



SOUTH NORFOLK COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the South Norfolk Council of South Norfolk Council, held on Monday, 16 October 2023 at 8.20 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: J Easter (Chairman), S Blundell (Vice-Chair), D Bills, G Blundell, C Brown, K Carsok, J Carver, J Cook, J Cork, K Cross, M Dewsbury, J Eddy, R Elliott, D Elmer, N Fowler, J Fuller, T Graham, M Hooton, K Hurn, K Kiddie, T Laidlaw, K Mason Billig, J McCloskey, G Minshull, J Morland, K Murphy, S Nuri-Nixon, J Overton, L Overton-Neal, 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: B Bernard, C Hudson and G Race

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

3731. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Bernard, Hudson and Race.

3732. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3733. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

The Chief of Staff advised members that at the last meeting she had reported that Cllr T Laidlaw had been appointed to the Scrutiny Committee to replace Cllr Halls. She wished to clarify that he had also replaced Cllr Halls as Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

Members were reminded that some discussions had taken place regarding the

appointments to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel and the political balance that was required. This matter had now been resolved and Cllr K Murphy had been appointed as the Council's representative on the Panel and Cllr S Ridley was the substitute member. The Chief of Staff thanked Cllr M Rosen for his assistance in this matter.

3734. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Bob McClenning and Cllr Carmina McConnell to their first meeting of Council since being elected at the by-elections held on 29 September 2023.

The Chairman informed Council that Cllr Michael Rosen would address the meeting on behalf of all Group Leaders, in respect of the conflict in Israel and Gaza.

Cllr M Rosen informed members that the conflict had an impact on communities in South Norfolk and he asked that the Council offer its support to the friends and families of the Israeli victims of Hamas and to the Palestinian's living under the shadow of Hamas who were also victims.

He also asked the Council to support Israel's legitimate right to defend itself and to be mindful of the impact locally and offer support to the communities in South Norfolk that were affected by this conflict. He urged all those involved to work together to try to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.

With a show of hands, members voted to support this statement.

3735. PETITIONS

No petitions to the Council had been received.

3736. NATURE CRISIS - MOTION SUBMITTED BY CLLR C BROWN

Cllr C Brown moved the following motion seconded by Cllr D Roberts.
"This Council notes:

- The UK has lost nearly half of its biodiversity since the Industrial Revolution and is ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations for biodiversity.
- The Conservative Government has missed its 2020 target for 50% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest to be in favourable condition and for UK seas to meet Good Environmental Status.
- The Conservative Government is set to miss its target for 75% of rivers and streams to be in good condition by 2027, with just 14% of surface waters in good ecological condition in England and 0% in good overall condition.
- There has been a global decline of 68% in animal population sizes since 1970.

- The climate emergency and the ecological emergencies are intrinsically linked.

This Council believes that:

- The ecological emergency is one of the greatest threats to life on Earth, and to people's health, wellbeing and prosperity, and without urgent and effective action nature and human life will be put in serious jeopardy.
- Everyone has a role to play in responding to the nature crisis, including local government.
- We can support our communities and residents to improve the natural environment in our district.

This Council resolves to:

- Set ambitious targets and actions for increasing biodiversity in the district, including:
 - Supporting new habitat creation schemes.
 - Encouraging communities to identify opportunities for nature and biodiversity improvements and support them to take action.
 - Make planning work for nature by encouraging developers to go beyond minimum biodiversity net gain requirements.
 - Seeking future planning changes to improve biodiversity net gain requirements by increasing the length of time that net gain habitat must be maintained from 30 years to 120 years and increasing the net gain requirement for major developments from 10% in smaller sites up to 100% in larger greenfield sites.
 - Working with partners and regulatory bodies to enforce environmental rules to protect nature.
- Support communities and landowners to increase woodland cover in the district, targeting a doubling by 2050.
- Seek Government funding to:
 - Increase the network of local nature reserves and ensure they are well managed.
 - Move to more nature-friendly management policy of council land.
 - Put sustainability at the core of purchasing policy.
- Request the Leader to write to our local MPs to push for Government action to:
 - Manage our land for nature by providing a fair deal for farmers with a long-term funding guarantee, based on public money for public goods, to pay for a shift to a wildlife-friendly, high welfare, climate-positive and economically thriving farming sector.
 - Introduce a 'Right to Nature' and recognise everyone's human right to a healthy environment."

Cllr Brown advised the meeting that nature and biodiversity had suffered hugely since the Industrial Revolution and the UK had lost nearly half of its biodiversity during this time. He also noted a worldwide decline in animal population and Government environmental targets being missed.

He suggested that the climate emergency and the ecological emergency were

intrinsically linked, and he believed that everyone had a role to play in responding to this, both as individuals and as a local authority. The motion, therefore, set out a list of actions that the Council should undertake.

In seconding the motion, Cllr D Roberts explained that Wymondham Town Council was very active in supporting environmental projects and he suggested that South Norfolk Council could do more.

Cllr J Fuller stated that improving the environment was something that everyone wanted to see, and he emphasised that the Council already played a leading role in areas such as tackling the nutrient neutrality issue, whilst protecting the economy. A great deal of work was also being done on solutions such as Green Infrastructure Recreational Impact Avoidance and Mitigation to reduce the impact of visitor pressure from new homes on habitat sites and biodiversity net gain. He also stressed that the members supported their communities by numerous grants for environmental projects at a local level, and he was also meeting senior politicians such as the Secretary of State at DEFRA to drive forward the environmental agenda.

He questioned the value of introducing a Right to Nature, in the light of all the activities that the Council was already undertaking, and whilst he sympathised with the intent of the motion, he would not want to bind the Council to it. Cllr M Rosen noted the numerous environmental activities already being undertaken by the Council and suggested that the motion was taking up unnecessary time on an already full agenda. He suggested going straight to a vote on the matter.

Members referred to numerous environmental projects supported by the Council. The Chairman noted the stance taken by the Council in opposition to the proposed Norwich Tilbury pylon route, which would blight the South Norfolk countryside.

In summing up, Cllr Brown emphasised the importance of the issue and that the aim of the motion was to raise the profile of what was being done in the District and to encourage the Council to redouble its efforts. He added that he would be happy for the Cleaner, Safer Environment Policy Committee to look into this issue further, if required.

With 13 votes for, 20 against and 4 abstentions the motion was lost.

3737. BOYS NEED BINS - MOTION SUBMITTED BY CLLR C BROWN

Cllr C Brown moved the following motion seconded by Cllr C McConnell.

“This Council notes:

- Prostate Cancer UK’s campaign of “boys need bins” which highlights the growing numbers of those who suffer with incontinence issues as a result of prostate treatment.
- Prostate Cancer UK cites that 1 in 8 men will get prostate cancer and that 1 in 3 men over 65 are estimated to have a urinary incontinence

problem. Council believes that it is important to make life more comfortable and dignified for those who suffer such problems.

This Council supports the provision of sanitary bins in all toilets so that waste products can be disposed of in a discreet and hygienic manner.

This Council resolves to:

- Request that the Managing Director works with Officers of the Council to roll out a programme to provide sanitary bins, in Council owned or managed male toilets by the end of 2023.
- Call upon Cabinet to make the funding available to achieve this.
- Requests the Leader to write to the MPs covering our district to ask them to publicly back the campaign, as found on the Prostate Cancer UK website.”

Cllr C Brown advised the meeting that the motion requested that the Council back the campaign by Prostate Cancer UK, which sought to highlight male incontinence issues caused through Prostate Cancer, which affected 1 in 8 men. The Council should, therefore, ensure that incontinence bins were provided in all its male toilets.

Cllr D Elmer confirmed that the Council was seeking quotes for incontinence bins for Council owned toilets and he would support the motion.

Cllr Rosen suggested removing ‘male’ from the motion, as all toilets should be supplied with incontinence bins. It was noted that females already have such bins in their toilets, but there was no objection from Cllr Brown to amending the wording as suggested.

The importance of sufficient clean toilet facilities was also emphasised, and it was also suggested that education in respect of Prostate Cancer was also an important aspect of the campaign.

It was then unanimously

RESOLVED:

1. To note:
 - Prostate Cancer UK’s campaign of “boys need bins” which highlights the growing numbers of those who suffer with incontinence issues as a result of prostate treatment.
 - Prostate Cancer UK cites that 1 in 8 men will get prostate cancer and that 1 in 3 men over 65 are estimated to have a urinary incontinence problem. Council believes that it is important to make life more comfortable and dignified for those who suffer such problems.
2. To support the provision of sanitary bins in all toilets so that waste products can be disposed of in a discreet and hygienic manner.

3. That

- The Managing Director works with officers of the Council to roll out a programme to provide sanitary bins, in all Council owned or managed by the end of 2023.
- Cabinet will make the funding available to achieve this.
- the Council writes to the MPs covering our district to ask them to publicly back the campaign, as found on the Prostate Cancer UK website.

3738. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET ARISING FROM THE MEETINGS HELD ON 4 SEPTEMBER AND 9 OCTOBER 2023

The Chairman advised the meeting that items 8.5, 8.6 and 8.8 were exempt, so would be considered following the exclusion of the press and public later in the meeting.

3739. LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES REVIEW

Cllr K Kiddie presented the item which set out proposed changes to Licensing Fees and Charges. He advised the meeting that currently the Licensing Fees and Charges did not cover the costs of administering the service. The changes proposed sought to cover these costs. He emphasised that the Council would not make a profit from the fees and charges and they would not be implemented until April 2024.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To

1. Agree the updated proposed fees and charges outlined at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of the report; and
2. Agree the reviewed Licensing Fees and Charges being applied to all new licence and renewal applications with effect from 1st April 2024; and
3. Agree the fees and charges relating to Scrap Metal at Appendix 1 of the report; and
4. Authorise the Food, Safety and Licensing Manager to publish the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing fees in accordance with the relevant legislative provisions, together with delegated authority to consider any objections received and only refer matters back to Cabinet if substantial comments, material to the implementation of the revised

fees and charges, are received.

3740. RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY - REFRESH

Cllr J Fuller informed the meeting that the refresh was part of a regular review of risk that had been undertaken. He recommended the Policy for approval by the Council.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To approve the revised Risk Management Policy.

3741. LEISURE SERVICE STRATEGIC DELIVERY PLAN

Cllr K Carsok introduced the item, which set out the vision for the Leisure Service and included specific and measurable targets and an Action Plan. She recommended the adoption of the Plan to Council.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To adopt the Leisure Service Strategic Delivery Plan.

3742. COUNCIL AND REGISTERED PROVIDER STATUS

Cllr G Minshull informed the meeting that it was a legal requirement for the Council to register with the Regulator for Social Housing as a Registered Provider.

Cllr C Brown welcomed the work being done by the Council to provide temporary accommodation for residents in the District.

In response to a query regarding the definition of affordable housing, Cllr Minshull explained that there were a number of definitions across different tenures, and that he would ask officers to provide members with further information following the meeting.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To agree that South Norfolk Council should be registered with the Regulator for Social Housing as a Registered Provider of social housing.

3743. UPDATE TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

Cllr J Fuller presented the item which was a regular update of the Local Development Scheme as it progressed towards the adoption of the new Local Plan, which had been slightly delayed by the work on the Village Clusters, which would need to be reconsulted on. He added that this consultation should now commence in December and would be extended to ensure that parish and town councils had sufficient opportunity to consider and respond to the consultation.

In response to a query, he acknowledged that the process for setting local plans was overly ponderous and he would welcome a more plan led, lighter touch, system from Government.

It was noted that the Wymondham Neighbourhood Plan had recently been adopted and it was confirmed that the Local Development Scheme would be amended to take account of this.

Cllr Overton-Neal confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan would run in conjunction with the Wymondham Area Action Plan 2015.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To approve the proposed amendments to the current Local Development Scheme.

3744. MEMBER WARD GRANT AND COMMUNITY ACTION FUND - SPEND AND TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW

Members noted that this was an additional recommendation from Cabinet arising from the meeting held 9 October, and had therefore not been listed on the Council agenda.

Cllr K Carsok advised the meeting that she was very proud of both schemes, which delivered a huge number of projects for the local communities. The proposal would increase the Community Action Fund Pot from £50,000 to £75,000.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To increase the Community Action Fund pot by £25,000 in 2023/24.

3745. ANTI-FRAUD AND ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY

Cllr S Ridley advised the meeting that the Strategy sought to protect the public purse from theft and corruption, and he commended it to members.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To adopt the Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Strategy.

3746. REVIEW OF CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

Cllr S Ridley informed the meeting that the main changes proposed in the review of the Contract Procedure Rules was to add reference to reducing carbon emissions, as a criteria in the statement of intent. In addition, reference to European Union law had been removed, authority level had been increased for Assistant Directors, and new contract approval was increased from £100,000 to £200,000, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To adopt the amended Contract Procedure Rules.

3747. FRAG COMMITTEE - INDEPENDENT PERSONS

Cllr S Ridley informed the meeting that the Committee had recommended appointing an independent non-voting person to the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee.

Cllr D Sacks advised the meeting that at the 22 September 2023 meeting the Committee had received the Statement of Accounts 2020/21 30 minutes before the start of the meeting. She was very concerned that members had just ten minutes to study a 300-page document and would imagine that an independent person would feel the same.

In response, Cllr Ridley informed the meeting that the audit of the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts had been delayed due to Covid and resourcing levels at the external auditors. Deferring a decision on the Statement of Accounts had been proposed at the meeting, but had been defeated.

Cllr J Webber proposed to amend the recommendation to include increasing the size of the Interview Panel to include a member of the opposition and to add an additional clause that no independent person could serve more than two terms i.e. eight years. This proposal was seconded by Cllr B McClenning.

Cllr M Rosen informed the meeting that he would support the amendment as he hoped a truly independent person would improve the level of decision making on the Committee.

Cllr J Fuller advised the meeting that nationally he sat as Vice-Chairman of the Resources Panel of the Local Government Association and the backlog in local authority audit was such that some authorities had unaudited accounts from 2015. He acknowledged that the Committee had not had sufficient time to consider the Statement of Accounts and he apologised for this occurrence.

Moreover, he accepted the amendments put forward and encouraged his colleagues to vote for them.

Cllr S Ridley informed the meeting that he would vote against the amendments, as he felt them to be unnecessary.

Following a vote, the proposed amendments were carried.

It was then unanimously

RESOLVED

1. That steps be taken to appoint an Independent Person onto the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance Committee.
2. That the interview be widened to include a member of one of the Opposition Groups
3. That the appointed Independent Person be permitted to serve for no more than two terms (eight years)

3748. ADOPTION OF DISS AND DISTRICT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Cllr L Overton-Neal introduced the report which presented the first cross-county Neighbourhood Plan considered by the Council. Officers from South Norfolk Council and Mid Suffolk Council had supported the Steering Group in the drafting of the Plan.

A referendum on the Plan had been held on 28 September 2023 and had resulted in 84% of those who voted doing so in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan. It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To adopt the Diss & District Neighbourhood Plan, following a successful outcome at the referendum held on 28 September 2023.

3749. MONITORING OFFICER REPORT

Cllr J Fuller introduced the report which reviewed the standing orders for full Council meetings and provided clarity over interpretation, and outlined proposed administrative updates to the constitution.

The report also recognised the need for the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee to review the current position with some parish councils and explore options and seek to resolve issues where necessary.

Cllr C Brown welcomed the recommendations of the report, in particular the work to be undertaken by the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee, to review town and parish councils. In response to a query, members noted that the Committee would be meeting some time in December.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED

To agree:

1. The changes to the standing orders as set out in section 2 of the report.
2. The administrative updates to the constitution as set out in section 3 of the report.
3. The consequential changes to the constitution to be delegated to the Monitoring Officer.
4. That Council notes the allocation of work to the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee.

3750. QUESTIONS TO CHAIRMAN AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a. Cabinet -Questions to the Leader and other Cabinet members:

Cllr J McCloskey asked how many staff employed by the Council, either directly or indirectly were on zero-hour contracts and how many staff employed directly or indirectly earned less than the National Living Wage?

Cllr Fuller informed the meeting that this information would be forwarded to Cllr McCloskey following the meeting.

Cllr Rosen asked for clarity on the conditionality of the offer of the proceeds from the sale of the ex-Town Council offices in Middleton Street Wymondham, for improvements to the public realm in the Town.

Cllr Fuller confirmed that the sale of the offices was close to completion. The proceeds of more than £400,000 would be increased by a contribution from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Fund to around £650,000, to be put towards public realm improvements in the Town Centre. This was conditional on the Town Council also contributing some of its own CIL receipts to the scheme. It was also hoped that the County Council would make a contribution to increase this sum to around £1m. He was hopeful that they could bring this coalition together to drive the scheme forward.

In answer to a query about whether a second member had been appointed as a director on Big Sky, Cllr Fuller confirmed that this had been an oversight and an appointment would be made in due course.

Cllr G Blundell asked if Cllr Fuller agreed with him that the recent approval of funding for the Western Link and the Long Stratton bypass would be a positive move for the District both environmentally and economically.

Cllr Fuller welcomed these road improvements and many others which would be a boost for the economy and the environment.

Cllr D Sacks asked Cllr Fuller to what extent he felt it was appropriate to pollute the environment given his stance on nutrient neutrality.

In response, Cllr Fuller informed the meeting that it was never appropriate to

pollute the environment, but the Government's proposals had been misrepresented by departments and agencies such as DEFRA and Natural England and the water companies. It was these bodies whose role it was to keep watercourses clean, but instead they had sought to pass on their responsibilities to councils and developers. The evidence he had presented to the Government sought to put the responsibility for nutrient pollution back to the agencies that were paid and had the powers and responsibilities to deal with it. He emphasised that it was indefensible that councils were expected to regulate emissions from agriculture and sewage treatment works, when it had no powers to do so and to characterise this intervention as encouraging pollution was grossly wide of the mark.

Cllr J Morland noted that the Council's Environment Policy supported the concept of community energy, and he asked if onshore wind and solar power should be included in this.

In response, Cllr Fuller advised the meeting that it had been very difficult for onshore wind schemes to be approved due to national planning policy, but if applications were made, the Development Management Committee would consider each of them on their own merits.

Cllr C Brown asked Cllr K Kiddie when food waste collection would commence in the District, and when would a response from DEFRA be received to their consultation on the consistency of household recycling that the Council had responded to back in June 2021.

In response Cllr Kiddie confirmed that collecting food waste would require a large capital outlay and was probably not financially viable in rural areas of South Norfolk, but modelling was taking place to assess how it could be done in more urban areas.

Cllr G Blundell asked Cllr Kiddie if the Council collected electrical items and textiles as side waste. In response, Cllr Kiddie informed the meeting that the Council had held Waste Electrical Equipment events in the past and future events were being planned. The collection of textiles was also a consideration currently being thought through.

3751. OUTSIDE BODIES - FEEDBACK FROM REPRESENTATIVES

Members noted Cllr Carsok's report on the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Integrated Care Partnership, and the South Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Partnership.

Cllr C McConnell raised a concern about the rollout of the Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) operational model, which changed the way emergency services responded to calls involving mental health issues by seeking to ensure the right response was delivered by the most appropriate agency, rather than the police being the default first responder.

Cllr McConnell acknowledged the impact of mental health incidents on police resources but noted that only the police had the authority to restrain or take into care individuals that were having psychotic episodes, and as this authority was not available to other emergency responders, she questioned what could be done to address this gap in the system.

In response, Cllr Carsok referred Cllr McConnell in the first instance to Sgt Jason Ellis, who was based in the Horizon Building and could advise her on how RCRP was progressing. The Council was also using the network of agencies that worked with the Help Hub to influence how the RCRP would work.

3752. THE SALE OF THE SOUTH NORFOLK HOUSE SITE - PUBLIC BRIEFING NOTE

The Chairman advised the meeting that this item had been deferred to a future meeting.

3753. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

To exclude the press and public from the meeting for the remaining items of business because otherwise, information which was exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 would be disclosed to them.

3754. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND: PURCHASE OF PROPERTIES

Cllr G Minshull introduced the recommendations from Cabinet, which sought agreement for the purchase and management of properties.

Members expressed their support for the recommendations and it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

To agree the recommendations from Cabinet

3755. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT WORKS TO DISS LEISURE CENTRE

Cllr K Carsok introduced the recommendations from Cabinet regarding proposals for the improvement and refurbishment of Diss Leisure Centre.
It was unanimously

RESOLVED:

To agree the recommendations from Cabinet

3756. LONG STRATTON BYPASS FUNDING AGREEMENTS

Cllr J Fuller introduced the recommendations from Cabinet which presented proposals regarding the Long Stratton bypass funding agreements.

Cllr Fuller commended the recommendations to Council, explaining that this was one of many steps in what was a long process to ensure the funding and delivery of the bypass.

Some members queried the security of the agreement for the Council and Cllr Fuller assured members that measures were in place to mitigate the risk of default or lack of repayments. In response to suggestions that the report lacked necessary detail, he explained that the arrangements had been agreed in principle earlier in the year.

With 33 votes in favour, 7 against and 3 abstentions, it was

RESOLVED:

To agree the recommendations from Cabinet

(The meeting concluded at 10.24pm)

Chairman