



## COUNCIL

**Minutes of a meeting of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Tuesday 22 March 2011 at 7.30pm**

**Members Present:** Councillors Allen, Bell Bills, Blake, Dale, Dewsbury, East, Fuller, Goldson, Gray, Greenway, Gould, Herbert, C Kemp, Legg, Lewis, Mooney, Neal, Overton, Palmer, Rice J Savage, R Savage, Stevens, Thomas, Tilcock, Walden, Ward, Weeks, Wheatley, J Wilby, M Wilby, and Wynne

**Apologies:** Councillors Baldock, Denby, Ellis, Game, W Kemp, Thomson, Watt and Windridge

**Officers in Attendance:** The Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive, the Change Management Director, the Director of Communities, the Head of Environmental Services, the Solicitor to the Council and the Head of IT.

**Also in Attendance:** 4 members of the public

### 3052 URGENT ITEM

Cllr D Bills explained that Council agreement regarding the joint scrutiny arrangements between Great Yarmouth Borough Council and South Norfolk Council was urgently sought, so that the first planned meeting of the Committee could take place on 12 April 2011.

It was unanimously

#### **RESOLVED**

- a) That a Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee be established to consider shared service working, comprising ten members, with five Members nominated from each of Great Yarmouth's and South Norfolk's Councils' Scrutiny Committees (GYBC 3 Majority Group and 2 Minority Group; SNC 4 Majority Group and 1 Minority Group member).
- b) That the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider an early draft of the proposed Business Case for shared services, following consideration of the first draft by the Joint Programme Board at its meeting on 30 March and prior to consideration by both Councils' Cabinets.

- c) the first meeting of the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee be held on either 11/12 April 2011 at 6.30pm at Great Yarmouth and that any subsequent meetings will be held at alternative venues.
- d) To approve the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure for the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

### 3053 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared personal interests in the matters listed below:

Minute	Member	Nature of Interest
3054	Cllrs Blake, Dewsbury, Fuller and Gould	Members of the GNDP
3054	Cllr Wynne	Former member of the GNDP

### 3054 ADOPTION OF THE JOINT CORE STRATEGY

Cllr D Blake explained that at its meeting on 17 March 2011, the Greater Norwich Development Partnership's Policy Group agreed to recommend that each of the local planning authorities formally adopted the Joint Core Strategy (JCS), incorporating the Inspectors' recommendations. He reminded members that the preparation of the JCS had been lengthy and he thanked all those Members and Officers involved in the process. He stressed that it was a very important stage to have reached; the Council had worked with its partners to produce a long term strategy for homes and jobs, which also protected South Norfolk's natural and cultural heritage.

Cllr J Fuller acknowledged that the process had been difficult but felt its achievements should be celebrated. The unique character of market towns had been protected, a settlement hierarchy had been set enabling smaller villages to have a level of growth proportionate to their size and the Long Stratton bypass now looked to be a real possibility. He believed the strategy would provide opportunities for employment growth, with the Norwich Research Park and Hethel Engineering Centre being at the forefront of their fields. He believed the JCS provided a future for communities that local people both wanted and deserved.

Cllr M Gray drew attention to the funding for infrastructure to support the JCS. He was concerned that there was no evidence to suggest that the proposed housing in Long Stratton would deliver a bypass in addition to affordable housing, schools and community facilities. There had been no information concerning the routing of a Long Stratton bypass and he suspected that further housing would add to the congestion and problems on the A140 between Long Stratton and Norwich. He reminded members of the need for a roundabout at the Hempnall crossroads and the issue of drainage capacity in Long Stratton.

He had noted that the Parish Council had been opposed to the current proposals. Cllr Gray also raised concerns regarding the location of housing, referring to the allocation of 3200 houses for Wymondham and Hetherset, whilst stressing the need to protect the strategic gap between the two settlements. He was also concerned at the location of the 1200 allocation at Cringleford, explaining that future development might lead to the access to the hospital running through the centre of a housing estate. Cllr Gray could not support the uncertainty relating to the housing allocations and was wary of the 1800 houses unallocated to specific developments. Summing up, he explained that approving the plan would be 'a leap in the dark'. He felt that much more information was required before it made sense to "take that leap".

Cllr M Wynne believed the Council had reached a milestone in a process which would have concluded years ago, had the previous Labour Government not imposed new policies. He thanked the Planning Policy staff, past and present, for their contributions to the process. He believed that it was a real achievement to have finally reached the final stages of the JCS process. He did however suggest that the Council needed to proceed with caution, stressing the need to progress site specific locations as soon as possible. He did not wish to see developers, land agents and consultants dictate the design and pace of development and he urged the Planning Committee to refuse applications for inappropriate sites and poor design. He understood Cllr Gray's concerns regarding location but reminded Council that it could not decide where houses were allocated until site specific policies had been worked through.

Cllr A Thomas explained that the quality of life for Long Stratton residents had been blighted by the A140. She felt that the quality of life and health of residents were key considerations which led her to support the allocation in Long Stratton and the potential bypass. She explained that the Parish Council supported a dual carriageway bypass for Long Stratton, but realistically, in the current climate, she felt that a single carriage way was the more likely outcome. In response to Cllr Gray's comments, she advised that details of where any potential bypass would start and stop were unknown, but explained that once a planning application was proposed, the details would be widely consulted upon.

Cllr V Bell thanked Cllr Wynne for his professionalism and his positive approach which he demonstrated in his previous role as Chairman of the Planning Committee and LDF Steering Group. She expressed concerns regarding infrastructure to support the JCS, pointing in particular to the Queens Hill development in Costessey, explaining the local primary school to be full despite only half of the houses being occupied. She also expressed concerns with regard to the 1800 allocation, which were yet to be linked to particular settlements.

Cllr G Wheatley referred members to paragraph 4.7 of the report, which detailed the advantage of having an adopted JCS, helping to resist speculative and inappropriate development proposals. He stressed that adopting the strategy would be empowering the Council not exposing it. Cllr T East agreed that adoption of the JCS was the best way forward, but referring back to the problems experienced at the Queens Hill development in Costessey, stressed the need for infrastructure to be addressed.

Cllr T Lewis echoed the sentiments of Cllr Gray. He felt that a major weakness of the JCS was that it contained too many uncertainties regarding infrastructure, the Long Stratton bypass, the 1800 unallocated houses and the Northern Distributor Route. He was concerned that these issues would cause further problems in the future.

Cllr Fuller was disappointed at the Liberal Democrat Group party consensus. He was particularly surprised at the sentiments of Cllr Gray, who understood the workings of the JCS framework and the timings of site specific work. He urged members to support the recommendations of the report, failure to do so would result in little defence against speculative development. He suggested that the current problems at Queens Hill, Costessey, could be a resulting consequence of failures in the last Local Plan.

Cllr East was appalled that Cllr Fuller had used the issues at Queens Hill as a mechanism to score points against the opposition. He stressed that it was unjust to blame the Liberal Democrats for the failures at Queens Hill, reminding Council that the developers had gone bankrupt.

With 25 Members voting for and the remaining Members abstaining, it was

**RESOLVED**

To:

1. Note the Inspector's report and the required changes;
2. Adopt the Joint Core Strategy as part of the development plan for South Norfolk, providing new strategic policies, superseding a number of South Norfolk Local Plan saved policies and making minor consequential amendments to the proposals map for South Norfolk Council;
3. Delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive to proceed with the necessary legal and administrative processes to secure adoption of the Joint Core Strategy.

**3055 MEMBERS' IT ALLOWANCE & TRAINING**

Cllr D Bills introduced the report regarding Members' IT Allowances and Training, referring in particular to the proposals to introduce a £10 monthly allowance to contribute towards the cost of a member's internet connection at home. Cllr Bills explained that the proposed policy provided a consistent and transparent approach, which ideally would be in place before the election in May. He further explained that those members who currently had the benefit of a broadband connection set up by the Council, would have the opportunity take over the existing contracts from the Council and would be eligible to claim the £10.00 monthly allowance.

Cllr M Dewsbury was not able to support the proposals for a £10.00 allowance to replace existing arrangements. She moved the following amendment:

Replace paragraph 3.3 (b) first paragraph

"A provision will be made for those members who already purchase Broadband, to claim up to £10.00 per month to supplement the costs of their internet connection at home."

Replace paragraph 3.3 (b) second paragraph:

“ Members communication needs will be assessed, to agree what support is required to fulfil their duties as a councillor, and individual arrangements will be made to ensure all councillors have the same standard of communication with the Council.”

Cllr Dewsbury agreed that both a computer and broadband were required to allow her to carry out her duties as a member, but she stressed that she would not choose to own either if she was not a district councillor. Not all members could afford their own computers and internet connection, and she believed that savings could be found elsewhere from the printing costs of agendas. She stressed the need to base any new policy on equality as opposed to consistency.

Cllr S Rice, in seconding Cllr Dewsbury's amendment, explained that she did not have her own computer at home and could not afford her own broadband connection. She pointed to the recent difficulties she had encountered when moving house, expressing her disappointment at the length of time taken to install a broadband connection at her new property. Cllr Rice also suggested that members required more up to date IT equipment and that members required replacement laptops.

Cllr K Weeks expressed his support for the amendment, stating that he considered the proposals to involve a lot of work for only minimal savings.

Referring to paragraph 3.3 (a) of the report, Cllr J Herbert advised members that despite being a “twin hatter”, he had not been issued with a laptop from Norfolk County Council. Using Citrix software, he was able to access Norfolk County Council's intranet through his own computer, and he was disappointed that he was not able to access South Norfolk Council information in a similar way.

Cllr C Kemp commended the report but suggested that some details required further work before they could be implemented. He referred to his inability to access the intranet through his own computer and welcomed the development of an extranet.

The IT Manager advised members that he was certain that the development of an extranet was achievable and would make accessing Council information much easier for members. He explained that currently twin hatters were able to access Norfolk County Council information much easier than that at South Norfolk due to different Government Connect requirements, which placed more security controls upon South Norfolk because of its need to connect to the systems of the Department of Works and Pensions. He apologised to those members who had experienced problems with IT and their broadband connections in the past. He believed that the proposals in the report would lead to an improved service and would establish much needed consistency.

Cllr J Fuller reminded members that the members' allowance was designed to pay for incidental expenses including that of basic communication. He felt the report to be sound and urged members to take forward its recommendations in order to provide clarity for new members. In response to Cllr Herbert's comments concerning laptops, Cllr Fuller advised that all County Council members were given the option of being supplied with a Norfolk County Council laptop. South Norfolk Council would therefore not be issuing laptops to “twin hatters”.

Members then voted on the amendment from Mrs M Dewsbury. With 15 vote in favour and 12 against, the amendment was carried.

Cllr M Gray, whilst understanding the need for a policy to be in place in time for the election, still felt there was a need to refer the report back to officers for further work and consultation with members, before any details were worked through. He moved this amendment which was subsequently seconded by Cllr T Lewis.

Cllr C Kemp then suggested a further amendment:

“That the report be referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration at its meeting on 30 March and that its recommendations be reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 26 April.

To delegate authority to the Cabinet to implement any decision reached.”

Following Cllr Kemp’s proposal, Cllr Gray, with the consent of the Council, withdrew his previous amendment. Seconding Cllr Kemp’s amendment, he expressed his support for the proposal.

With 27 votes in favour and 0 against, this amendment was carried.

It was then

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report’s proposals be referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration at its meeting on 30 March 2011 and that its subsequent recommendations be reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 26 April 2011;
2. To delegate to Cabinet the authority to implement any decision reached.

The Council concluded at 9.05 pm

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CHAIRMAN