

COUNCIL

Minutes of a remote meeting of South Norfolk District Council, held on Monday 14 December 2020 at 7.00pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: Minshull (Chairman), Amis, Bendle, Bernard, Bills, Blundell (for part of the meeting), Brown, Burrill, Clifford-Jackson, Curson, Dearnley, Dewsbury, Duffin, Easter, Edney (for part of the meeting), Elliott, Ellis, Elmer, Francis, Fuller, Glover, Halls, Hardy, Holden, Hornby, Hudson, Hurn, Kemp, Kiddie, Knight, Laidlaw, Legg, Mason Billig, Neal, Nuri-Nixon, Overton, Ridley, Rowe, J Savage, R Savage, Spruce, Thomas, Thomson, J Wilby, M Wilby and Worley.

Officers in Attendance: The Managing Director (T Holden), the Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Director of Place (P Courtier), the Director of Resources (D Lorimer) the Assistant Director, Governance and Business Support (E Hodds) and the Assistant Director of Finance (R Fincham)

3559 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr J Halls declared an 'other' interest relating to item 11 on the agenda, the Monitoring Officer report, and his appointment to the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Committee.

3560 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3561 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman was extremely sad to report the recent passing of former South Norfolk councillor, Ms Pauline Allen, adding that his thoughts were very much with Pauline's partner, former councillor, Prof. Murray Gray. The Chairman

explained that flowers had been sent on behalf of the Council, and that if restrictions allowed, he would be attending the funeral.

Cllr C Brown paid tribute to Ms Allen, who had served on South Norfolk District Council twice, between 1995 and 1999, and again from 2007 until 2015. He referred to her dedication and her tireless work for the community; her ultimate goal being to help those in need. She was extremely well respected within the local community and would be missed by all those that knew her.

Cllr J Fuller also paid tribute to Ms Allen and the positive impact she had on so many residents in the District. He expressed his sincere condolences, on behalf of the Council, to Prof. Gray.

Council then observed a minute's silence in tribute to Ms Allen.

The Chairman then referred members to the list of civic engagements for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the period 21 September to 13 December 2020. He explained that he had unfortunately not been able to attend the Annual Civic Immersion, hosted by RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall, and that this had been listed in error.

3562 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Cllr F Ellis moved the following motion, seconded by Cllr B Duffin:

“South Norfolk Council has an enviable record of getting roofs over peoples’ heads with a proven commitment to delivering nearly 1% of the nation’s affordable housing stock and building homes of all types for families of all ages and in all circumstances. This work tied with a commitment to support the most vulnerable is the mark of a compassionate Council.

But as we look years ahead as to how we will address these needs, we must be realistic that sustainable options for large scale settlement extensions are diminishing and we must actively contemplate whether new settlements will be required in the longer term to meet the needs of residents, some of whom may yet be unborn.

The Government is changing the way planning works and we do need to change our approach with it. Now is the time to consider and embrace the idea of new planned communities, close to existing infrastructure but with the opportunity to form low-impact garden communities of the future that we can be proud of in the decades to come. We cannot continue to just keep bolting-on thousands of homes to existing places. A new approach is necessary for our children and grandchildren.

Therefore, this Council commits itself to proactively start preparation for the planning of a new settlement in South Norfolk in the middle years of this decade. It instructs officers to work with members to set out the key success factors and objectives and to devise a process by which landowners and communities can respond to an invitation to make a fresh start on a new way of delivering homes in our district.”

Cllr Ellis explained that there would always be a need for new houses, and that the practice of extending existing settlements, could not be sustained. She urged members to support the motion, and the proactive planning of a new settlement, within South Norfolk.

In seconding the motion, Cllr B Duffin referred to Wymondham, Hethersett and Cringleford, as areas where significant development had already taken place. He felt that a new settlement was a sensible way forward and would provide some respite to other towns and villages.

Cllr J Fuller welcomed the motion, explaining that sustainable options for settlement extensions were diminishing, and that a new settlement was required in the longer term. He referred to examples of well planned new settlements and he stressed the need to consider success criteria and not to leave the call for sites to chance. He referred to Policy 7.6 in the new Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP), and in response to a query, he advised that three potential sites had been proposed through the current GNLP, and that these would be investigated, along with other potential locations in the next Local Plan, taking account of any agreed criteria. He referred to one member’s suggestion that too much agricultural land was being lost to housing, explaining that this was an example of what might be included within any agreed criteria.

Cllr C Brown was interested as to why the motion was put forward at the current time, whilst the Council was still in the midst of the current Local Planning process, which would take the Council up to 2038. He felt the potential need for a new settlement was adequately referred to in Policy 7.6 of the GNLP, and he suggested that with current planning resources being so scarce, officers’ current focus should be on the adoption of the GNLP. He stressed that he had no opposition in principle to a new settlement but did not believe that a motion was appropriate at this time.

In response to a query, Cllr Ellis confirmed that the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Site Allocation was progressing well. Summing up, she hoped that all members would support the motion and contribute to the future debate on how a new settlement should look and where it should be located.

Following a roll call vote, with 37 votes for, 7 against, and 1 abstention, the motion was carried.

RESOLVED

This Council commits itself to proactively start preparation for the planning of a new settlement in South Norfolk in the middle years of this decade. It instructs officers to work with members to set out the key success factors and objectives and to devise a process by which landowners and communities can respond to an invitation to make a fresh start on a new way of delivering homes in the district.

3563 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETINGS HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER, 2 NOVEMBER AND 7 DECEMBER 2020

(a) Updated Delivery Plan to reflect the Impact of COVID-19

Members noted that the report outlining the updated Delivery Plan, to reflect the impact of Covid-19, had been updated since being presented at Cabinet in September, and was attached at page 21 of the agenda.

Cllr Fuller presented the report which presented members with an updated Delivery Plan for 2020/21, and proposed a one-year plan for 21/22.

He commended the report to members, explaining the need to plan the Council's response, so as to ensure that it was at the forefront of the recovery. In response to a query regarding the impact on the delivery of Council services, he referred members to the budget update report, (considered later on in the agenda), which Cllr Fuller believed, would ensure delivery of the Plan.

Voting was carried out by roll call and it was unanimously:

RESOLVED

To:

1. Approve the adoption of the updated Delivery Plan for 2020/21.
2. Approve the development of a one-year plan for 2021/2022. Returning to Council in February 2021.

(b) Budget Update Report

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Worley, presented the recommendations from Cabinet, agreed at its meeting held on 2 November 2020, regarding the Council's budgets. Members noted that since this meeting, there had been further updates recommended by Cabinet, to be considered under item 8 (f).

Cllr C Brown expressed his support for the recommendations, however, referring to the development of a new business case for a LATC project, he expressed doubt as to what benefits this could bring if the Council was not working jointly with another authority.

Voting was carried out by roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

To:

- a) Increase the SNC 20/21 IT Capital Budget by £141,000, to fund the rollout of additional laptops to better facilitate the New Ways of Working;
- b) Agree that the unspent 'joint waste budget' be applied to cover the costs of developing a full business case for a LATC and depot projects.
- c) Increase the budgetary provision for Covid-19 expenditure from £250,000 to £305,000 to cover the additional £55,000 regulatory expenditure.
- d) Agree the proposed changes to the 20/21 income budgets as set out in paragraph 4.17 of the report;
- e) Agree that the Assistant Director Regulatory, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Economy and the Leader of the Council, is authorised to spend the new Coronavirus Enforcement grant of £57,176, to help the public and businesses understand the latest Covid 19 regulation, and increase compliance work and enforcement checks on businesses
- f) Remove the post of Assistant Director Consultancy Team from the establishment.

(c) Treasury Management Quarter 2 Report 2020/21

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Worley, presented the recommendations from Cabinet, agreed at its meeting held on 2 November 2020, regarding treasury management activity.

He outlined the current position with regard to the Council's investments and explained that some short term investments had been moved to money market funds, so that they could be drawn upon, should they be needed during the Council's response to Covid-19.

It was

RESOLVED

To:

- a) Note the treasury activity for the first half of the year and that it complies with the agreed strategy;
- b) Note the 2020/21 prudential indicators for the first six months of the year.

(d) The Vision for a Best in Class Housing Offer and Draft Allocations Scheme

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, presented the recommendations from Cabinet, agreed at its meeting held on 2 November 2020, regarding the vision for a “Best in Class Housing Offer”, and proposed a new Housing Allocations Scheme. Members noted that the Allocations Scheme had been updated since the Cabinet meeting, to take account of public/stakeholder consultation responses, and was detailed at page 93 of the Council agenda.

Cllr Bendle commended the report to members, and thanked all officers, in particular Victoria Parsons, for the work carried out to support the vision for a Best in Class Housing Model, and the production of a new Allocations Scheme.

Cllr C Brown concurred with Cllr Bendle’s comments, and congratulated officers on an excellent piece of work.

Voting was carried out by way of roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

To:

- a) endorse the officers work towards the Best in Class Housing model;
- b) agree the adoption of the Allocations Scheme.

(e) Public Space Protection Order – Dog Fouling

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr M Edney, presented the recommendations from Cabinet, agreed at its meeting held on 2 November 2020, regarding the making of a Public Space Protection Order.

Voting was carried out by way of roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

To:

- a) Make a Public Space Protection Order to require people in control of dogs to clean up after them if they foul in a public open space and restrict dogs from enclosed children play areas.
- b) Set the Fixed Penalty charge for breaching the Public Space Protection Order to £100 (reduced to £80 if paid within 14 calendar days from issue of the Fixed Penalty Notice).

(f) Budget Update Report – Second Wave COVID Funding

Members referred to the recommendations from Cabinet, agreed at its meeting held on 7 December 2020, regarding the additional budget required, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cllr J Fuller introduced the recommendations, explaining that additional budget was required to ensure an appropriate response to the pandemic and to support the economic recovery that would follow. This would require the use of reserves, which was affordable, due to the astute financial management of budgets, since the Conservatives took on the South Norfolk administration, back in 2007.

Cllr Fuller proposed an additional recommendation, to extend member-led ward grants for the current year only, until 31st March 2021. Each member would also be able to carry over any underspend from their budget, into the next financial year. This was in recognition of the fact that many community / voluntary groups were not currently meeting but would be in need of funding as the recovery progressed. This proposal was seconded by Cllr J Worley and welcomed by members.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Worley, outlined each of the recommendations, explaining that since the Cabinet meeting, the budgets had been analysed in great detail by both officers and members, to ensure that this was the appropriate way forward.

During discussion, members raised the issue of resources in environmental protection and the impact Brexit would have on local businesses, and Cllr Fuller assured Council that the proposed additional resources would allow the Council to be fully resourced to address such issues. It was acknowledged that Environmental Officers were difficult to recruit, and members were assured that the service would be provided with the necessary support. It was also noted that the Government had announced that Covid-19 Support grants could also be utilised to assist those businesses struggling with the impact of Brexit, if required.

One member expressed support for the proposed future investment in the technology in the Council Chamber, to ensure that the live streaming of meetings could continue, post the pandemic, and it was noted that hybrid meetings might be a possibility. Cllr A Thomas reminded members of the importance of responding to the IT questionnaire regarding their IT needs, as this would help to inform the review of members' IT, and ensure that members' needs were met.

Voting was carried out by way of roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

To:

1. Increase the general 20/21 Covid 19 emergency budgets by £450,000 to provide additional resource to support the Council's response to Covid 19. To be funded by the Government's Covid grant.
2. Increase the housing 20/21 Covid 19 emergency budget by £50,000 to meet the ongoing need for homelessness support. To be funded by the Government's Covid grant.
3. Agree that £350,000 should be included in the 21/22 budgets to help cover the cost of responding to the Covid 19 pandemic, to be funded from the Council's general reserve.
4. Increase the SNC 20/21 Information Technology Capital Budget by £40,000, to provide funding to support the outcome of the review of member IT.
5. Increase the SNC 20/21 Information Technology Capital Budget by £50,000, to improve the technology in the council chamber.
6. Extend member-led ward grants for the current year only, until 31st March 2021, and to carry over any underspends, into the next financial year.

(g) Update to Local Development Scheme

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Fuller, presented the recommendations from Cabinet, agreed at its meeting held 7 December, regarding the revised timetable for the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP), and the South Norfolk Village Clusters Local Plan.

Voting was carried out by way of roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

To approve the proposed amendments to the current Local Development Scheme.

(h) Proposals on the Future Governance Arrangement for the Big Sky Companies

Members considered the recommendations from the Cabinet, which sought approval to invite the Big Sky Board, to consider a change to the Big Sky Companies governance arrangements.

Councillor J Fuller outlined the recommendations, explaining that he felt that as the Big Sky projects grew, and returns and risks increased, it was appropriate that the Council was represented by two senior members, on the Big Sky Ventures Board. Should Big Sky agree to this request, he explained that he would be appointing Cllrs K Mason Billig, and A Thomas, to sit on the Board.

Voting was carried out by way of roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

1. To invite Big Sky Board to consider:
 - a. Increasing the number of Directors on the Board of Big Sky Ventures by one to a total of three; and
 - b. Offers two of the above positions to Members drawn from South Norfolk Council.
2. That should Big Sky agree to the above, that Cllrs Mason Billig and A Thomas be appointed to represent the Council on the Board.

3564 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LICENSING AND GAMBLING ACT COMMITTEE ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2020

Licensing Act 2003 Review of Licensing Policy

The Chairman of the Licensing Committee, Cllr R Elliott, introduced the recommendations, which sought Council approval for an amended Licensing Policy. He explained that under the Licensing Act 2003, every local authority was required to publish its Statement of Licensing Policy, and that there was a requirement to review this every 5 years.

He thanked officers who had been involved in revising the Policy and conducting the public consultation.

Voting was carried out by roll call and it was unanimously:

RESOLVED

To approve the amended Licensing Policy.

3565 COVID-19 UPDATE REPORT

Cllr J Fuller introduced the report, which provided an overview of the impact of Covid-19 on people, communities, and businesses in South Norfolk, together with details of the Council's ongoing response.

Cllr Fuller commended the report and the Council's response to the pandemic, which he believed had been proactive, but not heavy handed. He referred to the recent situation in Wymondham, where positive cases had risen dramatically, and how through an effective approach, working at street level with other agencies, this was addressed, and cases had dropped. He explained that the Council would be at the forefront of addressing the needs of residents, assisting with contact tracing and supporting the vaccination process.

He thanked staff on behalf of members, for all that they had done in responding to the needs of residents, acknowledging that many officers had not taken a break from work in over 6 months.

Cllr Y Bendle gave special mention to those staff in the Help Hub, and the Community Connectors, and advised members of a new arrangement whereby the Council would be offering a service up until 10.00pm on weekdays.

Cllr C Brown thanked officers for the helpful report and was conscious of the contribution from all staff, across all services, in support of the Council's response. He expected the impact of the pandemic to continue for many more months and stressed the importance of working together and remaining diligent.

Members praised the successful response to the Covid-19 outbreak in Wymondham, however it was suggested by one member, that the Town Council might have been kept better informed and if that had been the case, it may have been able to assist more. The Managing Director explained that the response to the situation in the town had been coordinated through the Tactical Co-ordinating Group and the Local Coordinating Group, in consultation with Public Health. The multi-agency response had been extremely successful, however suggestions for improvement were welcome.

In response to queries, Cllr Fuller explained that the Council had received no early indication with regard to which tier Norfolk would be placed in later that week, although he was doubtful that it would be any lower than the current tier 2. This view was echoed by the Managing Director, who felt it was highly unlikely that Norfolk would be placed in tier 1. He urged members to be advocates in encouraging communities to follow the rules over Christmas, to keep people safe, and to keep pressure off the NHS.

RESOLVED

To note the contents of the report regarding the local impact of Covid-19 together with the activities the Council is taking to mitigate those impacts.

3566 MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

Cllr Fuller introduced the report of the Monitoring Officer, which updated and sought agreement from Council on proposals to amend sections of the Constitution, to reinstate the six-month rule and to consider an appointment to an outside body.

Cllr Fuller outlined the recommendations of the report, however, turning to recommendation 3, to disband the Joint Lead Members' Group (JLMG), he explained that he had decided to withdraw this recommendation, as on reflection, he felt this to be premature, and should not be actioned until arrangements of the joint Scrutiny Committee were in place.

Cllr Brown was pleased to hear that the JLMG would not yet be disbanded, as he had found the joint informal cross-party group, to be very informative and helpful. He queried how the Joint Informal Cabinet would work, and how backbench members and members of the opposition, could keep track of discussions.

In response, Cllr Fuller explained that the Joint Informal Cabinet would be a way in which the two Cabinets could get together on matters of mutual intent but stressed that it was not a decision-making body. He explained that it had met the previous week, to consider how to more closely align the decision-making process.

Cllr K Mason Billig endorsed Cllr Brown's comments regarding the JLMG, stressing that it had been invaluable in engaging back benchers and opposition members into the collaboration process, but she stressed that she recognised

that this Group was replicating the work of other committees and creating additional work for officers. Whilst she agreed that the Group should be disbanded at some point, she felt that it would be more appropriate to wait until the Joint Informal Cabinet and Joint Scrutiny Committee, were established. She hoped that this way, both opposition members and backbenchers would continue to feel involved and engaged.

Voting was carried out by way of a roll call and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

To:

1. Amend the Constitution in respect of attesting the official Seal of the Council as outlined in paragraph 2.3 of the report
2. Amend the Constitution in respect of the Terms of Reference for Joint Informal Cabinet.

3. Amend the Constitution in respect of voting at remote Committee meetings.
4. Confirm the amendments to the appointment to Committees as outlined in section 3 of the report
5. Reinstate the six-month rule
6. Appoint Cllr K Mason Billig, (and Cllr J Knight as substitute), to the Broadland Futures Initiative Elected Members Forum.

3567 QUESTIONS TO CHAIRMEN AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

(a) Cabinet

Cllr P Hardy asked Cllr J Fuller for an update on the progress with the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP).

Cllr Fuller explained that work on the current Plan had commenced five years ago, and had now reached a crucial stage, whereby the Plan would be published for consultation under regulation 19, and responses would be invited with regard to the legality and soundness of the document. Representations received would assist members in deciding whether to submit the Plan in the Summer of 2021 and would be critical in informing the independent examination process. Members noted that the Regulation 19 draft would be presented to Cabinet in January, before going out to consultation.

Cllr Fuller acknowledged that there had been “sticking points” along the way but was pleased that issues had been addressed resulting in a Plan that positively supported the needs of South Norfolk. He referred to the village clusters, which would give people choice and make village settlements more desirable. He also gave mention to the lack of amenities in Costessey, Easton and Queen’s Hill, and the recognition in the Plan to provide more food and leisure facilities, possibly through the currently under-utilised Norfolk Showground. He stressed that for far too long, this area had been unable to access facilities enjoyed by all other market towns in South Norfolk. In response to concerns raised by Cllr M Dewsbury regarding traffic around the Showground, Cllr Fuller assured Council that an adequate Traffic Plan would be required, in consultation with Highways, with regard to any such development

Cllr C Brown asked Cllr Fuller whether he would support the Council’s website detailing members’ attendance figures, as did many other councils. Cllr Fuller explained that he had no objection to this but wondered whether it would be appropriate for Scrutiny to consider this matter, as he would not wish it to result in any unintended consequences.

Cllr Brown asked Cllr Fuller whether he would agree and support the motion that was unanimously agreed at a recent Norfolk County Council meeting, which promoted equality and the eradication of racism. Cllr Fuller agreed that discrimination in any form should not be tolerated and suggested that a cross party motion could be drawn up and considered at a future meeting of the Council. Cllr Dewsbury added that she would be happy to share the details of the training on equalities, that had been rolled out to both members and officers at the County Council, should people be interested.

In response to a query from Cllr D Bills, Cllr Bendle explained that as an interim measure, for a period of 6 months, or until a full review had taken place, the cap on Disabled Facilities Grants, would rise from £8k to £12k. She hoped that this would help to speed up the spending of the grant, which had been most difficult during the current year, due to the need for residents to self-isolate and shield.

Cllr P Hardy referred to the Hethersett Hearts community group, that helped vulnerable people within the local community, who were suffering from loneliness and anxiety, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. He wondered if there could be a relaxation of the rules of the Member Ward budgets, so that this group could be financially supported in the current year, despite already receiving funding from members within the last 2 years. Cllr Bendle explained that the current rules did allow groups to receive funding more than once within a 2 year period, as long as this was not for the same project, but agreed that the rules required clarification. She reminded members that the Scrutiny Committee would be considering Member Ward budgets at its meeting to be held on 21 December, and she welcomed further debate on the issue at that stage.

In the absence of Cllr Edney, Cllr Brown asked Cllr Fuller what priority he would give to carbon emission reduction, and did he agree with the UN Secretary General, that all countries should declare a climate change emergency?

In response, Cllr Fuller responded to other pressing emergencies, such as health and the economy. He suggested that if there was to be less carbon, then a reasoned debate needed to take place on what would replace it. There was a need to balance the environment and the place in which we lived with natural resources, and then the Council could better respond to the challenges of the future and build an economy around it. He did not believe in the use of slogans and felt that a more reasoned and less emotive debate was required, based on evidence. He referred to areas where the Council could make a real difference such as recycling and the prevention of fly tipping.

Cllr S Nuri Nixon asked Cllr L Neal if there were any plans to invest in Wymondham town centre, similar to that investment recently announced for

Harleston. Cllr Neal referred to the proposed investment in Wymondham train station, and investments already made in the leisure centre and Kett's Park. This had been taken in to account when deciding to direct funds to Harleston on this occasion. Cllr Fuller added that it needed to be recognised that Harleston had a peculiar configuration of road network, that did not lend itself to social distancing whilst shopping, and this was why it was felt that Harleston was in particular need of investment at this time.

(b) Scrutiny Committee

Cllr B Bernard asked Cllr G Minshall when the report that had been withdrawn from the October Scrutiny Committee agenda, regarding the Future of Community Grants, would be returning to the Committee for consideration. It was confirmed that this report would be considered at the December meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

(c) Licensing Committee

There were no questions to the Chairman of the Licensing Committee.

(d) Development Management Committee

There were no questions to the Chairman of the Development Management Committee. Cllr V Thomson confirmed that he continued to work with the Planning Officers, and Democratic Services, to ensure the smooth running of virtual meetings. He hoped once electronic voting was implemented, then an increase on the numbers of members sitting on the Committee, could be considered.

3568 OUTSIDE BODIES – FEEDBACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES

There were no reports from representatives on outside bodies to consider.

3569 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was

RESOLVED

To exclude the public and press from the meeting under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the following item of business on the grounds that it involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended)

3570 EXEMPT MINUTE

The exempt minute of the meeting held on 21 September 2020 was confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(The meeting concluded at 9.55pm)

Chairman