The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny Committee held on 12 December 2012 were agreed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Members considered the report of the Business Transformation Manager which introduced the final draft of the Directorate Business Plans for 2013/14. He explained that the Plans had been developed at various workshops in order to include both staff and members in the process, which had both been positive and productive. The Chairman invited comments from the Committee and each Directorate was considered in turn:

Chief Executive’s Directorate:
With regard to the new homes bonus, members were advised that the figures had been calculated from the tax base. Members noted the increase in resource allocated to external and internal engagement and queried whether the outcomes of the additional expenditure and how this was resulting in an enhanced service could be the subject of a future report to Committee. It was agreed that this would be added to the Committee’s work programme and considered in November 2013.
Members queried whether the Council intend to market its customer database and were reassured that the information would be used in line with the Data Protection Act, be for internal use only and not sold onto any third party. Members queried the performance measures related to external and internal engagement and were advised that measures and targets would be set following the quarter 4 performance review.

The role of consultants was discussed. Members were advised that there was no specified budget for consultants and that expenditure relating to consultants used to fill temporary or vacant posts would be taken from relevant and existing staffing budgets. Expenditure associated with consultants employed for their technical knowledge relating to specialised projects would be taken from the budget for the service concerned. Members were reassured that the Council had a clear policy on the use of consultants that was adhered to. The Head of Finance confirmed that all payments to consultants were compliant with HMRC requirements.

With reference to the Customer Services Team, members congratulated officers on the high performance related to answering calls within 20 seconds and responding to electronic contact within one day.

Corporate Resources Directorate:
In relation to IT, members were advised that the replacement programme included members’ IT equipment and that the Directorate Plan was set to deliver the IT Strategy, approved by members. The overall resource allocated to IT support was decreasing as IT systems were being combined, for instance IDOX across planning and environmental services. Members queried the figures related to spend on upgrading IT storage and officers agreed to provide this information to members.

Members were pleased to learn of the improvements that were planned to the procurement process, which they considered were needed following previous audits. They queried whether the milestone date regarding this could be brought forward so that the outcomes could be achieved sooner, but were advised that the milestone date showed the completion date, with work already progressing.

In response to a member query regarding the cost of administering housing benefit, officers advised the Committee that the reduction in resources was partly due to the cut in the housing benefit administration grant that the Council would receive next year. This represented a reduction of £70,000-80,000. A decrease in the staffing numbers in the team due to a lean review had led staff in revenues and benefits becoming more generic in order to tackle workloads more effectively.

Growth and Localism Directorate:
Members queried the detail relating to the participatory budget exercise, particularly why the resource allocated in 2013/14 could not be compared to the previous year. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Neighbourhood Board scheme; Your Neighbourhood Your Choice, was in development at the time of preparing the 2012/13 Plans, and thus not included in last year’s directorate plans.

The Committee noted the increase in resource allocated to maximising external funding to the Council and communities of South Norfolk and requested that a future report be brought to Committee to review the level of funding that the Council had secured, and outcomes of this.
Members discussed the intention to develop market town action plans and were reassured that work carried out by the Market Towns Task Group would be used whilst taking account of new research and thinking, such as the Portas Review.

In response to a query regarding why pre-application advice appeared in the Plans of two Directorates, the Chief Executive advised members that this reflected the current system, which resulted in both Development Control and Planning Policy (both in different Directorates) being involved in the pre-application process. This would be rectified by the introduction of the Growth and Localism Directorate.

Members commented on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and queried whether the Council had used the allowed 5% for administration. The Deputy Chief Executive advised members that work was still ongoing regarding how this would work in practice, however it would be imprudent to assume CIL at this time.

Environment and Housing Directorate:
In response to a query regarding informing parish councils of street sweeping regimes, the Director of Development and Environment reassured members that the Council was intending to implement a process in spring 2013 that would address this.

Members were concerned that the resource allocated to providing temporary accommodation for homeless households had decreased, however they were reassured that staffing costs had been lowered following a lean review undertaken by the team and that the service could still be delivered effectively within the budget allocated.

Members queried the target relating to the number of homes referred into the Green Deals (120) and whether this could be achieved. Officers were confident that this could be achieved and confirmed that this would be monitored through performance monitoring.

Generally, members queried how the Council’s partnerships were monitored and reviewed and asked whether this would come before a future meeting of Scrutiny Committee. Members were advised that Service Level Agreements were signed when an organisation agreed to deliver services on the council’s behalf. Service delivery would be monitored against the agreement and addressed as appropriate.

Members discussed the big picture measures that would be reported on an annual basis and noted that these would be reviewed by Cabinet when the Quarter 4 performance report was considered.

Members were pleased to learn of the level of staff participation in the process again this year and of the commitment of staff to identify savings and efficiencies throughout the process. In response to a question relating to whether the Council had identified any activity that currently could not be undertaken due to budget constraints that may be able to go ahead if money were to be made available through further savings, the Chief Executive was confident that the Council’s vision and core services could be delivered and achieved within the budget that had been set. However, further work would be carried out with customers to determine what they wanted, needed and valued in order to ensure that the priorities and activities set by the Directorate planning process met the expectations of residents. The Chief Executive advised members of the high level of officer retention at South Norfolk and the level of investment in staff development that had occurred in the past year. Members welcomed this; particularly that South Norfolk Council had made just one compulsory redundancy in that time.
The Liberal Democrats (Cllrs Bell, Lewis and Watt) abstained from endorsing the financial element of the plans, however Scrutiny Committee endorsed the activities planned for 2013/14 and **RESOLVED:**

To recommend to Cabinet that the Directorate Business Plans 2013/14 are approved.

### 1062 REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT SCHEME OF DELEGATION 2011

The Council’s Cabinet member for Environment and Regulation introduced the report and advised members that the Scheme of Delegation that had been in operation since 2011, which had worked well and resulted in efficiencies and improvements. Members were referred to paragraph 3.3 of the report, which outlined comparisons of data relating to the number of applications referred to committee. Members queried the figures and requested that officers check their findings and send updated figures to committee members.

Cllr J Mooney, Chairman of the Development Management Committee, addressed the Scrutiny Committee and advised members that a number of changes had been made to development management since he had been appointed chairman. These changes were working well and had resulted in many benefits, such as the Committee now dealing mainly with major applications. Cllr Mooney stressed the importance of two-way communication between officers and members regarding planning applications, particularly relating to whether decisions should be delegated or referred to Committee. Members agreed that it was beneficial to discuss applications with officers before any decision was made as to whether the application should be decided at Committee. It was hoped that this conversation would encourage members to give reasons relating to why they considered an application should be determined by Committee. In addition, members considered that the reasons should be included in the Committee report.

Members discussed the comment slips they received relating to planning applications in their ward and enquired if these would soon be available electronically. The Head of Development Management advised members that officers hoped to introduce this soon and were developing this capability within the new IT systems.

**RESOLVED**

1. That members noted the contents of the report;
2. To recommend that the reasons given by members for referrals to the Committee should be recorded in the case officer’s report

### 1063 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND THE CABINET CORE AGENDA

Members noted the Scrutiny Committee work programme. The Chairman referred to the Directorate Business Plans 2014/15 process that would involve the Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman was keen for a workshop style event and asked for further input in the development of the workshop.

(The meeting concluded at 11.30 am)

Chairman