

**Notes of a meeting of the Sheringham
Town & Parish Council Area Forum
held at Sheringham & Beeston Regis Scout Headquarters
Wednesday 1 July 2009 at 7:00 pm**

Present:

Margaret Roffe	Beeston Regis Parish Council
Derek Thompson	Beeston Regis Parish Council
Peter Bullimore	Beeston Regis Parish Council
Brian John Hannah	Norfolk County Council
Penny Bevan Jones	North Norfolk District Council
Janet Day	Upper Sheringham Parish Council
Sarita Presland	Norfolk ALC
Tony Ing	North Norfolk District Council
Kirsty Rea (Notes taker)	North Norfolk District Council
Maureen Clarke	North Norfolk District Council
Julie Souter	North Norfolk District Council
Samanta	North Norfolk Youth Voice
Jacob	North Norfolk Youth Voice
Stuart	North Norfolk Youth Voice

Apologies:

Henry Cordeaux	North Norfolk District Council
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1. Welcome and Introductions

Tony Ing, Strategic Director Information, North Norfolk District Council explained that as a result of feedback from Parish and Town Councils, the Council had recently appointed a member champion for Parish and Town Councils, Cllr Gloria Lisher who would develop relationships with Councils and act as a liaison point.

2. North Norfolk Youth Voice

Members of the North Norfolk Youth Voice, Jacob, Sam and Stewart gave a presentation outlining what the purpose of their group was and what it hoped to achieve. The group was formed about a year ago and is supported by the District

Council. It will be developing stronger links with district councillors and act as a voice for young people within the area.

Cllr Brian Hannah questioned how the group hoped to achieve inclusion in decision making. The group had been invited to District Council and County Council meetings but these were normally within school hours. They would also be willing to attend Parish Council meetings and welcomed anybody to attend their meetings. Cllr B Hannah suggested that the group needed to be more widely involved in the Council. The group were aware that young people were involved much more at an international and national level and there was a need to bridge the gap locally.

Cllr B Hannah suggested that the starting point was to engage schools in democratic decision making but he had found that teachers had not particularly encouraged this approach. There are many young people that do not understand how the democratic framework operates and are not aware what councils do. North Norfolk District Council has appointed a member champion, Cllr Barbara McGoun who would be an ideal liaison point for schools. The group considered that the Schools Councils were not as effective as they could be and were often more about ticking the right boxes. Councillors would be willing to attend School Council meetings to point out their value etc.

The Group were first hoping to make inroads into local decision making through the Council and wanted to establish networks to tap into this route. North Norfolk Youth Voice is developing a Youth Inclusion Strategy on behalf of the District Council which will set out how the Council can engage with young people.

Tony Ing explained that there was evidence that the numbers of Councillors standing for election was declining in some areas and therefore there was work to be done to make the role more attractive and interesting and encourage involvement. Sam considered that the Council could be doing more to explain about the voting process to young people to encourage them to participate.

Jacob explained that young people often felt too intimidated to attend Parish and Town Council meetings and considered that Parish Councils could be doing more to encourage people to engage.

3. **Local Government Reorganisation**

Tony Ing provided an update on the latest position in respect of the Local Government Reorganisation.

The Norfolk Local Government Association had discussions in June, after the County Council Elections, and a decision was taken to pass a motion which put certain decisions to the Boundary Committee and to make a formal representation in favour of retention of the two tier structure and promote joint working within the county. According to the letter to the Boundary Committee, this motion was supported by all Councils with the exception of Norwich City Council and the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group at the County Council.

A county wide MORI poll has been carried out to gauge stakeholder views. The results would be available in the next couple of days.

The Boundary Committee will be making its recommendations to the Secretary of State. The details of the timetable etc have been provided to all Chief Executives in Norfolk setting out how the remainder of the process will be managed.

On 15 July, the Boundary Committee are due to submit their recommendations to the Secretary of State. He will be making a judgement on the merits of the recommendations and has the option to put forward modifications but it had to meet three long term objectives namely, effective strategic leadership, neighbourhood empowerment and value for money and equity of provision of public services. If the Secretary of State decides that more than one option has merits it will be decided on which offers the maximum benefits.

There will be a period of consultation which will end on 18 September. There is still an opportunity for Parish Councils to provide further feedback or commentary. There is also some scope for oral representations to be accepted. If there are no significant issues around the consultation then a decision will be made by mid-October. If the decision is to go ahead with a unitary council then this will be made by the end of December and take effect from 1 April 2011.

Details of the recommendations will be made available on the Boundary Committee website.

Cllr Brian Hannah stated that if the unitary option goes ahead this will drastically reduce the number of councillors. The County Council currently has 84 but this will only increase to 120 for the whole of the county. It therefore becomes increasingly difficult to be represented.

Tony Ing explained that the District Council would be required to make further efficiencies, regardless of whether the unitary council goes ahead, as otherwise it will not have sustainable budgetary position.

In answer to a question, Tony Ing explained that any unitary council would be an entirely new council and would not be directly reflective of the current performance of Norwich City Council.

4. **Quality Councils**

Sarita Presland, Norfolk Association of Local Councils gave a presentation outlining the work of the Norfolk Association of Local Councils and the benefits of becoming a Quality Council.

The Association has a membership of over 400 parish councils and provides training, visits to meetings or 1-1 and legal advice. There are now 39 Councils which have achieved quality status.

In answer to a question, Sarita Presland explained that there was about 7% of Parish Councils with quality status because two of the main hurdles was to have a qualified Clerk in place and electoral mandate.

Parish Councils were of the view that principal authorities were unwilling to devolve services as they wished to justify their existence and defend their position. Sarita Presland explained that many parishes were forming clusters were they could achieve economies of scale and gives greater confidence to challenging principal authorities. She referred to a County Ranger scheme which was being piloted with one of the clusters. Tony Ing responded that, in principle, it should not be a problem to have a “patchwork quilt” effect of Parish Councils with devolved services but that problems often arose when economies of scale were diluted and there are instances where parishes have taken on functions that they could not sustain and were subsequently transferred back. If a valid proposal was put forward by a Parish/Town Council then the District Council would give consideration.

5. **Way Forward**

Maureen Clarke, Supporting Communities Manager, North Norfolk District Council gave a presentation on community engagement and the purpose and benefits.

The Council is developing a community engagement and consultation strategy in partnership with North Norfolk Community Partnership. Parish and Town Councils can be involved in being part of the steering group and contributing their views through consultation. The findings of the consultation will be presented at the Annual Town and Parish Council Conference in November.

Cllr Penny Bevan-Jones stated that the legislation encouraging engagement with communities contradicted the Government’s agenda for unitary councils whereby you would ended up with one councillor serving up to 10,000 residents.

6. **Any Other Business**

Councillor Gloria Lisher was appointed as Champion Member for Parish and Town Councils and would develop relationships with Councils and act as a liaison point.



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