



## **SOUTH NORFOLK COUNCIL**

**Minutes of a meeting of the South Norfolk Council of South Norfolk Council, held on Wednesday, 24 May 2023 at 7.30 pm.**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: J Easter (Chairman), B Bernard, D Bills, G Blundell, S Blundell, C Brown, K Carsok, J Carver, J Cook, J Cork, K Cross, M Dewsbury, J Eddy, R Elliott, D Elmer, A Evans, N Fowler, J Fuller, T Graham, J Halls, M Hooton, C Hudson, K Hurn, K Kiddie, T Laidlaw, K Mason Billig, J McCloskey, G Minshull, J Morland, K Murphy, L Neal, J Overton, G Race, S Ridley, D Roberts, M Rosen, J Rowe, D Sacks, R Savage, I Spratt, D Thompson, V Thomson, J Webber and J Woolliscroft

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors: J Fulcher and S Nuri-Nixon

**Officers in Attendance:** T Holden (Managing Director), P Courtier (Director of Place), D Lorimer (Director of Resources), J Sutterby (Director of People and Communities), E Hodds (Chief of Staff), R Fincham (Assistant Director of Finance) and C White (Democratic Services Manager)

### **3700. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Fulcher and Nuri-Nixon.

### **3701. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **3702. CHAIRMAN'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Cllr Easter drew members' attention to the engagements that he had attended as Chairman of the Council over the last four months. He thanked the Democratic Services Manager and the Chief of Staff for their assistance during his tenure as Chairman during 2022/23.

### **3703. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL FOR 2023/24 AND DECLARATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE**

In response to a request for nominations for the Chairman of the Council for 2023/24, Cllr Minshull nominated Cllr Easter. Cllr Minshull noted how well Cllr Easter had carried out his role over the last year and suggested that as South Norfolk had a new Council with many new members his experience would prove invaluable over the coming year.

Cllr J Halls seconded the nomination and in the absence of any other nominations, it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr J Easter be elected Chairman of the Council for 2023/24.

Cllr Easter took the Chair and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office. He announced that he was honoured to be re-appointed as Chairman and promised that he would continue to do his utmost to promote the Council over the next municipal year.

**3704. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL FOR 2023/24 AND DECLARATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE**

Cllr C Brown proposed, seconded by Cllr S Ridley, that Cllr S Blundell be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council for the ensuing municipal year.

In the absence of any other nominations, it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr S Blundell be elected Vice-Chairman of the Council for 2023/24.

Cllr Blundell then signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

**3705. ELECTION OF LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FOR 2023/24**

Cllr S Ridley proposed, seconded by Cllr M Hooton, that Cllr J Fuller be appointed Leader of the Council for the ensuing municipal year.

In the absence of other nominations, it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr J Fuller be elected Leader of the Council for 2023/24.

Cllr Fuller then announced his Cabinet members and portfolios, and Cllr C Brown announced the shadow portfolio holders (as detailed below):

| <b>Cabinet Member</b> | <b>Portfolio</b>   | <b>Shadow Cabinet Member</b>            |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Cllr J Fuller         | The Leader, External Affairs and Policy                  | Cllr C Brown (Leader of the opposition) |
| Cllr D Elmer          | Governance Technology and Innovation (and Deputy Leader) | Cllr J Halls                            |
| Cllr R Elliott        | Finance and Resources                                    | Cllr T Laidlaw                          |
| Cllr K Carsok         | Healthy and Active Communities                           | Cllr J Webber                           |
| Cllr K Kiddie         | Cleaner, Safer Environment                               | Cllr I Spratt                           |
| Cllr G Minshull       | Supporting People  | Cllr D Roberts                          |

|             |                 |                   |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Cllr L Neal | Greener Economy | Cllr S Nuri-Nixon |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|

Cllr Fuller also paid tribute to former Councillor, Yvonne Bendle, who had been Vice-Chairman during 2022/23 and had stepped down at the recent elections. He noted that Mrs Bendle had played a significant role in supporting small businesses, as well as being heavily involved in the development of the Help Hub and he wished to put on record the Council's appreciation of her work in these areas, as well as for her service as Vice-Chairman of the Council.

**3706. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF COUNCIL HELD ON 22 FEBRUARY 2023, 6 MARCH 2023 AND 13 APRIL 2023.**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2023, 6 March 2023 and 13 April 2023 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

**3707. REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER**

The Managing Director introduced the report, which set out the results of the South Norfolk district elections held on Thursday 4 May 2023.

Cllr Brown commended the Returning Officer and the Team for the elections, which had been delivered in an exemplary manner.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the persons elected as District Councillors on 4 May 2023.

**3708. MONITORING OFFICER REPORT**

Cllr J Fuller introduced the report, which proposed some changes to the committee structure in order to provide greater alignment between portfolios and committees. The report also proposed appointing Mr Alex Oram as the Independent Person to provide his views on standards complaints.

Cllr C Hudson noted that the Conservative Group had gifted a seat on the Scrutiny Committee to the Labour Group member during the previous administration and he requested that a similar approach be taken by the new administration for the independent members.

In response, Cllr Fuller advised the meeting that the Conservative Group had recognised at the 2019 district elections that the Labour party had secured a significant number of votes across the District and therefore, Cllr Rowe was a representative of a wider constituency than just his own Ward and it was considered appropriate that a seat on the Scrutiny Committee should be given to him. He did not consider that this was the case for the independent members.

Cllr C Brown confirmed that the Liberal Democrat member on the Horizon Task and Finish Group would be Cllr J Halls.

In response to a query regarding Appendix 1 of the report, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that the items referred to as Finance, Audit and Governance should have been titled Finance, *Resources*, Audit and Governance.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** to approve:

1. The modification to the delegation of responsibilities and cabinet portfolio committees as included in (section 2 of the report) and Appendix 1 of this report.
2. The allocation of seats on Council committees in accordance with Appendix 2 of the report and to appoint to those seats as advised by Group Leaders.
3. The appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.
4. That any consequential amendments to the constitution be delegated to the Monitoring Officer.
5. The appointment of the Independent Person, Mr Alex Oram, to 30 May 2027.

### **3709. APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

Council considered the list of appointments to outside bodies for 2023/24.

The Chairman advised the meeting that the outside body listed as the Transforming Cities Fund Joint Committee had changed its name to the Transport for Norwich Advisory Committee.

Cllr Fuller advised the meeting that membership of the Local Government Association - Rural Services Network and the Local Government Information Unit would be reviewed and discussed with Group Leaders to consider if they were providing sufficient value for money and if membership was worthwhile.

It was also agreed that Cllr K Cross would be the Council's representative on the Norfolk Records Committee, and that Cllr C Hudson would be appointed to the Waveney, Lower Yare and Lothingland Internal Drainage Board.

Cllr C Brown confirmed that the Liberal Democrat substitute on the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel would be Cllr G Blundell and the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee substitute would be Cllr B Bernard.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** to agree the appointments to outside bodies as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report, and as updated at the meeting.

### **3710. SCHEME OF SUBSTITUTES 2023-27**

Cllr Fuller introduced the report which sought Council approval to adopt a scheme

of substitution for 2023-27. The scheme set out the rules on member substitution at Committee meetings and helped to ensure that political balance was maintained.

The Chief of Staff advised the meeting that she would require written confirmation from the Group Leaders that their members would act as substitutes, subject to any mandatory training requirements.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** to adopt a scheme of substitution, as detailed in paragraph 4 of the report, for the duration of the Council.

### **3711. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 20 MARCH 2023**

#### **Adoption of Updated Regulation of Investigatory Powers**

Members considered the recommendations from Cabinet regarding the Adoption of Updated Regulation of Investigatory Powers, arising from its meeting held on 20 March 2023.

Cllr J Fuller advised the meeting that the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Policy was an important part of the Council's public safety obligations and provided a framework for implementing its statutory responsibilities for environmental health and safety.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** to approve the proposed Regulation of Investigatory Powers Policy and Guidance, as set out in Appendix 1, and to agree to adopt the Policy and Guidance.

### **3712. ANNUAL REPORTS AND QUESTIONS TO CHAIRMAN AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

#### **a) Cabinet**

Cllr Hudson asked Cllr Fuller about the total cost expended by the Council for the removal of the public toilets in Harleston and the reinstatement of the area post removal.

In response Cllr Fuller advised the meeting that it had been confirmed by research that one of the biggest determinants of satisfaction with shopping centres is its toilets. Accordingly, the Council had spent a significant amount of money to improve all the public toilets in its market towns in order to make them more attractive environments for residents to visit and shop in. Unfortunately, in Harleston the toilets had been repeatedly vandalised and, therefore, regrettably they had to be removed and alternative arrangements made. The toilets had been concreted into their base, which made it impossible to cleanly remove and repurpose them for use elsewhere. In total about £35,000 had been expended in removing and making good the site. A written response with greater detail on this matter would be provided for Cllr Hudson in due course.

Cllr D Sacks asked Cllr Fuller about the marketing of South Norfolk House. In

response Cllr Fuller advised the meeting that the property had been advertised for sale with existing use for six months in line with the Council's planning policy, which was an important means of protecting community assets. However, at the end of that six-month period no offers had been received, so offers were invited for the redevelopment or other uses for the site. A number of these bids had been considered at the 13 April 2023 Extraordinary Council meeting and in due course they would be considered further.

Cllr M Rosen asked Cllr Fuller if he would commit to a cross-party initiative in advance of the expected national legislation to help address some of the issues faced by people living in rented accommodation. Specifically, to work with responsible landlords and letting agents to reduce the number of no-fault evictions, limit rent rises and to see a greater role for the Council in mediating between landlords and tenants in cases of anti-social behaviour and avoiding the need for evictions in these circumstances.

In response Cllr Fuller noted that the housing rental reform legislation was currently going through Parliament, and it would be unwise to pre-empt it, as it was clear that there could be unintended consequences. For example, whilst the principle of removing Section 21 no fault evictions appeared to be a good thing it made the rental of homes for students for the academic year unlawful. This and similar matters needed to be addressed before the legislation became law.

Cllr Fuller also noted that the Council had an enviable record on social housing with more social houses in South Norfolk now than before Right to Buy was introduced. However, the Council also needed to work constructively with private landlords to manage the housing market in the District. An example of this was when the Council helped people secure accommodation by providing a guarantee for the deposit on privately rented properties. The Council could do this with confidence, as officers had good relationships with many private landlords. Equally, the Council sought to root out irresponsible landlords and had enforcement measures in place to address those who wilfully refused to upgrade their properties to meet the latest energy efficiency standards.

In summing up, Cllr Fuller advised members that now was not the time for the Council go into matters that would be subject to forthcoming primary legislation, however, members could consider a number of areas in local housing policy on a cross party basis through the Supporting People Policy Committee, whilst keeping in mind the excellent work already being undertaken in this field both in South Norfolk and in Broadland.

Cllr K Mason Billig informed the meeting that Loddon Parish Council, had become a Town Council and she referred to the excellent improvement works by South Norfolk Council to the town centre in Harleston and confirmed that a similar sort of scheme would be very much welcomed for Loddon and Chedgrave.

In response, Cllr Fuller confirmed that significant schemes were proposed for a number of market towns and larger settlements in the District, which could be funded via Community Infrastructure Levy receipts and the loan fund.

Cllr C Brown informed the meeting that he wished to record his thanks to the Council for providing grants for parishes to hold coronation celebrations. He had

received many messages of thanks for the money provided by South Norfolk for events across the District.

Cllr Brown also wished to record his thanks for the new implementation of the Modern.Gov committee system, which would provide greater transparency in respect of member attendance at meetings.

Cllr Brown asked about the new electric vehicle charging points in Harleston car park, which had doubled from four to eight, but had been downgraded from a fast 22 kilowatt to a slow seven kilowatts. This meant that even though the number of charging points had doubled they were delivering less power. Moreover, the price per unit had increased from 30p per unit to 55p per unit, which was far in excess of that being charged by Suffolk councils.

In response, Cllr Neal advised the meeting that the contractor had made an error in fitting the slower charging points and would be rectifying this issue soon. The increased tariff was the first increase since the charging points had been installed and reflected the increased price of electricity. It was proposed that, henceforth, electricity tariffs would be looked at annually to prevent such a large increase being necessary in future.

Cllr Fuller confirmed that the original tender had been based on seven kilowatts and later amended to 22 kilowatt chargers at the same price. Several tenders had been received from companies prepared to provide charging points at no cost, but who would have charged at a significantly higher rate. The Council, however, had decided to invest in the infrastructure to provide electricity at better value to residents.

Cllr C Hudson asked Cllr D Elmer about the fit-out costs for the Horizon Centre and how that compared to the estimated figures provided in November 2021 and secondly the impact on the Council finances of the delay in the sale of South Norfolk House from March 2023.

In response, Cllr Elmer confirmed that he would provide a written response to these questions following the meeting.

#### **(b) Annual Review of the Scrutiny Committee – Questions to the Chairman**

Members noted the Annual Review of the Scrutiny Committee for 2022/23.

Cllr J Rowe wished to record his thanks to Jack Hornby, the previous chairman of the Scrutiny Committee for how well he had chaired the Committee and he advised the meeting that he would seek to bring that same level of commitment to the role.

#### **(c) Annual Report of the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee 2022/23 – Questions to the Chairman**

Members noted the Annual Report of the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee for 2022/23.

Cllr Ridley informed the meeting that he was delighted to have

been asked to Chair the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee and he referred to the Committee's Annual Report, detailed at page 64 of the agenda papers.

He advised members that the Committee had had a very successful year much of which was due to the excellent officer support it had received.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** to approve the Annual Report of the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee.

**(d) Development Management Committee – Questions to the Chairman**

The Chairman of the Development Management Committee, Cllr V Thomson, advised members that planning training would be held in person at the Horizon Centre, next Tuesday at 5.00pm.

**3713. OUTSIDE BODIES - FEEDBACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES**

The Chairman advised the meeting that he had not been informed of any reports from representatives on outside bodies. He reminded the meeting that members appointed to represent the Council on outside bodies were invited to submit reports to Council on their respective activities, if there was anything important to report which was pertinent to the Council.

(The meeting concluded at 9.01 pm)

---

Chairman