

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet of South Norfolk District Council held at Broadland District Council Offices, Thorpe Lodge, Thorpe St Andrew, on Monday 2 July 2018 at 10.00 am.

Members Present:

Cabinet: Councillors J Fuller (Chairman), Y Bendle, M Edney, K Mason Billig, L Neal and B Stone

Non-Appointed: Councillors B Bernard, C Kemp, T Lewis and G Minshull

Also in Attendance: N Tullock (on behalf of SNC Staff Forum)
P Grant and J Jackson (on behalf of SNC UNISON)

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Communities and Wellbeing (J Sutterby), the Head of Business Transformation (H Ralph) and the Head of Governance (E Hodds).

2655 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred to a reception held the previous evening to celebrate Cllr C Kemp's 50 years in public service. Cabinet applauded Cllr Kemp on this achievement, noting that he had also received letters of congratulation from the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Conservative Party.

Cllr M Edney referred to the South Norfolk On Show, held the previous weekend. The day had been a great success and he thanked all staff who had supported the event, through its organisation, or assisting on the day.

Cllr Edney also made reference to the launch of the Pub of the Year Awards for 2018, and he urged members to nominate, and encourage others to nominate their local pubs.

2656 COLLABORATIVE WORKING – THE FEASIBILITY REPORT

The Subject of the Decision

Members considered the report of the Chief Executive, which presented members with the Feasibility Study, addressing the opportunities and benefits of South Norfolk and Broadland Councils working closer together through shared services and one joint officer team.

Cllr K Mason Billig commended the report to members, and asked Cabinet to consider what the future held, should the Council choose not to follow the proposed route. She referred to financial uncertainties, and the possibility of changes being forced upon the Council at a later stage.

Mr P Grant, UNISON Branch Secretary, was then invited to address the meeting.

Mr Grant stressed that UNISON was not against the proposed collaboration, however, it was concerned for staff who were not only worried about their jobs, but also service delivery.

Referring to paragraph 6.17 of the report, Mr Grant expressed concern with regard to the results of the staff survey, drawing members' attention to the low response rate. He did not believe that the results of the survey were the views of the majority, and he stressed that any future surveys would need to be undertaken in a proper, timely manner, involving all trade unions and staff bodies. UNISON had received feedback from employees which had demonstrated that there was a great deal of concern and unease with the direction and pace of the proposals. He reminded members that staff buy-in was key to the success or otherwise, of the proposals.

Turning to paragraph 10.4, regarding a Joint Officer Team, Mr Grant felt that some members of staff did not understand what this meant. He felt that there were differences in culture between the two councils, and he hoped that UNISON would be involved in creating a new vision for both authorities, that was fair to both staff and residents. Regarding staff turnover figures, he hoped that this would not be used as a tool to create savings. UNISON understood the need for reasoned evaluations and hoped that they would be carried out in a timely manner, so as not to create stress for remaining staff.

Finally, Mr Grant raised the issue of a no compulsory redundancy agreement, which had been recommended by the Scrutiny Committee at Broadland District Council. He sought assurances that a “best of both” approach would be applied when considering terms and conditions, and he also requested that consideration be given to those staff with caring needs, should an officer be asked to work at a different location. Summing up, he hoped that as an “employer of choice”, these basic assurances would be provided, to give employees confidence for the future.

Mrs N Tullock, the Chairman of the Staff Forum was then invited to speak. She stressed that the Forum had tried to encourage more staff to complete the staff survey, and accepted that the response rate was low. She explained that some staff were concerned about the future and possible redundancies, however, she believed that staff at South Norfolk were generally accepting of change, and viewed it as “part of the day job”. Whilst she would like to see no redundancies, she did not envisage a no compulsory redundancy agreement as a realistic proposal, and she stressed that any broken promises would damage the trust between staff, management and members. Mrs Tullock did however raise concerns regarding the lower on average length of service at South Norfolk, and hoped that the Council would not be seen as a more favourable option, if redundancies were sought.

Summing up, Mrs Tullock explained that although there were concerns, the Forum wanted to work with Management, to ensure the best future for all staff.

The Chairman hoped that both UNISON and the Staff Forum would take comfort from the Council’s track record, where only a small handful of staff had been made redundant over the last twelve years. He did not think that it would be sensible to agree to a no compulsory redundancy agreement, but stressed that redundancies would only be considered as a very last resort. He reminded members that every vacant post was already assessed as a matter of course, and the Chief Executive explained that it was anticipated that only one in every four vacancies, would not be filled. Referring to concerns regarding staff with caring commitments, the Chairman referred to the Council’s current Flexible Working Policy. He believed that technology would allow more staff to work remotely, providing more flexibility for staff. A single staff core was, he believed the way forward, and would create a more seamless service for the customer.

Cllr B Stone expressed his support for the recommendations, explaining that he felt that this was an opportunity not to be missed. He believed that in the long term, the collaboration would create more opportunities and job security.

Referring to the concerns regarding terms and conditions of staff, Cllr C Kemp explained that he had worked in employment law and he assured the meeting that any changes to these, based on his experience, would need to be, on balance, neutral, or an improvement.

Cllr M Edney stressed that staff at South Norfolk were very valued and he was more fearful for their future, should the collaboration fail to go ahead. He knew that staff had done their very best in making savings, year after year, but understood that it was not feasible for this to continue indefinitely. He believed that the proposals would offer more security and career opportunities for staff.

Cllr Y Bendle concurred with the views already expressed by Cabinet members. She had seen many changes over the years, with posts being both deleted and created. Jobs always attracted many applications from both external and internal applicants., and the Council was viewed as a good place to work. She understood that staff might be concerned over terms and conditions, but felt that these needed to be looked at in more detail, at a later date.

The Chief Executive explained that she had been impressed by the active role played by both UNISON and the Staff Forum, and she recognised that UNISON had always tried to find a compromise, when disagreements had arisen. She understood that people were fearful of change, but she stressed that the Council would continue to value and support its staff. She hoped that both UNISON and the Staff Forum would play a big part in any shift to a new way of working.

Referring to the recommendations of the report, the Chairman suggested a change to recommendation 1 (e) in that the establishment of a growth delivery board be considered at the September meeting of the Cabinet, as opposed to being delegated to the Chief Executive. Cabinet agreed to this change, noting that Cllr Fuller had already discussed this proposed change with the Leader of Broadland District Council. The Chairman further explained that should the recommendations be agreed by Council on 12 July, a report would also be considered by Council concerning the process for the recruitment of a new Managing Director. He envisaged that this would involve a Committee of members, with a 3:1 split, for both South Norfolk and Broadland Councils

The Decision

RESOLVED: To:

TO RECOMMEND THAT COUNCIL

1. Agrees the proposals set out in the feasibility report for collaborative working, forming One Joint Officer Team across the two autonomous Councils. The required interdependent elements to deliver this are set out below:

- (a) the routemap for delivery of the collaborative working. (Sections 9 to 19)
 - (b) the deletion of both councils' current Chief Executive roles and that a new post of Joint Managing Director (Head of Paid Service) be created. Details of the proposed appointment to this post will be provided to the Councils in line with the timeline outlined in this report. (Sections 10.4 to 10.8)
 - (c) subsequent to the appointment of a Joint Managing Director, the establishment of a joint senior management team and one joint officer team across the two autonomous councils. (Sections 10.10 to 10.12)
 - (d) that the current joint management arrangements in planning continue in line with the existing 12 months interim arrangements until January 2019 and that work commences on the development of a joint planning team in accordance with the timeline as set out in the report. (Section 10.13)
 - (e) the establishment of a growth delivery team to accelerate and promote quality development in the delivery of the districts' strategic sites as set out in Appendix 4, and that a report be brought to the September meeting of the Cabinet, detailing the most appropriate operational approach and resource to establish the growth delivery team within an agreed budget.
 - (f) the budget for the one joint officer team transition costs, and the other identified implementation costs. (Sections 20.33 to 20.37)
 - (g) the provisional costs/savings split as set out in section 20 of this report and its accompanying principles and that responsibility to refine this cost/savings split be delegated to the S151 officers of both Councils, in consultation with the Leaders of each Council, as part of the development of budgets for 2019/20. The final decision by Members on the cost/saving split between the two councils will be made as part of the budget setting process for 2019/20. (Sections 20.16 to 20.25);
2. Approves the ceasing of employment of the Chief Executive with the delegation of the exit arrangements, including the effective date and terms, to the South Norfolk Section 151 Officer and the lead HR Business Partner, the details of which will be shared with the South Norfolk Leader and the Deputy Leader. This is in line with South Norfolk Council's Constitution and the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001. This decision is subject to a five-day objection period. (Sections 10.4 to 10.9)

The Reasons for the Decision

To ensure a stronger voice, an increase in growth and delivery, and greater financial stability, which would benefit both Councils and residents.

Other Options Considered

None

2650 CABINET CORE AGENDA

The Chairman referred members to the latest version of the Cabinet Core Agenda.

Members noted that should it receive approval from the Council meeting to be held 12 July, a report would be considered at the September meeting of the Cabinet, regarding the operational approach and resource to establish a Growth Delivery Team.

(The meeting concluded at 10.49 am)

Chairman