

COUNCIL

Minutes of a remote meeting of South Norfolk District Council held on Monday 27 July 2020 at 7.00pm

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

Apologies: Councillors: Amis, Bernard, Blundell, Curson, Hornby and Neal

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)

Also in Attendance: Mr J Bootman

3541 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Mr J Bootman put the following question to Council:

UNESCO has stated:

“The appearance of COVID-19 has shown that when we destroy biodiversity, we destroy the system that supports human life. The more biodiverse an ecosystem is, the more difficult it is for a pathogen to spread rapidly or dominate. Loss of biodiversity provides an opportunity for pathogens to pass between animals and people”

and:

“the COVID 19 virus has lessons that apply to global crises of biodiversity loss. For this reason, our best vaccine for the future is to protect nature and biodiversity”.

Will South Norfolk Council now make biodiversity retention and enhancement a prime determinant for all future projects, including maintenance, planning regulation, construction, etc.?

Cllr Fuller thanked Mr Bootman for his question, which he considered to be timely, not just due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because the Council's new Environmental Strategy, was to be considered by Council later that evening.

Although Cllr Fuller did not necessarily agree with all the points made regarding biodiversity, he explained that the Council's new Environmental Strategy supported biodiversity retention. It detailed what the Council was doing to become greener and how it was assisting others in becoming greener, whilst taking in to account the global and natural environment in which residents lived.

Referring to biodiversity retention in building control, he explained that the Council was currently in the process of devising a new Local Plan, and that this would need to take in to account energy efficiency and net biodiversity gains, currently subject to a consultation through the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

In summary, Cllr Fuller believed that a combination of local and national action would address the issues raised, and he encouraged Mr Bootman to listen to the debate regarding the Council's Environmental Strategy, later in the meeting.

In response, Cllr Bootman advised that the views expressed earlier regarding biodiversity were accepted amongst scientists. He was disappointed that Cllr Fuller had not explicitly committed the Council to making retention and enhancement of the natural world, a prime determinate for future projects. He did agree that there was a wide range of actions that the Council could do to help, for example mowing less in some areas, encouraging tree planting and ensuring new build was in an appropriate place and to a suitable standard. To date, he had been disappointed in the Council's record in protecting the environment.

The Chairman then thanked Mr Bootman for his question and attendance.

3542 URGENT ITEMS – TEMPORARY PAVEMENT NOTICES

Cllr M Edney referred to the urgent report that had been circulated separately to the main agenda, regarding the decision made at Cabinet on 21 July regarding the approval of the delegation of authority to officers and the setting of fees and licence conditions for new temporary pavement licences to local business premises.

Cllr Edney explained that since the Cabinet decision, a late amendment in the Business and Planning Act 2020, had meant that Temporary Pavement Notices were no longer the responsibility of the Council's Executive, as had previously been thought, and therefore a Council decision was now required.

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

RESOLVED:

To agree to:

- a) Set the temporary pavement licensing application fee at £75.

- b) Delegate authority to the following officers for the purposes provided at sub-paragraphs (i) and (ii) below:
- Licensing & Enforcement Officers
 - Senior Environmental Health Officer (Licensing)
 - Food, Safety and Licensing Team Manager
 - Assistant Director Regulatory
 - Director for Place
- i) To decide whether to approve, refuse, or revoke pavement licences, also to set their durations.
- ii) To decide which licence conditions are attached to each licence (selecting from local standard conditions as established, and non-standard conditions as appropriate to individual circumstances).
- c) Delegate authority to the following officers, the power to enforce licence conditions and to vary or revoke individual licences:
- Senior Environmental Health Officer (Licensing)
 - Food, Safety and Licensing Team Manager
 - Assistant Director Regulatory
 - Director for Place

3543 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred members to the list of civic engagements for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, for the period 17 February to 26 July 2020.

3544 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 February and 15 June 2020 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

3545 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 21 JULY

(i) Broadland and South Norfolk – Our Plan for Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis

Cllr Fuller introduced the Cabinet recommendations regarding the Council's Plan for Recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. He referred to the Council's existing and future role in driving forward the recovery and the economy, supporting volunteer groups and communities, and looking after the most vulnerable. He stressed the need to ensure that appropriate finances were in place, that any gains were not lost, and that lessons had been learnt. He made reference to the extraordinary efforts from staff across all areas of the Council.

Cllr C Brown welcomed the Plan, and congratulated staff on all their hard work over the last four months.

He referred to the short/medium and long term aims and queried what this meant in terms of timescales. He also questioned how success would be measured and how progress would be monitored against these measures to ensure that the Council delivered against its aspirations.

Cllr V Clifford-Jackson echoed Cllr Brown's comments, referring to the excellent work from staff. She felt the Plan to be an excellent document, and stressed the need to build on the knowledge gained over the previous few months.

Cllr Y Bendle commented on the excellent partnership working, between the Districts, the County Council, and the voluntary sector, and it was hoped that the best practice delivered through this approach would continue. Members acknowledged the huge amount of work carried out by the volunteer sector, and local communities.

Cllr Fuller explained that the pandemic had been a good test of strength for the Council and he had been impressed with how the Council had been able to react immediately with a strong and co-ordinated approach. Now in the recovery stage, the Council needed to prioritise families, jobs and businesses, and focus on growing the economy. He advised that local indicators would be put in place and the Council would be looking to benchmark with other authorities.

It was unanimously:

RESOLVED: To:

- a) Endorse the initial Recovery Plan and priorities to support recovery from the Covid-19 crisis in South Norfolk.
- b) Agree the in-year review and update of the 2020/21 Delivery Plan, to be brought back to Cabinets in September 2020 and then onto Councils for agreement.

(ii) Environmental Strategy

Cllr M Edney was pleased to commend the Environmental Strategy to members.

He thanked the Economic and Environment Policy Committee and the relevant officers, for their work on the Strategy. He felt its format to be much more user friendly, and particularly liked the separate action plan, which would be used to monitor progress and ensure that the Council was delivering against its aspirations.

Cllr C Brown welcomed the Strategy, explaining that he had been part of the Policy Committee that had worked on the document with officers, over many months. He felt that there were many good initiatives and actions throughout the Strategy, but

his one concern was that although climate change was most people's greatest environmental concern, it had not been given a high profile throughout the document.

Cllr Nuri-Nixon echoed Cllr Brown's concerns, and she referred to other Councils where a climate change emergency had been declared.

Cllr V Clifford-Jackson queried how flexible the document was and whether new suggestions could be added to the Action Plan later down the line.

Cllr Edney explained that the document had been designed to be flexible. Although it did not mention "Climate Emergency", it was very clear and concise on the relevant actions that would be taken to protect the environment.

Cllr A Dearnley, Chairman of the Economic and Environment Policy Committee, thanked officers and members for their work on the Strategy, and he gave particular reference to the contributions from Cllr Brown. He remained optimistic, that with everyone's involvement, it would really make a difference.

With 33 votes for and 2 abstentions, it was

- RESOLVED:** To approve
- a) The Environmental Strategy.
 - b) The Action Plan.

3546 MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

Cllr J Fuller presented the report of the Monitoring Officer, which proposed new and amended Terms of Reference for both the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Policy Committee, and the Community Action Panel, and reported a number of changes to committee membership.

Members expressed their support for the recommendations, and it was unanimously

- RESOLVED:**
- 1. To note
 - (a) The terms of reference for the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Policy Committee.
 - (b) The membership of the Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Policy Committee; and
 - (c) The subsequent amendments to Committee membership as a result of the changes to Cabinet membership and the new Policy Committee.
 - 2. To approve the changes to the terms of reference for the Community Action Fund Panel.

3547 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FINANCE, RESOURCES, AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2019/20

Cllr P Hardy presented the Annual Report of the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee, which provided an update on the work of the Committee during 2019.

He referred to the addition of Risk Management to the Committee's Terms of Reference, explaining that the new Risk Management Policy was being devised and would be presented to Council for approval over the next few months.

He thanked Faye Heywood, the Council's Internal Audit Manager, and Emma Hodds, the Assistant Director for Governance and Business Support, and their respective teams, for their invaluable efforts during these testing times.

Cllr V Clifford-Jackson echoed Cllr Hardy's views, suggesting it had been an outstanding effort by all, giving mention to a number of achievements including the the Annual Governance Statement and Internal Audit Plans.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the Annual Report of the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee.

3548 QUESTIONS TO CHAIRMEN AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**(a) Cabinet**

Cllr K Mason Billig asked Cllr J Fuller, whether he could provide an update for Council on the potential for Local Government Reorganisation.

Cllr Fuller explained that the Government was keen to see more mayoral accountability and that substantial monies for the Prosperity Fund would be distributed to local authorities, via mayors, through the Devolution and Recovery Bill. He understood that current Government thinking with regard to the size of any new combined authority was 3 – 500,000, certainly no larger. In return, such authorities would receive a generous funding package and additional powers in areas such as public health, transport, and infrastructure. He stressed that it was still very early days and that there was still a distinct lack of detail, however, the Council could be asked for a preliminary view as early as September. He explained that he had asked the Managing Director to work with others across Norfolk, to carry out some scenario planning, to consider future options and how the county could benefit from these proposals.

Cllr T Holden asked Cllr J Fuller whether prior to any decision regarding the formation of a Local Government Trading Company with Broadland District Council, any additional steps needed to be taken.

Cllr Fuller stressed that he was extremely proud of the Council's in-house waste collection team which always delivered, whatever the weather. The cross-party working group, chaired by Cllr Dearnley for South Norfolk, had worked with leading

consultants and it was clear that a joint waste company owned by both councils could save each Council up to £500,000 per year. Cllr Fuller had asked the Managing Director to carry out some further work with consultants to ensure that these predictions were based on the latest figures in the market, and that the proposed savings could be realised. He added that with Local Government Reorganisation on the horizon, a long-term private contract might not be a viable option.

Cllr Brown supported this approach, stressing the importance of doing what was best for residents.

Cllr J Knight referred to previous discussions at Council meetings regarding his situation at the Broads Authority, and he asked whether any progress had been made. Cllr Fuller added that this was a matter that had been subject of discussion at a number of meetings, and he reminded members that Council had asked the Managing Director to mediate between the two authorities.

The Managing Director explained that discussions were continuing with the Broads Authority, alongside the Local Government Association's regional peer, Cllr William Nunn. He was pleased to hear that the restrictions imposed by the BA had now been lifted and he advised that he would be providing a detailed report to Council on 21 September. He hoped that the matter could then be brought to a close.

Cllr T Laidlaw referred to Cllr A Thomas' new portfolio of "Customer Focus" and asked what her immediate priorities would be. Cllr Thomas explained that recent focus had been on the Council's Leisure Centres. She would also be working closely with Cllr C Hudson, the Chairman of the new Commercial, Trading and Customer Focus Policy Committee regarding IT, as this was key to so many areas. She added that other areas of focus would include CNC Building Control and Big Sky.

Cllr C Brown asked Cllr Edney what he felt the Council could do to ensure a "green" recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and more generally what the priorities in his portfolio would be going forward.

Cllr Edney referred members to the Environmental Strategy, discussed earlier that evening. He considered all aspects of his portfolio to be important, but felt that waste minimisation to be a particular priority.

Cllr V Clifford-Jackson asked Cllr K Mason Billig what her priorities were going forward, under her new portfolio of Governance and Efficiency.

Cllr Mason Billig explained that her priority over the last couple of years had been the collaboration with Broadland District Council, and that this would continue to be a focus, along with legal services and the potential Local Government Reorganisation.

(b) Annual Review of the Scrutiny Committee

Members considered the Annual Review of the Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman, Cllr G Minshull, thanked the Vice -Chairman, Cllr V Clifford-Jackson for

her contributions over the year. He also thanked Cllr J Worley for his service on the Committee and welcomed Cllr J Hornby as his replacement.

(c) Licensing Committee

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

(d) Development Management Committee

In response to a query, the Chairman of the Development Management Committee, Cllr V Thomson, advised that the reduced Committee membership of five, would be reviewed in September. He felt that the remote meetings had been working well and was pleased to report that the numbers of public watching on YouTube were high.

(The meeting concluded at 8:36 pm)

Chairman