

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 18 September 2019 at the Council Chamber - Council Offices, Holt Road, Cromer, NR27 9EN at 9.30 am

Committee

Members Present:

Mr N Dixon (Chairman)	Mr T Adams (Vice-Chairman)
Mr H Blathwayt	Mrs W Fredericks
Mr P Heinrich	Mr N Housden
Mr G Mancini-Boyle	Mr N Pearce
Miss L Shires	Mrs E Spagnola
Mr A Varley	Mr J Toye

Members also attending:

Cllr A Brown	Cllr S Bütikofer (Leader)
Cllr J Rest	Cllr N Lloyd
Cllr V Gay	

Officers in Attendance:

Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny), Corporate Director and Head of Paid Service (NB), Corporate Director and Head of Paid Service (SB), Head of Finance and Asset Management/Section 151 Officer, Major Projects Manager, PA to Chief Executive and Leader, Benefits Team Leader, Conservation and Design Officer, Assets and Property Programme Manager and Customer Services Team Leader

Also in attendance:

17 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

18 SUBSTITUTES

None.

19 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

20 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held of 17th July 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

21 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

23 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) informed the Committee that a petition by the name of 'Save the Splash Leisure Centre in Sheringham' had been received. It was noted that whilst the petition had received 2142 signatures, only 429 were from within the district of North Norfolk. As a result, the petition had not met the threshold of 750 signatures from within the district to be debated by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, or the 1500 signatures from within the district to be debated by Council.

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

None received.

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

None received.

26 BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20 - PERIOD 4

The Report was introduced by the Head of Finance and Asset Management, who explained that it was the first Budget Monitoring Report of the year. Members were informed that at present, there was a predicted full year overspend of £141,156, though this would continue to be monitored by officers.

Questions and Discussion

The Head of Finance and Asset Management informed Members that part of the current overspend was the result of demand led budgets such as Planning, that had not yet produced the expected income, though this was dependent on the number of applications received. In contrast, it was reported that Car Parking revenue had improved and was doing better than forecast.

Members were reminded that a Report was presented in the 2018/19 financial year regarding the successful draw down of remaining funds from the insurance pay-out for the 2013 storm surge, that had subsequently been placed in reserve for works to Cromer Pier. The Head of Finance and Asset Management informed Members that the Report asked for the release of these funds, totalling £468,954 in order to fund the remaining structural repair works to the Pier.

RESOLVED

To commend the Report to Council.

27 STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) introduced the Report and informed Members that the Statutory Guidance for Councils and Combined Authorities on which it was based, had been published by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government in early May. It was stated that the recommendations in the Report were taken from the guidance, and it was hoped that they would help to improve the working practices of the Committee.

Questions and Discussion

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) informed Members that the recommendations included in the Report would put in place a number of actions to improve the efficiency of the Committee. These included; the introduction of a selection criteria and scoring system for scrutiny topic selection, consideration of resource implications when establishing sub-Committees, the introduction of a scrutiny guide, and the creation of an executive/scrutiny protocol. The Chairman added that in order for the Committee to make the best use of its time, a structured and focused approach was required, and it was right therefore to provide guidance on these issues.

Cllr H Blathwayt suggested that he would be interested in reviewing the legal advice given regarding Cromer Tennis Hub payments. The Chairman replied that this would certainly be an issue that could be considered, though the scoring system would need to be put in place first, to determine whether the issue was appropriate for consideration by the Committee.

Cllr J Toye asked how the scoring system would rate topics for consideration, to which the Chairman replied that whilst the criteria had not yet been considered, issues would need to pertain areas in which the Council had influence. This would be the Council's own services, or a select number of external organisations that provided services in the district. The Chairman added that consideration could also be given to whether the Committee was addressing the presenting or underlying issues. The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) confirmed that the Council's own services would be given the highest scoring in the criteria, but noted that the Committee was required to cover crime and disorder amongst other district-wide issues, that would require external bodies to be taken into consideration.

Approval of the recommendations was proposed by Cllr T Adams and seconded by Cllr W Fredericks.

RESOLVED

- 1. That a criteria/scoring system is introduced to assist in scrutiny topic selection.**
- 2. That resourcing implications are considered when establishing Task and Finish Groups or other sub-Committees.**
- 3. That a Scrutiny Guide is produced to provide Councillors, Officers and members of the public guidance on the role of the Committee, the purpose of scrutiny, where it fits into the Council, who can be involved, and how it works.**
- 4. To recommend to Cabinet that an executive/scrutiny protocol is implemented to support early and regular engagement between the executive and scrutiny.**

28 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) informed Members that the Cabinet Work Programme was up to date, although the Corporate Plan would need to be approved before substantial items of business could be added.

29 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) informed Members that whilst the Work Programme was up to date, some items may be pushed back, such as the waste contract and medium term financial plan. It was confirmed that the Police and Crime Commissioner had confirmed that he would attend the November meeting, alongside a senior police officer from within the district, to provide a briefing on the difficulties of tackling rural crime in North Norfolk.

The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) reminded Members that in June 2019, the Committee had made a recommendation to the Road Safety Team at Norfolk County Council. He added that whilst the restructuring of the Team had delayed the implementation of that recommendation, they had agreed to it in principle. It was stated that the Norfolk Parking Partnership at NCC had also picked up on concerns of illegal or dangerous parking, and had as a result introduced a zero tolerance policy on illegal parking in restricted areas, whilst also reducing the observational period required to take action from ten to five minutes. The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) informed Members that whilst the Sheringham Primary School Parking Task and Finish Group was established on a time limited basis of three months, concerns were raised that the disbanding of the Group remained ambiguous. Cllr T Adams proposed that with NCC now working to tackle the issue, the Task and Finish Group was no longer necessary and should be formally disbanded. Cllr J Toye seconded the proposal.

The Corporate Director (SB) commented on the timing of the waste contract on the Work Programme, and informed Members that at present, it was expected that it would go to Council for final approval on 21st November, meaning that the Committee and Cabinet would review the contract earlier in the same month. The Chairman noted that there was a unique gestation period for the waste contract, in that whilst it had taken several years to reach this point, the remaining time for review was short. As a result, he informed Members that the Committee would need to focus more on the process of procurement than the details of the contract itself. It was confirmed that it would not be possible to make substantial changes to the contract at this final stage, but Members were reassured that the opportunity had been given for the Committee to provide input prior to the May election.

RESOLVED

That the Sheringham Primary School Parking Task and Finish Group be formally disbanded.

30 PRE-SCRUTINY OF THE CORPORATE PLAN FRAMEWORK

The Major Projects Manager introduced the Report and informed Members that he and the other Work Stream Leaders in attendance had worked with SROs and Cabinet sponsors to form the high level framework of the plan, which stemmed from the administrations six key priorities. He explained that the Corporate Plan provided an outline of the Council's aspirations for the next four years and beyond, under which delivery and action plans could be set in place to implement projects.

Questions and Discussion

The Major Projects Manager identified the six key themes of the Corporate Plan as; affordable housing, boosting business growth, customer focus, environment, financial sustainability and quality of life. It was explained that underneath these six key themes, underlying challenges had been identified, with responses and areas for action, which Cabinet had chosen to share with Members for consultation. As a result, the Committee was required to determine how to proceed, in order to provide adequate scrutiny and positive input to the existing framework. The Major Projects Manager stated that there was still work to do, but this was the first step, and whilst the Work Stream Leaders were not certain of their requirements, they were happy to continue their involvement, if capacity allowed.

The Chairman stated for those new to the formulation of a Corporate Plan, that it was essential to stress the importance of the document as the foundation of all of the Council's work going forward within the term. He added that the Plan would be underpinned by documents such as the Local Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan, and it was crucial therefore, that Members understood how it would feed into these. The Chairman stated that with the purpose of the Corporate Plan explained, it was for the Committee to decide how best to proceed, though it was clear that a structured approach with sufficient time to undertake a full review was a necessity. The Chairman therefore proposed that a review day be held in early October in order to undertake a focused review of the existing Draft Corporate Plan Framework. It was stressed that the review would need to stay at a strategic high-level approach to avoid discussing action or delivery plans, that would come at a later stage. The date of the review was stressed as equally important, as it would need to allow time for Members and groups to review the existing framework to formulate questions and have these answered by the Work Stream Leaders, SROs and Cabinet sponsors prior to the meeting.

Cllr A Brown asked whether the review process could take place at Full Council or an additional O&S meeting. Cllr S Bütikofer stated that she wanted all Members to be involved and expressed support for a one day O&S review, but warned that due to time constraints, it would need to take place early in October to meet the November deadline. The Corporate Director (SB) clarified for Members that the intention was for the final version of the Corporate Plan to be approved by Council on 20th November, having been to Cabinet on 4th November. Clarification was then given that group discussion of the existing Draft Corporate Plan Framework would not be arranged as a formal process, though groups were welcome to discuss the document amongst themselves to formulate questions.

The 8th October was suggested as a potential date, though it was accepted that the Council Leader's attendance would be crucial, and that a date would need to be agreed outside of the meeting.

Cllr W Fredericks thanked all involved in bringing the Draft Corporate Plan Framework to its current stage, and expressed support for a review day. Cllr N Pearce reiterated the thanks and stated that the decision to involve all Members and a range of Officers was a radical overturn and new approach that he was pleased to see.

The Major Projects Manager asked what resources would be available for the Work Stream Leaders to continue their involvement in the development of the Plan. Cllr S Bütikofer replied that she would discuss the issue with the Corporate Directors, as

she was aware that normal work must continue for the Work Stream Leaders.

Cllr N Housden asked if there was any briefing document available to explain how the current challenges, responses, and areas for action had been identified. Cllr S Bütikofer replied it may be possible to offer explanations prior to the meeting, and added that she would be happy to meet with Members to discuss this. The Chairman asked if the Work Stream Leaders had any notes available that could be shared. For clarification, Cllr S Bütikofer informed Members that the basis of the Corporate Plan had been set by the manifesto pledges on which they had been elected. The Corporate Director (SB) added that the Corporate Plan put in place a strategy for the next four years, and whilst he hoped there was general consensus around the key themes and underlying principles, it was not yet a finished piece of work. Cllr N Housden replied that he was not looking for great detail, but wanted as much supporting information as possible prior to the review. The Chairman replied that Q&A completed before the review would also inform debate on the day. The Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) explained for Members that had not been involved in scrutiny reviews of this kind, that questions from Members would be submitted to the Work Stream Leaders, SROs and Cabinet sponsors in advance of the meeting, for answers to be provided to begin the review from an informed position.

The Major Projects Manager accepted that due to the size of the document, presentation was difficult, but noted that options were being considered to improve this.

Cllr S Bütikofer stated that it was important for Members to understand that this level of consultation had not been undertaken before at the Council, and that the aim of allowing further consultation, was to ensure that the challenges and areas for action identified were correct. Cllr V Gay added this approach worked well in connection with the Local Plan, and Members could check whether the documents complimented one another. The Chairman agreed and stated that this would be a good approach that could identify gaps.

Cllr J Toye stated that there was no heading for joining up the key themes, and suggested that there were clear links between each of the themes that needed to be recognised. The Corporate Director (SB) replied that the graphic representation had been a choice, and that other options could be considered to better represent the link between each theme.

Cllr J Rest stated that the 8th October only allowed a relatively short timescale for questions to be formulated, to which the Corporate Director (SB) replied that officers would require at least five working days to respond to the questions and a balance had to be found. The Chairman added that if questions were missed in advance of the review, this would not preclude them from being asked on the day. Cllr N Housden stated that he felt the review was a brilliant idea and asked for clarification on which sections were open to questioning. The Corporate Director (SB) replied that questions could be asked of the entire framework, though the six key themes were set by the electoral manifesto of the administration and would not be changed. Cllr N Pearce stated that he was positive about the approach, but asked if a timeline or framework could be set to avoid slowing down the process. Cllr A Brown added that a timeline and plan for the review would be helpful in advance of the meeting. It was confirmed that once dates had been agreed, a briefing paper would be circulated amongst Members that would clarify this information, followed by a detailed agenda once the prerequisite Q&A had been completed.

A half day review of the Draft Corporate Plan Framework was proposed by Cllr N Housden and seconded by Cllr N Pearce.

RESOLVED

That a half day review of the Draft Corporate Plan Framework takes place in October, date to be confirmed.

31 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

32 TO CONSIDER ANY EXEMPT MATTERS ARISING FROM CONSIDERATION OF THE PUBLIC BUSINESS OF THE AGENDA

The meeting ended at 11.20 am.

Chairman