

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 15 December 2020 in the remotely via Zoom at 9.30 am

Committee Members Present: Mr N Dixon (Chairman) Ms L Withington (Vice-Chairman)

Mrs W Fredericks
Mr N Housden
Mrs E Spagnola
Mr C Cushing

Mr P Heinrich
Mr G Mancini-Boyle
Mr A Varley

Members also attending: Ms V Gay (Observer) Mr J Rest (Observer)

Mr E Seward (Observer) Miss L Shires (Observer)
Mr J Toye (Observer) Mrs S Bütikofer (Observer)

Officers in Attendance: Chief Executive (CE), Democratic Services Manager (DSM), Chief Technical Accountant (CTA), Programme & Projects Manager (PPM), Policy and Performance Management Officer (PPMO) and Head of Economic and Community Development (ADSG)

Also in attendance:

101 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr A Brown and Cllr H Blathwayt.

102 SUBSTITUTES

None.

103 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

104 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 11th November were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

105 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

106 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

107 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

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

None received.

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

None to report.

110 FEES AND CHARGES 2021/22

Cllr E Seward - Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets introduced the report and informed Members that it was an annual report to consider any changes to the Council's fees and charges, prior to setting the budget. He added that the fees and charges had been frozen where possible, to account for the impact of Covid-19.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr N Housden referred to point 2.4 and noted that some fees had not been published in relation to the waste contract, and asked whether these related to monitoring software mentioned in the last waste contract monitoring report. Cllr N Lloyd replied that the unpublished fees and charges did not relate to the monitoring software, and instead related to commercial waste fees which were dependent on gate fees at the County's waste processing centres. He added that as the service was commercial, it was also not advisable to advertise the proposed fees this early in the year.
- ii. The Chairman asked whether any consideration had been given to reducing fees such as car parking charges, as a means of supporting residents and businesses impacted by Covid-19. The CE replied that there had not been any formal consideration of reducing these charges, though the Council did hold data on individual car park use over the summer period, that could be discussed at a future meeting. He added that in general terms, coastal car parks had seen higher usage in July, August and September, whereas in-land car parks had seen reduced numbers. It was noted that periods of free parking had been provided in Holt following the fire at Budgens, and in North Walsham on account of engineering works.
- iii. The Chairman noted that free parking had been offered in Sheringham, and asked the local Member to provide further information. Cllr L Withington stated that traders would appreciate that no increase in parking charges had been proposed, and added that it would be helpful to discuss the potential for offering limited free parking to support town centres and local businesses. The CE replied that the Government's revenue support scheme was set to be in place until 31st March 2021, and any changes to the Council's prevailing policy within that timeframe would not be covered by the scheme. He added that the Council continued to provide a range of non-statutory functions for residents such as public conveniences, which required significant funding that should be taken into account when setting future fees and charges.
- iv. Cllr E Seward stated that on the basis of the financial information available, the Council had a balanced in-year budget, and the same was expected for 2021/22. As a result, there was no requirement to increase charges, though it was notable that parking income generated approximately £2m per annum,

which provided a significant proportion of funding for the Council's discretionary services.

- v. The Chairman clarified that the purpose of the discussion was to explore whether free parking had subsequently increased the use of the Council's car parks and visits to towns within the District. Cllr P Heinrich noted that the Council's car parking charges remained low relative to other Districts, and that maintaining current charges would not place any further burden on residents and visitors.
- vi. In addition to the substantive recommendations, Cllr N Housden proposed that the Committee should review whether reduced parking fees had provided any benefits for the Council or District. Cllr C Cushing agreed and seconded the proposals.

RESOLVED

1. To recommend to Full Council:

a) The fees and charges from 1 April 2021 as included in Appendix A.

b) That Delegated Authority be given to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and relevant Heads of Service, to agree those fees and charges not included within Appendix A as required as outlined within the report

2. That additional information on parking numbers be provided to determine whether any benefit had been gained from offering limited free parking.

111 MANAGING PERFORMANCE QUARTER 2 2020/2021

Cllr S Butikofer - Portfolio Holder for Executive Support introduced the report and informed Members that the Council continued to make progress on its priorities, though the Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and a significant increase in visitor numbers had increased demands on the Council, during the reporting period.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr C Cushing referred to the timeliness of the report and suggested that efforts should be made to provide more up to date information. Cllr S Butikofer replied that she did understand the concerns, and noted that whilst local government reporting was substantially different to the private sector, there should be a compromise that can be achieved. The Chairman asked whether this would change with the introduction of the Inphase system. The CE replied that there was a difference between management and performance information, with the latter being more retrospective. It was noted that the introduction of Inphase would enable more real time data reporting, though outstanding IT issues meant that this was not yet available for Members. The PPMO confirmed that real-time data would be available once access had been granted to Members, which the IT Team were currently working to resolve. The DS&GOS referred to the previous request to provide a briefing on the Inphase system, and noted that whilst it was dependent on intranet issues being resolved, it would be arranged as soon as possible.

- ii. The Chairman suggested that the Committee should focus on exceptions reporting, and the CE stated that this was included on pages 58-61. The PPMO added that key priorities were also outlined in a separate section of the report on pages 20-27.
- iii. It was suggested that a briefing could be given on Inphase to provide Members with more information and guidance on the capabilities of the system, prior to enabling Members' access. The DS&GOS stated that he would work with the PPMO to arrange for this briefing to take place early in the new year.
- iv. Cllr W Fredericks stated her thanks to officers for continuing to work hard throughout the challenges of the Pandemic.

RESOLVED

- 1. To note the report and endorse the actions being taken by Strategic Leadership Team detailed in Appendix A – Managing Performance.**

ACTIONS

- 1. Scrutiny Officer to arrange for Inphase Demonstration Briefing to take place in January 2021.**

112 NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL'S ACTIONS IN THE CURRENT PHASE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The CE introduced the report and informed Members that it covered the period from September to the end of November. He referred to point 1.3 on the number of cases in the District, and noted that there was a delay in receiving this data, which meant that the actual number of cases published by the Government for North Norfolk were 62 per 100k, which was slightly down on previous weeks after a single outbreak in a care home. It was noted that between 60 and 70 cases per 100k placed the District at the upper end of its infection up rate prior to October, though the District remained in an advantageous position relative to national rates, and below the County average.

The CE referred paragraph 2.2 on the 'You Are Welcome' campaign, and noted that the Council continued to promote and support local shopping in the run up to Christmas, which included the provision of six Covid support officers in towns to provide help and advice. It was reported that the cost of these support officers had been met by the containment management fund, provided by Central Government. The CE reported that the Council had also received £5.2m of local restrictions support grants, and the Council had paid out over £4m of this through 2781 payments to 75% of eligible businesses. He added that Government guidance had been increased to include a wet-led pub scheme and an additional restrictions scheme that would be launched in January.

The CE reported that support continued for rough sleepers, in addition to support payments for those having to self-isolate that were either on benefits or unable to work. Finally, it was noted that officers were continuing to work with health services and strategic partners to begin the delivery of vaccines, with a mass roll-out anticipated in the new year.

Questions and Discussion

- i. It was confirmed following a question from Cllr G Mancini-Boyle, that homeless individuals were tested for Covid-19 prior to being given shelter, and that officers were also provided with the required PPE.
- ii. Cllr N Housden asked whether Council's had in any way worked together or developed a mechanism to pressure Government to limit visitors from higher tier areas, to which the CE replied that the issue had been raised with strategic partners. Cllr S Butikofer stated that she shared concerns on this matter, and had raised this issue with partners and continued to lobby Government on the matter. It was noted that policing remained the issue, as it was not possible to prevent all visitors from higher tier areas. Cllr S Butikofer added that she hoped that fogging machines deployed by the Council in high touch areas, had also helped to keep infection rates relatively low in the District.
- iii. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle referred to mobile testing sites, and asked whether this would be increased as a result of the rise in infections. Cllr S Butikofer stated that she would welcome increased testing, though at present infection rates remained relatively low in the District, and as a result testing would remain focused in areas of higher infection. She added that if the need were to arise, then she would push for increased testing, and stated that testing would continue over the Christmas period. Cllr L Withington stated that the Cromer testing facility was easily accessible and available three days per week.

RESOLVED

To note the report.

113 SHERINGHAM LEISURE CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE: DECEMBER 2020

Cllr V Gay – Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Wellbeing & Culture introduced the report and stated that the project remained on-track for a phase 1 opening in August 2021. She added that an assessment had been made on bringing forward demolition of the existing site at the announcement of the second lockdown, and it had been determined that there would be no financial benefit in taking this action. It was noted that the project team and responsibilities remained unchanged despite the Council's ongoing management restructure. Cllr V Gay stated that it was unfortunate that current circumstances had meant that the project hadn't been used to communicate and raise awareness of professions in the District, though the aspiration to do so remained. It was noted that the project risk register remained unchanged from the last report.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr N Housden referred to discussions at a previous meeting and stated that requests had been made for additional budget information, but this had not been supplied. He added that the cost-benefit analysis of demolishing the existing facility early had not taken into account the potential for any future loss of income, and suggested that the Committee would need more information to properly scrutinise this decision. Cllr V Gay replied that the financial information provided sought to show that the project remained on track and within budget, though more information could be provided if necessary. On the cost-benefit analysis, it was noted that early demolition would continue to be reassessed if future lockdowns were to occur. Cllr N Housden reiterated that it was his understanding that the Committee had previously asked for additional information that had not been provided. He added that due to the size of the

project, it was crucial to continue to re-evaluate the early demolition of the existing site, if further changes in circumstances were to arise. Cllr N Housden suggested that it would also be appropriate to return to monthly monitoring reports for the Committee. Cllr V Gay asked whether the requirements for additional could be requested in writing, to clarify the exact requirements.

- ii. Cllr C Cushing stated that in his experience, the amount of information provided in the report was not adequate given the size of the project, and agreed that monitoring reports should return to a monthly frequency.
- iii. Cllr L Withington stated that she was concerned that the existing facility's role in supporting wellbeing across the District had been overlooked, which was crucial under the current circumstances. The Chairman clarified that there had not been a proposal for early closure of the existing facility, but that this decision should be kept under review, if there were any future changes in circumstances.
- iv. Cllr P Heinrich stated that he was supportive of requests for more detailed budget information, and suggested that whilst it was prudent to continue to monitor the cost-benefit of the existing facility, the current tier rules allowed gyms to remain open, which provided an important service for residents.
- v. Cllr V Gay stated that a monthly report would be possible, though it would be helpful if questions were submitted in advance of the meeting to ensure that adequate information could be provided. Cllr N Housden replied that he wanted to ensure that the Committee were able to review detailed budget information within the report. Cllr V Gay stated that it would be helpful to know exactly what financial information would be required.
- vi. The ADSG stated for the record that the total project budget was £12.8m, and clarified that the completion and opening of the new facility was not dependent on the closure of the existing facility. As such, it was possible to fully complete construction prior to commencing demolition of the existing facility. He added that consideration of early demolition was dependent on the costs of maintaining the facility outweighing its benefits, however the second lockdown had not changed this position. It was noted that if there was a further lockdown, then this decision would be reconsidered. The ADSG stated that he would be reluctant to include a full cashflow breakdown in the monitoring reports, as the budget profile included already outlined whether the project remained on-track financially. It was noted that at present there was a slight overspend, which had been included in the report to maintain the existing level of contingency, at this stage of the project. Cllr V Gay stated that there were four points for reassessment of early demolition, and stated that the decision would continue to be kept under review.
- vii. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle suggested that it would be helpful to receive an update from the contractors on progress, potentially with a slideshow to show progress. Cllr V Gay agreed and stated that she would seek to determine whether this could be provided. Cllr S Butikofer noted that she had recently passed the construction site and had been reassured to see progress.
- viii. Cllr N Housden stated that he did not feel the full budget information would be too complex for review and suggested that he would like to see this if possible.
- ix. The Chairman summarised comments and noted that there had been a

request for monthly updates with a visual presentation of progress, and more detailed financial information to be provided, as part of this update. The requests were proposed by Cllr N Housden and seconded by Cllr C Cushing.

RESOLVED

- 1. To note the report.**
- 2. That more detailed budget information be provided in future reports.**
- 3. That updates are provided on a monthly basis from January 2021.**
- 4. That a visual presentation on the progress of the new leisure centre be provided as part of the next update.**

114 SCRUTINY PANELS - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The DS&GOS introduced the item and informed Members that a draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Scrutiny Panels had been prepared for consideration by the Committee. It was noted that there was a proposal for Cabinet to have a similar Corporate Plan Working Group, that would review similar reports. The DS&GOS stated that the six key themes of the Corporate Plan had been provisionally divided into three groups, and that the makeup of each panel would be politically balanced with five Members, including a Chairman from and appointed by the Committee.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The CE stated that there was value in the panels being utilised to make better use of the Committee's time, and that they should work in unison with the new project management proposals. He added that within these proposals, it was suggested that a Cabinet Working Party should be established to monitor major projects. The CE stated that he believed that a wider discussion was first needed to agree the working practices of these arrangements, prior to implementation of the panels, to ensure that they would add value with effective pre-scrutiny.
- ii. Cllr S Butikofer stated that she would also like to see more pre-scrutiny take place to ensure better use of Committee time, whilst providing input to policy development, and adding value to projects. The Chairman stated that the proposal would provide greater opportunity for pre-scrutiny, as well as giving back benchers greater opportunity to feed into the Council's projects.
- iii. Cllr P Heinrich stated that he understood the purpose of the proposals, though raised concerns that it could be slightly premature without yet knowing how the panels would operate. The Chairman noted that the proposals had been brought forward at an early stage to ensure that they were ready to begin once working practices had been established. He added that it was not expected that the panels would begin to operate, until this process had been agreed. The DS&GOS noted that at this stage the Committee were only asked to agree the TOR, to ensure that the panels were ready to operate once working practices had been agreed under the new project management and governance arrangements.
- iv. Cllr W Fredericks stated that she felt the proposals were premature and did not

want to approve the TOR at this stage. She added that she wanted input into how the panels would operate, and asked whether this could be deferred until that discussion had taken place.

- v. Cllr L Withington stated that she supported the method of pre-scrutiny, but raised concerns that the panels would lengthen the process. She added that she could not support the proposals until discussion on the working practices had taken place.
- vi. Cllr J Rest stated that he had listened to concerns, but noted that local authorities tended to work slowly, which would delay implementation. As a result, he did not see the need for further delay and suggested that the Committee should approve the TOR.
- vii. The DS&GOS noted that the Committee had already agreed to establish Scrutiny Panels at its February meeting, and reiterated that the purpose of agreeing the TOR was to ensure that the panels were ready to begin, once working practices had been established. The Chairman reminded Members that working groups were not a new practice for the Council, and they had been proven to work previously, with ultimate control resting with the Committee.
- viii. Cllr P Heinrich stated that he had no problem with the TOR, but it was the timescale of other changes that concerned him. He proposed that the TOR could be agreed on the basis that they would not be implemented until working practices had been established. The DS&GOS confirmed that it was reasonable for the Committee to agree the TOR and await discussion on the new working practices, prior to initiating meetings.
- ix. The CE stated that the Scrutiny Panels would provide value to the functioning of the Committee, but it was important that discussion first took place to determine how the panels would align with the new project management and governance framework proposals discussed at GRAC. He added that the Council had to ensure that the process would function in a way that would make best use of the Council's resources, whilst adding as much value as possible to deliver for the people of North Norfolk.
- x. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle stated that he supported the proposals, and suggested that his understanding of sub-committee was to allow greater analysis of topics that would make better use of time for the Committee.
- xi. Cllr N Housden stated that the sooner the structure was in place the better, as it would ensure the Committee was ready when required.
- xii. Cllr W Fredericks stated that she still had concerns about approving the TOR prior to discussion of the working practices, and suggested that the Committee should consider Cllr P Heinrich's proposal to approve the TOR, but delay implementation until further discussion had taken place.
- xiii. It was proposed by Cllr P Heinrich and seconded by Cllr A Varley to agree the draft TOR and pause implementation of the Panels until working practices had been established.

RESOLVED

- 1. To agree the draft Terms of Reference and pause implementation of the Panels until working practices have been established.**

115 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The DS&GOS informed Members that the MTFs and 2021/22 budget were expected to go to Cabinet in February, which would allow both reports to come to the Committee for pre-scrutiny in January. In addition, the Communications Strategy was also scheduled for the February Cabinet meeting, which again could allow a good opportunity for the Committee to pre-scrutinise the strategy at its January meeting.

RESOLVED

To note the Cabinet Work Programme.

116 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The DS&GOS noted that the primary focus of the January meeting would remain the MTFs and pre-scrutiny of the draft budget. However, the Committee had just requested an additional Sheringham Leisure Centre project update, and there was a possibility that the Communications Strategy and draft Equality and Diversity Policy could come for pre-scrutiny, if ready.

Questions and Discussion

- Cllr N Housden asked whether a further ambulance response times report would come to the Committee, to which the DS&GOS replied that this had been discussed at a previous meeting, with a number of recommendations made to NHOSC that had been communicated to EEAST. He added that the Committee had agreed in principle to continue to monitor response times, on the premise that this could come back to the Committee if required. Cllr S Butikofer stated that she had been involved in a coastal parish working group that was monitoring the situation, and she could ask the individual leading that work to present to the Committee in the future, if required.
- The Chairman confirmed that NHOSC were continuing to monitor response times at County level, and noted that the Ambulance Trust had recently been placed in special measures, which would likely divert resources for the foreseeable future. The DS&GOS noted that response times remained the worst in the County, and the Committee should continue to monitor the situation as a result.

ACTIONS

- 1. To invite the Chair of the Coastal Parish Working Group to a future meeting to provide an update on the monitoring of ambulance response times in North Norfolk.**

117 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 11.45 am.

Chairman