

# COUNCIL

**Minutes of meeting of South Norfolk District Council, held on Monday 17 October 2022 at 7.30pm.**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: Easter (Chairman), Amis, Bernard, Bills, Blundell, Brown, Burrill, Dearnley, Dewsbury, Duffin, Ellis, Elliott, Francis, Fuller, Glover, Halls, Hardy, Hornby, Hudson, Hurn, Kemp, Kiddie, Knight, Laidlaw, Legg, Mason Billig, Minshull, Neal, Nixon, Overton, Ridley, Rowe, J Savage, R Savage, Spratt, Thomas, Thomson, J Wilby, N Wilby and J Worley

**Apologies** Councillors: Bendle, Edney, Elmer, Holden and Spruce

**Officers in Attendance:** The Managing Director (T Holden), the Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Director of Resources (D Lorimer), the Governance Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer (L Mockford) and the Democratic Services Manager (C White)

## **3657 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Bendall, Edney, Elmer and Holden.

## **3658 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by members.

## **3659 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

## **3660 CHAIRMAN'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Members noted the civic engagements attended by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the period 24 May to 11 July 2022.

The Chairman took this opportunity to observe the passing of the Queen and to remember the shining example she set for those in public service.

The Chairman also asked members to note the passing of Lady Sheelin Knollys, a past Chairman and Alderman of South Norfolk Council.

Cllr J Fuller reminded the Council that Lady Knollys had served on the Council for 20 years until 2003. Her reputation for fair-mindedness, guile, wit and compassion was well-known and she served as an example to all who knew her. He noted that although she had left the Council before he had become a member of the Council, he had met her on many occasions and he had warm memories of a wonderful lady who was a true servant of South Norfolk Council and would be sorely missed.

Cllr V Thomson informed the meeting that he first met Lady Knollys when he stood as her successor for Rockland Ward. He noted how kind and supportive she had been and how she had been active in a huge number of bodies and organisations during her career. He added that Lady Knollys had a great intellect and a strong character and would be deeply missed.

The Council then stood and observed a minute's silence in tribute to both Queen Elizabeth II and Lady Knollys.

Cllr Florence Ellis reminded the Council that the early part of her civic year had been disrupted by the restrictions caused by the pandemic and she had decided that something should be done to remember that difficult time. She had, therefore, commissioned a map of South Norfolk that was illustrated with people who lived and continued to work in the District, delivering local services throughout that time.

Cllr Ellis then presented the map to the Managing Director who thanked her on behalf of members, officers and the agencies represented in the map for a wonderful concept, which had captured a moment in time across the District. He confirmed that the map would be hung in pride of place in the new Horizon building.

### **3661 QUESTION FROM MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC**

The Chairman explained that a question from a member of the public, a Ms A Reeder, had been submitted. Unfortunately Ms Reeder had been unable to attend the meeting, and the Chairman had therefore agreed that on this occasion the meeting should consider her question in her absence:

*'On average there have been cuts to Government grant to local government since 2010 of 60p in the pound, which has forced councils to reassess their ways of working. Without public consent our council has moved to shared services with Broadland and is now moving to new accommodation with Broadland out of our area. Could the Leader advise of the contractual position should the councils decide not to work together in the future or realise that there is excess capacity in the new offices, given the move to hybrid working? Could the Leader also advise the scale of any redundancies or loss of key staff that will arise because of the relocation of the offices from Long Stratton?*

*After much secrecy the cost of the new premises has now come to light in the EDP. Given current market volatility, rising interest rates and inflation how*

*does the Council propose to cover the gap between the sale of Cygnet House and Thorpe Lodge both of whose combined market value are considerably less than the new offices and whose capital receipt is not yet realised?*

In response, Cllr K Mason Billig advised the meeting that in respect of the point raised above about public consent the Council was directly elected by the public to make decisions on their behalf and that members took this responsibility very seriously. She reminded the meeting that a Feasibility Study had been conducted before a decision to share staff with Broadland was made, which had indicated the potential benefits of collaboration. As a result of this decision the Council was set to make savings of £8.5m over five years.

The next step on this journey was to move to a new shared office that would build on this good work. South Norfolk House cost £750,000 per annum to run and electricity costs could rise by 200 percent in the near future, and Broadland District Council was in a similar position. It was, therefore, more practical to share one office site. Although the new office was not in South Norfolk, it was only just across the border in Broadland Business Park and was closer to two thirds of South Norfolk residents than the offices at Long Stratton. To ensure that all residents had access to Council services an outreach centre in Diss had been opened that day. This office would be open five days a week and had already received positive feedback from customers.

Cllr Mason Billig informed the meeting that the majority of residents accessed Council services online or by telephone or were visited in their own home. A survey of footfall at both local authorities had identified that the majority of visits in person were from taxi drivers renewing their licences. It was, therefore, not considered that anyone would be disadvantaged by the office move.

She explained that should the two councils decide not to work together in the future there was nothing to prevent them from still sharing an office, as it was owned jointly. There was also an opportunity to rent out office space at the new building, which would generate further income and help subsidise Council Tax in the future.

Collaboration had been undertaken on the basis of avoiding redundancies and this principle had been very successful to date. In Long Stratton there were only 2.4 full time employees directly affected by the office move and consultation was taking place with them about potential redeployment. Staff were seen as the Council's greatest asset and had been kept involved in the decision to move all through the process and the vast majority were looking forward to moving to a new modern office.

The move to the Horizon Building would bring many benefits for staff, members and visitors and with a modern flexible way of working it would ensure that the Council remained an employer of choice.

Purchasing the Horizon Centre was a commercial transaction, subject to a non-disclosure agreement with Aviva and the Council was contractually obliged to keep the purchase price confidential until the sale was completed.

Cllr Mason Billig stressed that there had been no attempt to withhold any details of the purchase and following a great deal of negotiation the Councils had paid £2.4m less than the asking price.

South Norfolk House would close on 4 November 2022 and would be mothballed to keep costs at a minimum. It was expected that the new office would open early in the New Year when Thorpe Lodge would also be closed. Both sites were very desirable commercial opportunities and were being actively marketed and had received a good deal of interest.

It had been calculated that the cost of the move would be recovered in four and a half years and that going forward savings of £600,000 per annum in running costs would be made.

Cllr Mason Billig explained that the decision to move offices was taken having undertaken over and above the expected level of due diligence for a commercial move of this type. A cross party Council Working Group, involving members from both South Norfolk and Broadland, had looked at all aspects of the project and several options had been considered, including the status quo and it had been concluded that the move to the Horizon building was the best option.

Overall, the move would save a vast amount of Council Tax payers' money, it would be better for residents, staff and members and the new building would enable an 80% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> across both Councils.

## **3662 NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

### **(a) Fuel duty relief for rural areas**

#### **Cllr C Brown**

Cllr C Brown proposed the following motion, seconded by Cllr S Nuri-Nixon:

"The Council notes:

- That, because of its rural nature, residents in South Norfolk have been disproportionately affected by the steep rise in fuel prices over the past year. Car journeys in South Norfolk are in general longer, and public transport services less frequent, than urban areas.
- Research by the Countryside Alliance has found that rural households spend an average of £2440 a year on filling up their car, £800 more than households in urban areas.
- That the Government operates a Fuel Duty Relief scheme for rural areas, but at present it only applies in extremely remote parts of Britain such as Orkney, Shetland, the Outer & Inner Hebrides and the Isles of Scilly.
- The Early Day Motion tabled by Richard Foord MP (Lib Dem, Tiverton & Honiton) calling for Fuel Duty Relief to be extended to cover most rural areas in Britain, and for the relief rate to be doubled from 5p to 10p per litre. Coupled with a 2.5% cut in VAT, also called for by the Liberal

Democrats, this would save the average driver in South Norfolk £7.60 each time they fill up their car (and over £200 over the next year).

This Council believes that more should be done to support residents in South Norfolk with rising fuel prices.

This Council resolves to:

- Instruct the Managing Director to write to Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt MP to express our support of the proposal to extend fuel duty relief to more rural areas, including South Norfolk, and for the relief rate to be doubled to 10p.
- Write to our local Members of Parliament expressing the Council's support for this proposal and requesting that they support the Early Day Motion tabled by Richard Foord MP."

Cllr Brown urged members to support the motion, which sought to provide additional support to residents in the District with rising fuel costs, amid a wider cost of living crisis. He explained that the District had been disproportionately affected by the rise in fuel prices due to its rural nature and the lack of public transport in many areas.

Cllr L Neal expressed surprise at the proposed motion, as it would encourage car use, which ran counter to the Liberal Democrats views in combating climate change.

She added that the Council was taking measures to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by installing electric vehicle charging points (EVCPs) in its carparks and that these would double in number by Christmas. The Council had also been in touch with parish and town councils and 25 of them wished to go ahead with EVCP installations and a further 50 had expressed an interest. It was measures such as these that should be encouraged, rather than increasing petrol and diesel car use.

Cllr Fuller informed the meeting that he too thought that the proposal was inconsistent with the views previously expressed by the Liberal Democrat Group. He explained that as well as EVCP installation in car parks and parishes in the District, they would also soon be installed at the Council's leisure centres. This policy would allow choice for the rural motorist and not just those people with drives at home to charge electric vehicles to participate in the fight against climate change.

He advised members that South Norfolk was unique in providing business rate relief for rural garages, to allow them to maintain local rural services. However, he pointed to the fact that South Norfolk also had large urban areas at Costessey, Cringleford, Wymondham and Diss and asked if it was proposed that the fuel duty relief would apply to these areas? He suggested that the proposal would incentivise motorists to travel further to fill up their cars for less. He also asked how it would be enforced to allow only South Norfolk residents to benefit from the cheaper fuel.

Overall, he considered the motion to be well-meaning, but poorly thought out and that it did nothing to encourage a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. He would, therefore, not support the motion.

Cllr J Hornby noted that the motion referred to areas of extreme rurality where the average price of fuel was much higher than in South Norfolk to start with. He agreed with the Leader that this was not a well thought out motion.

In response, Cllr Brown conceded that the District had urban areas, but it also had very rural areas, with few petrol stations and poor public transport where residents had no choice, but to use cars. There were also many people who could not afford to buy an electric vehicle and it was these people that the motion was targeted at. He added that he supported the green measures being introduced by the Council, but it had been calculated that people in rural areas were spending £800 a year more on fuel than in non-rural areas and that during this cost-of-living crisis the motion should be supported and the details of its implementation worked out later.

With 10 votes in favour and 29 against the motion was lost.

## **(b) Fighting anti-refugee Laws**

### **Cllr C Brown**

Cllr C Brown proposed the following motion, seconded by Cllr T Laidlaw:

“The Council notes that:

- South Norfolk is proud of our history of welcoming people seeking safety in South Norfolk.
- There are significant problems with the UK asylum system that affect people in this area, including a record backlog of cases awaiting a decision, a de facto ban on working, and enforced poverty and homelessness.
- The Nationality and Borders Act does not address these issues, and has instead created a two-tier system, punishing people seeking safety based on the journeys they make.
- Under these laws, people seeking safety will be criminalised and threatened with removal to Rwanda.
- People will be warehoused in large accommodation centres, segregated from communities and denied support.
- Many recognised refugees will receive a temporary and precarious status.
- Over 400 charities and faith groups have signed a national pledge to ‘Fight the ‘Anti-Refugee Laws’, including Amnesty International UK, Liberty, Crisis, Refugee Council, Save the Children, Shelter and Oxfam.

This Council believes that:

- Everyone’s claim for asylum should be treated equally and fairly.
- These are fundamentally ‘anti-refugee’ laws that undermine internationally recognised rights for people fleeing war and persecution to seek safety.

- These measures will create ever-longer delays in the asylum process.
- The UK needs an asylum system that empowers people seeking safety to rebuild their lives and enables communities to welcome them.

This Council resolves to:

- Defend the right to seek safety from war and persecution in the UK and sign the national 'Fight the Anti-Refugee Laws' pledge.
- Call on the UK Government to withdraw the UK-Rwanda agreement, repeal the Nationality and Borders Act, and work with Local Authorities and communities to build a refugee protection system that treats all people with dignity and compassion.
- Work with local organisations and people with lived experience of the asylum system to identify ways to mitigate the effects of these measures in South Norfolk.
- Join the network of cities, towns and districts which promote the inclusion and welfare of people who are fleeing violence and persecution and become a recognised Council of Sanctuary."

Cllr C Brown informed the meeting that the motion was intended to oppose the Nationality and Borders Act and to address the huge problems with the UK asylum system, which criminalised those seeking safety in the country. He noted that 400 charities and organisations were opposed to the Act and the motion set out how South Norfolk, which had been a welcoming District for those fleeing Ukraine, should oppose it.

He added that the proposed resolution sought to fight the anti-refugee laws and withdraw from the UK-Rwanda agreement and work with local organisations to enable refugees to settle and receive support in South Norfolk and to become a recognised Council of Sanctuary.

Cllr Ridley agreed that South Norfolk was proud of its history of welcoming people seeking safety. However, he considered the motion a misnomer and that the Nationality and Borders Act was not anti-refugee legislation. He noted that the UK had taken back control of its borders following Brexit and that there remained legal and proper ways to enter the country as a genuine refugee fleeing persecution. He suggested that supporting this motion would give encouragement to the criminal gangs who preyed on people and smuggled them across the channel in dangerous small boats. He advised the meeting that genuine refugees using legal routes should be encouraged to come to the UK, but not economic migrants. He thought that the motion was ill-conceived and should be rejected.

Cllr Worley informed the meeting that the UK-Rwanda agreement was the reason that he had resigned from the Conservative Party. He recognised that the issues raised in the motion were out of the Council's control, but he felt that a message should be sent to the Government that the Council did not support sending asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Cllr Rowe agreed with the motion and said that he considered sending asylum seekers to Rwanda to be shameful.

The Leader advised the meeting that he did not agree with the premise that the Act was an anti-refugee law and that this was a politicised mischaracterisation. He noted that the UK had always welcomed genuine asylum seekers who wanted to avoid persecution and he cited the response to refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan. In particular, South Norfolk had taken in more Ukrainian families than any other district in Norfolk. Staff at the Council had provided support for these displaced families consisting mainly of women and children, whilst their husbands fought for democracy in Ukraine. Similarly, Afghan families had been welcomed to South Norfolk.

He noted that what was currently happening was economic migrancy fuelled by criminal gangs bringing boats of mostly young men of working age to this country, when they would be better building the economy of their own nations.

The UK had a reputation for supporting and helping nations to develop and this should be the main focus to prevent the pull factor that brought economic migrants to these shores and denuded countries of the people that they needed to thrive. He stressed that the UK should support asylum seekers, but not economic migrants.

Cllr A Thomas, took issue with the suggestion in the motion that people would be warehoused in large accommodation centres, segregated from communities and denied support as she was aware of asylum seekers being housed in hotels in Bowthorpe, Costessey and Hellesdon and that they were not being segregated. She added that it had not yet been confirmed whether or not the Council would be called upon to provide these asylum seekers with additional support.

Cllr J Hornby suggested that no country's asylum laws were perfect, but many migrants had travelled through a number of safe countries before claiming asylum in the UK. He agreed with the principle that if a person came to the UK illegally they should be treated differently from someone who had come via a legal route and he would vote against the motion.

Cllr T Laidlaw explained that he would support the motion and suggested that some migrants simply wanted to live in a constitutional democracy and should be respected for this.

Cllr Brown acknowledged that this was a complex issue. He reiterated that migrants were being held in large accommodation centres and that 400 organisations were opposed to the Act. He also noted that the UK took in fewer migrants than most other European nations and that legal routes should be opened up for migration to help develop and grow the economy.

A recorded vote was then conducted as follows:

Cllrs Amis, Bernard, Blundell, Brown, Burrill, Glover, Halls, Hudson, Laidlaw, Nuri-Nixon, Rowe, Spratt and Worley voted for the motion

Cllrs Bills, Dearnley, Dewsbury, Duffin, Easter, Elliott, Ellis, Francis, Fuller, Hardy, Hornby, Hurn, Kemp, Kiddie, Knight, Legg, Mason Billig, Minshull,



Neal, Overton, Ridley, J Savage, R Savage, Thomas, Thomson, J Wilby and M Wilby voted against the motion.

With 13 votes in favour and 27 against, the motion was lost.

### **3663 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 17 OCTOBER 2022**

#### **(a) Update to the Local Development Scheme**

Cllr J Fuller presented the recommendation from Cabinet, which was the latest iteration in a long series of updates on progress to the adoption of the various Local Plans. Members were asked to note and approve the amendments to the scheme.

It was unanimously

#### **RESOLVED**

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

#### **(b) Using intelligence to achieve a First-Class Customer Service**

Members were informed that this report had been deferred to a future meeting of Cabinet.

#### **(c) Public Space Protection Order – Dog Fouling**

Cllr G Minshull presented the recommendation from Cabinet, which sought Council approval for the Public Space Protection Order No. 3, which had lapsed during the pandemic. The Order was subject to an amendment to clarify that people with assistance dogs would still be required to clear up any dog fouling in a public space.

It was unanimously

#### **RESOLVED**

To approve the Public Space Protection Order No. 3 as proposed in paragraph 4.7 and Appendix 1 of the report (subject to a minor amendment) over the geographical areas identified in Appendix 2 for a period of three years.

### **3664 ADOPTION OF REDENHALL WITH HARLESTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Cllr L Neal introduced the report, which sought approval of the Redenhall

with Harleston Neighbourhood Plan. She congratulated the steering group volunteers for all their hard work and noted that 87 percent of those who had voted had been in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan.

She advised the meeting that the Neighbourhood Plan would give residents the chance to shape their community going forwards and its adoption would mean that Redenhall with Harleston Town Council would receive a larger proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts from development that was approved within its parish for spending on local infrastructure projects.

Cllr Neal endorsed the Neighbourhood Plan, which would be used by officers and members when determining planning applications in the area.

Cllr J Savage, local member for Harleston, also endorsed the Neighbourhood Plan and recommended it for adoption. He wished to thank the Neighbourhood Steering Group (Chair Carolyn Malinowski) and all others involved in the formation of the Plan.

It was unanimously

#### **RESOLVED**

To adopt the Redenhall with Harleston Neighbourhood Plan.

#### **3665 THE ADOPTION OF UPDATED AND CONSOLIDATED MODEL BYELAWS FOR THE PURPOSES OF REGISTRATION OF A RANGE OF SKIN PIERCING TREATMENTS UNDER RELEVANT LEGISLATION**

Cllr W Kemp presented the report, which proposed the registration of businesses providing cosmetic piercing or semi-permanent skin colouring and the adoption of model byelaws applying to tattooing, semi-permanent skin colouring, cosmetic piercing, electrolysis businesses and the practice of acupuncture.

Cllr Kemp drew members' attention to Cllr Bendle's report, as Chairman of the Licensing Committee, which outlined its deliberations on this matter.

In response to a query from Cllr Blundell regarding hygiene, Cllr Fuller confirmed that there was an absolute test, which meant that these establishments must be compliant with the regulations in order to be allowed to trade.

It was unanimously

#### **RESOLVED**

1. To adopt the model byelaws in Appendix 1 in accordance with its powers in Part VIII of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.

2. Agree to delegate authorisation to the Director of Place to affix the Council's Common Seal to the byelaws shown in Appendix 1, to adopt the byelaws and make application to the Secretary of State for Health, for confirmation of these byelaws.
3. Agree to the revocation of existing legacy byelaws at Appendix 2 upon adoption of the consolidated byelaws at Appendix 1.

## **3666 QUESTIONS TO CHAIRMEN AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

### **(a) Cabinet**

Cllr C Brown referred to his question at the last Council meeting regarding member attendance and the implementation of a new committee system, which would record this. He noted that he had been told by Cllr Fuller at the July Council that the software would be in place shortly and asked why this was not the case.

In response, Cllr J Fuller explained that the system was being tested but some accessibility issues had arisen that had not been anticipated. Progress was being made in bringing forward the implementation of the system and the provider was currently working on a fix to address the issues that had arisen.

Cllr C Hudson requested an update on the removal of the Harleston toilets.

Cllr Fuller referred to the Managing Director to respond. The Managing Director explained that officers had been unsuccessful in engaging with the original provider of the facility. Work was now being undertaken to explore if the toilets could be moved. If it could be moved further work would be done on its relocation. If this was not possible it would be disposed of in accordance with the Council's disposal of assets policy. Members would be kept informed of how this matter was progressing.

Cllr T Laidlaw reminded Council that the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Policy Committee had been suspended in May, pending an assessment of how its work would be carried out going forward. He expressed his concern that no action had been taken, especially as the Committee had been examining the recovery and commercial performance of the leisure centres, and other commercial activities, including the acquisition of the Horizon building. He added that communication to members regarding progress with the Horizon building had not been great, with most information being obtained through the Eastern Daily Press.

In response, Cllr Fuller advised Council that a lot of work was going on in respect of leisure and that Cllr Elliott had attended a meeting of the Leisure Board that morning. Cllr J Hornby informed members that the Scrutiny Committee had received a very good update on the Leisure Recovery Plan at its July meeting.

The purchase of the Horizon building had taken longer to complete than anticipated, but it was hoped that by December a joint decision-making body could be agreed with Broadland to look at how the Horizon building would be used.

Cllr K Mason Billig added that the delay with the Horizon building was due to difficulties about agreeing an access road with a neighbouring property. She confirmed that she was holding fortnightly meetings with the Leader of Broadland District Council to discuss the layout and requirements for the Horizon building and that a detailed survey of the equipment at both offices was being conducted, to assess what could be reused in order to keep costs down. The Horizon building would be a modern office, with bookable desks and different types of spaces, similar to those at Breckland Council, and a suitable environment for an employer of choice. Once this analysis had been completed the details would go to a quantity surveyor in order to identify the exact costs. It was intended that the Council Chamber would be a multi-use space that could be let out for conferences to generate further income.

Cllr Fuller added that he anticipated that the membership of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Policy Committee would be agreed at the next meeting of Council and that the leisure centres and the Horizon building would form part of its Work Programme.

Cllr J Halls announced that Wymondham ward members had received notification that disabled access adaptations for platform two at the town's train station were in jeopardy, as Network Rail had objected to them, which could potentially see funding for the works being lost.

Cllr Fuller confirmed that this was most unsatisfactory and that the Council along with George Freeman MP, the County Council and Greater Anglia was actively working to resolve this issue and deliver the improvements.

In answer to a suggestion from Cllr C Hudson that South Norfolk House could be used for sheltered accommodation, Cllr Fuller cautioned against speculating on the future use of the offices whilst it was still being marketed for the statutory six-month period. He suggested that the use of the offices could be looked at once this period had expired in January.

Cllr Brown asked Cllr G Minshull about a wider roll out of the food waste collection across the District and also if any progress was being made with any Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) recycling events.

Cllr Minshull informed Council that it would be inappropriate for the Council to implement a wider food waste collection at this time, as it was anticipated that the Government would be introducing a fully funded scheme in the near future. The Council would, therefore, wait until the Government had made its position clear.

Cllr Minshull confirmed that the first post-Covid WEEE event was held at Diss two weeks ago and had been a resounding success. Further events

would be rolled out in the future and a paper would be brought to Cabinet in the near future with options for WEEE kerbside collections.

Members were also informed that the Council had been awarded gold standard status by the RSPCA for its stray dog service following a recent inspection.

Cllr Minshull also advised the meeting that a new bin collection app was to be launched that week. The app would confirm bin collection days, set reminders and allow missing or damaged bins to be reported.

Cllr S Nuri-Nixon raised a concern about the requirement for photo ID when voting at polling stations, which had been introduced by the Elections Act 2022. She asked if this would be in place for the May 2023 District elections and what measures were being implemented to prevent voters from being disenfranchised and what would the extra cost of the requirement be.

In response Cllr Mason Billig confirmed that the measures would be in place for next year's elections and that the Council was well prepared for their introduction. The Managing Director informed the meeting that it was anticipated that any additional costs would be picked up under New Burdens funding.

Cllr Hudson requested more details regarding the mothballing of South Norfolk House, the cost of the repurposing of the Horizon building and where the shortfall between the sale of South Norfolk House and the purchase of the Horizon building was coming from.

In response Cllr Mason Billig informed members that mothballing South Norfolk House simply consisted of turning off the heating, making the building secure and ceasing to run services in order to save Council Taxpayers' money. As referred to above, the costs of repurposing the Horizon building would be confirmed by a quantity surveyor once details of the required layout had been agreed. A budget for this had been set at Council and as much equipment as possible would be reused in order to save money. The shortfall between the sale of South Norfolk House and the purchase of the Horizon building would be offset by savings of £600,000 per annum in running costs and it was anticipated that the Horizon building would be paid for in four and a half years.

Cllr B Bernard asked if the Council's budgets were being reassessed in the light of current inflationary pressures.

Cllr A Dearnley confirmed that work was being undertaken on the budgets. No figures were available at this stage, but they would be brought to Cabinet in due course. He added that budgeting would be more difficult over the coming years, but the Council had considerable reserves and remained financially sound and he confirmed that services were not under threat.

Cllr Fuller emphasised that the Council was in a healthy financial position, with strong reserves. However, he recognised that there were inflationary pressures in areas such as fuel for waste collection services, homelessness and temporary accommodation and he suggested that a sophisticated targeted approach should be taken to address these services. He stressed that it would be a team effort to support residents and that one means of doing this was to move to a structurally lower cost base at the Horizon building, which would optimise the space required by staff and save 84 percent in energy. He added that all of these changes would mean that South Norfolk was best placed to support its residents in need, whilst keeping a close eye on budgets.

Cllr Fuller informed the meeting that South Norfolk was unique in holding a budget workshop where all members were invited to provide input and he requested that all members attend and actively participate in the budget setting process.

In response to a query about a Council Tax freeze for next year, Cllr Fuller confirmed that if the Council had lower costs as a result of the move to the Horizon building it was only right that these savings should be shared in the form of a Council Tax freeze.

The Managing Director emphasised that Council Tax setting was for Council to determine, whilst being mindful of the different political perspectives of members.

#### **(b) Scrutiny Committee**

Cllr Rowe congratulated Cllr Hornby on his excellent chairmanship of the Scrutiny Committee.

In response, Cllr Hornby emphasised the importance of leaving aside political differences at meetings and praised the fine officer support provided to the Committee.

#### **(c) Development Management Committee**

Cllr V Thomson advised the meeting that the Development Management Committee meeting on 19 October would be the last to be held at South Norfolk House.

### **3667 OUTSIDE BODIES – FEEDBACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES**

There was no member feedback regarding outside bodies.

The meeting concluded at 9.45 pm.

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Chairman