

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 27 June 2018 at 9.30am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: T Lewis, B Bernard (for part of the meeting), B Duffin, C Gould and T Palmer

Apologies: Councillors: G Minshull, L Hornby, R Savage and J Wilby

Substitutes: Councillors: C Kemp for G Minshull
D Goldson for L Hornby and
D Bills (for part of the meeting) for R Savage

Cabinet Members in Attendance: Councillors: Y Bendle and K Mason Billig

Officers in Attendance: The Director of Communities and Wellbeing (J Sutterby), the Director of Growth and Business Development (D Lorimer), the Head of Governance (E Hodds), the Head of Business Transformation (H Ralph), the Head of Health and Leisure Services (S Goddard), the Community Leisure Manager (M Heazle) and the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard)

Also in Attendance: Cllr J Leggett and S Fennell, Broadland District Council
N Tullock – on behalf of SNC Staff Forum
P Grant and J Jackson – on behalf of SNC UNISON

1226 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Minute	Declaration
T Lewis	1229	Cllr Lewis declared an interest as a member of the Joint Members' Working Group and removed himself from the Scrutiny Committee for this item.

1227 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 May 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1228 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR ITEM 5 (COLLABORATIVE WORKING – THE FEASIBILITY REPORT)

As Cllr Lewis had declared an 'other interest' and removed himself from the Committee for this item, it was proposed and seconded that Cllr C Kemp chair the meeting for the following item only.

1229 COLLABORATIVE WORKING – THE FEASIBILITY REPORT

Cllr Mason Billig welcomed Cllr J Leggett from Broadland District Council to the meeting and provided members with a brief history of the work undertaken regarding collaborative working, advising of the liaison which had taken place between both Councils with key stakeholders, customers, members and staff. She thanked officers for their work in producing the comprehensive feasibility report which, in her opinion, contained sufficient information to enable the Councils to make an informed decision.

The Head of Business Transformation presented the Feasibility Report, advising members that its content formed the conclusion of ten months of work undertaken jointly by members and officers across both Councils. During a summary of the salient points, the Committee's attention was drawn to a route-map which set out suggested timescales for various activities to be implemented and an indication of the anticipated savings which might be realised from natural staff turnover over the next five years.

Members were advised that the report had been considered by Broadland District Council's Scrutiny Committee on the previous day when concerns had been raised regarding the pace of change and the impact of collaborative working on staff. It was noted that Broadland's Scrutiny Committee had recommended that its Cabinet approve the recommendations in the report but that all

references to “one joint officer team” be removed from the body of Recommendation 1, part 1c and part 1f. It was further noted that an additional recommendation had been made by Broadland’s Scrutiny Committee “that there be no compulsory redundancies as a result of collaboration, save for those resulting from external factors beyond the control of the two autonomous councils”. South Norfolk Council Scrutiny Committee members were advised that they should consider the original recommendations contained within the report and, if they wished to make any changes, these would need to be proposed, seconded and agreed in the usual manner.

The SNC Staff Forum Chairman, N Tullock, addressed the Committee and advised that a staff survey had been undertaken across both Councils but that there had been limited participation. She stated that although staff at SNC were concerned about potential redundancies and changes to their terms and conditions, they saw change as part of their jobs and had a generally positive attitude to the collaboration.

The South Norfolk UNISON Branch Secretary, P Grant, addressed the Committee and spoke of UNISON’s concerns regarding the proposed collaboration. He stated that UNISON still awaited reassurances and did not feel that the staff survey reflected the opinions and concerns of staff at either Council or at the depot where staff were concerned about the potential outsourcing of services. Mr Grant requested that members ensured that employees of both Councils were given assurances regarding redundancies and their terms and conditions, and that levels of service would not be compromised by the collaboration. He asked that the Committee echo the concerns of Broadland District Council’s Scrutiny Committee and make similar changes to the recommendations contained in the report.

In response to members’ questions regarding senior management changes and restructuring, the Head of Business Transformation advised that officers were working closely with the East of England Local Government Association (EEGLA) to manage the process. The Committee was advised that once the new Managing Director was in post, they would make their own decisions regarding their leadership team requirements and that would enable consideration of how the joint officer team could be developed in line with the Council’s Organisational Change Policy and through consultation with staff. Members discussed the recommendations made by Broadland’s Scrutiny Committee that references to the “one joint officer team” be deleted and that a ‘no redundancy’ policy should be considered. After deliberation, whilst members were sympathetic to staff and suggested that the Council should seek to avoid compulsory redundancies in the process wherever possible, they considered that making a pledge for no redundancies might be unrealistic and that such a commitment might ‘tie the hands’ of the new Managing Director and of new members elected in 2019. Furthermore, the Committee expressed concerns that Broadland’s Scrutiny Committee had recommended the deletion of references to one joint officer team and felt that slowing down the pace of implementation would restrict the new Managing Director’s ability to restructure the organisation, and could also prolong the uncertainty of staff across both Councils. The SNC Scrutiny Committee confirmed its support for the establishment of a joint officer team, considering that this was crucial to the success of the delivery of the aims of collaboration, as outlined in paragraph 10.3 of the report.

The Committee considered some of the indicative savings detailed in the report and, although officers stressed that monetary savings were not the main driver for collaborative working, members noted that potential savings were likely to be realised through natural staff turnover, shared procurement costs and IT platforms, in addition to the ability to attract funding which, without the economies of scale brought about by the collaboration, would otherwise be unavailable.

Members discussed how the joint officer team might work and drew attention to the contribution in the report from Kevin Dicks, the Chief Executive of Bromsgrove and Redditch Borough Council, which highlighted the importance that staff terms and conditions be aligned towards the start of the process so that officers were not performing the same role on different terms across the two Councils. It was noted that the indicative timescale suggested that terms and conditions would not be reviewed until June 2019 and Members considered it might be advantageous for officers to consider bringing forward the assessment and potential alignment of staff terms and conditions by six-months. It was also suggested that Kevin Dicks be thanked by the Committee for his valuable input to the process.

During discussions, members stated that it might be helpful for them to consider the different structure and remit of committee meetings and the Monitoring Officer agreed to circulate a list of SNC and BDC Committees to members of both Councils to highlight where the remit and focus of committees were the same, similar or different.

Members discussed various differences in the work of the two Councils and noted that some services for which SNC raised charges were provided free to Broadland residents. The Committee suggested that officers should consider whether this should be regarded as a risk, due to the potential for complaints. It was, however, noted that the two Councils would retain their autonomy so there might be some services which were treated differently by the other authority and any decisions whether services were free or charged was for each Council to decide independently.

The Committee discussed member involvement in the future and supported the continuation of the Joint Lead Member Group, with a possible expansion of membership. Members were also supportive of a joint Scrutiny Committee being formalised to consider collaborative working in the future, which the Monitoring Officer would consider in more detail in due course, consulting key members.

The Committee analysed each section of the Feasibility Report and noted a minor error at paragraph 12.5, which officers agreed to amend.

It was then:

RESOLVED: by a vote of 7-0 that:

1. The Scrutiny Committee recommends that Cabinet approve recommendations 1 and 2 as outlined in paragraphs 8.3.1 and 8.3.2 of the report; and
2. The Committee records its thanks to officers for their considerable work in putting together the Feasibility Report.

1230 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

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 involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended).

1231 LEISURE SERVICE PERFORMANCE

Cllr Bendle introduced the report of the Head of Leisure and Health Services, commending staff on their positive attitudes during periods of upheaval and change.

The Head of Leisure and Health Services presented his exempt report and members noted its content. The Committee was updated regarding the fluctuations in footfall and the income and expenditure of its leisure centres and was pleased to note the additional external grant funding which had been achieved during the past 24 months. The Director of Communities and Wellbeing reminded members that the operation of leisure centres was not a statutory requirement of the Council but stressed three important advantages of running the service in-house; the commercial return, the ability to offer residents a facility which they desired, and the health and wellbeing aspect of enabling residents to be more active.

There was some discussion around the location of leisure centres and it was noted that although the centres were not spread throughout the district, events such as the recent boot camp, allowed activities to extend out into the wider area. Members also discussed health fitness clubs and it was felt that the Council had chosen to manage its facilities with both a high duty of care to its customers and in line with best practice/health & safety guidelines, in comparison with some establishments which were not staffed so had the ability make larger profits.

After further discussion it was

RESOLVED: To note the report and commend officers on the successes achieved.

1232 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND CABINET CORE AGENDA

The Committee noted the Work Programme and Cabinet Core Agenda.

Cllr C Kemp drew members' attention to his suggestion at Full Council that there be a presentation made to the 8 August 2018 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee by the Police and Crime Commissioner to consider the business case to transfer the governance of the Fire and Rescue Service from Norfolk County Council to the Local Commissioner. Officers agreed to explore this matter further and, if necessary, invite the relevant speaker to attend.

(The meeting concluded at 12:32pm)

Chairman