

Minutes of an Extraordinary Council meeting held at Riverside, Canning Road, Lowestoft on **Wednesday, 23 November 2016 at 8.35 pm.**

**3b**

Members present:

M Bee (Chairman), S Allen, P Ashdown, E Back, N Brooks, A Cackett, G Catchpole, J Ceresa, M Cherry, Y Cherry, G Elliott, J Ford, T Gandy, T Goldson, L Gooch, I Graham, K Grant, J Groom, L Harris-Logan, M Ladd, C Law, P Light, S Logan, F Mortimer, T Mortimer, J Murray, R Neil, M Pitchers, B Provan, C Punt, D Ritchie, C Rivett, M Rudd, J Smith, L Smith, K Springall, C Topping, N Webb, S Webb and S Woods

Officers present:

S Baker (Chief Executive), A Charvonia (Strategic Director & Monitoring Officer), A Jarvis (Strategic Director) and N Wotton (Democratic Services Manager)

The informal presentation and question session on Devolution commenced at 7.30 pm.

The Chairman of the Council informed Members that there would be an informal presentation on Devolution and the opportunity to ask questions prior to the commencement of the formal Council meeting. Members noted that the revised recommendations were being considered by all of the Councils in Suffolk and they could not therefore be significantly amended at this stage. The recommendations were a statement of intent to allow the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to continue discussions with Government regarding a Devolution deal for Suffolk.

The Leader of the Council reported that following the recent decision of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council to reject the Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution Deal, the Deal had collapsed and could not be progressed any further. Negotiations would need to commence instead for a Suffolk-only Devolution Deal and the other Councils in Suffolk had already met and expressed their support for this proposal. The revised recommendations which would be considered during the formal meeting, would give permission for the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to continue negotiations regarding a Suffolk-only Devolution Deal. Members were reassured that any proposals or developments regarding Devolution would need to be considered and debated by Full Council, as had happened for the Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution Deal. It was proposed that Andy Wood would continue to lead the negotiations for Suffolk, as he was very experienced and knowledgeable in this respect.

Members noted that there may be an opportunity for other Councils outside Suffolk, such as those in South Norfolk or North Essex, to join the Devolution Deal at a later date, once the Deal and funding for Suffolk had been agreed. It was noted that it was important to be inclusive and work closely with neighbouring authorities across boundaries.

The Leader of the Council took the opportunity to clarify the role of the Mayor for any future Combined Authority for Suffolk. The Mayor would chair the meetings involving the Leaders of the Councils and would be a figure head for the Combined Authority and they would be held to account by the Government and the public. However, their power would be limited, as they would have no power of veto and any decisions taken by the Combined Authority would need to be made by a majority vote or be approved unanimously. The Mayor would have a strategic role and it was noted that many people had concerns regarding the title of 'Mayor', however these were unfounded in this case. It was also noted that planning issues would still need to be dealt with by the appropriate Local Planning Authority, therefore large housing developments could not be imposed on District Councils by the Combined Authority.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Devolution Deal had recently been established and they were currently investigating how to spend their devolved funding in their areas. It was important to continue the discussions with Government and to find out what deal would be available for Suffolk. The other Councils in Suffolk had all voted in favour of the continued discussions and it was hoped that Waveney Councillors would do the same this evening.

Questions

Would it be better to invite the South Norfolk and North Essex Councils to join us straight away rather than waiting?

No, it is important that we finalise a deal for Suffolk only. Once we are satisfied with that, we can then look to involve other Councils in the area and then we will get additional funding for them, on top of what had already been agreed for Suffolk. If we have additional Councils joining us in the future, we could have Devo 2 or even Devo 3 in future.

I am concerned that we have not been given enough time to consider the revised recommendations that are now before us.

Please accept our apologies, however the situation with Devolution is very fluid and the revised recommendations were only just agreed with the Suffolk Leaders. We do want everyone to be clear about the situation, so we can adjourn the proceedings this evening to allow Members to have their Group meetings, should they wish to discuss the matter further with their Group.

Am I correct that we are the last Council in Suffolk to consider this matter? What would happen if we were to reject the recommendations this evening?

Yes, Waveney is the last Council to consider this. If Waveney were to reject the revised recommendations this evening, then there could be no Suffolk-only deal.

Can you explain how the future Governance arrangements for a Suffolk-only deal would work?

We would need to negotiate that, as the Suffolk-only deal would have a smaller footprint and fewer Leaders. It is likely that the Governance arrangements would be different to those suggested for the Norfolk and Suffolk deal, however they will still be robust and appropriate.

How does Devolution affect our health services and the Waveney and Great Yarmouth Clinical Commissioning Group?

Devolution will focus upon growth, infrastructure and housing. Health is unlikely to come into that for a long time. However we have strong links with Great Yarmouth and the situation is working well. There may need to be some restructures involving Health in the future due to the funding situation.

Do we really need to have a Combined Authority for Devolution, we already have Suffolk County Council which has elected Members, why do we need another tier of bureaucracy?

Suffolk County Council is a separate entity. Their Leader is elected by their Division and their Group, they are not elected by all of the population of Suffolk, therefore they are not representative and it would not be appropriate for Suffolk County Council to take on this role.

I am concerned that we have not been given enough time to consider this fully and it is not certain that Waveney will benefit from any of the Devolution funding, as other Suffolk Councils are likely to receive it.

It is clear that the money will go to all of the Councils in Suffolk, there is significant money available and it will make a huge difference. We will all benefit and the money will be shared.

Will all of the processes for Devolution remain the same for these negotiations? Is it just a case of having to renegotiate the amount of funding that Suffolk receives?

We are only seeking an agreement in principle this evening to continue talks with Government. The Norfolk and Suffolk deal is now off the table and we need to start the whole process again from scratch, we will need to renegotiate every element. If we do manage to negotiate a satisfactory deal, there will be significant slippage to the envisaged timescales and a Mayor will not be elected until May 2018 at the earliest. When we have negotiated a deal for Suffolk, that Deal will need to be considered and approved by every Council in Suffolk, so Councillors will have the final say and will be kept informed of developments.

I am confused about the role of Mayor – they are to be held accountable but they have no power, how can that work?

The previous deal had a 'Mayor-lite' approach to the role. They were a figure head and would chair the Combined Authority meetings which the Leaders would attend. They would have a strategic role and would be held to account. However they would not have the power of veto, so the Leaders would collectively make the decisions.

If we get a good deal for Suffolk, why do we need to involve other Councils and have Devo 2?

Having additional Councils join the Suffolk deal will result in us receiving more funding from Government, which will be in addition to the funding we would get for Suffolk only. It is important that we take a strategic view and are not hindered by borders, so that the whole region can benefit from Devolution and more investment.

Many people in Waveney travel more to Norwich and Norfolk rather than Ipswich and South Suffolk, so how will Devolution benefit us? Also, if the Mayor decided to increase business rates, that could drive businesses to relocate to Norfolk, how could we stop that?

We need to remove boundaries and take a strategic approach to infrastructure and transport, as roads and trains do not just stop at County boundaries! The Devolution funding will not just be focussed upon Ipswich, the whole County will benefit. With regard to business rates, you are correct that the Mayor can increase them by 2%, however they would need to have the agreement of the Leaders to do this.

Do we have any idea of how much money a Suffolk-only deal would be offered?

We do not know at this point in time but when we start the negotiations we will aim to get the best possible deal for Suffolk.

Will it be better for us to include the South Norfolk Councils in our Devolution Deal in future?

It is not crucial to expand but it makes sense to look wider and increase the financial base. We need to think strategically and outside of the Suffolk Boundary. We should not be isolationist but inclusive. We need to keep our options open and see how things develop but we will always operate in the best interests of the residents of Suffolk.

Are we sure that we will get a Suffolk-only Deal, as Suffolk was not thought to be big enough in the past, which is why we included Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough at various times in the negotiations? Also, will our Enterprise Zone which is shared with Great Yarmouth be in danger, if half of it is not in the Devolution Deal area?

I cannot answer that at this time, as policy is developing continuously in this respect. However, in respect of the size of Suffolk, there has been a precedent set in other parts of the country, as Cornwall has got a Devolution Deal and they have a significantly lower population than Suffolk. We will just have to wait and see what deal we can negotiate with the Government.

I am concerned about the public consultation and engagement methods used during the Norfolk and Suffolk Deal. The phone surveys and online polls provided very different responses, which were deemed 'statistically non representational'. Can we have different methods for the public consultation in any future Suffolk Deal? Could we have a referendum?

We will need to do the consultation again for the Suffolk Deal as we have to start from scratch with the whole process again. I will take your concerns on board and update the other Leaders during our meetings and negotiations. However, as it is a Suffolk-wide Deal, we will need to use the same consultation methods across Suffolk, we could not do anything different for Waveney. With regards to holding a referendum about this, it would cost approximately £1 million to do that for Suffolk, which is prohibitively high.

**THE INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS WERE ADJOURNED FROM 8.25 PM TO 8.35PM TO ALLOW FOR GROUP MEETINGS TO TAKE PLACE PRIOR TO THE FORMAL MEETING COMMENCING**

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Ardley, S Barker, M Barnard, J Craig, A Green, L Nicholls, K Patience and T Reynolds.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**3. THE NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK DEVOLUTION AGREEMENT**

As Members had been fully apprised of the current developments regarding Devolution prior to the start of the formal Council meeting, the Leader of the Council moved the revised recommendations which had also been considered by all of the other Suffolk Councils in recent days.

A Member commented that the Labour Group would like to be involved with and contribute to the Devolution negotiations at an earlier stage for these negotiations, in order that they could feel some ownership of the proposals and be more comfortable in supporting the recommendations.

A Member stated that it was important to be receptive to the new negotiations, as it was the first step on a long journey to gaining the additional funding needed to support housing, growth and infrastructure. It was noted that some areas had been devolved additional powers in respect of health, which was an extremely important issue for this area.

With regard to public consultation and engagement, a Member sought assurances that the Leader of the Council would inform the other Suffolk Leaders of the concerns raised by Waveney Councillors, regarding the consultation methods used for the Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution public consultation and which gave the contradictory results. The Leader confirmed that he would highlight the concerns that had been raised, however it was noted that the public consultation methods used would have to be the same across all of the Councils in Suffolk, there could be no alternative arrangements made for Waveney alone.

**RESOLVED**

That the Council agrees:

1. To reiterate the commitment given previously by the Council to devolution as a means of delivering accelerated growth in the local and national economy and of helping local people and places to 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 in relation to devolution.
  - 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 Council and Cabinet, as appropriate, as the devolution process progresses.

The meeting was concluded at 8.45 pm

Chairman