

Minutes of the Suffolk County Council Meeting held on 23 November 2016 at 2.00 pm in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, Ipswich.

Present: Councillors Colin Spence, (Chairman of the County Council), Jenny Antill, Helen Armitage, Nick Barber, Trevor Beckwith, Mark Bee, Peter Beer, Michael Bond, Tony Brown, John Burns, Stephen Burroughes, David Busby, Peter Byatt, Kim Clements, Terry Clements, Mary Evans, John Field, James Finch, Jessica Fleming, Julian Flood, Sandra Gage, Peter Gardiner, Mandy Gaylard, Tony Goldson, John Goodwin, Michael Gower, Derek Hackett, Matthew Hicks, Beccy Hopfensperger, Christopher Hudson, David Hudson, Gordon Jones, Richard Kemp, Michael Ladd, Inga Lockington, Sandy Martin, Guy McGregor, Robin Millar, Bill Mountford, David Nettleton, Graham Newman, Colin Noble, Patricia O'Brien, Penny Otton, Caroline Page, Keith Patience, Bert Poole, Bill Quinton, Andrew Reid, David Ritchie, Bryony Rudkin, Trevor Sheldrick, Stephen Searle, Reg Silvester, Richard Smith MVO, Joanna Spicer, Sarah Stamp, Jane Storey, Julia Truelove, Robin Vickery, James Waters, Paul West, Robert Whiting and David Wood.

### **35. Thought for the Day**

Council received a thought for the day from Mr Stephen Javes, Chair of Community Action Suffolk.

### **36. Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman welcomed people to the meeting and thanked Mr Javes for agreeing to do the Thought for the Day slightly ahead of schedule to allow more time for the debate.

#### Councillor Trevor Sheldrick

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Trevor Sheldrick to his first meeting as Liberal Democrat County Councillor for the Hadleigh Division.

#### Senior Staff Leaving

The Chairman announced that Mark Sanderson would be leaving his post as Deputy Chief Fire Officer on 31 December after more than 30 years in the fire and rescue service, 25 of which were in Suffolk. The Chairman congratulated Mark on his service at many fire stations and across different roles, and holding positions including the national lead within the fire service on prevention and procurement and also for children and young people. The Chairman referred to Mark's exemplary professionalism in carrying out his role as Deputy Chief Fire Officer for the last three years and commended Mark for his diligence,

commitment and support and thanked him on behalf of the Council for his much valued support to Suffolk's Fire and Rescue Service.

[Members stood and applauded Mark Sanderson]

**37. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sarah Adams, Sonia Barker, Kathy Bole, Janet Craig, Mark Ereira, Gary Green, Len Jacklin and John Sayers.

**38. Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

**39. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2016 were confirmed as a correct record.

**40. Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution**

The Chairman proposed that the maximum speaking times for this item were amended as follows:

Leader of Council (20 mins, then 7 mins at conclusion); Seconder (7 mins); Leader of Opposition (15 mins, then 7 mins before Leader's conclusion); other group leaders (10 mins each); other councillors (5 mins each).

**Decision:** Members agreed by general assent to standing orders be changed for this item only.

The Chairman then invited the Chief Executive to provide a short presentation regarding the current position for Devolution in Suffolk. The Chief Executive referred to Norfolk voting against the deal and referred to that fact that this Council's commitment was important as ever. She emphasised, from an officer perspective, that devolution was a means of delivering accelerated growth for the local economy, expectations of Government that by 2020, when the Rate Support Grant would be removed, that local government would deliver income from growth from Business Rates, New Homes Bonus and Council Tax. The Chief Executive referred to the untapped potential in Suffolk's ability to feed the country through its food and drinks industry, deliver power through Sizewell and offshore wind, and connect with the rest of the world through BT Global research, local ports and growth in the digital economy. Councillors were being asked to agree to the Leader and Chief Executive having a conversation with the Secretary of State and be at the heart of discussions for non-metropolitan authorities, starting with the original deal asking for money the Council would otherwise not get, and control over how it was spent. She also emphasised the importance of engaging with Suffolk residents and the benefits to them.

Councillor Colin Noble proposed and Councillor James Waters seconded the following amendment to the recommendations in the report.

*As a result of the decision by King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council not to consent to being included in a draft Order to be laid before Parliament to create a Mayoral Combined Authority for Norfolk and Suffolk to implement the Norfolk*

*and Suffolk Devolution Deal, the Government has taken the Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution Deal off the table.*

*It is recommended that Council agrees:*

- 1. To reiterate the commitment, given at its June meeting, to Devolution as a means for delivering accelerated growth in the local and national economy and helping local people and places fulfil their potential.*
- 2. To authorise the Leader and Chief Executive to:*
  - a) seek an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss the Government's intentions around devolution; and*
  - b) work with Government and local partners to agree an alternative devolution deal as soon as possible.*
- 3. That further reports are presented to the Authority, as appropriate, as the Devolution process progresses.*

Councillor Bill Mountford, Leader of the UKIP Group proposed, and Councillor Bert Poole seconded, the following amendment as additional text (in italics) to the concluding sentence to the amendment:

- 3. That further reports are presented to the Authority, as appropriate, as the Devolution process progresses and any final deal to be subject to a referendum of the people of Suffolk.*

Councillor Noble, as proposer of the original motion as amended, did not agree the additional wording.

A point of order was raised regarding whether or not an amendment could be taken as the same recommendations were being put to all Suffolk Councils. The Monitoring Officer advised that the Council's Constitution allows for amendments to be put forward in these circumstances.

Councillor Bill Mountford, on speaking to the proposed addition to the amendment, proposed that the decision about devolution should be made only with the agreement of the people of Suffolk.

Members who did not support Councillor Mountford's amendment regarding a referendum pointed out, that if accepted, it would go against what other Suffolk council's had agreed and would need to be referred back to Suffolk Public Sector Leaders. Other councillors emphasised the recommendations were about going back to negotiate with Government, including the matter of a directly elected mayor, and that if this Council proposed a referendum, the government would not be likely to negotiate with Suffolk. The Leader confirmed that although decisions relating to devolution needed to be made by the executive, the Council's Cabinet would have met and fulfilled the will of the full Council and he gave an undertaking to back that decision in full.

On a vote being taken on the additional wording to the amendment proposed by Councillor Bill Mountford and seconded by Councillor Bert Poole, 13 councillors voted for the amendment and 51 councillors voted against and there was 1 abstention so the vote was lost. Therefore the motion proposed by Councillor

Colin Noble and seconded by Councillor James Waters became the substantive motion.

Councillor Colin Noble, in speaking to the amendment, referred to the current position following the decision the previous week by Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council deciding the deal was not for them. He encouraged members to regard this as an opportunity rather than a setback and emphasised the benefits to Suffolk of a vision, supported by businesses across the board, for more growth in Suffolk. He referred to the Combined Authority and elected mayor model having the potential to deliver savings and be a catalyst for delivering local government working with parish, district and borough councils. He commented that the Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Board had already been functioning like a Combined Authority.

The Leader also emphasised the need for accelerating growth in the economy, creating more jobs, the importance of Ipswich housing growth, by redefining public service, and through new ways of working. He advocated the transfer of more powers locally as decisions made at parish and district level were better than decisions made at Whitehall and he encouraged support for work with Suffolk public sector leaders to talk with government about a new deal.

Councillor Sandy Martin, Leader of the Labour Group agreed with the need for more housing, especially for young families, better roads, faster broadband and education and supported the actions councils were taking together with the support of businesses in the county and the need to devolve more decisions locally. He also wanted decisions made by an accountable body, where local voices were heard and taken into account. He acknowledged the need to accept the imperfections of the past relationship with the Government, but urged further negotiation and co-operation with the government.

Councillor Bill Mountord, as Leader of the UKIP Group, supported the Leader's desire to drive the economy and growth, but argued that this was not a once in a lifetime deal, that we should seek a better deal, developing it more openly, gaining public support. He also suggested that Suffolk should look at Cornwall as a unitary authority as a model for avoiding the need to create another layer of government, advocating that Suffolk should look at a total restructure of local government, reducing the number of councillors and officers.

Councillor John Field, spokesperson for the Liberal Democrat and Independent Group, supported the motion as a way forward, with his Group supporting the principles of devolution with more local democracy and decision making around how money is spent. However, he advocated a more radical approach, including introducing a system of proportional representation in Suffolk, opposing the requirement for a directly elected mayor and the need to accept that we had to negotiate a smaller deal before being able to get a larger future deal. He also endorsed the need for the provision of honest information as it became available and bringing reports back to Council for debate.

Councillor Beckwith, speaking on behalf of the Green and Independent Group agreed with elements of the recommendations but queried the requirement for a directly elected mayor and questioned how realistic it was for Government to commit to funding for 30 years and with regard to talking to councils in Norfolk and North Essex, he asked where this was going.

Councillors speaking in support of the motion commented on examples of bringing expertise and people together to achieve change such as St Edmundsbury Borough Council transferring housing stock and leisure stock, opportunities for further growth such as horseracing and tourism and collaboration across health, police and the voluntary sector. Support was also given to the principles of economic development and business growth, improved infrastructure and transport for which there were unfunded needs, more jobs and apprenticeship grants and the need to provide support for transport, young people and vulnerable older people, affordable housing and to considering the benefits to Suffolk residents. One councillor announced that the government had just confirmed £1 million for Suffolk's A12 segway bypass in addition to money to build the third crossing at Lowestoft and bridges in Ipswich.

Reference was also made to the uncertainty faced in the light of Government proposing changes affecting education and fire and rescue services and concern over the communications coming from Government and civil servants with regard to devolution. Members advocated greater focus on how we work with local partners, recognition of the contribution Suffolk agricultural and rural heritage and use of arable land makes to the Suffolk economy and the local and wider food supply. A suggestion was made that councillors should be in a position to explain the implications of devolution to residents and provide feedback to the Leader and Chief Executive and reassurance was requested that future reports would come back to full Council first and an undertaking that Cabinet would take Council's decision forward. Acknowledgement was given to the work of Suffolk Chief Executives and staff through what had already been a long process and for sticking with it.

Members identified a number of issues for inclusion in future discussions, including the negotiation of a better financial offer with less Government intervention, opposition to having to have an elected mayor, consideration of a better democratic system which could be based on political proportionality, avoiding a further layer of governance and imposed targets, and clarity on when funding would become available if a deal were agreed. Support was also given to the principles of more local autonomy and seeking grass roots views, consideration of including a focus on developing closer links between NHS and Social Care, emphasis on the quality of life of residents, potential engagement beyond Suffolk, looking to examples of different models of local governance and the provision of better information, using different approaches to engagement and getting the best deal for Suffolk.

In his closing remarks the Leader undertook to champion decision making locally, to consider his own notes and minutes of this meeting during further talks and seek to develop further mutual trust and confidence between central and local government. He referred to Suffolk being on a journey, looking to Manchester which was taking on new areas of operation not in its original deal and he undertook to seek to build trust and talk to other places and build a coalition of willing councils, bringing back as much information as he could on a Suffolk based devolution deal for debate before final decisions were made.

On a vote being taken, 57 councillors voted in favour of the motion and there were 7 abstentions.

**Decision:** Council agreed

1. *To reiterate the commitment, given at its June meeting, to Devolution as a means for delivering accelerated growth in the local and national economy and helping local people and places fulfil their potential.*
2. *To authorise the Leader and Chief Executive to:*
  - a) *seek an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss the Government's intentions around devolution; and*
  - b) *work with Government and local partners to agree an alternative devolution deal as soon as possible.*
3. *That further reports are presented to the Authority, as appropriate, as the Devolution process progresses.*

**Reason for decision:** All councillors who voted agreed the substantive motion.

**Alternative options:** Council could have agreed the amendment to the motion as proposed by Councillor Bill Mountford and Councillor Bert Poole.

**Declarations of interest:** None were declared.

**Dispensations:** None were given.

*The meeting closed at 3.59 p.m.*

Chairman