

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 20 March 2024 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am

Committee	Cllr N Dixon (Chairman)	Cllr S Penfold (Vice-Chairman)
Members Present:	Cllr M Batey Cllr C Cushing Cllr M Hankins Cllr N Housden	Cllr J Boyle Cllr A Fletcher Cllr V Holliday Cllr L Vickers
Members also attending:	Cllr A Brown Cllr A Varley	Cllr L Shires Cllr L Withington
Officers in Attendance:	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny, Director for Place & Climate Change, Programme & Projects Manager, Director for Resources / S151 Officer, Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth and Policy and Performance Management Officer	

133 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted by Councillors Garry Bull and Roy MacDonald.

134 SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutes at the meeting.

135 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

136 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th February 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chair of the Homelessness Task and Finish Group, Councillor Holliday, updated the Committee on its work and advised that the group was about halfway through its gathering evidence from internal and external witnesses. It was hoped that this would be completed by the end of May.

137 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

138 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

139 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

140 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A MEMBER

None received.

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

The Democratic Services (Scrutiny) Officer advised that in respect of the Peer Review Action Plan the Overview and Scrutiny element of it was to be covered by training on Monday 25 March 2024 with specific sessions set aside for Senior Officers, Cabinet Members and then all non-Executive members of the Council.

That would be followed by a plenary session to follow up on the points raised in the sessions and develop a plan for developing Overview and Scrutiny at the council. The date for the plenary session was expected to be in mid April.

142 BUDGET MONITORING PERIOD 10

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services, Councillor Shires, presented a report on the Council's on the Council's financial performance and projected outturn for 2023/24 for the revenue account, capital programme and reserves statement as at the end of January 2024.

Cllr Shires commented that there was a projection for a General Fund Deficit of £0.986m at 31 March 2024. The need to provide temporary accommodation for an unanticipated number of people who had been made homeless had significantly raised the council's expenditure during the financial year.

Cllr Shires drew the Committee's attention to the work that had been done to deal with this overspend which had been considered and approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on 11 March 2024.

The Director of Resources in response to Cllr Dixon's question stated that it was anticipated that there would be some variance to the end of year budget figure but it was not expected to be significant.

The Director of Resources in response to Cllr Penfold's question stated that the level of additional borrowing that the council had to undertake was of a short-term basis that the council had to do to maintain cash flow and carried little risk.

The Director of Resources in response to Cllr Cushing's question advised the final outturn figures would be by the end of May and go to cabinet in July with the closure of the accounts to be considered by the Governance, Risk and Audit Committee.

The Director of Resources in response to Cllr Housden's question stated that in respect of the three capital schemes for major coastal projects they were almost all

Government grant funded and the Council contribution was just £600k.

Cllr Shires in response to Cllr Dixon's question advised that the budget overspend due to higher car park receipts at the car parks where this income is shared with relevant parishes was due to how the agreement with the Parish Councils was worded. The Council was currently negotiating with the Parish Councils to see if it was possible to change the agreements.

The Director of Resources in response to Cllr Dixon's question advised that the overspend from the Communities Fund using £125,000 of the UK prosperity fund in 2023/24 before it had been allocated was due to a miscommunication between the Council and the government department on the funding.

The Director of Resources in response to Cllr Housden's question stated that there was provision made in the Council's budget for the expected number of vacancies across the council's services. The Council at the moment, unlike some local authorities, did not hold posts vacant for budgetary reasons.

Councillor Housden proposed, seconded by Councillor Dixon and agreed by the Committee that a report should be submitted to a future meeting on the Council's Workforce Development Strategy that should include how vacancies are managed, how agency staff are used, what work the council does to recruit staff as well as the impact of vacancies especially key staff on the Council's service delivery and budget.

Cllr Shires in response to Cllr Cushing's question advised that the £63,000 variance in rental income from investment properties related to the units at The Cedars, North Walsham and was due to broadband not been installed. The Council was seeking compensation from Openreach and all but one of the units were shortly to be filled and be in use.

The Director of Resources in response to Cllr Holliday's question stated that it was projected that the increase in the Local Housing Allowance for next year announced in the budget would have a 370k effect on the council's budget but it was only as an estimation at this stage as there are a number of factors involved.

Resolved – that a report on the Council's Workforce Development Strategy be submitted to a future meeting to include how vacancies are managed, how agency staff are used, what work the council does to recruit staff, as well as the impact of vacancies, especially key staff, on the Council's service delivery and budget.

143 CAR PARK INCOME ANALYSIS - APRIL TO DECEMBER 2023

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates and Property Services, Councillor Shires, presented a report that detailed the level of car park income generated by the Council for the period 1 April to 31 December 2023 compared to previous years income.

The Committee considered that the report did not include the information sought when the car park usage and revenue generation was considered in Feb 2023; in particular, there was no information on expenditure and thus surpluses couldn't be identified.

It agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny

Committee arrange a meeting with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates and Property Services and appropriate officers to consider the information that should be considered.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates and Property Services in response to Cllr Housden's question stated that the car park enforcement was undertaken by outside contractor and there was a question over the viability of an in-house service being created.

The Director of Resources added that a review of the car park service was to be undertaken with the expectation that it would be completed in October and would also review potential car park charges for next year.

Resolved – that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee arrange a meeting with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates and Property Services and appropriate officers to consider the information that should be considered in a future report to the Committee on the Council's Car Parks.

144 PROGRESS REPORT ON NET ZERO TARGET

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Net Zero, Councillor Varley, presented a report on the progress being made against the Net Zero Action Plan which accompanies the Council's Net Zero Strategy.

Cllr Varley reminded the Committee that the Council had declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and took a benchmark figure for the Council's carbon footprint in 2019/20. The trajectory for reducing the carbon emissions was moving in the right direction with the rate of reduction exceeding the expected profile.

Cllr Varley added that there had been an increase in carbon emissions in 2022/23 but this was largely due to the construction of the Reef Leisure Centre in Sheringham. The Council was now taking significant steps to reduce the impact that leisure centres were having on the Council's carbon footprint.

Cllr Varley in response to Cllr Dixon's question advised that the interventions made for the Solar Car Port at the Reef and the insulation added at the Cromer Offices will be quantified and will seek to make both buildings more energy efficient and sustainable. The data showing how successful they have been will be available in next year's report.

The Climate and Environmental Policy Manager confirmed in response to Cllr Dixon's question that the Council was looking at internal Carbon Pricing models used by other local authorities to introduce decision wheels to help inform the cabinet of the environmental consequences of its decisions. It was expected that this could take 3 to 6 months to be fully implemented.

Cllr Varley in response to Cllr Dixon's question stated that the Net Zero Strategy covered the years 22/23 and 23/34 and the work on reviewing it was now happening.

Cllr Varley replied to Cllr Penfold's question by stating that the data for carbon emissions would vary and there would be years when it would go up and years when it would go down and he was comfortable with the overall direction but there was a long way to go to reach the net zero target.

The Climate and Environmental Policy Manager confirmed in response to Cllr Penfold's question that there were other greenhouse gases included with the council's emissions calculation.

Cllr Varley in response to Cllr Holliday's questions stated that the Council's £500K reserve was for a carbon busting project which could have a significant impact on the reduction of emissions. It was important to reduce carbon emissions through driving down vehicle usage, the Council has 46 electric charging points and was looking to roll out more in the future.

The Climate and Environmental Policy Manager confirmed in response to Cllr Fletcher's question that the Local Government Association model that the Council followed did not allow the carbon benefits of the Council's existing natural assets to be included in its overall footprint calculation. It will be though something that the Council will need to consider in the future.

Cllr Varley in response to Cllr Hankin's questions agreed to provide a written response to the committee on the process that has been taken with the contractor to ensure that the upcoming changes to the waste contract rounds would reduce the overall carbon emissions.

Cllr Varley in response to Cllr Withington's question agreed to provide a written response on the update of the salary sacrifice scheme to use electric vehicles.

Cllr Varley in response to Cllr Dixon's question stated that there was a net zero target for the Council of 2030 and for the whole of North Norfolk it was 2045. For the whole district the council was already showcasing and signposting various grants for insulation and retrofitting as well as working with local businesses.

Cllr Varley in response to Cllr Dixon's question felt that climate change needed to be at the forefront of the council's decision-making process and then the need to strive to reach net zero was fundamental.

The Assistant Director Sustainable Growth reminded the committee in response to Cllr Dixon's question that the Council's Environmental Charter set out three Chapters – dealing with the Council's own emissions; acting as a community leader to reduce emissions outside of the council and holding events to encourage people to reducing their own emissions.

Cllr Varley stated that he was happy to consider Councillor's Dixon's suggestion about what further work the Council can do to promote carbon footprint reductions to business, the public to better prepare for the adverse effects of climate change locally but it was the collective responsibility of everyone on the council to ensure that reductions are made.

Cllr Holliday proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Cushing that all reports include a section on net zero impact so that a change in the carbon footprint is highlighted and explained.

Resolved – that (A) the progress towards and the challenges of the Council's Net Zero target is noted,

(B) the planned projects and interventions for 2024/25 to help reduce the Council's carbon footprint and wider district emissions be welcomed, and

(C) all reports to the Council's decision-making bodies should include a section on net zero impact so that a change in the carbon footprint is highlighted and explained.

145 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The Democratic Services (Scrutiny) Officer advised that the items that needed updating in the workplan had been covered elsewhere during the meeting.

RESOLVED

To note the update.

146 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 1.00 pm.

Chairman