

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

**Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 November 2018 in the Council Chamber, North Norfolk District Council, Holt Road, Cromer at 9.30 am.**

### Members Present:

**Committee:** Cllr S Hester (Chairman)

Cllr A Claussen-Reynolds

Cllr J English

Cllr V Gay

Cllr R Shepherd (S)

Cllr M Knowles

Cllr N Lloyd

Cllr R Reynolds

Cllr E Seward

Cllr B Smith

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett

**Officers in Attendance:** The Head of Finance & Asset Management, the Corporate Director (SB), the Head of Legal Services, and the Democratic Services & Governance Officer (Scrutiny).

**Members in Attendance:** Cllr J Rest, Cllr N Pearce, Cllr R Price (Portfolio Holder for Property and Asset Commercialisation), Cllr S Arnold (Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Planning Policy), and Cllr J Lee (Leader).

## 66. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr K Ward, Cllr R Reynolds and Cllr S Bütikofer.

## 67. SUBSTITUTES

Cllr R Shepherd for Cllr R Reynolds.

## 68. PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

## 69. MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

### Questions and Discussion

In response to a question from Cllr E Seward, the Democratic Services and Governance Officer confirmed that the Council's response had been submitted to NCC for their public consultation on Children's centres across the county.

## 70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To be taken, if necessary, at the appropriate item on the Agenda.

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

None received.

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

Three questions were submitted to the committee by Cllr K Ward. The first question was a request for a brief review of the mandate and way in which the recently established Social Prescribing Team worked, and what they had achieved to date. The Second question was a request for information regarding the payments made by the Big Society Fund since 2015. It was asked which parishes had applied to the fund, who was successful/unsuccessful, the percentage of second homes in the parishes that had been awarded funding, and if any organisation had been given more than one grant. The final question was a request for the Members bulletin to include information on any staff that had either joined or left the organisation on a weekly basis.

### Questions and Discussion

The Corporate Director (SB) replied to the first question, and stated he would provide a written response on the Social Prescribing Team at the next meeting. On the second question, regarding awards made by the Big Society Fund, he informed Members that annual reports of all BSF funding were available on the NNDC website, and that he would seek further details regarding the specific Parishes to which funding had been awarded. The Democratic Services and Governance Officer informed Members that he would share the website location of the BSF annual report via email.

Members were then informed in reference to the final question on staff joining and leaving the organisation, that the Democratic Services and Governance Officer had already arranged to receive this information and it would be included in the bulletin moving forward.

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

None received.

## **74. PUBLIC CONVENIENCE OPENING HOURS**

The Head of Finance and Asset Management introduced the report and informed Members that he had sought to provide an overview of the current situation and scope for possible future service improvements.

### Questions and Discussion

The Head of Finance and Asset Management informed Members that at present the Council managed thirty-nine public convenience facilities, although one of these was a temporary structure that would be removed in the winter. Of the thirty-eight remaining facilities, eight were stated to be available all year, twenty-one had reduced opening hours, five were open on weekends only and the final five were closed during the weekends throughout winter. The extension of these opening hours was then discussed and the Committee was informed that arrangements had been made to keep open the facilities at Cart Gap and West Runton throughout the winter at an agreed cost of £2,500. The Head of Finance and Asset Management then informed Members that in the simplest terms, more use would mean higher costs, but a clearer idea was needed of the requirements in order to establish the exact maintenance costs with the contractor Kier. It was suggested that with current staffing arrangements, extending the opening hours of two to three more units may be possible,

however more staff would likely be required beyond this level. A rough estimate of expected costs was provided, in which extending the opening hours for thirty units would bring an anticipated additional cost of £75k-100k, nine units at £23k-30k and six units at £15k-20k.

The Head of Finance and Asset Management stated that extending the opening hours of any facility could lead to increased risk from issues such as vandalism or weather damage, as had been seen on Sheringham promenade. It was stated that significant vandalism could also lead to higher insurance premiums, that when combined with repairs, could place further pressure on the budget. Staff time was also required to resolve these issues and third party contractors were often needed for repair works. It was suggested that the Council would liaise with local police to limit any potential risks of anti-social behaviour. Further focus was then placed on the weather damage that had been caused in the past, and it was stated that Cart Gap had been drained down in previous years to avoid damage to pipework during cold periods.

The overall cost of providing public conveniences across the district was stated to be between £700k-800k, which was noted to be a substantial amount alongside the existing £600k that had recently been allocated for facility improvements. The Head of Finance and Asset Management suggested that despite these costs, a greater provision for the public would support other projects, such as the deep history coast. He added that in some cases, it might be possible to consider concessions in order to fund service improvements. In summary, the Head of Finance and Asset Management reminded the Committee that all changes would need to be considered alongside the budget deficit that was forecast to reach up to £2m. It was suggested that any additional spending would increase this figure and would require careful consideration.

The Chairman reminded the Committee of its options to either; do nothing, reduce, or extend the opening hours of the district's public conveniences.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett stated that she would like to make a plea for Overstrand, and suggested that at present, the weekend only opening hours were not meeting the requirements of the area. She added that due to the cliff being a geological feature, and Kingswood creating significant demand, there was a clear need for more opening hours to improve services all year round.

Cllr E Seward thanked the Head of Finance and Asset Management for producing the report, then stated that he was under the impression that business rates could be claimed back on the public conveniences after 2021, which would substantially reduce the cost of the provision. He then suggested that in the new waste contract being discussed with Kier, he expected that an extension of the toilet cleaning service would be included in the contract. On the specific need for extended opening hours, he stated that it was clear that Cart Gap and West Runton should be kept open, and that he had noted Cllr A Fitch-Tillett's concerns about Overstrand. Cllr E Seward informed Members that he had spoken to Cllr B Smith regarding the public conveniences in Mundesley, and was aware that it was only necessary to keep one of the two facilities open throughout the winter. Overall, he suggested that there was a clear need to look at the usage and location of each facility, as there was no need for service extensions in areas where other options were available.

Cllr V Gay stated her support for Cllr A Fitch-Tillett regarding the facilities at Overstrand, and suggested that she knew through friends in the teaching profession that schoolchildren often needed to use these facilities, and it was therefore important that the opening hours were extended.

Cllr A Claussen-Reynolds stated that there were clearly passionate feelings about the public conveniences that required a more detailed discussion, and proposed that it could be

referred to the Asset Management Working Group, with an aim to discuss the options in detail, then formulate recommendations for the Committee.

Cllr B Smith asked whether the Committee would aim to recommend that both facilities be kept open in Mundesley. The Head of Finance and Asset Management replied that at this stage, this was only an option, not a proposal. Cllr B Smith raised concerns that opening the Mundesley promenade toilets through winter would allow for severe storm damage, with repair costs expected to be tremendous and financially unviable. Alternatively, he recommended that extending the opening hours of the Marina/Beach Road facility would be a more suitable option. He then added his support to extending the opening hours of the Overstrand public conveniences.

Cllr R Shepherd thanked the Head of Finance and Asset Management for the report, then brought the Sheringham facilities to the attention of the Committee and reminded Members that an internal rebuild had already been arranged.

Cllr J Lee referred to the Overstrand facilities, and suggested that it may be worth providing the Kingswood visitor centre with keys to allow access outside of normal hours throughout the winter. On the previously mentioned business rates relief, he sought to remind the Committee that this was only a hope, and at this stage could not be used to set the budget.

Cllr R Price (portfolio Holder for Property and Asset Commercialisation) stated that he was passionate about improving service provision. He added that new projects such as the Deep History Coast provided an excellent opportunity to extend the tourism season in the district, and that it would require the extension of opening hours for some facilities. He seconded the proposal from Cllr A Claussen-Reynolds to refer the report to the Asset Management Working Group.

Cllr A Fitch-Tillett asked whether there was enough time for the report to be discussed at the AMWG before the budget setting would take place. The Head of Finance and Asset Management informed Members that recommendations would need to be agreed by January. It was confirmed following a question from the Chairman that it would be possible to have a test run of the extended opening hours.

Cllr A Claussen-Reynolds asked Members to send in their concerns regarding the public conveniences for the AMWG to discuss.

The Chairman asked for a vote on whether to refer the public convenience opening hours to the AMWG.

## **RESOLVED**

**To refer the public convenience opening hours report to the Asset Management Working Group for further discussion to establish recommendations.**

## **75. BUDGET MONITORING PERIOD 6**

The Head of Finance and Asset Management introduced the Report, and informed Members that as a half yearly review of the budget, an underspend of £160k was now being expected, as opposed to the originally expected underspend of approximately £300k. He then explained that this was in part due to the fact that the district valuer had reduced the Council's predicted income after it was confirmed that a new Solar farm fell within the Broadland boundary as opposed to North Norfolk.

On the Council's investments, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that some investments in the Council's portfolio were volatile, and therefore interest rates were

expected to rise and fall in the short term. He added that in spite of this, the Council's savings plan remained on track and the Council had a good track record of delivering its savings targets.

The Chairman referred the Committee to the Report's recommendations and asked if there were any questions. Cllr E Seward stated that he had no problems with the recommendations, but instead asked to refer to page 17 of the Report regarding investment interest. He stated that whilst he understood that financial forecasting was not a precise science, there was a clear need for any forecasts to be as accurate as possible. It was stated in the Report that an average balance of £35m had been assumed. Cllr E Seward then suggested that this figure had gone up to approximately £40m, but the expected interest rate had reduced. He then asked why this was the case, and why the predictions were so far out, and added that he had expected the predictions to have been more accurate. He then raised a second question on staff cost savings in the Environmental Health Team, and asked why the savings had been put in, but within months were not available to be taken. The Head of Finance and Asset Management responded to the first question and stated that the interest rate position was out of the control of the Council. He then reminded Members that the Council's investments were spread across a diverse portfolio and that some of these investments did come with an element of volatility. He suggested that this volatility would smooth out over a long period but it still made the interest rates on the Council's investments difficult to predict. It was then suggested that Brexit could be expected to have a significant effect on interest rates, but the Council was taking good advice to avoid this. It was stated that the Council would have more control over its large project investments, and that whilst a 25% margin of error was not the best position, the Finance Team was constantly looking to improve this figure. On the second question, the Head of Finance and Asset Management stated that the savings in the Environmental Health Team had been gathered over a long period of time, and unfortunately circumstances had changed, meaning that the original savings could not be made in the same way. The Corporate Director (SB) stated that the Head of Environmental Health was looking at the structure of his department, and that a potential upcoming retirement could create savings. He added that there had been some pressure on the team in recent weeks, and whilst there were concerns on whether the full savings could be met, it was expected that some efficiency savings would still be possible.

On recruitment, the Corporate Director (SB) stated that some Planning Officers had recently joined the Council from Breckland, and suggested that the Council must maintain competitive salaries in order to retain or encourage new staff to join the organisation. Cllr V Gay stated that it was heart-warming to hear that staff were happy to work at NNDC over other organisations. She added that a 2.3% return on the Council's investments looked very optimistic.

On the Fakenham Extra Care Scheme, Cllr N Lloyd reminded the Committee that the scheme had been approved by Full Council, then asked if 50% of the project was being funded by Norfolk County Council. He then asked what the other efficiencies and savings referred to on page 17 of the Report. The Head of Finance and Asset Management informed Members that the County Council funding for the Fakenham Extra Care Scheme had not been included in the year end savings because the original funding had come from the capital budget and not revenue. On the other efficiencies and savings question, he informed Members that he would provide a written response.

Cllr Richard Price stated that in terms of recommendations to Cabinet, he was happy to look at funding for the Public Conveniences of Overstrand, West Runton and Cart Gap this year.

The Chairman asked the Committee to vote on the recommendations.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. To recommend that Cabinet note the contents of the current budget monitoring position.**
- 2. To recommend that Cabinet agree to the release of £607,000 from the Capital Projects reserve required to fund works to the Cromer office with the contract being awarded to the supplier**
- 3. To recommend that Cabinet consider the winter public convenience facilities at West Runton and Cart Gap as detailed in the body of the main report.**

## **76. MARKET TOWNS INITIATIVE WORKING GROUP**

In absence of the Chair of the MTI Working Group, the O&S Chairman read out the following statement:

“The Market Towns Initiative Working Group met on Monday 5th November to discuss the process for the consideration of applications for funding. The Group had always intended that decisions regarding the awarding of funding should be finalised before Christmas. It was therefore proposed that the Group would meet as many times as necessary before the end of November to ensure that recommendations could be made to Cabinet on 3rd December.

Due to time pressures, it is proposed that recommendations are made by the Working Group directly to Cabinet, whilst ensuring Overview & Scrutiny Committee members are kept fully informed by email.”

### Questions and Discussion

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer informed Members that he would send the MTI Working Group’s recommendations to Committee Members via email by the 30<sup>th</sup> November.

Cllr J Lee expressed his concerns that the MTI Working Group’s recommendations would not come back to the Committee prior to Cabinet. The Democratic Services and Governance Officer replied that unfortunately the Committee timetable meant that in order for Cabinet to approve any recommendations before Christmas, there would not be enough time for the Report to come to O&S before 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

## **77. THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer gave a brief summary of upcoming items on the Cabinet Work Programme.

## **78. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE**

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer reminded Members that PCC Lorne Green and Supt. Chris Harvey would be in attendance at the next meeting to provide an update on online scams and crime and disorder in the district.

The meeting ended at 10.30am

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Chairman