

## **SCRUTINY PANEL - ENVIRONMENT & QUALITY OF LIFE**

**Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel - Environment & Quality of Life held on Thursday, 21 April 2022 in the remotely via Zoom at 2.00 pm**

**Committee Members Present:** Mr H Blathwayt Mr A Varley  
Dr V Holliday Mr J Rest

**Members also attending:** Ms V Gay (Observer)

**Officers in Attendance:** Director for Communities (DFC), Assistant Director for People Services (ADPS) and Democratic Services and Governance Officer - Scrutiny (DSGOS)

### **28 APOLOGIES**

None.

### **29 MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **30 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None declared.

### **31 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None received.

### **32 QUALITY OF LIFE STRATEGY**

The ADPS introduced the report with a presentation outlining the and context and key elements of the Quality of Life Strategy. She added that quality of life was one of six themes of the Corporate Plan, which presented a number of challenges to the Council as a result of the demographics and rurality of the District. It was noted that post-sixteen education was a particular concern, due to limited opportunities. The ADPS stated that the Council had made a commitment to maintaining and enhancing sports and leisure facilities, open spaces and tourist infrastructure including public conveniences, and supporting cultural events. She added that these were seen as having a direct impact on maintaining the mental and physical wellbeing of residents, and were therefore seen as a priority. It was reported that from these priorities, a range of actions had been developed to deliver on these commitments, of which a number were already complete, such as continued investment in public conveniences and changing places, a sports strategy, the new Reef Leisure Centre, supporting community projects, maintaining high quality open spaces, and the Mammoth Marathon.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The ADPS stated that existing research had been utilised to develop a basis for the Strategy and clearly define what quality of life meant for the Council. She added that the centre for thriving places index had provided data for comparisons with other regions and the England average. It was noted that the Co-op community wellbeing index had also been helpful as it focused on community level data.
- ii. Cllr J Rest stated that the Quality of Life foundation suggested that people living in North Norfolk were the least anxious in the County, which was a credit and likely the result of excellent services and assistance provided to the public.
- iii. Cllr V Holliday asked whether wellbeing was the same as quality of life, as the definitions were slightly different, and asked whether the Council were treating them as such. The ADPS replied that this would be covered at a later point when reviewing the Strategy.
- iv. The ADPS stated that the Quality of Life Foundation Framework was an important piece of work that had been used to triangulate the Council's understanding of quality of life, by identifying common themes between various studies. These common themes included environment, health, education, employment, transport, housing, culture and participation. The wider determinants of health were discussed and it was noted that research had shown that quality of life, and health and wellbeing were inextricably linked, and would therefore both be addressed within the Strategy. The ADPS noted that health inequalities were continuing to widen, and the Council had to take this into account.
- v. Cllr V Holliday referenced a report referenced within the Strategy and noted that North Norfolk's health issues were more related to gentrification than deprivation, which suggested the report may not be 100% relevant to the District's demographics. She added that she was also not convinced that quality of life and health and wellbeing were the same issue. The DFC replied that officers had made considerable efforts to ensure that the Strategy had additional breadth beyond health and wellbeing, to focus on wider issues relating to quality of life. He added that opportunities and access to services beyond health were a primary example. It was noted that the Council also had to be careful not to replicate work that would be undertaken by the new Health and Wellbeing Partnership. The Chairman noted that access to NHS dentistry would have significant impact on residents' quality of life, and suggested that health was particularly relevant to the Strategy. Cllr V Gay stated that she felt that the breadth of the Strategy was appropriate, and suggested that whilst some aspects of studies referenced may not be entirely relevant, there were many aspects that remained important to understanding quality of life. She added that access to dentistry would be an excellent first point of discussion for the new Health and Wellbeing Board.
- vi. The ADPS referred to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and noted that the role of the District Council had changed as a result of the Pandemic, which had moved its interventions further to the bottom of the hierarchy pyramid. She added that she was unsure whether these actions would need to continue, but residents were still struggling, and the Council would remain focused on support.
- vii. The ADPS reported that the Thriving Places Index had been used to identify

where the Council was not achieving England average performance, which acted as a guide to direct service improvements. She added that the key challenges facing North Norfolk had also been considered including energy use, education, community participation, transport, mental health and housing. The DSGOS noted that previous discussions held by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had considered the impact of poor transport links and isolation, which was outside of the Council's responsibilities, and asked how this would be approached. The ADPS suggested that the approach to addressing these issues would be covered during discussion of the action plan.

- viii. Cllr V Holliday suggested that it was interesting to make comparisons in the Thriving Places Index, where it was evident that mental health was a real concern for North Norfolk, even though the provision of services would be very similar to South Norfolk. The Chairman cautioned that this could be the result of demographic differences, and asked whether new residents were given any guidance on where to access services in the District. The ADPS replied that this had not been done previously, though something similar was being established for Ukrainian refugees as a programme of wrap-around support. She added that there could be benefits in making this information more readily available. The DFC noted that all new residents would receive a Council Tax bill, and this contained NNDC website information, which would provide a range of information for the public.
- ix. The ADPS stated that ongoing issues effecting quality of life in the District were the ongoing recovery from Covid, the cost of living crisis, the unknowns of the levelling-up agenda and supporting those effected by the Ukraine crisis. She added that working in partnership would be vital to responding to these issues.
- x. The ADPS stated that the action plan contained a summary of actions related to issues discussed, with sustainability issues relating to delivery of the Net Zero Strategy and maintaining the District's Blue and Green flags public spaces. She added that actions had been focused on areas that the Council could influence directly, though opportunities to influence partners on matters such as education had been included where possible.
- xi. Cllr V Holliday referred to the outcomes listed in appendix 7, and asked whether it would be possible to include more tangible outcomes. The ADPS replied that it would be difficult to determine outcomes in relation to quality of life, though data from the ONS annual population survey could be used to help develop this. Cllr V Gay noted that discussions had taken place on achieving outcomes, but at this early stage the Strategy focused on implementing actions to improve quality of life, with refinements possible in the future. Cllr H Blathwayt suggested that trends on quality of life issues across Norfolk all appeared to show a decline, apart from in Breckland, and asked if the reasons for this were known. The DFC replied that it was possible that downward trends in data could be skewed by the Pandemic, and this was a key reason the quality of life survey had not been pursued. He added that he would also seek input on where metrics and measures could be most useful, with Cllr V Holliday open to assisting with the development of these metrics.
- xii. The ADPS referred to the Community Engagement Strategy that was in development, and suggested that it would be crucial for gathering feedback

from residents on the Quality of Life Strategy, and other services provided by the Council. She added that it was also important to encourage community participation, which projects such as the North Walsham High Street and Heritage Action Zone were actively promoting.

- xiii. On transport and connectivity, the ADPS noted that Council's Community Transport Fund continued to target services to vulnerable residents and those in need of assistance. She added that personal transport remained important to residents and promotion of active forms of travel would form a key part of this work, in collaboration with Active Norfolk. It was noted that lobbying partners could also influence transport providers, though this was not included in the action plan at this stage. Cllr J Rest referred to electric vehicle charging points, and stated that unfortunately electric vehicles were too expensive for the majority of residents, though they did offer an opportunity for use by tourists. The ADPS acknowledged the cost of electric vehicles and vehicles in general, and noted that the Council did have support options available for those that were particularly isolated.
- xiv. The Chairman asked whether the Council held figures for high speed internet connectivity, and whether there were any plans for further improvement. The DSGOS replied that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had reviewed plans of the Better Broadband for Norfolk scheme, to which NNDC had contributed £1m, to improve high speed internet access across the County to approximately 90%. Cllr H Blathwayt stated that this was positive news, given that there was likely a connection between internet access and quality of life.
- xv. The ADPS referred to mental health and isolation within the action plan, and noted that whilst the Council were not able to directly influence mental health services, officers were aware of issues and would explore options to improve services through the newly formed Health and Wellbeing Board. On housing, the ADPS stated that the Council did have the ability to control and influence these issues, with the Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy already in place.
- xvi. The ADPS stated that the cost of living crisis would generate new issues, and various programmes were being developed to help residents cope with this. She added that as part of the levelling-up agenda, the Council would undertake an audit to ensure that residents had equitable access to services and make improvements where necessary. Cllr J Rest suggested that levelling-out would be a better term to ensure that areas were not missed. The Ukrainian refugee settlement scheme was discussed, and it was suggested that sustainability had to be taken into account, due to limited resources and issues such as the rurality of the District. Cllr H Blathwayt asked whether any Afghan refugees had been received, to which the ADPS replied that the area was not deemed suitable due to the lack of language and relevant religious services available. It was noted that in many cases, urban areas were deemed more practical for refugees, due to the accessibility of various services.
- xvii. The ADPS reported that the first Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board meeting would take place in the coming weeks, and it would be necessary to determine whether the Council needed to pursue its own strategy, or whether this could be addressed County-wide. She added that the Council would also continue to work in partnership with Active Norfolk and the Norfolk

Community Safety Partnership to ensure the health, wellbeing and safety of residents.

- xviii. The DSGOS informed Members that the Strategy would go to Cabinet for consideration in May, and the Panel were therefore required to make a recommendation on whether they were supportive of the Strategy in its current form, or whether any changes were required.
- xix. Cllr V Gay thanked officers for their work developing the Strategy and noted that Public Health were satisfied with the content. She added that it could be made explicit in response to Cllr V Holliday's suggestion, that outcomes could be further developed to include metrics relevant to North Norfolk.
- xx. The Health and Wellbeing Partnership was discussed and it was reported that it would remain an external organisation, therefore any information would be communicated as part of portfolio holders' updates. The DFC noted that once the transition to the new arrangements had settled, some changes could be expected in how the Integrated Care scheme and Health and Wellbeing Boards would operate. He added that he was confident that good governance was in place, and he expected good communication going forward.
- xxi. Cllr V Holliday stated that the Strategy itself was very broad, and asked whether there would be any form of prioritisation. The ADPS replied that prioritisation was not planned, but the Strategy had been focused on areas in which the District was performing below the England average. She added that several actions had already been completed, which meant that remaining actions should be achievable within a relatively short timescale. The DFC noted that the action plan would remain a live document, so that actions could be added as required.
- xxii. It was suggested that the Panel could recommend approval of the Strategy, subject to consideration of more measurable and demonstrable outcomes. The DSGOS confirmed that this would only mean that these outcomes should be in development, and that they would not need to be in place prior to Cabinet approval. The recommendation was proposed by Cllr A Varley and seconded by Cllr J Rest.

## **RESOLVED**

**To recommend approval of the Quality of Life Strategy, subject to consideration of the inclusion of demonstrable and measurable outcomes.**

## **33 BUSINESS FOR NEXT MEETING**

The DSGOS informed Members that the next meeting would likely take place on 26<sup>th</sup> May, with discussion returning to public conveniences.

The meeting ended at 3.57 pm.

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Chairman