officer would come back to him with the latest position. Members were advised to contact either the Marketing and Engagement Manager (C George) or the Communications Manager (D Peel) should they have suggestions for items to appear in The Link.

1056 CALL-IN OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICY DOCUMENT – PREFERRED OPTION POLICIES

Cllr T Lewis advised members that following reassurance from officers and confirmation from the Leader of the Council that further work was to be done to the policy documents, the call-in was withdrawn.
1057 PROVISION OF LEGAL SERVICES – REVIEW OF NPLAW

The Compliance and Risk Manager summarised the findings contained within the report and advised the Committee that although the decision to transfer the legal service to nplaw had presented some challenges, overall the decision so far had proven to be very successful for the Council.

Members were advised that there had been a good business case for joining nplaw, with an aim to strengthen and build resilience as well as giving members and officers access to a greater range of specialist advice. The Compliance and Risk Manager informed members that examples of the benefit of more specialist advice were already evident with regard to procurement and human resource advice which had been sought regarding the forthcoming CNC transfer as well as other ventures.

The Committee was informed that feedback had been sought from officers and members and the outcomes were generally very positive. Further, an internal audit review had taken place resulting in an ‘adequate’ assurance level and four recommendations which were in hand.

Responding to members’ questions the Compliance and Risk Manager confirmed that any issues of dissatisfaction with the service provided by nplaw would be made known to her, but that generally both officers and members were satisfied with the service.

Members were advised that the Board of nplaw would be meeting in January 2013 to consider its finances, and that South Norfolk Council would receive a share of the profits should these arise.

Members discussed the service generally and also with regard to particular issues such as the transfer of staff to nplaw. Members were pleased to note that the former Council staff had settled in well at nplaw and comments from those staff included in the report were noted by the Committee.

The Committee discussed the Development Management Committee and the issue of attendance of a solicitor. Members noted that since the transfer to nplaw, the practice was for the Chairman of the Development Management Committee to decide in advance of each Committee meeting whether the attendance of a legal advisor was necessary at the meeting. Members noted that the Planning officers were highly competent, well qualified and able to deal with many applications without the need for members to require expert legal advice. Members were satisfied with the arrangement particularly as there had not been any incidents where applications had been deferred due to the need for legal advice at Committee.

Members were advised that although neither members or officers had been using video-conferencing with nplaw, the facility was available should the need arise. It was felt that email, telephone calls and conference calls had so far proven to be effective methods of communication.

RESOLVED

1. To support the proposed actions identified at 3.31 of the report

2. To review the arrangements with nplaw after a further 12 months, or earlier if necessary
CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT – ONE YEAR ON

The Council’s Cabinet member for Environment and Regulation introduced the report which informed members about the implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement in South Norfolk.

Members were advised by the Food and Health and Safety Manager that the Council had successfully taken on the additional function of the enforcement of on-street parking in restricted areas without increasing staffing levels, contrary to advice given to the Council by external consultants, by incorporating the work within the duties of existing staff who had good local knowledge of the areas and were able to implement the additional workload.

The portfolio holder confirmed that the Council had taken a ‘light touch’ approach and advised members that this had been well received, with no complaints received about the service provision itself.

The Committee was informed of the numbers of Penalty Charge Notices awarded, paid, and waived with further clarification given regarding the way in which disputes were resolved. Members were advised that approximately 70% of the notices were paid in good time.

Members discussed the role taken on by the Council, with clarification given by the Food and Health and Safety Manager. He advised members that the Council was only able to enforce where there were parking restriction signs or painted lines on the road. Other issues such as obstructions were the responsibility of the Police Authority or the Highways Authority, although the Council’s officers took proactive measures to help with parking issues where it could, negotiating and liaising with those involved, for example to aid with parking problems outside schools.

Following some discussion about general parking issues encountered by members across their wards, the Food and Health and Safety Manager suggested that he email all members again to confirm who they should contact in case of future queries.

Members were concerned about the issue of parking being fully considered as part of the planning application process, and wanted reassurance that the Council specifically considered parking issues when applications for large residential developments were considered by the Planning Officers. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that parking issues were already included in the newly adopted Place Making Guide, but that members could suggest that this be further enhanced at the next review of the Guide.

RESOLVED
1. To note the contents of the report
2. To recommend that specific guidance with regard to parking is enhanced in the next review of the Place Making Guide

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND THE CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members discussed the timing of the Review of localism delivery in South Norfolk item and agreed that this should remain scheduled for the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in May, but that the focus of the item should be amended to exclude funding as this would be addressed in the discussion of the budget on 6 February 2013.
Cllr Weeks confirmed that he had suggested to the Scrutiny Officer that the issue of flooding within the District be considered by the Committee. The Scrutiny Officer would consult with the Council’s Flood Defence Officer.

Cllr C Kemp suggested that the Committee consider the role of the Police and Crime Panel at a meeting in 2013, possibly the July meeting.

(The meeting concluded at 11.00 am)

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Chairman