

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, 23 July 2025 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 6.00 pm

Members Present:

Cllr T Adams	Cllr P Bailey
Cllr M Batey	Cllr D Birch
Cllr H Blathwayt	Cllr J Boyle
Cllr A Brown	Cllr S Bütikofer
Cllr C Cushing	Cllr N Dixon
Cllr P Fisher	Cllr A Fitch-Tillett
Cllr T FitzPatrick	Cllr A Fletcher
Cllr W Fredericks	Cllr M Gray
Cllr M Hankins	Cllr C Heinink
Cllr P Heinrich	Cllr V Holliday
Cllr K Leith	Cllr R Macdonald
Cllr G Mancini-Boyle	Cllr P Neatherway

Also in attendance:

20 MINUTES SILENCE

The Chair asked members to join him in a minutes silence in remembrance of former District Councillor, Garry Bull.

21 PRESENTATION - CHAIRMAN'S CHARITY

Representatives from the Chair's nominated charity for the year, 'Norfolk Charities, Norfolk Wheely Boat', gave a presentation to members on the work that they did.

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Batey, Bayes, Housden and Paterson.

23 MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on 21st May were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment: Cllr S penfold had been recorded as present when he had sent his apologies.

24 TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

None received.

25 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

26 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman spoke about recent civic events that he had attended:

24 May – Cromer & Sheringham Operatic & Dramatic Society, Performance of Charlie & the Chocolate Factory
08 June 2025 – Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council Civic Service & Reception
20 June 2025 - High Sheriff of Norfolk's Garden Party, Elsing Hall
28 June 2025 – Royal British Legion Armed Forces Day, Northrepps
12 July 2025 – Vice-chair attended afternoon tea with the Mayor of Wisbech
14 July 2025 – Opening of 3G sports pitch in Cromer

27 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader began by speaking about the recent loss of Garry Bull. He commended his strong commitment to public service, saying that he was known for his outstanding contribution to North Walsham, having served as Mayor of the town and then more recently as a District Councillor. He said that he would be greatly missed and sent condolences to his family and friends.

The Leader then spoke about recent key issues. He said that the annual accounts had now been published and thanked the Finance team for their hard work.

For the Local Plan, current work continued on agreeing modifications and preparing for the upcoming 6-week consultation period which would run from 4th August to 15th September.

Work continued on preparing the final submission for a 3 unitary model and there would be an extraordinary meeting of Full Council on 17th September for members to consider the proposals. He thanked town and parish council representatives for attending recent sessions on local government reorganisation (LGR) in Fakenham and Mundesley. There would be more sessions in the Autumn.

Cllr Adams then spoke about other achievements across the Council, including the 3G pitch at Cromer, the re-opening of the Leas play park at Sheringham and the completion of the Mundesley coastal defence works. He said that he was delighted to inform members that Green Flags had been retained at Sadler's Wood, Pretty Corner and Holt Country Park.

The Leader then spoke about recent flooding incidents across the district. He thanked members for their responses and support.

In conclusion, he urged all members to enjoy the summer and explore the many events taking place across the district. Tourism was doing really well at the moment and many businesses were continuing to thrive, despite some of the challenges faced on a national level. He said that two further locations had been confirmed for banking hubs at Cromer and North Walsham and discussions were continuing with Nationwide at Fakenham to discuss the future of services there.

28 PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

There were two public speakers, Ms M Harriss and Ms C Howard. The Chairman invited them to speak.

Ms Harriss spoke about the business group, Shop Fakenham, which had been set up to promote the town centre as a vibrant place to visit. Efforts were underway to reinstate the monthly farmers market and a website had been set up to showcase

events in the town. They had collaborated with local groups and received funding from the Chamber of Trade.

She said that the town was rich with Victorian and Georgian buildings but one of them, 9 Norwich Street, remained derelict behind scaffolding. It was an eyesore and Shop Fakenham had set up a petition to urge NNDC to take action.

Ms C Howard then spoke about the petition. She said that 2000 people had signed it and it had sparked conversations about the town and its future. She said that Fakenham was beginning to thrive once more. The Thursday market was a huge attraction and there was plenty of parking and easy access to the bus network. 9 Norwich street was holding the town back. It was a striking Victorian building, leading to an arcade – one of the last of its kind. It was upsetting to see it declared unsafe in 2019 and there had been no visible progress since then. She concluded by saying that the site could be a viable commercial asset and urged the Council to take action. The petition was handed to the Democratic Services Manager.

The Leader, Cllr Adams, thanked both speakers for attending the meeting. He said that he appreciated that progress with the site was not visible but reassured them that discussions were ongoing. The Council did not own the premises so it was challenging and although there were some legislative powers, they had to work within the legal constraints and could not 'play their cards openly'. He said that it was an extremely complex case and there were leaseholders affected too. He said that he would be happy to meet with Ms Harriss and Ms Howard, along with Cllr J Toye, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth, to discuss their concerns.

In conclusion, the Leader said that NNDC was not alone in dealing with challenging properties such as this, citing Dereham and Great Yarmouth as nearby towns with similar issues. He urged the Government to give local councils more powers to address such issues.

29 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND OUTSIDE BODEIS

The Chairman asked the Group Leaders if they had any changes to appointments to Committees, sub-committees, working parties or outside bodies.

Cllr T Adams said that he wished to make the following changes:

- Cllr J Boyle to replace Cllr S Penfold as Vice-Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr A Fletcher to replace Cllr J Boyle as Vice-Chair of the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee (GRAC).
- Visit North Norfolk was to be added to the approved list of Outside Bodies, with Cllrs L Withington and L Shires appointed as representatives. Cllr Withington would also be Chair of the Board.
- Cllr S Butikofer to replace Cllr J Toye as the appointed representative on the Police & Crime Panel and the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny sub-panel, with Cllr J Toye to be appointed as substitute for both bodies.

30 PORTFOLIO REPORTS

The Chair invited Portfolio Holders to add any further information to their written reports, where required.

Cllr W Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Benefits, said that there was an amendment on page 45 of the agenda pack. Where it stated 33 Homeless + priority need, it should state 'unintentionally homeless' not 'intentionally'. She said that her list of meetings attended also incorrectly included Joint Staff Consultative Committee (JSCC).

Cllr H Blathwayt also highlighted an error in one of the meetings listed as attended.

Cllr L Withington informed members that the Leas Play park had been opened in Sheringham and it had been full of children within a few hours. She asked members to promote the Pretty Corner Woodland Fair which was taking place on 29th July.

The Chairman then invited members to speak:

Cllr R McDonald asked Cllr A Varley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Net Zero, for more information on the 'Make my House Green' scheme. Cllr Varley replied that it had been very successful so far. Engagement with the company had been encouraging and the partnership with them had been about spreading the word about solar PV panels. He went on to speak about NNDC's Net zero project in Stalham and one of the main issues raised by the community was insufficient information on available products and schemes and the 'Make my House Green' project had proved to be a good starting point. A few households had already taken part and had solar panels installed. He added that everyone was advised to get at least three quotes before proceeding with purchasing a product. He then updated members on carbon savings from solar projects and said that they now stood at 2703 kg.

Cllr L Vickers asked the Leader Cllr T Adams about 9 Norwich Street, Fakenham. She said that the public speakers had already highlighted the positive attitude of the town and she sought assurance that there was a clear plan of action in place and that local members would be kept aware of any developments. Cllr Adams replied that any obstruction to the footway was the responsibility of Norfolk County Council (NCC) and as he had already stated, he could not discuss the matter publicly as it could damage any progress being made. He added that he wanted to see the matter resolved and that the obstacles were legal issues which would take time. Cllr Vickers said that she would like more transparency and that local members were not being kept informed. In response to Cllr Adams comment that local members had been involved, Cllr J Punchard said that there had been no contact from officers on the matter and he had raised this at the last 3 Full Council meetings.

Cllr N Dixon asked the Leader if he saw any opportunity, as devolution progressed, to achieve efficiencies and quality improvements through the delivery of services and democratic governance without increasing council tax. If so, could he outline what they would look like. Cllr Adams replied that he had outlined his position on this at the Full Council meeting in March. He said he did not agree with this model of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and felt that there were a lot of false promises. However, there were some opportunities in Norwich in terms of strategy and spend but there was not the same opportunity for the rest of rural Norfolk. He said that other areas of the country who had already gone through this process had not delivered savings and he remained unconvinced about the tangible benefits. He acknowledged that a reduction in the overall headcount of elected members would reduce costs.

Cllr Dixon said that he did not feel his question had been answered.

Cllr K Leith asked Cllr C Ringer, Portfolio Holder for IT, Environmental & Waste

Services, for an update on the collection of plastics. Cllr Ringer replied that the Council was trialling the collection of flexible plastics and films in an area of North Walsham. The results would then be used by the Norfolk Waste Partnership to inform DEFRA so that they could learn from the experience and help with understanding the cost implications ahead of a national rollout in 2027.

Cllr P Porter asked Cllr A Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enforcement, about the Government's proposed changes to Planning Committees. She said that if they were implemented the influence of elected members would be significantly reduced, with power shifting to planning officers. She asked how the Council had responded to the proposals. Cllr Brown said that a series of consultation documents had been released by the Government. He said that the response had been returned and the details could be seen on the Planning section of the NNDC website. He went on to say that he did not believe that the proposals would make the difference that the Government intended. The local connection to determining planning matters was a fundamental democratic freedom and any attempt to interfere was misplaced and would not lead to an increase in the number of developments planned by the Government.

Cllr J Boyle asked Cllr J Toye, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth, for an update on support offered to town centres and high streets and how well it had been received. Cllr Toye replied that it was going very well and there had been expressions of interest from Cromer, Holt, Stalham and Fakenham in the North Norfolk High Streets Matter' scheme. The local market town initiative had generated a further 9 expressions of interest, although it was disappointing that Wells and North Walsham had not applied.

Cllr V Holliday asked Cllr Toye about employment in the district. She said that there was currently a large percentage of part time workers on below median wage and she asked about proposals to bring more well-paid employment into North Norfolk. Cllr Toye replied that he met with colleagues in Great Yarmouth to discuss new jobs in the energy industry, and some in Norwich regarding the hi-tech sector. The Council was doing all that it could to work with industries to open up opportunities across the district. He added that options to bring educators to Norfolk instead of students having to travel were also being explored.

Cllr C Cushing asked Cllr W Fredericks if there were plans to house asylum seekers in Fakenham. Cllr Fredericks replied that the Council was aware of increased reporting about accommodation for asylum seekers. She said that the Government contracts a number of private sector organisations to provide accommodation. She said that the Council had been informed that 8 properties in the district had been appraised for refugee and asylum seeker accommodation by a Government contractor. As of today, she was not aware that any placements had been made into properties in the district. Separate to the above, NNDC had purchased 6 properties with local authority housing fund monies as part of the national Afghan housing resettlement programme. To date, no applications had been received under the scheme and the properties were used as temporary accommodation for local families. In conclusion, she said the Council had welcomed refugees from Ukraine and other refugees would be just as welcome.

1. Cabinet Agenda Item 8: Outturn report 2024/2025

Cllr L Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services, introduced this item. She highlighted improvements that had been made to the financial management and monitoring processes in the last year and said that the year end position was now projected every time budget performance was monitored and this provided clearer visibility and control over outcomes. Cllr Shires said that the Period 4 Budget Monitoring report last year had forecast a large deficit and through a combination of financial planning and cost control throughout the Council, the gap had been closed and the year had ended with a General Fund surplus of just over £600k. She then outlined the 'standout' figures, including an underspend on employee-related costs, tight controls on supplies and services and the generation of £2m in income due to planning, car parking and housing related grants.

Cllr Shires said that the initial plan had been to draw down approximately £4m from reserves and this had now been significantly reduced due to the surplus to just over £2m. This left £24m in reserves which would help with managing future pressures. Investment in local communities had continued through the last financial year, including capital projects such as coastal protection, public conveniences, solar panel installation at Victory leisure centre and supporting affordable housing.

Cllr Shires said that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had identified a reporting error on page 91 table 3.2 which should state **£36k** not £26k in the second column. This had been updated for the Full Council agenda. She then referred to page 99 s5.6(a) and said that she wished to propose that the underspend of £28,476 in the Purchase of Bins capital budget be put towards the cost of providing food waste caddies and moved to an additional capital budget. This was seconded by Cllr Ringer.

In conclusion, Cllr Shires said that the next budget would be extremely challenging. Early indications from central government regarding funding were not positive. However, this outturn report showed that the choices that been made had been effective and service delivery had been maintained and the reliance on the use of reserves reduced.

Cllr V Holliday, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee said that the Committee had supported the recommendations, including the transfer of the purchase of bins underspend to a reserve to be used towards the cost of delivering food waste caddies.

The Chair invited members to speak:

Cllr C Cushing said that he welcomed the surplus, however, in October 2024, a deficit of £1m had been forecast and he highlighted variances in tables A and B on pages 90 and 91 of the report. He asked Cllr Shires whether she still had confidence in future budget forecasts, given a possible variance of up to £5m. Cllr Shires replied that previously there had been criticism for having a deficit at the Outturn stage and the budget monitoring process had been changed to ensure that adjustments could be made in-year and everything possible had been done. She added that there was a full and comprehensive explanation for the variances and this demonstrated complete transparency and honesty about the current and projected financial position.

Cllr P Porter asked if there was any capital spend planned east of North Walsham. Cllr Shires replied that the outturn report reflected the budget set in February 2024 for 2024/2025. She mentioned the sandscaping scheme in Bacton and Walcott. She invited members to submit suggestions for the 2026/2027 budget.

Cllr T FitzPatrick referred to the capital budget roll-forward at section 5.9 of the report. He sought assurance that any projects that weren't contractually committed were being reviewed to assess whether they were still needed or if costs could be reduced. Cllr L Shires replied that officers were undertaking work to understand delivery times for these projects. She said that all the projects listed were being put forward to roll-over. Savings would be taken where possible and the figures listed were a maximum.

Cllr V Holliday asked about the implications of the budget surplus on the next round of council tax setting and whether it would be taken into account. Cllr Shires replied that everything was taken into account when the budget was set, however, the Council had no control over funding from central government and the delivery of key services such as tackling homelessness and the collection of food waste cost more than the Government believed them to. She assured Cllr Holliday that officers worked hard to ensure that everything was fully assessed and taken into consideration.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED to approve the following, with the additional recommendation (as agreed above)

- a) The provisional outturn position for the General Fund revenue account for 2024/25 (as shown in Appendix A);
- b) The transfers to and from reserves as detailed within the report (and Appendix C);
- c) The surplus of £0.622m be transferred to the General reserve to mitigate future funding shortfalls.
- d) The balance on the General Reserve of £2.825m following the transfer outlined above.
- e) The surplus of £0.384m relating to retained business rates be transferred to the Business Rates reserve.
- f) The financing of the 2024/25 capital programme as detailed within the report and at Appendix D.
- g) The updated capital programme for 2025/26 to 2030/31 and scheme financing as outlined within the report and detailed at Appendix E;
- h) Approval of additional funding to cover capital project overspends of £10,816 as detailed in paragraph 5.7.
- i) The roll-forward of existing capital project funding from 2024/25 into 2025/26 as detailed in paragraph 5.9.
- j). To note the addition of £55,000 towards the New Play Area (Sheringham, The Lees) to be funded from the Asset Management Reserve in 2025/26 for a total project budget of £120,000
- k) The addition of £6,081 towards the Cromer Offices LED Lighting in the Capital Programme to be funded from Capital Receipts in 2025/26 for a total project budget of £178,796.
- l) The addition of £20,000 towards the Public Conveniences (Sheringham & North Walsham) project in the Capital Programme to be funded from Capital Receipts in 2025/26 for a total project budget of £565,514.

- m) The addition of the Holt Eco Learning Space scheme for £100,000 into the 2025/26 Capital Programme to be funded by an external contribution.
- n) That the underspend of £28,476 in the Purchase of Bins capital budget be put towards the cost of providing food waste caddies and moved to an additional capital budget

2. Cabinet Agenda item 9 – Treasury Management Outturn Report 2024/2025

Cllr L Shires introduced this item. She highlighted that the actual capital expenditure was just over £25m and there was unfinanced borrowing of just over £1.1m. Importantly, borrowing levels remained well below the authorised limit.

Cllr Shires went on to say that during 2023/24, to assist with cashflow issues, the Council had secured a £5m long-term loan with the PWLB (Central Government Public Works Loans Board) running from the 27 March 2024 to 28 April 2025, at an interest rate of 5.39%. Overall, the Council's borrowing requirement had decreased by £4.7m at the financial year end due to increased efforts towards management of the Council's cashflow, payment run processing and appropriate financing of the Council's capital programme by accountants and managers.

Subsequent to the year end, the Council agreed a further PWLB loan for £5m in April 2025 for a period of 1 year. This would be reflected in the 2025/26 Treasury Management reporting.

Cllr J Boyle then spoke on behalf of the Governance, Risk & Audit Committee (GRAC) which had considered the report at the meeting on 3rd June 2025. She said that members had discussed it in depth and supported the recommendations.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr J Boyle and

RESOLVED

To approve the Treasury Management Outturn position 2024/2025.

3. Cabinet Agenda Item 10 – Debt Recovery 2024/2025

Cllr L Shires introduced this item. She said that the level of Council Tax and Non-Domestic (Business) Rates debts written off had increased since the previous year. The main reason for debts being written off were due to insolvency or where the debtor had absconded or was deceased. The collection rate for Council tax arrears had reached 98.37% and for business rates it was 99.45% - both higher than previous years. She added that the collection rate for business rates was the highest for 18 years.

Cllr Shires said that the outstanding arrears for council tax as at 31st March 2025 was £4.19m, which was slightly lower than the previous year. In terms of business rates, the total of all years' business rates arrears was £253k as at 31st March 2025. The picture overall was looking quite positive and she said that she wanted to reassure residents facing financial difficulty that they should contact the Council for advice and support.

Finally, Cllr Shires congratulated the team for their recent award from the Empty Homes Network. They were highly commended for the best use of media linking to long term empty homes work.

Cllr V Holliday, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee said that the committee had considered the report and supported the recommendations.

Cllr J Toye commented that officers dealt with residents facing debt issues in a positive and engaging way, which should be commended.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr W Fredericks and

RESOLVED

1. To approve the annual report which details the Council's write-offs, in accordance with the Council's Debt Write-Off Policy and performance in relation to revenues collection.
2. To approve the continued delegated authority as shown in appendix 2 for write offs.

4. Cabinet Agenda Item 11 - Housing Benefit Debt Recovery Report – 2024/2025

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr W Fredericks introduced this item. She said that the report provided an update on Housing Benefit debt recovery, detailing the Councils' collection performance and debt management arrangements for 2024 – 2025. She said that the Council was working with residents to identify any unclaimed benefits. She congratulated the Benefits team for being shortlisted for an award by the IRRV.

Cllr V Holliday spoke on behalf of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. She said that members supported the recommendations but views had been expressed that it was a very technical report and it would be helpful if it could be made more accessible in future.

It was proposed by Cllr L Shires, seconded by Cllr T Adams and

RESOLVED to

Approve the annual report giving details of Housing Benefit Overpayment debt recovery in accordance with the Council's Debt Recovery Policy, Write-Off Policy, and Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy

32 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 14 MAY 2025 AND 16 JULY 2025

Cllr V Holliday, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee said that the Committee had agreed that the start time of meetings should revert to 9.30am. There were no further recommendations but she did update members on Anglian Water's recent attendance at the June meeting and said that their responses to questions raised would be shared with all members.

It was proposed by Cllr V Holliday, seconded by Cllr J Boyle and

RESOLVED

To approve a change of start time for Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings from 10am to **9.30am**, with immediate effect.

33 RECOMMENDATION FROM THE EMPLOYMENT & APPEALS COMMITTEE (APPOINTMENTS PANEL) - RECRUITMENT DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES (S151 OFFICER)

Cllr S Butikofer introduced this item. She had chaired the recent meeting of the Employment & Appeals Committee. She explained that a panel had been convened on 18th July for the recruitment of a new Director of Resources (S151 Officer). It was a cross-party panel and members had agreed to the appointment of Don McCallum.

It was proposed by Cllr S Butikofer, seconded by Cllr L Shires and

RESOLVED to

Appoint Don McCallum as Director of Resources and S151 Officer.

34 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - 29TH MAY 2025

The Chair of Development Committee, Cllr P Heinrich, introduced this item. He said that the Committee had agreed unanimously to revert to a 9.30am start time for meetings.

It was proposed by Cllr P Heinrich, seconded by Cllr R Macdonald and

RESOLVED

To approve a change of start time for Development Committee meetings from 10am to **9.30am**, with immediate effect.

35 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM LICENSING COMMITTEE(PREMISES & GAMBLING) 9TH JULY 2025

Cllr E Spagnola, Vice-chair of the Licensing Committee (Premises & Gambling) introduced this item. She had chaired the meeting of 9th July. She said that members had fully supported the recommendations.

It was proposed by Cllr E Spagnola, seconded by Cllr C Ringer and

RESOLVED to

1. Approve the publication of the **Gambling Statement of Principles 2025**.
2. That the new statement is published, once approved.

36 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM LICENSING COMMITTEE(REGULATORY) 9TH JULY 2025

Cllr E Spagnola, Vice-chair of the Licensing Committee (Premises & Gambling) introduced this item. She had chaired the meeting of 9th July. She thanked officers

for their hard work in preparing the handbook. Cllr Ringer added that the Taxi Driver's Association had played a key role.

It was proposed by Cllr E Spagnola, seconded by Cllr C Ringer and

RESOLVED to

Adopt the Taxi and Private Hire Policy and Handbook 2025 v5.1 with effect from 1 September 2025.

37 OPPOSITION BUSINESS

The Chair invited Cllr C Cushing to introduce his motion. He began by saying that it was not about the merits of the various models of unitary authorities that were being explored, but about concerns about the approach the Administration was taking. There was a lack of openness about the analysis that had been undertaken and the opposition groups had been excluded. He said that there had been a different approach at Norfolk County Council, which had been an evidence-led process, comparing all three options. He said that the four recommendations were intended to be constructive and inclusive and he addressed them in turn.

He said any decision should be evidence based and the viability of each option. The needs of residents must be considered and there must be an assessment that showed that key services could still be delivered, without significant cost increases.

Cllr N Dixon seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Chairman invited the Leader, Cllr Adams to respond to the motion.

He began by saying that it was driven by the Conservative group failing to agree a preferred model of LGR. This was an issue that played out across the country, however, he urged them to make the most of the opportunities that had been given to them. He said that there had been an extensive discussion of the proposals in March and he had requested that standing orders were waived to allow the debate to continue for as long as possible. However, the Opposition had abstained on most of the proposals, despite an indication of consensus during the debate. He therefore urged Cllr Cushing to commit to allowing his group to have a free vote on the final submission proposals for LGR in September. He said that LGR was happening regardless of what NNDC wanted and the choice was between a large, behemoth council or a smaller unitary with a better chance of understanding local communities and their needs.

Cllr Adams said that all the authorities involved in the LGR process were undergoing similar actions, including the engagement of consultants to examine data and develop models but it would take time and could not be rushed. All authorities were working from the same, shared data and had signed an agreement regarding this.

It was not possible to compare the various proposals against each other. Each one was unique and focused on distinctive geographic areas, with varying needs and drivers. He said that consultations had been carried out with town and parish councils, more so than other authorities. He added that there was no intention to set up a working group. The Council was at capacity and there were not the resources to support it, without increasing headcount, which he was not prepared to do.

Feedback from other authorities indicated that working groups were of limited value and members often got lost in the detail. He concluded by saying that the three unitary option had the backing of several authorities and was cross-party, unlike other proposals. It was only two months until the final submission was due and time was very limited, there was strength in unity and he urged members to come together when the final submission was considered at Full Council in September.

The Chairman opened the debate and invited members to speak:

Cllr V Holliday said that she agreed with Cllr Adams that a decision should be made based on the best model for communities based in terms of democratic representation and their unique needs but she queried what would be the best model for critical statutory support such as adult social care and children's services, in terms of financial viability. She said that she would expect there to be a scientific underpinning, regardless of the size of the unitary and she wondered why the decision seemed to be on purely subjective terms rather than data driven.

Cllr Adams said that this was a debate, not a question and answer session but he did say that no one wanted to damage services and the processes underpinning them would be reviewed and agreed as the development of the models progressed.

Cllr T FitzPatrick said that the motion highlighted that concerns had been raised regarding the financial 'narrative' to back up some of the models that were proposed. He said that two thirds of the County Council budget was currently allocated to children's services and adult social care and if members wanted to do the best for their communities then they needed figures to back up why different options were being proposed. North Norfolk was an ageing, rural area and there would be increasing demands placed on statutory services.

Cllr L Vickers said that it was very disappointing that there were no plans to set up a working party. She felt that members worked well together across party lines and it would facilitate transparency and allow time to explore the role of town and parish councils in any future model.

Cllr J Toye said that it was a once in a lifetime opportunity and members had to do the best that they could. These projects took considerable time and there were consultants undertaking a lot of the detailed work. It was not realistic to have a working party in the limited timeframe.

Cllr S Butikofer said that she was not happy with LGR and did not feel it was right for North Norfolk but it was happening and members now needed to engage fully or risk having an outcome imposed on them. She said that other councils had already been through the process and they had found solutions to the challenges presented by adult social care and children's services. It was important to be data driven but it was being collated and shared across all of the authorities and this ensured that decisions would be informed and transparent. In conclusion, she said she shared concerns about the number of councillors and the democratic deficit but warned that there was some 'scare-mongering' regarding this from other authorities. She was hopeful that by September, members would have access to the information that they needed to make an informed decision.

Cllr L Withington said that she agreed with Cllr Toye and Cllr Butikofer. It was not where members wanted to be but there was an opportunity to do things differently and ensure the best outcome for North Norfolk. She said that she welcomed that several district councils across the county were working together collaboratively and

using their collective skills and knowledge to delve into the data and information and evaluate it and this ensured that the process was evidence-led.

Cllr W Fredericks said that she would like to point out that the Leader updated the opposition group leaders regularly on LGR. She suggested that they could consider sharing this with their groups.

Cllr N Dixon seconded the motion. He said that members needed to fully understand the significance of the decision being taken. It was the biggest decision that the Council would ever make and it was important that members got it right. To do this, basic rules should be followed to ensure that a credible conclusion was reached. The first was to be open-minded and inclusive and he didn't feel that this was currently the case. It had to be evidence-led and needed to cover all the reasonable models and the boundary options associated with those. It was also crucial that the best interests of the residents and businesses of North Norfolk and Norfolk more widely were placed at the heart of the decision. Party, personal and other concerns must take a back seat to the needs of the County and the District.

Cllr Dixon said that the process followed by the Council had not been open-minded and a closed approach with a preferred outcome had been stated by the Leader in March and this meant the process was prejudiced from day 1 and was therefore not open-minded.

He went onto say that it had not been inclusive and despite requests for a cross-party working group and offers from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Administration had not agreed. He then responded to the Leader's query regarding the second recommendation and clarified that it was about exploring the connections between the unitary authorities and local communities, as well as town and parish councils. There was a lot of work to do here and members could add real value to this.

He queried the sharing of data and said that the County Council had made all of its datasets available. The Leader interjected and said that all of the Councils had signed an agreement to share data – not just the County Council.

In conclusion, Cllr Dixon, said that NNDC was aligned with 6 other district councils and he felt that the workload should be reduced not increased as there was an opportunity to share knowledge and expertise. He said that without an open, objective, evidence-based process then any model put forward by the Council would lack credibility. It was not too late to change the process and he urged all members to support the motion.

Cllr Cushing summed up as proposer of the motion. He reiterated that this was an extremely important decision and the impact would be felt for years. He said that his members would have a free vote when the final submission was presented to Full Council and he hoped that all members would make a decision based on evidence presented to them and currently this was not the case.

The Chair thanked members for their input.

It was proposed by Cllr C Cushing, seconded by Cllr N Dixon that the following recommendations were made:

1. Ensure the ongoing research and proposal presentation work includes cost comparisons for 1, 2 & 3 unitaries including transition, revenue and capital

costs and with risk scores covering viability and quality scores for the range of services provided.

2. Address the need to investigate proposed decision-making structures and lines of functionality connecting with town & parish councils, for each Unitary model, to ensure local democratic participation and accountability.
3. Actively involve cross-party councillors in reviewing the research results and preparation of the proposal and supporting business case, either via Overview & Scrutiny or a cross-party working group, to make the process and results transparent and accessible to North Norfolk residents and businesses.
4. To either increase the 8th – 17th September period for all councillors to assimilate and respond to the proposal and supporting business case, or provide briefing/feedback sessions during that period to ensure all members are fully informed on all aspects of the proposal and the evidence supporting the selection.

When put to the vote, members resolved not to support the motion.

When put to the vote, the motion was not supported.

38 QUESTIONS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

None received.

39 NOTICE(S) OF MOTION

40 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

41 PRIVATE BUSINESS

The meeting ended at 8.48 pm.

Chairman