

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

**Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 June 2017 in the Council Chamber, North Norfolk District Council, Holt Road, Cromer at 9.30 am.**

### Members Present:

**Committee:** Cllr P W Moore (Chairman)

Cllr J English

Cllr V Gay

Cllr S Hester

Cllr M Knowles

Cllr N Pearce

Cllr E Seward

Cllr B Smith

Cllr K Ward (for Cllr S Butikofer)

Cllr G Williams

**Officers in Attendance:** The Corporate Director (SB), the Head of Finance and Asset Management , the Head of Economic and Community Development, the Democratic Services Team Leader and the Democratic Services Officer.

**Members in Attendance:** Cllr S Arnold, Cllr A Claussen-Reynolds, Cllr A Fitch-Tillett, Cllr W Northam, Cllr B Palmer, Cllr M Prior, Cllr J Rest and Cllr R Reynolds.

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mrs S Butikofer, Mr T FitzPatrick and Mr N Smith.

### 2. SUBSTITUTES

Ms K Ward, for Mrs S Butikofer.

### 3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Concern was expressed about the effectiveness of the new microphones and the background noise emanating from the cabinet. These concerns would be taken up with the IT team.

### 4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

### 5. MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 May 2017 were accepted as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

### 6. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None

## **7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

## **8. PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

None

## **9. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A MEMBER**

None

## **10. RESPONSES OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CABINET TO THE COMMITTEE'S REPORTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS**

None

## **11. 2016/17 OUTTURN REPORT (PERIOD 12 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT)**

The report provided a final budget monitoring position for the 2016/17 year and was introduced by the portfolio holder, Mr W Northam, who said that - because of good housekeeping - the Council was in a good outturn position with a final overall underspend on the revenue account of just over £671,000. This was after allowing transfers to Earmarked reserves for current and known commitments. The General Reserve remained within the recommended balance.

Questions and Discussion:

- a) Mr E Seward thanked officers for the report which was, he said, the second most important report received by Members after the Budget report to February Full Council. In response to his question regarding reserve movements, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that the figure in question was part of the recommendation and was yet to be approved. The reserve statement showed net reserves.
- b) Mr Seward asked a further question regarding the current balance of the Asset Management Reserve to which the balance of £371,399 from the Revenue Account surplus was recommended for transfer. The Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that the balance of the Asset Management Reserve would increase, subject to Full Council's approval of the recommendations on 21 June 2017. An updated statement would be provided in the next Budget Monitoring report.
- c) Mr Seward asked a question about the overall interest rate earned being lower than budget. The Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that, for reasons of prudence, NNDC held a mixed portfolio. The return from the Local Authorities Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT) pooled property fund had produced an excellent income return, earning 5.87%. Some of the rates received, however, had been lower. When the forecast was made at the beginning of the year the following variables were taken into account and impacted on the estimate that went into the budget:
  - How much to invest
  - How much interest it might earn
  - Fluctuation of interest rates

- d) Mr Seward asked a further question regarding the total variance for the year (£498,287) under the Business Rate Retention Scheme. The Head of Finance and Asset Management said that the Council had received more this year because of £388,579 additional income from renewable energy schemes in the previous year and an increase in levy (£28,210) from the County Council.
- e) Mr Seward asked about expected appeals against the rateable value of purpose built Health Centres. The Head of Finance and Asset Management said that some appeals had been settled but others were still outstanding. It was not within the Council's power, being in the hands of the District Valuer.
- f) Ms V Gay asked what the actual expenditure (£10,295) on the North Norfolk Enterprise Innovation Centre had been for. The Corporate Director (SB) would check this and report to Members. Ms Gay also asked what the current budget (£39,705) would be spent on. It was explained that NWES had been commissioned to produce a feasibility study which would be reported to Cabinet in September. The study looked at 3 sites in North Walsham. This had been shared with the portfolio holder, Mr N Dixon, and would be discussed with local members over the next few weeks. The report recommended a preferred site and the costs of taking the project further. This would ultimately be a decision for Cabinet and, at this stage, there was no capital budgetary identification for delivery of the project.
- g) Ms Gay asked a question about Public Conveniences – Review, Reprovision and Redevelopment. The Corporate Director (SB) said that, as well as a programme of public convenience renewal in Cromer and Wells, there were a number of locations where public conveniences had been identified for upgrade, demolition or replacement. A condition survey was being carried out on all the District's conveniences. Opportunities would be considered as they arose, linked to the Asset Realisation programme.
- h) Compulsory Purchase of Long Term Empty Properties: the figure shown against this item was the budget for the Enforcement Board and would be replenished when properties went on the market. A combined enforcement approach was being employed, involving liaison with Planning, Council Tax and Environmental Health. Good results had been achieved with this work and progress was shared regularly with Local Members, although Compulsory Purchase was a decision for Cabinet. Members with concerns about properties in their ward should contact the Corporate Director (NB). Sometimes there were difficulties, especially if a property was in probate, but often owners were willing to work with the Council. Mrs S Arnold commended the work of the Enforcement Team in bringing so many empty properties back into use.
- i) Gypsy and Traveller Short Stay Stopping Facilities: in response to a question from Mr S Hester, the Corporate Director (SB) explained that – several years ago – there had been significant issues with unauthorised encampments in the District. In addition, the 2004 Housing Act had indicated that Gypsies and Travellers could not be moved on unless there was an authorised site to accommodate them. After public consultation facilities had been provided at Cromer and Fakenham and a significant grant had been secured from the Department of Communities and Local Government, the balance of which was the current budget. Decisions needed to be taken about the future of the sites. This would be the work of the Asset Management Board. An options paper would be brought to Members. The Chairman asked if the current facilities were well used. The Corporate Director (SB) said that Cromer was well used but Fakenham tended not to be used as much. However, the issue was how to manage unauthorised encampments if the sites were to be closed. Since they had been opened there had been no significant problems managing such encampments. This had saved much public money and had eased community tensions. Mr R Reynolds, a local Member, said that the Fakenham site was used regularly and benefitted the community. Ms V

Gay and Mrs S Arnold also spoke, from experience in their wards, about the effectiveness of the Gypsy and Traveller Short Stay Stopping Places.

- j) Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households: the Council's main source of self-contained temporary accommodation had closed down in 2016. Since then another Bed and Breakfast had become available in the District. There were 5 small bedsits in Stalham and a 2-bedroomed bungalow in Holt had just been purchased. Negotiation was taking place with Victory Housing Trust regarding further units.

**RESOLVED** by 6 votes to 2 to approve the report and recommend the following to Full Council:

- a) **The provisional outturn position for the general fund revenue account for 2016/17;**
- b) **The transfers to and from reserves as detailed within the report (and appendix C) along with the corresponding updates to the 2017/18 budget;**
- c) **Transfer part of the surplus of £300,000 to the Organisational Development Reserve to support the development of the apprenticeship scheme with the balance of £371,399 being transferred to the Asset Management Reserve;**
- d) **The financing of the 2016/17 capital programme as detailed within the report and at Appendix D;**
- e) **The balance on the General Reserve of £2.332 million;**
- f) **The updated capital programme for 2017/18 to 2020/21 and the associated financing of the schemes as outlined within the report and detailed at Appendix E.**

## **12. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17**

The report was introduced by the portfolio holder, Mr W J Northam. It set out the Treasury Management activities actually undertaken during 2016/17 compared with the Treasury Management Strategy for the year. The report had been prepared to ensure the Council complied with the CIPFA Treasury Management and Prudential Codes. Treasury activities for the year had been carried out in accordance with the CIPFA Code and the Council's Treasury Strategy.

Global political events in the last year had resulted in heightened market volatility but the Council's focus, when investing, had always been on security and liquidity rather than rates of interest. Mr Northam commended the prudent work of the Technical Accountant.

It was proposed by Mr W Northam, seconded by Mr B Smith and

**RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council:

**That the Council be asked to RESOLVE that The Treasury Management Annual Report and Prudential Indicators for 2016/17 are approved.**

### **13. DEBT RECOVERY 2016/17**

The report, which was introduced by the portfolio holder, Mr W Northam, was an annual report detailing the Council's collection performance and debt management arrangements for 2016/2017. The Council took all reasonable steps to collect monies due. The revenues and benefits team had collected 98.7% of Council Tax and 99.36% of NNDR according to year-end figures for 2016/17. The Council Tax figure was the highest percentage collected for the past 10 years and the second highest ever collected by North Norfolk District Council. The NNDR figure was the highest percentage collected for the past nine years and the second highest ever collected by North Norfolk District Council. The figures meant that the Council had beaten its collection targets of 98.5% and 99.2% respectively. The staff were commended for their excellent work.

#### **RESOLVED**

**To note the annual report giving details of the Council's write-offs in accordance with the Council's Debt Write-Off Policy and performance in relation to revenues collection.**

### **14. DEEP HISTORY COAST PROJECT**

The report, which had been to Cabinet on 5 June 2017 was introduced by the Head of Economic and Community Development who reminded Members of the process to date. The original project had proposed an integrated set of capital and revenue schemes, relating to the cliffed stretch of coast (between Weybourne and Cart Gap) which was rich in evidence of human habitation of our coast some 850,000 years ago and fossil relics of glacial geology. The project envisaged the coast as a 'living landscape museum' and a bid had been submitted to the Coastal Communities Fund (administered by the DCLG) for £2,010,000 to develop and implement it over the next two years. The funding application was unsuccessful, although there could be an option to make a further application at a later date. All of the partners involved in the project's development had expressed disappointment about the outcome of the funding bid and had shown their continuing support for the project. The report suggested other ways in which the project could be delivered and, although it was hoped that the Coastal Communities Fund might be available for another year, requested funding from the Council's capital reserves in order to begin a scaled-down version of the Project, after consultation with local businesses.

Questions and Discussion:

- a) Ms K Ward communicated to the Committee that Mrs S Butikofer, Member for the Runtons, supported the project. The Corporate Director (SB) said that there was potential for part of the project to be delivered at West Runton. Ms Ward confirmed that discussions with local people and the Parish Council had begun and that the project was being positively received.
- b) Ms V Gay expressed support for the project but said that it was important that the whole of the District should be aware of it. She asked about the Norfolk County Council scheme for coastal walks. The Corporate Director (SB) said that this would have been part of the wider scheme which now couldn't be financed. The proposal focussed on West Runton and Cart Gap where most fossils were visible.
- c) Ms Gay asked about the possibility of another funding round from the Coastal Communities Fund. The Corporate Director (SB) advised that this was a possibility but could be affected by the results of the General Election.
- d) Mr G Williams said that it was a good scheme and was pleased that the Council

- wanted to support it, despite the funding setback. The scheme was based on a natural asset and linked in education, tourism and the economy. All communities could benefit. The information points would be vital. They shouldn't just be virtual.
- e) Mr J Rest asked how much funding the Council had originally hoped to receive from the Coastal Communities Fund. The Head of Economic and Community Development said that the whole project had been ambitious and that the amount needed was a minimum of £2 million.
  - f) Mr S Hester expressed support for the project. He suggested having art installations at the locations, so that Arts funding could be applied for.
  - g) Mr E Seward asked if there had been any feedback from the Coastal Communities Fund about why NNDC's bid had been unsuccessful and, if not, would any be forthcoming. He asked if there had been too much competition from elsewhere in the District. The Head of Economic and Community Development said that in the process of making the bid there had been contact with the Big Lottery Fund which had been very helpful. The letter subsequently received from the government had given no opportunity for feedback. Other local projects had been much smaller than the Deep History Coast Project and would have been unlikely to cause competition.
  - h) Mr Seward asked a question about the substance of engagement with the community. The Head of Economic and Community Development informed him that Parish Councils had been appraised of the detail and location of the various elements of the Project. In addition, funding was being sought from local businesses, especially the offshore industry.
  - i) Evidence to support the original bid had showed that the initiative could bring an additional 717,000 visitors to the area, create 17 direct jobs and 552 indirect jobs. Mr Seward asked how many visitors and jobs were estimated for the scaled-down version of the project. The Head of Economic and Community Development said that marketing would create visitors and that the Business Ambassador Scheme would build up the economic benefits.
  - j) Mr Seward also asked about keeping the toilets at Cart Gap open all year round and expressed concern about the amount of debris that was washed up at the location. The Head of Economic and Community Development said that year round facilities and enhanced toilet blocks were included in the plan. Some of these would be at West Runton. Regarding debris, a committed group helped keep the beach clean at Cart Gap. The nature of that part of the coastline was that debris would be washed up. In response to a further question from Mr Seward the Corporate Director (SB) explained that the Council had to make choices about the toilets that could be kept open all year round. At the moment, because of issues with vandalism, it was not possible to keep them all open. If facilities were designed which could be safely kept open they would be considered. The Council was committed to providing this facility in the future, if possible. The problem with traditional public conveniences was that an act of vandalism could render the whole block out of use. The new trend was to have single unisex cubicles, where damage would be sustained by one cubicle only. This design would be more suitable for year round use.
  - k) Ms V Gay asked when the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had last looked at the topic of Public Conveniences and suggested it for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.
  - l) The Chairman asked if there was any legal protection for fossils found on the beach. The Head of Economic and Community Development explained that part of the emphasis of the Project was that if people found a fossil they were asked to share it first on social media before taking it to the Museums Service for identification.

**RESOLVED to welcome the project and to note the report.**

## 15. THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Team Leader informed the Committee that the Local Lottery Scheme would now come to Cabinet on 2 September 2017.

**RESOLVED to note the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 01 June – 31 July 2017.**

## 16. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

- a) The Mental Health Support report referred by Full Council was on the Work Programme for July.
- b) The July Work Programme also included a breakdown of the Housing List requested by Members. Mr E Seward asked for a report with case studies to give a picture of the current situation. He was concerned that people on the List weren't always presenting their own best case. The Democratic Services Team Leader would discuss this with the Housing Strategy and Community Development Manager and Team Leader – Customer Services.
- c) CAB update on new arrangements: the Health and Communities Team Leader had invited the CAB to attend the meeting.
- d) Ms V Gay asked that Public Conveniences should be added to the Work Programme with focus on:
  - What are the provisions throughout the District?
  - What is open all year round?
  - What is planned?
- e) A response had been received from the Housing Strategy and Community Development Manager to a query from Mr B Smith regarding empty flats at Northfield House in Mundesley: **“I have checked and Victory Housing Trust have advised that there are a number of empty properties as it is Victory Housing Trust’s intention to dispose of the block of flats when all the tenants have moved out, on this basis empty properties are not being relet”**.

## RESOLVED

1. To note the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and Update.
2. To add Public Conveniences to the Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 10.58 am.

---

Chairman