

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 16 May 2018 at 9.30am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: G Minshull (Chairman), T Lewis, B Bernard, B Duffin, C Gould, T Palmer, R Savage and J Wilby

Apologies: Councillor: L Hornby

Cabinet Members in Attendance: Councillor: M Edney (for part of the meeting)

Officers in Attendance: The Director of the Director of Communities and Well-Being (J Sutterby), the Head of Governance (E Hodds), the Head of Business Transformation (H Ralph), the Head of Early Help (M Pursehouse), the Communities Manager (K Gallagher) and the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard)

1222 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 24 January and 7 February 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1223 REVIEW OF MEMBER WARD GRANT SPENDING

The Head of Early Help introduced the item, reminding members that the Scrutiny Committee was required to assess the scheme and make any necessary recommendations regarding the process, rather than to scrutinise the individual funding decisions made by members. The Committee was advised that a total of 106 grants had been made to support local groups throughout the District during the past year. Members were pleased to note that many worthy causes had been assisted by the grants awarded but were

concerned that 14 of these awards might not have received officer approval, had this been required. Officers advised that more detailed information was needed from members when they awarded grant monies to ensure that the impact and outcomes of these could be measured.

In considering the ground rules for the Member Ward Fund, the Committee identified various points which were deemed ambiguous, such as the rules around any carry-over of funding, guidelines regarding members' ability to use their budget to fund projects in Wards other than their own, the criteria around funding for schools and churches, and the process to be followed if grant monies were not spent as intended. In response, it was suggested that the ground rules should be reviewed by officers in consultation with Cllrs Edney, Minshull and Lewis with a revised version being communicated to all members with further training being arranged by officers.

The Head of Governance agreed that more clarity was required within the guidelines and felt that a review of the processes for Member Ward Grants and the Community Action Fund (CAF) scheme would be helpful. She also reminded members that, as agreed at the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in November 2017, any unspent Member Ward Fund monies remaining at the end of the calendar year, should be transferred to the CAF and urged members to spend their grants by the end of December 2018. It was suggested that a communication be sent to all members to this effect.

The Committee was concerned that there seemed to be a lack of information regarding feedback and outcomes from funded projects and noted that, in some cases, there had been little evidence of any publicity around projects funded and no proof of whether the monies had in fact been used for the nature intended. Officers reminded the Committee of the ground rules and reminded members that, to comply with paragraph 7.6 in relation to the delivery of funded projects and activities, they must ensure that money was being spent appropriately and that delivery was as agreed. It was further noted that where monies were not used appropriately, members together with the Communities Manager, were responsible for resolving disputes and taking action, including the withdrawal of funding, where appropriate. Officers further stated that the Communities Team could be approached for advice and could also provide plaques to publicise projects which had achieved Council funding, if required.

In response to a suggestion that the process had become complicated, Cllr Edney reminded the Committee that the previous scheme had been considerably onerous and that members had chosen to lead on the process for grant funding. He agreed that some aspects of the ground rules were unclear but that these would be reviewed and communicated to all members. Cllr Edney stressed that members needed to take ownership of the scheme and to be diligent when determining whether to approve or decline funding for community groups.

The Committee requested that members who had awarded grants which did not meet the criteria for the scheme were contacted by officers to make them aware of the issues and that a communication be sent to all members around the common issues which had

arisen over the past year. In response to a query around cross-ward funding, officers reminded members that they were only permitted to fund projects that directly benefited their wards and that this benefit needed to be clearly stated in the members notice of decision.

It was then:

RESOLVED: that the Committee recommend that:

1. Officers, in consultation with Cllrs Edney, Minshull and Lewis, carry out a review of the Ground Rules with a revised version being communicated to all members;
2. Training for members be arranged once the revised Ground Rules are in place;
3. Officers send a communication to all members regarding:
 - a. the requirement that all Member Ward Budget spending must be completed by 31 December 2018;
 - b. the common issues that have arisen over the past 12 months;
 - c. that officers in the Communities team can be approached for advice regarding Member-Led funding.

1224 BROADLAND AND SOUTH NORFOLK COLLABORATIVE WORKING OPPORTUNITIES – UPDATE

The Chairman updated members on the progress of collaborative working and reminded them that the final report of the feasibility study would be considered by Full Council on 12 July 2018.

The Head of Business Transformation advised members that a survey was being undertaken, with key stakeholders over the two districts, which sought their views, feedback and concerns. She encouraged members to make people aware that they could partake in this via the Council's website. The Committee was also advised that an LGA Peer CEX was undertaking external quality assurance of the feasibility study. In response to a member's question regarding feedback given at the joint event held at Hevingham, officers confirmed that this had been displayed the recent meeting of Full Council and would be used to inform the next stage of work being undertaken.

Members queried the savings anticipated by the collaboration and raised concerns that costs appeared to be increasing. In response, the Head of Business Transformation assured members that although there had to be some up-front investment in the project, the final report would include the anticipated savings and that there would be efficiencies in having one joint officer team with a natural staff turnover expected over a period of time. She stressed that while this did not mean staff would be cut, when opportunities arose, services would be reviewed to ascertain whether efficiencies could be made. Members were also reminded that there were other long-term benefits of the two Councils working collaboratively, such as the potential for officer development, the ability to attract skilled staff to a larger workforce, the capability to work together with a greater combined voice to improve the potential for attracting additional funding and influence on a national and regional stage.

1225 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND CABINET CORE AGENDA

The Committee noted the Work Programme and Cabinet Core Agenda.

(The meeting concluded at 11:58am)

Chairman