

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 6 April 2022 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am

Committee Mr N Dixon (Chairman) Mr S Penfold (Vice-Chairman)
Members Present:

Ms L Withington	Mr H Blathwayt
Mr P Heinrich	Dr V Holliday
Mr N Housden	Mrs E Spagnola
Mr A Varley	Mr C Cushing
Mr A Brown	Mr P Fisher

Members also attending: Mr T Adams (Observer) Mrs W Fredericks (Observer)
Mr R Kershaw (Observer) Mr N Lloyd (Observer)
Mr J Rest (Observer) Mr J Toye (Observer)

Officers in Attendance: Democratic Services and Governance Officer - Scrutiny (DSGOS), Chief Executive (CE), Director for Place & Climate Change (DFPCC), Director for Communities (DFC), Project Manager North Walsham Heritage Action Zone (PMNW), Economic Growth Manager (EGM) and Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth (ADSG)

Also in attendance: Serco Regional Director (SRD)
Serco Contracts Manager (SCM)

175 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

176 SUBSTITUTES

None.

177 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

178 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

179 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

180 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

181 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A

MEMBER

None received.

182 RESPONSES OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CABINET TO THE COMMITTEE'S REPORTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS

None to report.

183 WASTE CONTRACT: SERCO BRIEFING - TARGET OPERATING MODEL UPDATE

The DFC introduced the briefing and informed Members that it had been two years since Serco had taken over the contract, with core service delivery maintained under exceptional circumstances during the Covid-19 Pandemic. He added that the target operating model (TOM) contained two aspects relating to collections and additional added value items. It was noted that the new collections TOM which had previously been reported to be live from June had been delayed, and was now expected to launch in September, as agreed by the Council to avoid difficulties during the summer season. The DFC noted that from a residents perspective, there had been no disruption in service, as weekly collections continued as expected. He added that the impact of delaying the roll-out of the new collections TOM was carried by Serco and they accepted responsibility for this. It was noted that the Gap analysis work discussed previously had made significant progress, with a number of issues now complete, on-track to being delivered, or deemed as no longer deliverable. Roadside litter-picking was given as an example, which had been impacted by changes to Health and Safety legislation. He added that despite these issues, core services and collections had continued to be delivered to a satisfactory standard.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The SRD stated that as a result of the tripartite agreement, rollout of the new collections TOM had to be staggered between each Council, and whilst efforts had been made to bring the North Norfolk launch forward to June, this had not been possible, and was therefore delayed until after summer. He added that there needed to be approximately two months between the rollout in each District, to account for settling-in and resolution of any initial issues.
- ii. The SRD stated that in terms of performance, March had been the best month to date, with only 27 of 250k collections missed, which equated to a 99.9% successful collection rate. He added that continuing to operate the old collections model did create additional costs for Serco, but did not impact residents, and it was therefore in Serco's best interest to implement the new TOM as soon as realistically possible.
- iii. Cllr S Penfold asked how the DFC would rate Serco's performance in delivery of the overall contract on a scale of 1-5. The DFC replied that on the whole, whilst Serco had not delivered the full service outlined in the contract from the outset, performance had still been satisfactory given the impact of the Pandemic, and on that basis he would rate performance as good.
- iv. Cllr C Cushing asked what benefits would be realised for residents and Serco once the new collections TOM had been implemented. The SCM replied that the TOM would rectify a number of issues relating to property and trade growth, which were co-mingled collections. She added that this

growth had brought the current collection model to capacity, and reorganising routes to make collections more evenly spread would help to better distribute workload across the collection teams. It was noted that the new collections TOM would also be future-proofed, to create additional capacity for future anticipated growth in the District. The SCM noted that further benefits would include a reduction in the carbon footprint of collections, a reduction in costs and the amount of overtime required by staff which would improve work-life balance. She added that the new routes would also allow collections teams to rectify issues such as missed collections much faster, as vehicles would remain focused in smaller areas.

- v. In response to a question from Cllr N Housden, it was confirmed that the first KPI for Serco was achievement of the ISO standard which was now complete, with an audit due in April. The SCM added that a recent audit for the Kings Lynn service had shown that Serco were the first contractor in the area to achieve 100% pass with no issues, with the same model used across all three Districts. Cllr N Housden referred to emergency planning and asked whether any further action had been taken in response to fuel shortages. The SCM replied that the fuel supply tank was now in the process of being installed, with the first delivery of fuel booked for the 20th April to supply 24k litres of fuel. She added that Serco had also put in place additional measures such as establishing other means of purchasing fuel from any station within the District, and creating a call system to establish where supplies were available to ensure vehicles were filled every day. It was noted that the Breckland fuel tank had already been installed, and this could be used for other Districts if required.
- vi. Cllr S Penfold asked whether September was a target date for implementation of the new collections TOM, or whether this was confirmed. The SRM replied that Serco were confident that this date would be achieved, as this was well beyond the originally planned implementation date, and delaying further would generate additional costs for Serco. The SCM added that Breckland had implemented the new TOM in March without delay, and the benefits were already being seen.
- vii. The Chairman noted that performance, customer satisfaction and a commitment to implementing the new TOM were key to demonstrating a good working relationship between Serco and the Council. The DSGOS suggested that it could be helpful to receive an update in September on whether the TOM had been implemented as planned. The DFC suggested that an all Member briefing could be arranged a month prior to the implementation date to fully explain the expected changes to Members, with approximately 70% of collection days expected to change. It was suggested that the all Member briefing could be held in addition to a review of the implementation in September or October, following the settling-in period. The Chairman suggested it could also be useful to have a brief verbal update in July to provide reassurance that implementation remained on track.

RESOLVED

- 1. To note the briefing.**

ACTIONS

- 1. Director for Communities to provide update on implementation of the new**

collections target operating model at July O&S meeting.

2. Review implementation of new collections target operating model at October O&S meeting.

184 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS: PLANNING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Cllr J Toye – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enforcement introduced the item and noted that nutrient neutrality requirements had been placed on the District that would have a significant impact on development. As a result, it was reported that this would have an impact on applications beyond the month of March and would therefore potentially skew the results of any Planning customer experience survey completed after this time. The DFPCC noted that the nutrient neutrality requirements meant that the Council may not be able to issue as many decisions in the months ahead, and suggested that the March applications were therefore likely to provide a more comprehensive response from approximately 125 applications. He added that the survey could be sent to all applicants in March or the first 100 to simplify the process. It was noted that the survey form had been kept simple to encourage the maximum response, and covered a range of issues raised by the Committee including communication and customer satisfaction. The DFPCC noted that the form would be circulated electronically in April, subject to the approval of the Committee, to provide an evidence base for the service improvement plan.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr N Housden noted that there was no mention of pre-application advice within the survey and suggested that this was an important part of the service that should be covered. The DFPCC stated that this was an intentional omission as it was separate to submitting a formal planning application and therefore had different timescales and requirements, though could be included if necessary. Cllr N Housden replied that he felt pre-application advice formed the groundwork of any application, and therefore formed an important aspect of the service.
- ii. Cllr V Holliday suggested that Parish Councils and residents comments appeared to be have been missed within the survey, and asked whether this data could be included to form a wider evidence base. She added that question F on the overall processing of planning applications was fairly vague, and suggested that a more specific question would have greater value. The DFPCC replied that Parish and Town Councils would be dealt with separately via forum meetings, whilst the survey would focus specifically on planning applicants, as pre-application advice did not necessarily have a specific outcome or timeframe, and was therefore difficult to survey. He added that discussions with Parish and Town Councils would also feed into the service improvement plan.
- iii. The Chairman noted that the brief was focused on customer experience, and this would require some definition which in the first case would include applicants, though might also include consultees such as Parish/Town councils and residents. Cllr J Toye reiterated that Parish and Town Council feedback would be included in the process at a later point, and the survey was only the first step in data collection to provide an evidence base for the service improvement plan. He added that gaining the views of the wider public could be a challenge, but would be given careful consideration. It was

suggested that officers were open to suggestions for improvement of question F.

- iv. Cllr A Brown stated that his experience of surveys suggested the return rate would be 30-40% and asked what measures were in place to simplify this process such as a dedicated email, freepost return envelopes or other incentives. The DFPCC replied that the survey would be distributed electronically where possible, and noted that this would simplify the return and data collections process. He added that posting surveys would be possible for anyone that was unable to respond electronically, and additional incentives had not been considered.
- v. Cllr J Rest asked whether electronic responses would be anonymous and if those submitting a return would have an option to include their name on the form. The DFPCC replied that electronic surveys would be fed back to the Council anonymously and no option to include names was a deliberate step to ensure that the process remained anonymous. He added that the survey did include an option to contact him directly, and this would be the choice of each individual.
- vi. Cllr L Withington noted her interest in performance of the extensions process and suggested that she was unsure whether the survey questions would provide an answer to this. She added that she was aware that automatic extensions had been stopped, but it would be helpful to understand how applicants felt about extensions to their application decisions. The DFPCC replied that application extensions had to be agreed with applicants, and if not satisfied an extension would not be granted. He added that question F could be changed to determine whether applicants had been asked to extend their applications and how they felt about it. It was noted that extensions had reduced, but it remained a valuable tool for exceptionally busy periods. In response to a question from the Chairman, Cllr V Holliday suggested that this would be an improvement for question F, but suggested that it could also be useful to ask about appeals, as this could be a sign that applicants were not happy with the process. The DFPCC replied that the survey needed to remain focused on the customer experience, as the quality of decisions made had not been raised within the original scope of the review. He added that appeal decisions and the process itself were not undertaken by the Council, and it would not therefore provide feedback on Council run services.
- vii. Cllr N Housden referred to the planning portal and asked whether this should feature on the survey given its wide use by applicants. The DFPCC replied that the planning portal was not operated by NNDC but was an external privately run service, although NNDC did have its own Planning webpages. He added that NNDC received 60-70% of applications electronically, which was relatively low in comparison to national figures. It was noted that questions on NNDC's planning website could be a valid question, but it would be for the Committee to agree whether this was necessary.
- viii. Cllr S Penfold asked for clarification of who the survey would be sent to, how this had been determined, and what would be done with the data once received. The DFPCC replied that the data would help to form an evidence base for the Planning Service improvement plan, and noted that the survey would be sent to all applicants who had a decision granted in March. He added that it had been a good month for application decisions with only approximately 10% refused, and a reasonable number of appeal decisions

that would provide a reliable and even response.

- ix. An indication of the Committee's support to launch the survey was proposed by Cllr P Fisher and seconded by Cllr A Brown, subject to consideration of suggested amendments relating to question F, Parish and Town Council involvement, pre-application advice and the public access website.
- x. Cllr N Housden referred to nutrient neutrality and asked whether this would come for discussion at a future meeting. The Chairman replied that it was his understanding that Planning were still in the process of determining the impact of the nutrient neutrality requirements, and once this was known an opportunity to brief Members on the situation would be provided. Cllr J Toye stated that it was important to understand the implications of the issue beyond Planning, and whilst further details were yet to be received, a briefing could be expected in the future.

RESOLVED

- 1. To support launch of Planning survey questionnaire, subject to amendment of question F to seek responses on applications with decision date extensions and arrange further surveys/information gathering to cover customer experience of Town/Parish Councils and residents, including consideration of pre-application and the Council's planning public access website experience.**

185 NORTH WALSHAM HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE PROJECT UPDATE: APRIL 2022

Cllr R Kershaw – Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth introduced the report and informed Members that the project had moved from design and consultation into the construction phase, with work commencing on the restoration of the Cedars and Church approach. He added that the project took a holistic approach, that sought to go beyond infrastructure by providing extra resource, public talks on historic buildings, sign-writing and other workshops with local students and historic research into the town. It was reported that the cultural programme was also progressing well with the consortium established by NNDC, and further arts and culture funding had been made available to host events in the town. Cllr R Kershaw stated that the redesign of the town centre would also resolve a long standing issue with bus routes through the town, and as a result additional funding had been received from NCC and the Town Council to establish a new bus waiting area on the new road car park. He added that solutions were also being explored to improve Kings Arms Street and improve traffic flow through the town. It was reported that a funding uplift had also been received which had enabled the advance purchase of materials to mitigate the impact of inflationary costs and remain within budget.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr S Penfold stated that he and Cllr L Shires had used their NCC highways funding allocations to pay for a feasibility study into the Grammar School road roundabout and Kings Arms street, and noted that he would update Members as this work progressed. He added that Medieval Masonry, one of the contractors working on the Cedars restoration project were also very supportive of providing training opportunities, and suggested that this should be explored with the high school.

RESOLVED

To note the update.

186 SCOPING REPORT: COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION - IMPACT OF SECOND HOMES AND HOLIDAY LETS

Cllr L Withington introduced the report and informed Members that she aimed for the investigation to be open to comment from all Members and officers. She added that the investigation sought to clarify the situation in North Norfolk, as existing information only provided anecdotal evidence. It was suggested that taking a holistic approach would bring together various data to create a better overall understanding on a number of interrelated issues that could help form a basis of evidence to determine the Council's next steps. Cllr L Withington stated that it was also crucial to outline and understand the existing legislation available to manage second and holiday homes, and look at the potential of joining up schemes used elsewhere throughout the country.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The DSGOS noted that an initial three month timeframe was proposed within the report to allow various officers time to gather the necessary information required, with a response expected to come to the July Committee meeting, though some information may be dependent on unreleased census data.
- ii. Cllr V Holliday raised concerns of predetermination on matters relating house price increases and the availability of affordable housing, and suggested that steps would be required to ensure objectivity. Cllr J Toye stated that it was crucial to be open minded and avoid any sense of predetermination, and suggested that the investigation would be fully evidence-based. Cllr V Holliday suggested that only progressing points one and two of the four stage process at this time would be suitable to address concerns.
- iii. The AD SG stated that it was important for the investigation to remain objective, though the Council was conscious of the impact on housing supply in the District, which could in part be a result of demand for second and holiday homes. It was suggested that any investigation of housing need should focus more generally on housing supply, rather than affordable or privately rented accommodation.
- iv. The DSGOS noted that care had been taken to ensure that impacts were discussed as perceived issues, and that the investigation would remain objective and open to all possible information. He added that as a result of CCfA, it would be for the Committee to determine what the next steps should be upon consideration of the data collected.
- v. Cllr C Cushing stated that he welcomed the investigation as a worthy exercise to review a very important issue, but noted concerns of predetermination and suggested it was crucial that the investigation remained objective. Cllr L Withington replied that all efforts would be made to ensure that the investigation remained objective and not predetermined, taking a strictly evidence-based approach to outline the current situation in North Norfolk. She added that restricting the investigation to the first two stages would be a disservice to residents as it would limit the ability of the Committee to draw any conclusions. Cllr C Cushing stated that he was

supportive of the investigation, so long as it remained open-minded and objective.

- vi. Cllr V Holliday stated that she expected sufficient evidence would be provided from the first two points, and suggested that this is where the focus should be placed.
- vii. Cllr P Heinrich stated any good research had to be as open-minded and as extensive as possible. He added that every second home and holiday-let was another potential property that could no longer be used as a primary residence, and whilst existing evidence was anecdotal, he was concerned that this was taking away homes from families that were desperately in need of housing.
- viii. Cllr W Fredericks stated that she welcomed the investigation and supported taking an evidence-based approach that was open to involvement from all Councillors to gather evidence. It was confirmed following a question from Cllr W Fredericks that Air BNB was essentially an advertising platform for holiday lets, similar to other online booking platforms.
- ix. Cllr S Penfold referred to the definition of second homes and asked whether this would include empty homes or private rental accommodation owned by landlords living within the District. Cllr J Toye stated that properly defining the term second homes would form part of the investigation, as there were many different circumstances that could be referred to as second homes. The Chairman suggested that it would be helpful to have certainty around definitions, and it was therefore important to differentiate privately rented homes used for residential needs, from other second homes that could be largely unoccupied.
- x. Cllr A Brown stated that he fully endorsed the investigation and was happy to propose its approval. He added that it was important to review whether the emerging Local Plan would be based on the correct data in relation to second homes and holiday lets, and suggested that the investigation would aid this process.
- xi. Cllr H Blathwayt noted that some chalet properties were being used for full-time accommodation, and suggested that the investigation could review the collection of rates from these residents.
- xii. Cllr N Housden stated that he did not fully understand the objectives of the investigation, and asked whether this could be clarified. Cllr J Toye stated that the purpose of the investigation was to try to define the impact of second homes and holiday-lets, as objective data was not readily available.
- xiii. The scoping report and associated questions were proposed for approval by Cllr A Brown and seconded by Cllr P Heinrich.
- xiv. It was confirmed, following a question from Cllr S Penfold that the investigation would cover the whole District and not focus on a particular area. Cllr S Penfold stated that it would be helpful to see a heatmap of second home and holiday-let locations to know where they were most prevalent.

RESOLVED

1. **To approve the scoping report and associated questions in appendix 1 to allow officers to commence the investigation.**

187 ITEM DEFERRED: PRE-SCRUTINY: PARKLANDS PROPERTY DISPOSAL

The Chairman noted that the report had not been ready for consideration and would be considered at a later date.

188 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The DSGOS informed Members that arrangements had been made to review the Quality of Life Strategy at the next meeting of the Environment and Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel, and due to time constraints, any subsequent recommendations would be reported directly to Cabinet at its May meeting. He added that an Engagement Strategy was also being produced, and this would likely come to a future Committee meeting as a pre-scrutiny item.

RESOLVED

To note the Cabinet Work Programme.

189 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

- i. The DSGOS informed Members that the Committee had reached the end of its annual work programme, and a draft for the 2022/23 year would be prepared for consideration at the May meeting. He added that Members would be invited to submit suggestions, and guidance would be provided to assist with this process. It was noted that Anglian Water were also due to attend the next meeting, and Members would be asked to submit questions in advance of the meeting via email. The DSGOS stated that EEAST and Integrated Care Scheme representatives were also expected to attend the Committee in June or July to discuss ambulance response times, with the review of the Reef project expected in May.
- ii. It was noted that the Members Champion for Domestic Abuse had met with the PCC and NIDAS representatives, where services and referral options were discussed in detail to develop a better understanding of how the Council could better help support victims of domestic abuse.

RESOLVED

To note the Work Programme.

190 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 11.25 am.

Chairman