

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 21 April 2021 remotely via Zoom at 9.30 am

Committee	Mr N Dixon (Chairman)	Ms L Withington (Vice-Chairman)
Members Present:	Mr H Blathway Mr P Heinrich Mr G Mancini-Boyle Mr A Varley Mr A Brown	Mrs W Fredericks Mr N Housden Mrs E Spagnola Mr C Cushing Mr P Fisher
Members also attending:	Ms V Gay (Observer) Mr N Lloyd (Observer) Mr J Toye (Observer)	Mrs P Grove-Jones (Observer) Mr E Seward (Observer)
Officers in Attendance:	Democratic Services and Governance Officer - Scrutiny (DSGOS), Chief Executive (CE), Democratic Services Manager (DSM), Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth (ADSG), Programme & Projects Manager (PPO), Environmental Policy Officer EPO and Climate Change Project Officer (CCPO)	

Also in attendance:

169 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

170 SUBSTITUTES

None.

171 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

172 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 24th March 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

173 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

174 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

175 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

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

None received.

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

The Chairman noted that the recommendation made in relation the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy had been accepted by Cabinet. The DSGOS added that the recommendation from the Item 8 discussion on the loss of affordable homes had been accepted by the Assistant Director for Planning, and a report would be prepared for the June Development Committee and PPBH Working Party meetings.

178 NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL'S ACTIONS IN THE RECOVERY PHASE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The CE introduced the report and informed Members that it covered the period from December 2020 to the end of March 2021, during which infection rates had been very high at 442 cases per 100k. He added that infection rates had now reduced to approximately 14 cases per 100k and that the rate of vaccination in North Norfolk was very high, likely as a result of the demographics of the District. The CE noted that during the third lockdown there had been less requirement for community support from the Council, though focus had instead been placed on the payment and administration of Covid support grants. He added that the Council had paid in excess of £30m since January 2021, and the sum total of grants paid now stood at £118m, with 28k more payments processed in comparison to a normal year. The CE asked to record his thanks to the Revenues, Economic Growth and IT Teams for facilitating the caseload. It was noted that a further report on distributing the remaining funds was being prepared for review by Full Council. The CE noted that whilst the prospects for foreign travel remained unclear, a busy summer season was expected for the District, and preparations were under way to address this.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr N Housden asked whether there would be any benefit in asking Council staff to begin regular testing for Covid as they began to return to the office. The CE replied that it was possible for employees to access tests through NCC, and noted that anyone was now able to register for twice weekly lateral flow testing. He added that discussions were also taking place between HR and Public Health Norfolk to offer staff these tests on a regular basis. It was noted that Polling Staff had also been advised that tests should be taken in advance of the election, though this would not be mandatory.
- ii. The Chairman asked for a brief assessment of the current impact on Council services caused by Covid-19. The CE replied that at present the impact was relatively low, as the redeployments seen at the start of the pandemic had mostly come to an end. He added that during the initial stages there had also been issues relating to limited bandwidth, which had restricted the ability for all Council staff to work from home simultaneously, though this had been resolved. It was noted that whilst the majority of staff continued to work from home in line with Government guidance, service levels had returned to normal. The CE stated that Covid Advisors were also in place to support

visitors, residents and businesses, with additional posts funded by the Controlling Outbreak Management Fund. He added that last year's Opening up the High Street fund had been renewed for 2021 as the Welcome Back fund, by MHCLG. It was noted that some redeployment had been required to prepare for the upcoming election. The CE stated that consultation was in progress with staff to determine new ways of working, once a return to the office was possible.

- iii. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle asked for an update on whether the Council's car parks were prepared for the additional influx of tourists expected during the summer season, and whether any additional parking had been created. He then referred to the High Court ruling on the continuation of remote meetings, and asked whether there were any plans in place to return to physical meetings. The CE replied that discussions were ongoing with potential partners for increased parking provision to be made available over the summer season. He added that it was the intention of the Council to increase provision during the school summer holiday period. It was noted that park and ride schemes may also be given consideration if required, as most large spaces were not within close proximity to tourism areas. With reference to physical meetings, it was reported that the current provisions for virtual meetings would end on the 7th May, and the outcome of the High Court challenge was not yet known. He added that if the challenge was not successful, it was expected that most Committee meetings could take place in the Council Chamber with social distancing measures in place, though this would not be possible for Full Council meetings. As a result, consideration was being given to alternate venues for the AGM.
- iv. It was confirmed, following a question Cllr H Blathwayt that temporary planning permission for car parks and campsites lasted 56 days. The CE added that it would be helpful for any landowners considering a temporary parking or camping space, to notify the Council.
- v. Cllr A Brown suggested that the welcome back message might increase public littering, and asked whether the current bylaws were robust enough to address this issue, and whether any contingency plans were available to mitigate the additional pressure placed on the waste contractor. The CE replied that there was likely to be additional waste, and discussions were taking place with Serco on the number of public waste bins and the frequency of collections. He added that the Council would also promote the message of using public spaces responsibly, and stated that he was not aware of any shortcomings with the current bylaws, though the situation would be kept under review.
- vi. Cllr P Heinrich asked how many Covid Marshalls had been employed and what training they had received to deal with potentially difficult situations. The CE stated that the Council had ten Covid Support Officers, and added that whilst there was a small number of incidents where they had been challenged, they were not seen as providing an enforcement role. The Chairman noted that utilising the Support Officer terminology had helped to imply an advisory, as opposed to authoritative role.
- vii. Cllr W Fredericks raised concerns regarding the Enforcement Team and stated it was her understanding that only two staff covered the District, which placed great pressure on officers. She then asked whether there was any scope to increase the resource available to the Team, given an expected

increase in demand, once restrictions were relaxed. The CE replied that he would investigate the issue and provide a written response, and added that whilst the Planning Enforcement Team had approximately that number of dedicated staff, the Environmental Health Enforcement Team had greater resource.

- viii. In response to a question from Cllr N Housden, the CE suggested that there were no plans to record or restrict oversized caravans or campervans, though they were encouraged to use larger car parks such as Runton Road in Cromer. The CE added that overnight parking was also prohibited, which should help to mitigate any potential issues.
- ix. Cllr A Brown stated that the 56 day relaxation of permitted development rules previously mentioned also removed additional restrictions, and as a result, the Council was limited in its powers to prevent alternate usage throughout the summer season.

RESOLVED

1. To review and note the report.

179 UK COMMUNITY RENEWAL AND LEVELLING UP FUNDS

Cllr E Seward - Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets introduced the report and informed Members that work was progressing quickly, as arrangements had to be in place with bids submitted by mid-June. The CE stated that the fund had been announced on 3rd March to provide an opportunity for the District as a priority area to support investment in skills, businesses and supporting people into employment. He added that it was a revenue fund, and the maximum the Council could bid for was £3m, with a requirement for funds to be spent by Mach 2022. It was noted that there were challenges in developing plans and spending those funds within an eight month period, though it was still believed that the Council could use the funding to advance opportunities at the urban extensions in Fakenham and North Walsham. The CE reported that proposals had to be submitted to NCC by 14th May, then finalised bids would need to be submitted to Central Government by 14th June. He added that the process would involve the creation of a Strategic Stakeholder Board, and a Steering Group in both Fakenham and North Walsham, with arrangements being made for these groups to meet in the coming weeks. It was noted that NCC were also developing County-wide proposals that could be considered alongside the District proposals.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr A Brown stated that he welcomed the funding, but had concerns that rural areas were being overlooked as a result of the Government's methodology, and that issues could arise with match-funding. He asked whether the Shared Prosperity Fund planned for 2022 might address these issues. The CE replied that whilst the fund was a great opportunity for the District, £3m wouldn't cover all areas, and as a result North Walsham and Fakenham were seen as central locations that provided a significant number of jobs and services to residents of the wider District. He added that they were also areas designated for future growth and development, and funding was required to support this growth in a sustainable manner. The CE stated that the Shared Prosperity Fund was expected to provide greater funding opportunities, at which time more support may be available for more rural

locations.

- ii. Cllr C Cushing stated that he welcomed the funding as Fakenham often received less than what was allocated to other towns.
- iii. Cllr E Seward stated that he did understand the concerns raised regarding rural locations, and suggested that the Council would continue to look for future investment opportunities for these areas. He added that the Community Renewal Fund would enable the necessary preparatory work for sustainable growth in North Walsham and Fakenham. It was noted that if towns such as North Walsham were to continue to grow, then there had to be the necessary supporting infrastructure such as link roads, new primary schools, doctors surgeries, drainage and transport connection improvements. Cllr E Seward stated that that historically, in-land towns had suffered from a lack of investment, and the fund was a good opportunity to address this.
- iv. The Chairman noted that the funding available would not go far if shared over several towns, and accepted that it was therefore reasonable for funding to be directed to where there was the greatest need. He added that communication of this issue was important, and asked whether it could be given consideration.
- v. Cllr A Brown sought to clarify that he was fully supportive of both Fakenham and North Walsham receiving funding, but noted that the Government scheme appeared to have some bias towards towns with larger populations.
- vi. The recommendations were proposed by Cllr C Cushing and seconded by Cllr P Heinrich.

RESOLVED

- 1. To note the opportunities presented to North Norfolk by the new UK Community Renewal and Levelling Up programmes.**
- 2. To endorse the proposals made that a programme of complementary projects be developed in respect of the future planned growth of North Walsham and Fakenham as sustainable locations for future housing and business development at scale supported by provision of key transport, health, education community and green infrastructure and submitted to the County Council as lead body for endorsement and onward submission to the Government.**
- 3. To endorse the Cabinet resolution that in developing any proposals, the Council establishes a Strategic Stakeholder Board and Steering Groups for North Walsham and Fakenham to support project.**

180 PRE-SCRUTINY: NNDC DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL CHARTER

Cllr N Lloyd - Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, Climate Change and Environment introduced the report and thanked officers for their efforts preparing the draft Charter. The EPO stated that following the declaration of a climate emergency, the Council had committed to developing an Environmental Charter, which had been prepared following the employment the Climate Change and Environment Team. It was noted that workshops had been held to consult with staff and Members during the development of the Charter, which sought to outline the rights, aims and

principles aims of the organisation. The EPO informed Members that the Charter had been built around three main chapters, the first of which was delivering change across the Council's own estate, in order to achieve the target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. The next chapter outlined the Council's role as a community leader and influencer, in order to support communities in addressing the challenges of climate change. The final chapter focused on supporting individuals, to help residents understand what they could do to help limit the effects of climate change. It was noted that an Environment Forum meeting was scheduled to take place on 23rd April, where the draft Charter would be shared for public consultation. The EPO provided a summary of the remaining points of the Charter, and stated that the recommendation requested that the Committee endorse the document for further consultation, prior to final amendments and approval by Cabinet.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr H Blathwayt stated that he welcomed the progress on the Charter, and asked whether quarterly updates should be considered to monitor its implementation. The Chairman noted that the progress of implementation would be covered as part of normal performance monitoring. The ADSG stated that an action plan would follow once the Charter was approved, which would contain measurable targets that could be monitored using the InPhase system.
- ii. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle thanked officers and expressed his support for the Charter, then asked how closely the Environment and Climate Change Officers would work with the Planning Department to achieve its aims. The ADSG replied that the recent restructure had allowed for much closer working with the Planning Department under the Directorate of Place, and it was expected that there would be good cooperation between the officers involved to achieve the aims of the Charter.
- iii. Cllr L Withington stated that the development of the Charter had been exemplary, and this was clear in the quality of the document. She added that she was also pleased to hear how the restructure would enable the organisation to achieve the aims of the Charter.
- iv. Cllr N Lloyd stated that he was pleased to see that officers from across the organisation had embraced the green agenda, and had been highly supportive during the development of the Charter. He added that the new Local Plan would be the Council's greenest ever, and would allow for further development of green policies and innovation in the future, which would make a significant difference to reducing carbon emissions in the District.
- v. Cllr A Brown thanked officers for their work and endorsed the Charter, then noted that PPBH WP had recently reviewed the Local Plan policies relating to renewable energy, which now went above and beyond Government guidelines.
- vi. Cllr J Toyne stated as Planning Portfolio Holder that he continued to work with officers to make further improvements to policy, in order to support the Charter and make environmental improvements across the District.
- vii. The Chairman stated that he welcomed the document and asked whether it would be possible to make some additions to the draft Charter, such as a marking system or criteria, to support residents and businesses to achieve

environmental aims. He added that criteria such as energy conservation, renewable energy generation, water usage, reduction of single use materials and flood mitigation could be used to engage businesses, whilst increasing awareness of these issues. The EPO replied that there was significant merit in the proposal, and suggested that it could be used as a means to promote environmental excellence. She added that there was potential to use the Charter as a tool to enable and influence change, and suggested that a similar system to the food hygiene ratings could potentially be implemented in the future. The AD SG stated that he was fully supportive of the idea, as a means to incentivise the actions outlined in the Charter, in addition to events such as Greenbuild.

- viii. Cllr N Housden stated that he liked to see specifics and suggested that a vital aspect missing from the Charter was education, which had to be addressed. He added that the tree planting project, whilst positive also required more detail, as 30k hectares per year was required to meet the 2050 climate targets. It was suggested that greater detail and specifics would help people to better understand the dangers of climate change, such as the rate at which sea levels were rising. The EPO stated that the Charter did mention carbon literacy and engagement, but accepted that there was a need for education to be more explicit within the Charter, to help residents meet the challenges of climate change.
- ix. Cllr A Brown stated that he was supportive of proposals for a quality assurance system, and asked whether outside assurance bodies could be used to avoid criticism. The Chairman replied that the proposals would need development, and whilst external consultation would likely be considered as part of the process, it might be too early to consider at this stage. He added that primarily, some form of accreditation was needed to start businesses thinking about their environmental credentials. The AD SG stated that he would begin to look at accreditation systems elsewhere, and consider what options were available.
- x. Cllr N Lloyd stated that whilst the net zero carbon target applied to the Council estate, efforts would be made to lower emissions in the community and the second and third chapters of the Charter sought to address this.
- xi. The Chairman summarised potential recommendations including the consideration of an environmental accreditation system, and the development of educational aspects of the Charter.
- xii. Cllr H Blathwayt suggested that the UEA Tyndall Centre could be an option to consider for developing an environmental accreditation system.
- xiii. Cllr L Withington suggested that the recommendations should allow flexibility for officers to review options, in case accreditation systems were already available.
- xiv. It was proposed by Cllr N Housden and seconded by Cllr H Blathwayt that consideration be given to developing a marking system to provide accreditation on various environmental standards, that consideration be given to develop the educational aspects of the Charter, and that the Charter be endorsed for consultation.

RESOLVED

1. To recommend to Cabinet that consideration is given to developing and including a Charter Mark system setting standards across the spectrum of environmental improvements sought, such as: Energy Conservation; Renewable Energy Generation and Storage; Water Capture, Usage and Quality; Flood Prevention and Mitigation, Reductions in Single Use Materials and Carbon Capture projects. Such a system should link up with relevant Planning Policy standards, include an annual award/recognition scheme and seek accreditation with an external environmental body.
2. To recommend to Cabinet that consideration is given to increasing the educational and public engagement opportunities to promote active commitment to the Charter and the wider climate change agenda..
3. To endorse the draft Environmental Charter for consultation with the Environment Forum, prior to a revised draft being considered by Cabinet and Council for adoption.

181 SHERINGHAM LEISURE CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE: APRIL 2021

Cllr V Gay – Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Wellbeing introduced the report and informed Members that the old facility had now been demolished, and the project remained on budget and on track for the new facility to open in August. It was noted that some Councillors and officers had recently attended a site visit, and that once the tiling of the main pool was complete, fitting out of the facility would begin. Cllr V Gay noted that the Communications Team has prepared short videos to promote the various professions involved in the development of the facility.

The PPO provided a presentation of pictures taken during the most recent site visit, followed by a time lapse video of development.

RESOLVED

1. To receive and note the update.

182 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The DSGOS informed Members that as a result of taking reports as pre-scrutiny items, there was no significant upcoming reports to consider in the immediate future. He added that items such as the apprenticeship scheme could be worthy of consideration, if Members were supportive.

The DSM stated that due to time constraints, the Additional Restrictions Grant report would go to Full Council on 28th April, as opposed to Cabinet. She added that the Solar Car Port report listed on the Cabinet Work Programme was now expected to come forward later in the year.

RESOLVED

To note the Cabinet Work Programme.

183 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The DSGOS informed Members that the May meeting would include an Enforcement Board update, and consideration of a draft 2021/22 Work Programme,

for which an email would be circulated to request proposals, alongside guidance on topic selection. He added that officers were also in the process of arranging a briefing on the new Safer Norfolk Strategy, and it was hoped this could take place at the May meeting, though it remained to be confirmed. The Chairman added that historically District's had their own Community Safety Partnerships, though these had been merged into a County-wide Partnership. Therefore reviewing the new strategy would coincide with the Committee's recent review of crime and disorder.

RESOLVED

To note the Work Programme.

184 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 11.20 am.

Chairman