

SPECIAL COUNCIL

**Minutes of a Special meeting of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday
16 April 2018 at 7.30pm**

Members Present: Councillors; Duffin (Chairman), Amis, Bendle, Bernard, Bills, Broome, Dale, Dewsbury, Easton, Edney, Foulger, Fulcher, Fuller, Goldson, Gray, Hardy, J Hornby, L Hornby, Hudson, C Kemp, W Kemp, Larner, Legg, Lewis, Mason-Billig, Minshull, Mooney, Neal, Overton, Palmer, Pond, Riches, J Savage, R Savage, Stone, Thomas, Thomson, Wheatley, J Wilby and M Wilby.

Apologies: Councillors; Bell, Blundell, Ellis, Gould, Kiddie and Worsley

Officers in Attendance: The Chief Executive (S Dinneen), the Director of Growth and Business Development (D Lorimer), the Assistant Director of Resources (P Catchpole), the Head of Business Transformation (H Ralph) and the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer (E Hodds)

(The Press was also in attendance)

3431 CLLR K WORSLEY

Cllr A Thomas explained that she had recently visited Cllr K Worsley in hospital, and she was pleased to report that he was in good spirits and was recovering well from his operation. Council wished to pass on to Cllr Worsley, its very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

3432 MINUTES

Under minute number 3424, the Community Governance Review, it was agreed that after the words “unanimously resolved by Wymondham Town Council”, the words “by those present.” should be inserted.

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 19 February 2018, were then agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

3433 COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Members referred to the report of the Chief Executive, which provided Council with an update on the progress made with a feasibility study, to explore the options and opportunities for shared working between South Norfolk and Broadland councils.

Cllr J Fuller introduced the report, thanking officers and members for their involvement so far. He drew attention to the joint Statement of Intent by the Leaders of both Broadland and South Norfolk, which set out the ambitions for the enhanced collaboration between the two councils, and he referred to the similarities of the two areas, in terms of economy, demographics and the makeup of the two organisations. A shared services approach would provide an opportunity to increase capacity and resilience, together with greater financial stability, whilst providing a better service and quality of life for residents and local businesses. He understood that staff might be fearful of the future but he referred to the Council’s excellent track record in redeploying staff when needed and making the most of their skills. He believed that the proposals would in fact create new career opportunities for staff and help to attract and retain the most talented. He referred to the success of the shared planning management team roles, and the development of the feasibility study generally, and he could see no reason why the work on collaborative working should not be progressed.

Mr P Grant, Unison Secretary for the South Norfolk branch, then addressed the Council. He suggested that whilst South Norfolk Council was no stranger to collaborative working, it appeared that some radical conclusions had been reached after only six months investigation. He queried whether, behind the scenes, decisions had already been made, and explained that it was felt that the project was progressing at too fast a pace. Unison had been surprised that the report already referred to a shared management team and a one shared officer team, yet there was no real evidence to support these recommendations. He asked where were the day to day improvements in working practices that had been achieved to support this approach? When would a public consultation take place? Officers were naturally concerned about the impact this might have on jobs, conditions of service, and service delivery. Unison believed that further work was required to obtain the confidence and support of staff, and that this required time. Any transition in to a shared culture and a shared workforce required buy in and negotiation and he stressed that the union would be striving for the “best terms and conditions” for any future shared workforce. He urged members to be clearer

about the future – was it to be a continued collaborative approach, or a totally integrated Shared Service model? He suggested that it might only be a matter of time before the two councils merged and became a single authority.

Cllr K Mason Billig, the Chairman of the Joint Informal Lead Members' Group stressed that this was an interim report only, and that no decisions on the way forward were required at this stage. She reminded members that primarily the proposed arrangements needed to benefit residents, help to sustain the local economy and provide greater influence through a joint voice with Broadland. Of course, the economies of scale would provide savings and help to ensure that both councils were financially resilient, however cost savings were not the main reason for the proposed arrangement. Staff were being kept fully informed and it had already been evident that some officers welcomed the proposal and the new opportunities and ways of working it might bring. She agreed that further work would be required with regard to the terms and conditions of staff, the shift to a joint culture, and a "one team" approach, and this would be considered in time, once a formal decision had been made.

In response to a query from Cllr T Lewis, the Chief Executive clarified the role of the Joint Consultative Committee, and explained it would become involved in future discussions concerning shared services, once a formal decision had been made by members. Following a number of further queries, Cllr Mason Billig agreed that the opportunity for public engagement was an important part of the process and she confirmed that it would form part of the next stage of work. With regards to a query concerning whether any final decision on shared services was irrevocable, Cllr Mason Billig doubted that it could not be unpicked if necessary, and she acknowledged that as no one knew what the future held in terms of Local Government Reorganisation, it could be that the two councils would have to modify their approach in future. However, she stressed that what was important, was whether or not members believed that it was currently the right thing to do for the residents of South Norfolk.

In response to a query regarding the need for two main district offices, should the collaboration go ahead, Cllr Fuller believed that it was premature to make decisions on such matters at this stage, however, did suggest that although not a complete substitute for face to face contact, technology might reduce the need for an office base for all. What was more important was a single workforce, with a shared culture, that delivered the highest degree of service and efficiencies. He stressed that this was an opportunity to reshape the delivery of local government in the area, and he urged members to support the recommendations of the report.

Cllr T Lewis confirmed that he was, in principle, in favour of taking the work on the feasibility study to the next stage.

Cllr C Kemp also expressed his support for the recommendations, explaining that as a member of the Joint Informal Scrutiny Group, he had been most impressed with the process so far. He added that in his experience, the culture of an organisation, and its ways of working, far outweighed the importance of location. He supported a gradual approach to change, and he fully commended the report to members.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To note the report attached at Appendix 1 on the progress report on the South Norfolk / Broadland Council Feasibility Study and to endorse the approach for the June / July feasibility as outlined in section 14 of the report.

(The meeting concluded at 8.06 pm)

Chairman