



# **Electoral Review of South Norfolk Council**

## **Submission on the future size of South Norfolk Council**

8 April 2016

## **South Norfolk: An Overview**

South Norfolk is a large and diverse District, located to the South of the major urban conurbation of Norwich. The District is a key engine of growth and one of the fastest growing parts of the Country. The area is already home to some 130,000 people and this is expected to grow by up to 20% within the next 20 years.

The District is well located. It includes 3 major arterial routes – the A11, a key growth corridor connecting Norwich to Cambridge and then on to London; the A47, which connects Great Yarmouth through to Kings Lynn and Peterborough, and the A140, which connects Norwich to Ipswich. The main train line from Norwich to London stops in Diss.

There are over 100 villages in South Norfolk, which form 98 Town and Parish Councils and a further 14 Parish meetings. They vary from the Norwich fringe – Costessey Town, Cringleford and Trowse; the Market Towns of Wymondham, Diss, Loddon and Hingham, larger villages such as Mulbarton, Long Stratton and Poringland, and smaller rural settlements.

The District is partly overlapped in the East by the Broads Authority, whilst the Southern part of the District is marked by the tranquil Waveney Valley. We are fortunate to host Norwich Research Park, a world class centre for life sciences, which employs some 11,000 people. We are home to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, and the University of East Anglia straddles our borders. Hethel Engineering Centre is the regional hub for innovation and technology, next door to the Group Lotus car manufacturers. The District has seen significant investment following the dualling of the A11 in 2014.

South Norfolk Council itself presently has 46 Councillors, and 451 Council Staff. We have over 9000 revenues and benefits customers; and each year collect 3.5m bins, have over half a million visitors to our leisure centres and house over 500 people from our housing register.

### **Our Ambition**

We want to be recognised as a respected and ambitious local authority, innovating to help communities thrive by actively shaping services to meet today's and tomorrow's need.

We seek, in our work, to be customer focussed, collaborative and commercial in our approach to service delivery. We own 5 companies, which undertake property development, property management and building control and consultancy services and host a successful internal audit consortium. We operate services such as our leisure centres and waste collection internally, believing that we can most effectively deliver these for our residents.

We look for opportunities to enhance the way we deliver services, and have won national and regional plaudits for schemes such as our reuse events; our pub of the year competition and our building control work. We have been

consistently successful in seeking and obtaining external funding, whether for ourselves or for the businesses we help to support.

## **Our Community**

The 2011 census identified a population of 124,012 within the District – the fastest growing area in Norfolk. It is forecast by 2021 the population will reach 137,600 – a rise of 11% across 10 years.

Housing development creates challenges for Councils, ensuring that people feel connected and part of a community. We have recently conducted a Community Governance Review within Queens Hills, a part of Costessey Town Council; this area of over 2000 residents did not exist the last time that our Council size was reviewed. Cringleford, Wymondham, Poringland and Long Stratton have also experienced, or are due to experience, significant growth in housebuilding.

We are conscious that the current review has been triggered, in part, by this growing community. Councillors representing Old Costessey – which includes the Queens Hills area, represent over 3,100 electors each.

The average age of our residents is 43; in 2011, 21.39% of residents were pensioners. This trend is also set to continue to rise, and there are pockets of the community where it is expected that over 25% of residents are single pensioners.

## **Governance**

Our full submission sets out our governance structure (see Appendix 1). We presently have 46 Councillors, representing 36 wards which is a mix of single, two and three member wards. At present, 40 Councillors are Conservative and 6 Liberal Democrat.

Since 2000, the Council has operated a Leader and Cabinet model; this model is supported by Policy Committees, who serve to advise the Cabinet members. We feel our structure works to encourage members to truly work alongside officers in shaping and developing Council policy and services.

Our Council members play an active role in the Council and the life of our community. They have their own funding, which they can use to benefit community schemes. They support their Parish Councils, a variety of outside bodies, and generally seek opportunities to enhance their community.

## **Our Proposal**

As is highlighted in our evidence summary, South Norfolk Council is an ambitious authority. Whilst we must be realistic about the financial situation that authorities face, which means that we do not believe that an increase in Council size is tenable at this stage, members need to have the capacity to lead and direct the Council and communities that they represent. Based on the evidence we have prepared, we have drawn the following conclusions:

### **Demands on time of elected members**

Our most recent timesheet exercise, undertaken in January – February 2016, indicated that those members in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowances undertake, on average, 77 hours of Council work per month and backbench members undertake 53 hours per month. In practice, this means that our Councillors already invest a significant time commitment in delivering their roles.

Political Groups have indicated it is already challenging to recruit candidates for nomination, particularly when the reality of the time commitment is made clear to them. Groups have highlighted cases where otherwise willing volunteers have withdrawn from standing, yet could have played a valuable role in the Council if elected. They have also reported cases where younger Councillors in particular have left after one term as they are unable to support the commitment required; on average, our Councillors have served less than two terms.

If a further increase in time was expected of Councillors, groups would need to further assess the extent to which candidates had the time and financial resources to undertake the role. At present, the Council has limited representation from people with young families, those in disadvantaged groups, and those with substantial employment commitments, and whilst this is partly at the whim of the ballot box, increasing the time commitment required from Councillors will potentially serve to decrease the likelihood of the Council being representative of the society it serves.

### **Political management and governance**

From a governance perspective, we highlight within our submission that we operate a Cabinet-Leader governance model; this is supported by a series of advisory “Policy Committees”. This has operated well to engage members in specialist areas across the political spectrum in emerging developments before decisions are made, and provides a career progression for Councillors. To operate such a structure requires resources, and we project that it would be necessary to work with 30 Councillors as part of this approach. Whilst Councillors within this structure can take dual roles in the regulatory decision making arena (where we recognise that there may be potential to reduce the size of some of our committees), there is a requirement for appropriate, independent Scrutiny and roles such as the Chair and Vice-Chair of Council

which in practice means that a size of 39 Councillors should be seen as a minimum.

However, whilst a minimum may be acceptable, we need to ensure there is sufficient scope within our structure to account for fluctuations in Councillors own commitments and to flex for the demands of the Council; for example, forming additional task and finish groups, illness on the part of Councillors or temporary vacancies would be extremely difficult to accommodate. Further, this structure works well for the current political structure of the Council; a change in the balance could lead to additional pressure on leading group members.

Whilst preparing our submission, the Government announced a devolution deal for Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. This deal had an embedded acceptance of subsidiarity – that services would be devolved to the level that is right for delivery. It is expected that arising from this, there will be a need for leading members to work not just on a County-wide basis, but on a regional basis to drive an exciting agenda of growth, potentially making decisions that impact on a far wider basis. Inevitably, this will mean that support and back bench members may be called upon to a greater degree in not just enabling lead members to operate in this way, but to challenge the authority and ensuring that both the Eastern Combined Authority and South Norfolk Council is delivering the best service for its residents.

### **The member representative role**

Across South Norfolk, there are 98 Parish and Town Councils, and the Council makes up to 64 Outside Body appointments. Members will, inevitably, have other roles in their community as well as supporting the community work of South Norfolk Council.

Whilst this may not sound significant compared to the number of Councillors, South Norfolk is a diverse district of very isolated rural communities, as well as urban fringe areas. Although this exercise will not consider ward boundaries, in practice a reduction in Councillor numbers will only be possible were there to be an increase in the geographic size of wards in the rural areas, which could lead to several Councillors having between 5 and 10 Parish Councils. There are a range of natural and physical features which provide separation – and therefore identity within our communities. For example, many of our Southern communities identify with the Waveney Valley region; maintaining this identity whilst achieving the required balance in the size of wards will be extremely challenging were the numbers to be reduced.

### **The need to ensure effective constituent representation**

This has two aspects. As above, we have set out that the degree to which members represent their community will potentially be limited were significant reductions to be incurred.

South Norfolk is a growing district; by 2022 the electorate is predicted to be 117,566. Significant reductions in the number of Councillors will result in an untenable ratio of Councillors to constituents. At present, each Councillor represents just over 2,000 residents; were the number to be reduced by just 7 members, to 39, it is projected that each Councillor will then represent 3,000 residents – an increase of nearly 50%. This will result in increases in caseloads for Councillors, who in turn may require greater support (for example, additional Council officers, at a cost to the organisation) in order to continue to provide a positive and effective support to their constituents.

The proposed status quo will still result in some increase, whereby Councillors will have an increase in their residents, on average, of 18% compared to the current situation. This will be challenging, but is achievable compared to the position were the numbers to be reduced.

### **Effective council operations and the “right” size**

As a Council, we have to ensure we can deliver an ambitious programme of growth and investment to create a viable entity, providing services our customers value the most. We need to ensure we have Councillors who have the capacity and the ability to influence and subsequently make challenging decisions.

We have assessed other Councils size, and whilst we appreciate we have to consider what is right for ourselves, we feel that maintaining the status quo is consistent and fair compared to other similar authorities. For example, South Cambridgeshire, currently undertaking an electoral review, is considering 45 Councillors, whilst our neighbour, Breckland, had 49 Councillors when its review was undertaken in 2013-14.

Whilst there may be arguments to increase the number of Councillors South Norfolk has, we do not consider it feasible to do so; the financial position of local authorities does not warrant an increase, and with careful management of the Council’s committees (for example, reducing the membership of regulatory committees where feasible to do so) we can ensure that Councillor commitments do not become unmanageable despite the potential increase in their representational role.

Taking into account the above, and the evidence included in this submission, we consider that the number of Councillors should remain the same; this would result in the following position:

	Current (2015)	Proposed (2022)
Number of Councillors	46	46
Size of Electorate	99,573	117,566
Electors / Councillor	2,165	2,556
“commitments” – average number of Parishes, Committee appointments and outside body appointments	6.54	6.54



## Evidence to support our proposal

<b>Governance and Decisions Making</b>	
What kind of Governance arrangements are in place for the Authority?	<p>South Norfolk Council operates an executive-leader model of governance. The Leader of the Council appoints members to serve collectively as a Cabinet, which undertakes key decisions on behalf of the Council. Cabinet usually meets on 9 occasions per year.</p> <p>To support the Cabinet, 4 Policy Committees have been formed which work closely alongside Council officers to develop policy, and analyse service performance.</p>
How many portfolios are there?	<p>There are 6 portfolios:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy and External Affairs (Leader of the Council)</li> <li>• Stronger Communities and Leisure</li> <li>• Environment and Recycling</li> <li>• Housing, Early Intervention and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Finance and Resources (Deputy Leader of the Council)</li> <li>• Regulation and Public Safety</li> </ul> <p>Each portfolio serves a range of Council activity. There are also 5 Deputy Cabinet members, who also chair the 5 Cabinet Policy Committees.</p>
Describe how a portfolio holder carries out his/her work on a day to day basis	<p>Portfolio holders are expected to serve as the champions for their area and collectively provide clear leadership for the community. Their role is highlighted in the attached member role and responsibilities document (see Annex 1) but will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading on the preparation of policies and the budget, providing oversight to the performance of services within their area</li> <li>• Be the focus for forming partnerships and acting as the Council's representative for those areas, maintaining strong links with national and local levels of governments</li> <li>• Keeping informed on the latest government initiatives and how these will impact on their service areas, undertaking frequent liaison with key service officers</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represent the views of Cabinet externally and internally, including representation at scrutiny and policy committee decisions</li> </ul> <p>Deputy Cabinet members may be expected to support, work alongside and in some cases deputise for Cabinet members in delivering their role. They will also champion and promote the work of their policy committee, maintaining liaison with lead officers to ensure the robustness of work programmes and the progression of committee reports.</p>
<p>To what extent are decisions delegated to portfolio holders or are most decisions taken by the full Executive? What is the volume of decisions taken? How many decisions are taken by officers?</p>	<p>No decisions are made by individual members at South Norfolk Council. Cabinet can only make decisions collectively; all decisions involving spend / savings of more than £100k (not already budgeted for) and which significantly affect 1 or more ward are considered key and must be made by Cabinet. Cabinet will also consider items such as local plan documents prior to approval by Council.</p> <p>The number and nature of items will vary significantly, however a typical agenda would usually include 7-10 items. Committee reports – whether Cabinet, Scrutiny, Council or Policy Committee, would normally be subject to consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder.</p> <p>As above, the Executive is advised in its decision making by Cabinet Policy Committees. The policy committees are non-decision making and can meet on both a formal (public) and informal (non-public) basis. They were formed in 2012 to ensure that members had opportunities to be involved in supporting officers for decision making in specialist areas and develop a career progression route for members.</p> <p><b>Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance</b> – formed of 7 members, which meets approximately 6 times a year. They oversee the work of internal and external auditors and advise on general governance matters.</p> <p><b>Growth, Infrastructure and Environment</b> – formed of 7 members, overseeing matters related to related to Economic Development and the Environment. This usually meets 4-6 times a year</p> <p><b>Stronger Communities and Leisure</b> – formed of 7 members, overseeing community led issues and the operation of the Council’s leisure centres. This has usually met about 5 times a year</p>

	<p><b>Planning Policy and Regulation</b> – this is formed of 7 members, and is a new committee to oversee progress of the Council’s next local plan in conjunction with our partner authorities</p> <p><b>Housing, Wellbeing and Early Intervention</b> – formed of 7 members, overseeing matters related to the Housing, Early Intervention and Wellbeing Portfolio. This usually meets 4-5 times a year.</p>
<p>Do Executive (or other) members serve on other decision making partnerships, sub-regional or national bodies?</p>	<p>See below regarding outside body appointments for Councillors at South Norfolk Council.</p> <p>In addition, executive members actively support our commercially-focussed approach – whether through sitting on committees for shared service partnerships (such as the board of nplaw, our shared legal service, and CNC, the shared building control service), or serving as the shareholder representative for the Council’s wholly owned companies. The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Early Intervention and Wellbeing plays a leading role in the County Health and Wellbeing Board, serving as the obesity champion for the County.</p> <p>Outside of the direct Council appointments, the Leader of the Council is the current lead Conservative member for resources at the LGA, as well as serving on the board of New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership.</p> <p>In March, the Government announced a devolution deal for Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. The work to support the formation of the Combined Authority is currently underway, and at this stage it is difficult to be precise as to what additional commitment this may entail for Councillors, but current proposals envisage that Councillors will be part of a Mayoral Cabinet, with other Committees and workstreams to support the operation of the Authority. Inevitably, this will mean some additional commitment for leading members, and also additional commitment for members in roles such as scrutinising the work of the Combined Authority. With leading members committed to work on a regional basis, then other members within the Council may need to play a greater internal supporting role.</p>
<p>Is the role of the Executive Member considered to be full time?</p>	<p>The level of commitment may vary but as demonstrated by our recent timesheet exercise, the Leader of the Council is considered a full time role, whilst the other executive members spend, on average, 77 hours per month on their role which indicates a very significant time commitment.</p>

<p>How does the Council discharge its regulatory functions? How many members are involved in committees?</p>	<p>The regulatory functions are divided between 2 core groups of Committees. In order to sit on regulatory Committees, Councillors are required to have undertaken relevant training.</p> <p><b>Development Management</b>  This Committee makes decisions on applications not otherwise determined by officers. It is made of 11 Councillors, and there is a substitutes pool of a further 7 Councillors. Meetings take place on a 4 weekly basis, usually for a whole day, and are preceded by a briefing session. A typical agenda will include 12-15 applications, although some major applications will have their own special meeting. The Committee does have the option to refer applications for site visits, which has its own terms of reference.</p> <p><b>Licensing and Standards Committees</b></p> <p>This is a group of Committees in order to discharge various Council responsibilities. The meet on an “as required” basis – 3 meetings have taken place for each of the past two years, although 7 meetings took place in 2012-13.</p> <p>The meetings are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensing, Appeals and Complaints – this will hold hearing on “other” licensing applications, appeals against Council decisions and any complaints referred to it under the Councils complaints procedure</li> <li>• Licensing and Gambling Acts – this will develop licensing and gambling policies and a sub-committee decides matters related to licensing covered by the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005</li> <li>• Standards – to support the work of the Monitoring Officer, and in particular hear cases where a District or Parish Councillor is considered by the Monitoring Officer to have breached the Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Statutory Officer Hearings and Appeals – to make recommendations to Council on the</li> </ul>
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	<p>dismissal of statutory officers, as necessary</p> <p>The Standards Committee and Licensing Committees each have appointed Chairs and Vice-Chairs; membership is drawn from a pool of 15 members which are selected on a rotational basis.</p> <p>Other Council Committees are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Electoral Arrangements</b> – 6 members; will consider Community Governance Reviews, Polling Station and progression of Boundary Commission reviews. This was formed in June 2015 and has met 4 times since.</li> <li>• <b>Emergency Committee</b> – 5 members; convened to support the Council during the recovery phase of an emergency. It has not been necessary for this Committee to meet in the recent past.</li> <li>• <b>Joint Consultative Committee</b> – 6 members of Council (and 6 union members) – to advise on the application of terms, conditions of service and employment matters; this usually meets 3-4 times a year.</li> </ul>
<p>Describe the arrangements for the delegation of decisions in respect of regulatory functions? To what extent are decisions delegated to officers?</p>	<p>These are established in section 3 of the Council’s constitution.</p> <p>The majority of decisions are made by officers under delegated authority.</p> <p><b>Development Management</b>  The scheme of delegation was subject to review in 2014 to ensure that the Committee’s work is focused on the most significant and contentious applications within the District. In general, District Councillors have a key role in determining whether an application is referred to Committee, using their knowledge of local feeling and response to the application. The Chair of the Development Management Committee also plays an important role in consulting with officers on whether marginal applications should be referred to Committee</p> <p><b>Licensing and Standards</b>  For licensing, most decisions are delegated except for those that need to be made by the</p>

	<p>Committee by statute (such as new premises licenses). The Committee will also hear appeals on decisions such as licensing and homelessness cases although these are infrequent.</p> <p>For standards, the Committee will hear cases where the Monitoring Officer has determined an investigation is required and that investigation concludes there has been a breach. The Chair will also consider appeals against decisions of the Monitoring Officer, which usually number approximately 3 per year.</p>
<p>Is committee membership standing or rotating?</p>	<p>Committee membership is agreed each year at the annual Council meeting. Generally, membership remains steady across the electoral term with only minor changes being made.</p>
<p>Are meetings ad hoc, frequent and/or area based? How are the Chairs allocated?</p>	<p>See above regarding the frequency of meetings and nature of scheduling. Again, Chairs and Vice-Chairs for regulatory committees are appointed by the annual Council meeting.</p>
<p>What level of attendance is achieved? Are meetings always quorate?</p>	<p>Level of attendance at Committees is high (85% overall for the current municipal year – this includes 2 short notice Special Council meetings which have reduced the figures). The Council has an agreed scheme of substitution which is always followed. Committee meetings are always quorate.</p>
<p>What future issues may impact on the role of non-executive councillors in respect of regulatory functions? How might the role develop?</p>	<p>Regulatory functions are complex by their role.</p> <p>One of the most significant risks to the Council is the lack of 5 year land supply as required by paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Councillors on the Development Management Committee have to make a careful balance when forming their opinions due to the lack of 5 year land supply, which may or may not change as the Council's final local plan documents are progressed. However, this has increased the risk of successful challenge to Council refusals of housing related developments.</p> <p>In addition, the Council is mindful of periodic Government policy directions and new legislation.</p>

	<p>Recently, the Council has had to introduce regulatory committees to manage the change in processes to dismiss statutory officers, and we are still awaiting the full detail of the Local Audit Act and the implications this may present for Independent Audit Panels.</p> <p>On a wider basis, it may be the case as any devolution deal involving Norfolk Council progresses, and potentially a Combined Authority is formed, Councillors may find that they are being required to make decisions in different ways at a different level.</p>
<p>Has the Council defined the role of councillors? Has the Council adopted arrangements for training and developing Councillors and supporting them in their role?</p>	<p>The Council has a Councillor role description – see Annex 1.</p> <p>Councillors on regulatory committees are required to undertake training to ensure they are sufficiently skilled in their role. Since our last election in May, we have undertaken a robust training programme for all new Councillors, to ensure they are fully equipped for the role. Each new Councillor is assigned an officer buddy, whose role it is to help support them in understanding their role and finding out more about being a Councillor. The induction programme included events such as a “market stall” where Councillors could tour services to find out more. Training is a combination of skills based (such as electronic working, using the HR online system), knowledge based (such as planning policy, early intervention working, devolution) and competency based (such as using social media effectively). Members can also undertake “ward walks” with the Chief Executive to find out more about the Council’s role in their ward.</p> <p>Most Councillors will also sit on Policy Committees, where they will gain additional knowledge and insight into specialist area of services. To support their ongoing development, the Council has introduced the Deputy Cabinet member role, which serves as a precursor to serving on the Cabinet in future.</p>
<p>Has the Council assessed how much time members spend on Council business? Do Councillors generally find that the time they spend on</p>	<p>Our recent timesheet exercise indicates that Councillors spend, on average 53 hours per month on their role. Members in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowances generally have higher commitments than this average figure.</p> <p>This figure is a very significant time commitment for members although it can vary, with some</p>

<p>council business is what they expected?</p>	<p>Councillors inevitably having greater time they are able to invest in others and some having greater requirements placed on them by their role.</p>
<p>What is the extent of Councillors representational role on and appointment to outside bodies? How many are involved in this activity and what is their expected workload?</p>	<p>As above, the Council makes 64 appointments to outside bodies in a year. Members will typically have at least one appointment each. Workloads will vary significantly; from organisations where there are a couple of meetings a year through to those where there is a significant contribution in time required. Representation includes areas such as the Police and Crime Panel; the Broads Authority, County level Boards; Citizens Advice Bureaux and Internal Drainage Boards.</p> <p>In addition to the appointments, members, through their role, will often be requested to serve on other organisations – many members also sit on their local Parish or Town Council, act as School Governors and, for example, Councillor Dr Murray Gray is appointed to the Broads Authority by the Secretary of State.</p>
<p>Does the Council have difficulty in retaining councillors or attracting new candidates?</p>	<p>The Council holds all-out elections every 4 years.</p> <p>Political groups have reported that it can be challenging to recruit candidates, particularly when candidates are made aware of the level of time commitment that can be involved in being a District Councillor. There has been a tendency that younger members of Council tend to only serve for a short term but most Councillors depart through age-driven retirement. Of course, Councillor retention is driven in part by the ballot box, and at the last election 30 of the 46 Councillors re-stood; only one was defeated. On average Councillors have been serving for 7 years.</p> <p>Elections have historically been contested at South Norfolk Council – and certainly all seats were contested in the last two elections, in 2015 and 2011. At the 2015 elections, there were 148 candidates for the 46 seats on the Council.</p>
<p>Have there been any instances where the Council has been unable to discharge its duties due to a lack of councillors?</p>	<p>No.</p>

<p>Do Councillors have an individual or ward budget for allocation in their area? If so, how is the system administered?</p>	<p>Yes, each Councillor has £1000 to spend in their ward (or if this cannot be spent in their ward, in the wider area). In addition, 5 Councillors – Neighbourhood Chairman – have a pool of £25,000 that can be allocated to larger projects in their Neighbourhood Area. This scheme was introduced in 2014/15 and was fully spent in the year.</p> <p>Councillors identify projects through a variety of means – Parish meetings, social media, word of mouth and newsletters etc; they work directly with applicants and determine their priorities, before completing on-line applications. These are verified by Council officers and grants distributed.</p> <p>In addition, Councillors can also access a pool of £5,000 funding to support tree planting in their area, through the Neighbourhood Chairmen.</p>
<p><b>Scrutiny of the Council, outside bodies and Others</b></p>	
<p>What's the structure? How does it operate</p>	<p>Scrutiny is operated at South Norfolk Council through a single scrutiny committee. The scrutiny role tends to be limited as a result of the political balance, and to mitigate this, and ensure Councillors are proactively involved in decision making, we have formed the policy committee structure as set out above.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee has several roles; they hold the executive to account, normally either through the process that enables members to “call-in” decisions of Cabinet for further scrutiny, or through retrospective review of decisions made by Cabinet to ensure that the service or policy is operating as expected. They examine the budget and corporate and business plans prior to approval. It has also proved very effective in scrutinising outside bodies; for example, they have recently examined the work of the Internal Drainage Board and the Citizens Advice Bureaux.</p> <p>The Committee can appoint Task and Finish Groups should it wish and is supported by a Scrutiny Officer.</p>
<p>What is the general workload of scrutiny committees? Has the Council ever found that it</p>	<p>The Scrutiny Committee sets its own work programme, and both the members of the Council, and members of the community, can put forward suggestions using a “TOPIC” analysis to ensure scrutiny items are focussed in the right way. The Committee tends to focus on a small number of</p>

has had too many active projects for the scrutiny process to function effectively?	items which add most value to the Council. There has never been the situation where there are too many items for scrutiny, and if that were the case, there would be the potential to form additional groups to assess this.
Are Councillors involved in scrutinising external issues?	Yes, as above, the Committee has been successful in reviewing the work of outside bodies to help assess items that affect the Community. In addition to the examples above, the Committee have also reviewed the way that our Early Help approaches have successfully worked with partners – who presented to the Committee on their approach. The Committee ensures it looks at the full scope of services – for example, when looking at the Council’s Market Town Initiative, the Market Town Teams were invited to the Scrutiny meeting to talk about the work they are undertaking and as a result of the scrutiny considerations, a Market Town Conference was held at the Council.
When not in scrutiny meetings what activities are councillors expected to undertake?	All members of the Council are encouraged to consider items within their Community that may benefit from scrutiny review. The Committee members themselves periodically attend training sessions to enhance their skills, whilst the Chair and Vice-Chair will hold periodic briefings with the Scrutiny Officer and lead officers for services under scrutiny review.
How will the role of the scrutiny member change? What are the emerging issues and trends?	The emerging trend has been to place a greater emphasis on external scrutiny, rather than internal scrutiny. Most items that traditionally might have been pre-scrutinised are now passed through Policy Committees to review, rather than being scrutinised. Clearly, the members of the Committee will have a keen view to the potential of a devolution deal and how any Combined Authority can be held to account.
What kind of support do scrutiny members receive?	As above, there is a dedicated Scrutiny Officer (which is part of a wider role), in addition to the work of the Committee Services team. All scrutiny members are offered training in their role, as well as the opportunity to meet on a 1:1 basis with the Scrutiny Officer. The Chair and Vice-Chair have a strong relationship with the Scrutiny Officer, who will liaise with them on a regular basis.
<b>Representational Role: Representing Electors to the Council</b>	
Has the representational role of Councillors changed since the council last considered how many elected members it should have?	The number of Councillors was last reviewed in 2002, 14 years ago. There have been a number of shifts in the role of Councillor since:  <b>Electronic Working</b>

	<p>Councillors will now undertake much of their work via e-mail. This can make it faster to respond, but it is also easier to simply send e-mails to the Council which can result in a significant increase in the volume of correspondence. In addition, the advent of social media means that increasingly Councillors are using this as a key source of contact and liaison with the public.</p> <p><b>National Government Direction</b></p> <p>The pressures faced by local government have changed significantly. Planning matters absorb a significant amount of Councillor resources; the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) placed greater emphasis on the need to support development at a local level, which inevitably meets with public concern. The restricting level of resources that local authorities have faced since 2011 has meant that tough choices are inevitable; Councillors are often the public face of such decisions.</p> <p>At a local level, most recently we have introduced our member ward grant process, as above.</p> <p><b>Growth in the District</b></p> <p>There has been significant growth in South Norfolk over the past 15 years, and this growth is expected to continue. The Council has been marked as one of the fastest growing areas nationally, and whereas at the last review, the Local Government Boundary Commission’s own figures identified that on average there were 1,940 electors per Councillor, in 2022 we expect that this will increase to 2,500 were the status quo to be maintained – some 25%. Some areas have or will experience a particularly marked growth – notably Costessey, Cringleford and Wymondham. Inevitably, such an increase will mean that Councillors have to face the challenge of balancing their workload to ensure that ward queries are handled on a timely basis – and in particular, change their ways of working to ensure that they can represent their ward effectively.</p>
<p>In general terms, how do Councillors carry out their representational role with electors? Do members mainly respond to casework from</p>	<p>See Annex 1 regarding Councillor role descriptions.</p> <p>In practice, most – if not all – South Norfolk Councillors will take a very active role in their communities. We have 98 Parish and Town Councils within South Norfolk, and District Councillors are expected to attend meetings. As above, most Councillors will also take additional outside</p>

<p>constituents or do they have a more active role in the community?</p>	<p>appointments, such as to their Parish Council or local School. Last year, for example, Councillor David Bills was instrumental in launching a new dementia group in Hetherset. The member ward grant supports Councillors in their community leadership role.</p> <p>In addition, Councillors are expected to participate in South Norfolk Council events in the Community - for example, attending our award winning “reuse” events, the big litter pick, the annual South Norfolk on Show, nominate the Community for our successful Community Awards scheme,</p>
<p>How Councillors engage with constituents? Do they hold surgeries, public meetings, use IT etc?</p>	<p>Councillors will engage with their community in a variety of ways. Most Councillors no longer hold surgeries, but they will attend public meetings, use e-mail and social media, attend Parish Council meetings etc.</p>
<p>How do councillors generally deal with casework? Do they pass on issues directly to staff or do they take a more in depth approach to resolving issues?</p>	<p>Councillors are expected to take accountability for their casework, and manage their work appropriately, albeit with officer support. Usually, Councillors will contact officers directly – whether in person or via telephone / e-mail, and then respond to the individual.</p> <p>The Council has a local member protocol – see Annex 2 – which requires officers to consult local members on any issues in their area and ensure they are invited to appropriate meetings.</p>
<p>Has the Council put in place any mechanisms for councillors to interact with young people, those not on the electoral register or minority groups or their representative bodies?</p>	<p>This is seen as part of the work of the Council, rather than being highlighted as an item for special consideration.</p> <p>The Council has encouraged the Parliamentary Education Service to visit the District and several primary schools have benefited from their free events. We have an active and positive relationship with the University of East Anglia, based on the edge of our District, which sends students to visit Council meetings, engage with officers and attend placements. We participate in the National Graduate Programme, and have recently been highlighted as the Norfolk Apprentice Employer of the Year.</p> <p>There is not a significant ethnic minority population within South Norfolk and most minority groups will seek to engage with existing communities. The Council is at the forefront with its early help</p>

	<p>approaches to supporting people, and there are specific officers – who will engage with Councillors – who, as part of their role, will actively engage with minority and disadvantaged groups.</p>
<p>Are Councillors expected to attend meetings of community bodies such as parish councils or resident associations? What is the level of their involvement and what role do they play?</p>	<p>Yes, as above, there are 98 Town and Parish Councils in South Norfolk and 14 Parish Meetings. These vary from large Town Councils – Costessey, Diss and Wymondham, who have a number of sub-committees, to smaller Parish Meetings who may only meet a couple of times a year.</p> <p>District Councillors are expected to brief their Parishes on key issues affecting their area, consider representations made regarding planning applications, and help to identify ways in which the District Council can support resolution of Parish level issues.</p>
<p><b>The Future</b></p>	
<p>What impact do you think the localism agenda might have on the scope and conduct of council business and how do you think this might affect the role of councillors?</p>	<p>The Localism Agenda has impacted significantly on South Norfolk Council.</p> <p>The Council is one of the Country’s largest beneficiaries of New Homes Bonus, and the Council has sought to reinvest this funding into its communities. This has led to initiatives such as the local member ward grant, neighbourhood area grant, and a greater emphasis on supporting community capacity development. The Market Towns Initiative has helped to ensure the vibrancy of our local communities, and Councillors have taken an active role in helping the process to improve their local Towns. Councillors are involved in decisions such as whether Community Assets should be listed.</p>
<p>Does the council have any plans to devolve responsibilities and/or assets to community organisations? Or does the council expect to take on more responsibilities in the medium to long term?</p>	<p>Our Corporate Plan, agreed in December 2015 – see <a href="http://www.south-norfolk.gov.uk/democracy/1289.asp">http://www.south-norfolk.gov.uk/democracy/1289.asp</a> sets an ambitious agenda. The Council’s approach is to deliver services, seeking ways in which to be customer focussed, collaborative and commercial in our approach to service delivery. As a local authority, we deliver some 86 different services.</p> <p>The Council is starting an active involvement in the One Public Estate Agenda, which seeks to rationalise and improve the efficiency and value for money of public assets. As above, the Council has also been at the forefront of pioneering early help, forming the first early help hub in Norfolk.</p>

<p>Have changes to the arrangements for local delivery of services led to significant changes to councillors' workloads? (For example, control of housing stock or sharing services with neighbouring authorities)</p>	<p>This involves working with a range of Partners, including statutory, third sector and community providers to benefit residents at an early stage before issues escalates. We are also directly working alongside community sports providers to see how we can actively support them, linking to our three leisure centres. We are a founder member of the Municipal Bonds Agency.</p> <p>In 2013, the Council agreed to host the CNC Building Control service for 4 authorities; this has recently expanded to include a 5<sup>th</sup> authority. We have also recently agreed to expand our successful Internal Audit Consortium, and to form a Procurement Consortium, again hosted at our authority. We have formed Build Insight, one of the very first Local Authority owned Approved Inspector Companies in the Country, and formed Big Sky Developments and Big Sky Property Management, wholly owned Companies who are delivering residential and commercial property development and management services.</p> <p>This work requires Councillors to provide oversight, agreement, challenge, support Councillors by serving on Boards, acting as Shareholders etc – for example, our £3m+ leisure enhancement programme has been overseen by a group of 5 Councillors which has met on 5 occasions in the past year.</p>
<p>Are there any developments in policy ongoing that might significantly affect the role of elected members in the future?</p>	<p>Our approach is ambitious, but will clearly be influenced by the current prospects of a devolution deal. This has the potential for a major impact on the Council's responsibilities.</p> <p>Already, we work closely alongside partners in Norwich and Broadland, in addition to the County Council, in considering the future development of the Greater Norwich area through the Greater Norwich Growth Board. The work of this body is currently being assessed, to determine whether further powers or responsibilities should be taken on by it.</p> <p>As mentioned in this document, the main development is devolution. Any deal involving Norfolk will inevitably impact on the way in which services are delivered in the County. It is too early at this stage to determine how a Combined Authority will operate, the level of representation, or whether</p>

	any services will be transferred to or from South Norfolk.
What has been the impact of recent financial constraints on the council's activities?	<p>As above, the Council's approach has been to be more commercial in its operation. It has formed companies to deliver profit to the Council, and replace lost funding with increased income. However, the financial constraints are likely to increase, not just through lost Revenue Support Grant, but the Government is also consulting on the future of New Homes Bonus.</p> <p>In addition to seeking to commercialising services, the Council has actively looked to secure funding towards services– for example, the Council has secured Transformation Funding towards our Building Control expansion. On a more local level, the Council has recently obtained funding from South Norfolk Clinical Commissioning Group to support residents living in their homes with dementia. Councillors have a role in ensuring that initiatives such as this are actively promoted in their community.</p>

### **Members' Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **1 All Members**

This section applies to all members of the Council.

##### **1.1 As a member of the Council**

Members should:

- a. participate in the governance and management of the Council through attendance at Council meetings
- b. take part in committees, panels and working groups of the Council to which they have been appointed.
- c. become involved in representation on outside bodies as appointed by Council and referring back relevant issues, e.g. via Scrutiny and/or the Cabinet/Council;
- d. act as an ambassador for the Council at all times

##### **1.2 Constituency Role**

Members should represent the local community in the District by:

- a. attending meetings of key stakeholders in the District where possible, including meetings of or with town or parish councils, residents' and tenants' associations;
- b. attending appropriate meetings in their Ward, including meetings with local business people and voluntary organisations;
- c. being accessible to members of the community (individually or in groups) and acting as a facilitator to meet local needs;
- d. keeping informed on key issues and promoting their community;
- e. representing the interests of their ward and of individual constituents and responding to enquiries and representations, fairly and impartially.
- f. consulting their community on the development and implementation of policies.

##### **1.3 Key Role**

Members should:

- a. maintain the highest standards of conduct and ethics and act within the law (including the Council's Standing Orders and Rules for Financial Governance) at all times.

- b. observe the Member's Code of Conduct and the Protocol on Member/Officer relations and the local code of practice on planning and judicial matters set out in the Constitution at all times, and
- c. accept a personal responsibility to undertake training and development opportunities to enable them to carry out their responsibilities as a member.

## **2. The Chairman of the Council**

The Chairman of the Council should:

- 1.1 Promote South Norfolk as its First Citizen and to act as ambassador for the District
- 1.2 Preside over meetings of the Council
- 1.3 Nominate and campaign for the Chairman's theme for the year.
- 1.4 Act as a host to civic visitors to the District
- 1.5 Represent the Council at events to which s/he is invited throughout the year
- 1.6 Defend the democratic rights of the Council

## **3. The Vice Chairman of the Council**

- 3.1 In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman should carry out the above roles and responsibilities.

## **4. The Members on the Scrutiny Committee.**

Members should:

- 4.1 carry out their functions in accordance with the constitution and the "working style" of the Committee.
- 4.2 impartially challenge and evaluate the actions of the Cabinet both before and after decisions are taken by:
  - a. questioning the basis for decisions;
  - b. ensuring the policies proposed are consistent with the Council's aims and objectives and the needs of the community;
  - c. ensuring that the views of members who are not on the Cabinet and the wider community are taken into account by the Cabinet;
  - d. making recommendations for further action or amendments to the Cabinet or full Council.
- 4.3 proactively seek information about and be aware of:

- a. all Council activities, including existing and new policies, procedures and key issues;
- b. the formulation and management of the Council's budget.

- 4.4 be aware of national developments and best practice relating to scrutiny and to keep the scrutiny process under review.
- 4.5 consider and investigate broad policy issues and make recommendations to the Cabinet or the Council.
- 4.6 review and monitor performance and operational effectiveness in key service areas or themes including their own effectiveness and work schedule.

## **5. The Members of Licensing, Appeals & Complaints Committee or Development Management Committee**

Members of Development Management or Licensing, Appeals and Complaints Committee, should:

- 5.1 carry out their functions in accordance with the Constitution.
- 5.2 consider and determine issues, keeping informed of any changes in law and guidance and Council policy, taking account of the guidance in the Code of Practice on Planning Matters and Judicial Matters, as the case may be.
- 5.3 be sufficiently knowledgeable in these areas to enable them to take proper informed decisions, participating in training organised by the Council.
- 5.4 co-operate fully in any appeals or inspections following decisions.

## **6. The Members of the Standards Committee**

Standards Committee members should:

- 6.1 maintain an independent and unbiased view in assessing matters before the Committee.
- 6.2 ensure they are fully versed in the ethical principles and codes which relate to the Committee's terms of reference.
- 6.3 approach relevant points of the Committee's work in a quasi-judicial capacity.
- 6.4 support the Committee's role in training Parish Councillors in the requirements of the Code of Conduct.

## **7. The Members of the Cabinet (collectively)**

The Leader and the Cabinet Members (Portfolio holders) should, collectively, provide clear leadership for the community and in particular:

- 7.1 lead the Sustainable Community Planning process with input and advice from the Scrutiny Committee and other bodies as appropriate.
- 7.2 lead the preparation of policies and budget and regularly review and monitor performance.
- 7.3 be the focus for forming partnerships with other local public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations to address local needs and ensure good links with national, regional and local levels of government.
- 7.4 take decisions on resources and priorities within the policy and budget framework set by Council in order to deliver and implement the budget and the policies decided by full Council.
- 7.5 respond to any recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee and other members who are not on the Cabinet.
- 7.6 respond to the needs of local communities, seeking to resolve conflict through clear leadership.
- 7.7 be collectively accountable for decisions taken by the Cabinet.

## **8. The Leader**

In addition to the above, the Leader should:

- 8.1 chair the Cabinet and ensure that it achieves its objectives in a timely and effective way.
- 8.2 champion and be accountable for the work of the Cabinet to the Council and the community.
- 8.3 ensure the Cabinet fully considers the scrutiny process when taking decisions.
- 8.4 actively communicate with the Cabinet Members and senior management of the Council to secure service delivery, whilst observing and following the protocol for officer member relations.

## **9. The Members of Cabinet as Portfolio Holders**

In addition to their collective Cabinet Roles the Portfolio Holders should:

- 9.1 co-ordinate activity within their portfolio.
- 9.2 be responsible for the budgets within their Portfolio.
- 9.3 maintain a strategic overview of their Portfolio and suggest strategies to Cabinet to carry out the policy framework.
- 9.4 review policies and suggest changes to Cabinet.
- 9.5 attend any appropriate meetings (internal or external) and/or provide written or verbal information as necessary.

- 9.6 attend Scrutiny Committee meetings as required and assist the Scrutiny process.
- 9.7 assist officers in monitoring performance within the Portfolio and make service improvements as required, whilst observing and following the Officer/Member protocol at all times.
- 9.8 involve themselves in representation of cross-agency boundaries within the remit of their Portfolio and as appointed by Council.
- 9.9 liaise with and attend appropriate Cabinet Policy Committees

## **10. The Deputy Cabinet Portfolio Holders**

- 10.1 Act as chair of the relevant cabinet policy committee, ensuring its functions allocated by Cabinet are discharged in line with the working style for policy committees;
- 10.2 Liaise with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder on issues relevant to the Portfolio, and feeding back on the work of the Policy Committee;
- 10.3 Operate in a collaborative manner with key officers relevant to the Cabinet Portfolio to develop policy, maintaining oversight of the relevant Cabinet and Policy objectives;
- 10.4 Undertake work, where requested, to support the Cabinet Portfolio Holder in discharging their functions outlined in 9.1-9.9 above

## Involvement of Ward Councillors

- 7.1 South Norfolk Council believes that members need to be aware of significant developments in their ward in order for them to be fully effective in representing their electors and acting as community leaders.
- 7.2. It also recognises that in order for officers to give the best possible service to our residents, members need to make officers similarly aware.
- 7.3 Senior Officers as well as the Leader, Cabinet Members, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees have a responsibility to **ensure that local members are kept informed** of significant matters that are not the subject of formal committee reports. Significant matters will be those that are likely to be of interest to local residents, the media and to the member concerned. Officers will use their judgement as to what matters should be reported but should consider the “need to know” of the local member concerned. **Local members do not have the right to all information, only that which is reasonably necessary to perform their duties.** Members’ entitlement to information is defined more fully in the Council’s “Access to information Rules, which are set out in section 4.2 of the Constitution. **The Director concerned will determine this initially.** The general presumption is that if Directors are in doubt, then the local member should be informed. But if the Director indicates that the information they pass on is confidential, Members must respect that confidentiality.
- 7.4 Members are in a unique position to act as a link between the Council and its communities and are a very valuable source of local information to the Council as they are closest to their communities. They have a responsibility to ensure that information is passed to relevant officers in order that they can give the best possible service to individuals and communities.
- 7.5 Where the issue concerns a specific ward or wards and is the subject of a committee report, then the author must ensure that the local members are consulted as part of that process. The report preparation template prompts officers to ensure this is undertaken. The Scheme of Delegation in Part 3 of the Constitution (para 1.11.2) makes it clear to officers that in the exercise of their delegated powers, they should carefully consider the necessity of consulting the local member.
- 7.6 Ward members are routinely made aware of and **given the opportunity to comment** on planning applications, alcohol premises

licensing applications and applications for neighbourhood grants relating to their wards. Officers should consider whether they should at least inform ward members about other potentially controversial applications or licence changes.

- 7.7 Whenever a public meeting is organised by the Council to consider a local issue, all Members representing the Ward or Wards affected should, as a matter of course, be invited to attend the meeting. This will not apply to circumstances where an officer is simply making administrative arrangements for a public meeting on behalf of another organisation.
- 7.8. When the Council undertakes any form of consultation on a local issue, the Ward Member(s) should be notified. This similarly applies to official events where the Chairman of the Council, the Leader or Chief Executive is attending.
- 7.9. Officers should give careful consideration as to whether local members should be invited to other meetings. If, for whatever reasons they decide not to involve the local member, or if the local member having been invited does not wish to attend, then the officer should inform the local member of any significant outcome from the meeting. Likewise, Members who arrange public meetings in their ward should consider whether it would be helpful to invite appropriate officers. If they decide not to, then they should advise relevant officers of any significant outcomes from the meeting.
- 7.10. Ward Members will only be kept informed of correspondence between the Council and local MPs that concern their constituents, if it is clear to the officers that the constituent has raised the same issue with both the Ward Member and the MP, or where the constituent has given her/his consent, and then only on a strictly confidential basis.
- 7.11 . It is hoped that by formalising the expectations/responsibilities of officers and members, a more consistent flow of information should be achieved. If Members feel that this protocol has not been abided by, then it should be reported to the relevant Director in the first instance.