

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 14 May 2025 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 10.00 am

Committee	Cllr N Dixon (Chairman)	Cllr S Penfold (Vice-Chairman)
Members Present:	Cllr P Bailey Cllr J Boyle Cllr A Fletcher Cllr P Heinrich Cllr N Housden	Cllr M Batey Cllr C Cushing Cllr M Hankins Cllr V Holliday Cllr L Vickers

Members also attending:

Officers in Attendance: Assistant Director for Finance, Assets, Legal & Monitoring Officer, Chief Executive and Director for Communities

Also in attendance:

1 SUBSTITUTES

None.

2 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

3 MINUTES

The Monitoring Officer explained that due to resourcing pressures in the Democratic Services Team, the minutes for the April meeting would go to the June meeting for approval.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

5 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

6 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None.

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

No matters were brought forward.

8 RESPONSES OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CABINET TO THE COMMITTEE'S

REPORTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chairman informed members that there had not been any recommendations to Cabinet.

9 REPORTING PROGRESS IMPLEMENTING CORPORATE PLAN 2023-27 ACTION PLAN 2024-25 - TO END OF QUARTER 4 - 31 MARCH 2025

The Chairman invited the Deputy Leader, Cllr W Fredericks, to present this item. She began by thanking officers for their hard work and invited members to speak.

Cllr S Penfold thanked officers for adding the previous RAG status for comparison. He referred to action 27 (page 17) – Fakenham Banking Hub. He said that the action related to Fakenham but the comments included in the report related to North Walsham. He asked for an update on progress with this project in Fakenham. Cllr Fredericks replied that success had been achieved in North Walsham and Holt and comments were included to provide context. She said that negotiations were still ongoing regarding a banking hub in Fakenham and confirmed that it was being actively pursued. She added support from local members would be welcomed.

Cllr C Cushing, local member for Fakenham, said that he had previously raised this in Cabinet meetings. He added that he had discussed the issue with Jerome Mayhew MP and he explained that a banking hub could not currently be set up in the town as there was a Building Society that would accept cash deposits from residents. One option would be 'Cash Access UK' as the Nationwide Building Society did not accept deposits from businesses. One plan that was being pursued by Mr Mayhew, was to push for a permanent post office in the town and for this to have a Cash Access UK facility. He questioned whether this action should be included in report as it was not within the remit of NNDC to set up a banking hub. Cllr Fredericks thanked Cllr Cushing for his update and agreed that the Council's role was mainly lobbying but said that it was important to support the business community, even if this meant indirectly.

Cllr L Vickers, local member for Fakenham said that she had recently attended a meeting with Jerome Mayhew MP and there was an upcoming meeting with the Mayor of Fakenham and the Council's Business Development Team to discuss other funding to improve Fakenham town centre.

The Chairman asked if there was any other work underway, in addition to lobbying. Cllr Fredericks replied that the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth would be able to provide more information on this. The Director for Communities (DFC) added that he would provide further information in writing. He added that a lot of businesses had moved online in recent years and the scope of the original objective had been broadened to reflect this and the changing environment and needs of businesses and residents.

Cllr Penfold suggested that it could be worth changing the language used from banking 'hub' to 'facility'. He then referred to action 40 (page 19) 'Review the Council's approach to asset commercialisation' and asked what was planned for the physical assets linked to the Deep History Coast project, now that the Tourist Information Centre in Cromer had been sold. The Chief Executive replied that there had been discussions with Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) but they were unable to accommodate the audio-visual materials at any of their sites so they had been donated to Sheringham Museum. The display cabinets had gone to the Tourist Information Centre in Holt.

Cllr N Housden referred to action 30 'Develop energy infrastructure and water resources plans'. He queried the amber status and said he felt it should be red, especially given the plans for devolution in the county, adding that this action related to crucial infrastructure and the reference to 'continued dialogue' seemed vague.

Cllr Fredericks replied that the Council met with representatives from Anglian Water (AW) on a quarterly basis to discuss their forthcoming business plan. She assured members that it was an ongoing process and that was why there was no date included in the action. Cllr Housden felt that more detail on this topic was needed.

The DFC added that the RAG status was reflective of the progress status of the action and discussions were ongoing on this matter.

Cllr P Heinrich said that access to banking services included ATMs – many residents still wanted to use cash. He then referred to action 11 'continue the Council's commitment to improving the quality and accessibility of our public conveniences'. He asked for an update on the maintenance programme. Cllr Fredericks said that there was a maintenance programme in place and a written update could be provided. She urged members to report any issues or concerns to the Property Services team.

The Chairman agreed with the comment regarding access to ATMs and this impacted on residents and tourists too. He said that it was important to ensure that there was an ATM available before banks closed in a town. Cllr Fredericks replied that this would be an ideal outcome but it was very challenging to achieve this when multi-national companies were involved.

Cllr V Holliday commented that she would like the actions in the report to be more focussed on outcomes and not just process. She then asked when the Action Plan for 2025/2026 would be published, requesting that when it was compiled that the action was not too narrow compared to the corporate plan objective. She used Action 5 as an example where the action of stopping the use of weedkiller was very focussed compared to the overall objective 'protecting and enhancing the special landscape and ecological value of North Norfolk', which was extremely broad.

Cllr Fredericks said that it might be beneficial to hold a workshop for members on the Action Plan to ensure that it included the information the committee wanted to see.

The Chairman said that the essence of Cllr Holliday's feedback was that actions would be more beneficial if they were more outcome focused rather than process driven. Cllr Fredericks said that more clarity was needed as to the balance between outcomes and the process that was driving the achievement of these.

The DFC said that he would take the request on board and look at how future reports could be presented. Cllr Holliday added that it was more about ensuring the action was right rather than just reporting on it. For Action 5, for example, there were high level actions that could be assessed against.

The Chairman asked for clarification as to when the new action plan would be coming forward. Cllr Fredericks replied that due to the pressures of LGR, the current AP would carry over for the time being.

The Chief Executive said that he understood members' frustrations. The Council had

agreed a corporate plan for 2023 – 2027 and this included high level objectives and an annual plan was then produced to support this which could flex and adapt to changes. There had been an AP agreed for this year, reflecting LGR and Devolution which came through the committee cycle in March 2025. He accepted that there was a degree of choice and the actions reflected priorities of the Administration and there were some areas such as water and energy which had no fixed outcome and for which the council continued to play a lobbying role. They did impact on residents in the district and that's why they were included. He concluded by reminding members that they could request any issue to come forward for the committee to consider.

Cllr N Housden referred again to action 30, and said that he would like to see more specificity in the comments to show that the outcomes are moving forward.

Cllr Cushing referred to action 4 'Increase the percentage of household waste collected which is recycled' and said that a more specific outcome could be 'aim to recycle 45% of household waste by the end of March 2026'. It was important that the objectives were measurable and specific and that members could assess progress against them. Cllr Fredericks thanked him and reminded members that Portfolio Holder reports to Full Council meetings also contained a lot of information about ongoing work across the Council's service areas.

Cllr J Boyle asked for an update on action 1 'complete the work on the production and examination of the North Norfolk Local Plan'. The Chairman said that progress had been made recently and that the Local Plan was now drawing to a close, with the recommendations of the Planning Inspector now available.

Cllr M Hankins asked about action 18 (page 15) 'promote greater take up of Neighbourhood Plans (NPs)'. How many NPs had been approved across the district. He also wondered whether the determination of small growth villages had led to an increase in submitting NPs and if so, which villages were they. Cllr Fredericks said that the Portfolio Holder, Cllr A Brown, would provide a response to Cllr Hankins. One option would be a member briefing on the Local Plan, including an update on NPs.

The DFC confirmed that there were currently 15 NPs in place. The Chairman added that this was a good example of where the AP comment could be metric-based.

Cllr M Hankins then asked about action 31 'understanding the constraints of existing mobile and digital infrastructure in North Norfolk'. He said that this was a real issue of concern in his ward and many other rural parishes and it would be helpful to know when the collection of data would conclude and the results shared. Cllr Fredericks said that the information had been collected and the Portfolio Holder, Cllr Toye, would provide an update.

Cllr Holliday said that Cllr Toye had indicated it would be another month before the information was collated.

The Chief Executive said that this was similar to the banking hubs. NNDC could lobby and influence but could not directly deliver an outcome. Planning applications for masts were not always supported by local residents and this was an area that could be explored more. Cllr Holliday said that she believed the impact on residents was not being voiced strongly enough and that more could be done to highlight this. Cllr Hankins added that prioritising areas for investment was in the Council's gift, although he did accept that it was down to the providers to install masts.

Cllr M Batey said that contacting providers was very challenging and made dealing with this issue almost impossible.

Cllr Holliday queried why the Planning Policy & Built Heritage Working Party meeting had been cancelled as the queries regarding NPs and small growth villages could be picked up via this. The Chief Executive said that the upcoming meeting of the working party had been cancelled because the Planning Inspector's letter had not been received at the time of agenda publication. It had since come through and the Planning Policy team would update members soon, once officers had time to reflect on the letter and respond accordingly.

Cllr Holliday asked for a report to be prepared on mobile connectivity so that members could consider the data that had been collated. The Chairman suggested that this could be addressed when the work programme was considered (agenda item 13).

It was proposed by Cllr S Penfold, seconded by Cllr P Heinrich and

RESOLVED to note the report.

10 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager updated members on the Cabinet work programme.

11 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

The Committee considered the Action tracker and received an update from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Benefits on the current status of the recommendations made by the Homelessness Task & Finish Group to Cabinet.

The Chairman reminded all members of the committee that it was important to review the tracker regularly and monitor the actions.

12 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman invited the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Services to provide an update on the work programme.

Cllr Holliday asked about the scheduling of scrutiny of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process and whether this could be brought forward to the June meeting. The Chief Executive replied that June was too premature to consider this. Feedback from MHCLG had just been received, at a meeting with Norfolk partners. A lot of preparatory work was needed and a procurement for a strategic partner to assist in this was underway, as well as several themed workstreams focussed on service delivery and reform. These would commence in early June.

He said that he would write to all members advising how this would move forward in the coming weeks and it was unlikely that there would be anything substantive to share at the June meeting of the committee, given that the majority of the work would not commence until early in the month. He went on to say that he was intending to hold a briefing for town and parish councils towards the end of June and then a workshop briefing in July for members, ahead of a formal special meeting of Full Council in September (date tbc) which would be a co-ordinated meeting across the partnered Norfolk councils to agree the final submission to central government.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for the update. He acknowledged that there was a lot of work to be done and it was accepted that a consensual approach would be preferable. The planning and delivery of this was a considerable amount of work in a short period of time. He added that it would be helpful if the Committee could understand the timescales and how the work would be achieved over the next 4 months. The Chief Executive acknowledged this and said that the timescales were set by central government. He assured members that work was progressing at pace, in line with the criteria set out by Government.

Cllr S Penfold suggested that the NWHAZ update should come to June instead of July and that it would be difficult to accommodate scrutiny of LGR prior to September. Cllr Housden agreed. The Chief Executive confirmed that a final submission for LGR would go to Full Council in mid-September and an all-member briefing would be held in July. It was not possible or beneficial to bring a report to Overview & Scrutiny before then, for the reasons given earlier and a workshop for all members may be a better approach.

It should be noted that work was also progressing towards the creation of a new Mayoral Combined Authority, which would be taking up officer time too in the coming months.

Cllr Housden asked if there were elements of the LGR process that could be extracted and then considered by the Committee. The Chief Executive replied that further discussions would be needed before he was able to respond on this.

Cllr Fredericks suggested that the workshop briefing took place first and any key issues arising from this could then come to the committee. The Chairman agreed that there were potentially issues of duplication but added that it was important that the committee understood the overarching structure of the process and how it would progress over the coming months. Consideration could then be given as to how the committee could add value to the process. The Chief Executive replied that he was intending to share a 'road map' of the process with all members soon but added that it may be helpful to bring the workshop earlier and then any issues arising from this could be considered at the July meeting of the committee.

Cllr Holliday said that she was concerned that a workshop may not generate the feedback that was necessary to highlight key areas or themes for the committee to then focus on. She added that it was important that the committee added value and agreed that it was probably best to start with the workshop and see what came out of that.

The Chief Executive said that it may not be possible to bring the North Walsham HAZ update forward as the Economic Growth Team was under considerable pressure at the moment. He said he would clarify the situation and report back.

Cllr Holliday suggested that Anglian Water could be requested to come to the June meeting as the schedule was currently very light.

Cllr C Cushing commented on the new start time for the meeting and asked if it would be possible to revert to the 9.30am start. Cllr Heinrich agreed and said that a later start time for the Development Committee had not been beneficial and the meeting had over-run into the afternoon.

The Monitoring Officer said that any change to the meeting times and dates would need to go to Full Council. This was unanimously agreed.

Cllr Cushing said that this was Cllr Dixon's last meeting as Chairman of the committee and he invited members to join him in thanking him for his hard work and commitment. It was a challenging committee to chair and Cllr Dixon had done an excellent job. Cllr Dixon thanked members and said that it had worked well because members and officers had worked well together and he wished the committee well for the future. Cllr Penfold reiterated Cllr Cushing's comments and thanked Cllr Dixon for his support and encouragement and said it had been a pleasure to be Vice-Chairman during his tenure.

13 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 12.04 pm.

Chairman