

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 17 April 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 V Holliday Cllr L Vickers	Cllr J Boyle Cllr M Hankins Cllr N Housden

Officers in Attendance: Chief Executive, Estates and Asset Strategy Manager, Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer, Director for Resources / S151 Officer and Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth

147 SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutes at the meeting.

148 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors Andrew Fletcher and Roy MacDonald.

149 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

150 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

151 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

152 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

153 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

154 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A

MEMBER

None received.

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

The Committee welcomed the tracker as it formed an audit tracker but wished to see an additional column that showed what outcomes had happened in respect of the committee's recommendations.

156 ANNUAL REVIEW OF BEACH HUTS AND CHALETS

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates and Property Services, Councillor Shires, presented a report giving an annual review of the Beach Huts and Chalets Service for a twelve-month period following the previous 21/22 review.

The Estates and Asset Strategy Manager (EASM) responded to Councillor Boyle's question on how to better publicise beach huts availability by advising that the storm boards had now been replaced and it was proposed to cover those with more information or advertising about the availability of huts in that area.

The EASM added that despite the additional maintenance costs the weekly lets produce more income than the five year lets but it was an option to consider as to whether there should be more five year lets offered rather than weekly lets.

The EASM in response to Councillor Penfold's question on whether there was flexibility to take short term bookings stated that the bookings closed on Thursdays and the service was working with the Tourist Information staff to allow them to book huts if members of the public would like to use a weekly hut.

The EASM advised in response to Councillor Holliday's question on whether the Council could change its emphasis from weekly lets to five year lets that some of the costs fell across both types of lets and won't disappear if there was a change to more 5 year lets but there might be a difference in business rates. A more detailed analysis could be brought back to the committee.

The EASM confirmed to Councillor Holliday's further question of how a green levy could be used that the green levy mentioned in the report related to Net Zero and how the weekly lets were used could make a small contribution to the Council's Net Zero target but that it would be possible to consider whether a payment could be sought.

Councillor Shires confirmed that use of the green levy would be considered, and it would take a wider perspective to see if it could be applied elsewhere.

The EASM in response to Councillor Dixon's question about those people who are still on the waiting list stated that some people had been on the five-year let waiting list since 2013. Some of those people will have been offered a Chalet and refused it as it did not meet their needs but remained on the list.

The EASM in response to Councillor Finch-Tillett statement about the offer from a

private farmer to store private huts in Overstrand over the winter so that they were not damaged during storms advised that the tenants had been consulted and the majority of them had not replied or had said no. however, the council had changed the lease renewal process which will take effect from April 2024 so that it would be possible to do that in the future.

The EASM in response to the Councillor Withington, Portfolio Holder for Community, Leisure and Outreach comments about the number of beach huts that had stayed on the beach in Sheringham when the requirements for insurance had changed, confirmed that the council has asked beach hut owners to take out public liability insurance for their huts and that some people like to use their huts over the winter months with the block blocking over the winter being really popular.

The EASM in response to Councillor Housden's question about the wider costs of maintenance of the beach huts to the council stated that recharges from other Council departments included the Leisure service seafront inspectors and the Property service. If a hut is swept away by a storm surge it was not economical to rebuild the hut as the income from it would not cover the building cost.

The Director of Resources added that the net cost of providing the beach hut included a depreciation value to cover its value rather than an amount to replace the hut. It would not take into account any potential future storm damage. The Council could set up a sinking fund but don't consider it appropriate at the current time.

The Estates and Asset Strategy Manager added that the Council did have insurance that could cover some or all of the cost of rebuilding a hut.

Councillor Shires confirmed that this was a part of a wider position in that if the weather conditions became increasingly more adverse it would not be safe or sustainable to keep putting these huts on the coast.

The EASM in response to Councillor Holliday's question that it was now easier for the Council to move the huts confirmed that the council's costs would increase if more huts had to be moved but the lease now included the ability for the Council to recharge those costs.

The EASM in response to Councillor Withington's question on whether it was more beneficial to lease all of the beach huts to members of the council stated that there were 17 beach huts out of the weekly list that could be looked at to ascertain the costs of transferring the maintenance of the huts from the council to the private owners so that the Council's role was just one of lease management.

The EASM in response to Councillor Brown, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enforcement question on whether an administration fee for renewal of the beach hut licence stated that the Council did charge an administration fee of £75 for renewing the licence which is phased over the five-year period and had been recently introduced.

The EASM advised in response to Councillor Holliday's question on what the carbon effect of people coming to the area to use the beach huts was, that it would be possible to assess the effect on the carbon footprint of people coming to the area to use using the beach huts.

The Committee agreed that it would a further report on a number of issues that had been raised during the meeting and that report come back to its October meeting.

Resolved – that a report be submitted to the October committee meeting on the Beach Huts and Chalets that covered

- **How to best market and promote the beach huts**
- **The possibility of conversion from weekly to five year leases**
- **The split of costs between weekly and five year huts**
- **The question of not having Council huts and instead having them as private leases**
- **The green levy and how far that might be extended**
- **The relationship with private tenants including the removal of huts from the beach**
- **The Sustainability of the beach huts physically and financially, and**
- **The effect on the carbon footprint of people coming to use the beach huts**

157 EAST OF ENGLAND WATER SUMMIT

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Net Zero, Councillor Varley reported on a East of England Local Authority Water Summit held on 8 March 2024. He advised that the key issues at the summit were an overall shortage of water and its effect on sustainable housing and economic development, a recent excess of water due to flooding and storms and the quality of the water.

Councillor Varley commented that the Council was not a direct provider of water services so could not directly affect these issues but there was a role for the Council to lobby and challenge the key stakeholders and should be something the council continues to do.

The Climate and Environmental Policy Manager confirmed in response to Cllr Housden's question about grey water and water harvesting in new homes that the greenhouse gas emissions from water production are 5% to 6% and the use of greywater recycling would reduce those emissions.

Councillor Varley added that the quality of water in the chalk streams had been discussed and looked at how nature-based solutions and the use of community group initiatives could address this.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Tim Adams advised in response to Councillor Dixon's question on which water issues should be taken forward that it was worth looking at Anglian Water's Strategic Investment Plan as North Norfolk needed investment there was a role for the Council to scrutinise that. Letters had gone to Anglia Water following the motion at full council in December 2023.

Councillor Adams added that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had a role in policy development and if it wanted to explore issues such as the water aspects of planning and environmental health it could do so.

The Committee agreed that it be useful for the Council's cabinet to advise on what water issues it thinks the Council should take forward.

It further agreed to ask the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance, Water Resources East,

and Anglian water to talk about flooding and wider and more strategic water issues.

Resolved – that (A) the Chairman of the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance be invited to a future meeting on how the Council is working with the alliance on flooding issues,

(B) Anglian Water and Water Resources East be invited to the same meeting on the strategic water issues that affect North Norfolk to include the Anglian Water Strategic Investment Plan, and

(C) the Cabinet provide advice on what it would like the Council to take forward on water issues following the East of England Water Summit

158 REPORTING PROGRESS IMPLEMENTING CORPORATE PLAN 2023-27 ACTION PLAN 2023-24 – TO END OF QUARTER 3 – 31ST DECEMBER 2023

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Tim Adams presented a Quarter 3 report that detailed the progress that had been made in implementing the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-27 Action Plan 2023.

The Leader stated that he was confident and comfortable in the status and delivery of the actions in the delivery plan.

Councillor Adams in response to Councillor Holliday's question on whether those projects haven't started yet should be rated Amber stated that he would review the grading of those projects.

In respect of Councillor Holliday's further question on what progress the Council had made on nutrient neutrality that there was going to be an all members briefing, and it would be good to reconsider that grading after that briefing.

Councillor Adams in response to Councillor Housden's question about it taking 24 minutes to answer his phone call through the Council's customer service centre, commented that there will be peaks and troughs in the customer services centre after council tax demands went out, but the average response time was around 17 minutes and the recent survey on the service produced some very good feedback. The service compared well to the private sector especially the banks or phone companies and the council needed to take a view of what an acceptable response time was as that would have resource implications.

The Chief Executive (CEX) stated that the service Councillor Housden received would not meet his expectations but would require further details on what had exactly happened so that he could investigate the situation fully.

Councillor Liz Withington, Portfolio Holder for Community, Leisure and Outreach advised that work had been undertaken across departments to ensure that peaks in potential calls to customer services were reduced to better manage workload and the release of Council tax letters had been seen as a success. Improvements was very much on the radar.

Councillor Adams in response to Councillor Cushing's question on whether the assessments were correct based on the data shown and with a lack of deadlines commented that it was up to the committee which performance metrics the Committee wanted to look at. Those projects which were not shown as having a grade associated with them in the report were not at risk.

The CEX reminded the committee that the Council had agreed its new Corporate Plan at full council in July 2023, there had been some member workshops in September to develop the plan and this was the first quarterly report on the progress being made up to 31 December 2023.

The CEX added that the committee had made a number of requests for further work earlier in the meeting that were outside of the Corporate Plan, and these would need additional staffing resources and the expectation was that the council had to do more with less particularly where that involved non statutory work.

Councillor Adams stated that the big-ticket variances were the Fakenham Leisure Centre, North Walsham Solar array, a failure in a public convenience in Sheringham and nutrient neutrality would affect service delivery.

The CEX in response to Councillor Holliday's question that not getting the second homes premium was a big risk as it reduced the ability to build affordable homes, advised that the progress the council could make on using the second homes council tax levy to build affordable homes was being constrained by the national legislative context and marking that action as red would not cover the work the council has been doing in preparation for this including conversations with Norfolk County Council.

Councillor Adams in response to Councillor Penfold's question about how the council monitored where things were going well and then shared that as good practise commented that the building of the Sheringham Leisure Centre has been a real success with a higher-than-expected footfall and learning from that project could be applied to the building of the Fakenham Leisure Centre.

Resolved – that the report is noted.

159 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The Democratic Services (Scrutiny) Officer (DSO) provided an update on the items on the workplan and advised that the report on the North Walsham Heritage Zone End Of Project report would be coming to the June Committee meeting and there was an opportunity to have a site visit before the committee meeting.

The ambulance Trust had indicated that they would be happy to come to the committee to talk about ambulance response times in North Norfolk and the committee asked if that session could also include the County Council social care, North Norfolk university Hospital and the Community Trust.

The DSO added that if the Ambulance Trust was unable to come to the May Committee meeting it could be a good idea to cancel the meeting and instead hold a workshop to investigate the Committee's workplan items for the rest of the year.

RESOLVED – that (A) a site visit be arranged for committee members to look at the North Walsham Heritage Zone project before the report came to the June Committee meetings, and

(B) the May Committee meeting be cancelled and the Democratic Services (Scrutiny) Officer work with Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the details of a work planning session in its place.

160 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm.

Chairman