

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 16 September 2020 in the remotely via Zoom at 9.30 am

Committee Members Present:	Mr N Dixon (Chairman)	Mr H Blathwayt
	Mrs W Fredericks	Mr P Heinrich
	Mr G Mancini-Boyle	Miss L Shires
	Mrs E Spagnola	Mr J Toye
	Mr A Varley	
Other Members Present:	Mr J Rest (Observer)	Mr E Seward (Observer)
	Mr C Cushing (Observer)	
Officers in Attendance:	Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) (DS&GOS), Chief Executive (CE), Democratic Services Manager (DSM), Head of Economic and Community Development (HECD) and Chief Technical Accountant (CTA)	

53 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr T Adams and Cllr N Housden.

54 SUBSTITUTES

None.

55 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

56 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 12th August 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

On p3 Cllr L Shires stated that her comments on continued expenditure referred to Cabinet spending plans.

57 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

58 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

59 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

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

None received.

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

- i. The DS&GOS informed Members that Cabinet had accepted the Committee's recommendation to cooperate with the Committee on a pre-scrutiny session, to review the administration's income generation and savings plans, and similarly the HFAM had agreed to provide a summary report of the Council's reserves for the same meeting. Both reports would be expected to come to either the October or November OSC meeting.

62 2019/20 OUTTURN REPORT (PERIOD 12 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT)

Cllr E Seward – Portfolio Holder for Finance introduced the report and informed Members that there had been a year end surplus of approximately £100k, which had been transferred to reserves. He added that the statement of accounts had been prepared within the required timeframe, and would now go to GRAC for sign-off. Cllr E Seward stated he had revisited his comments from the 2019-20 budget setting process, and confirmed that whilst some of the expected benefits from the business rates pool had been realised, uncertainty around Central Government spending reviews remained. It was noted that towards the end of the financial year, it was evident that the Coronavirus lockdown had a negative impact on the Council's finances, estimated at a combined shortfall of £250k. It was reported that the Council's expenditure for the year had been higher than normal, largely as a result of the Sandscaping project, though this was supported by significant external funding. On reserves, Cllr E Seward stated that the Council had begun the 19/20 year with approximately £18.8m in general and earmarked reserves, though a surplus of £2.4m from the previous budget had increased this figure.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle stated that the treasury had recently opened a business rates consultation, and asked what the Council's response would be. The CTA replied that she was in the process of drafting a response to the consultation with the Revenues Manager that took into account a range of issues over approximately forty questions. She added that they were on-track to submit the response by the required deadline and would share it once complete.
- ii. The recommendations were proposed by Cllr W Fredericks and seconded by Cllr J Toye.

RESOLVED

To recommend the following to Full Council:

- 1. The provisional outturn position for the General Fund revenue account for 2019/20.**
- 2. The transfers to and from reserves as detailed within the report (and appendix C) along with the corresponding updates to the 2020/21 budget.**
- 3. Allocate the surplus of £97,114 to the General Reserve.**
- 4. The financing of the 2019/20 capital programme as detailed within the**

report and at Appendix D.

5. The balance on the General Reserve of £2.404 million (after allocation of the underspend per recommendation c).
6. The updated capital programme for 2020/21 to 2023/24 and scheme financing as outlined within the report and detailed at Appendix E.
7. The outturn position in respect of the Prudential Indicators for 2019/20 as detailed in Appendix F.
8. Agree the award of the new cleaning contract to Eco Cleen Services Ltd.

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

The CE introduced the report and informed Members that the District had been very busy with tourists during July and August, which had required working collaboratively with local businesses to maintain a safe environment with very low Coronavirus transmission rates, which was a positive outcome for the Council. He added that this had caused additional pressures on services with regards to cleansing and litter collection. It was reported that the Council had also administered the discretionary business grants scheme, with final payments agreed on Wednesday 9th September. The CE stated that the Council had been successful in securing a tourism support grant that would be administered in the coming months, in addition to the Council's existing efforts that included the use of a fogging machine to deep cleanse high contact areas such as public conveniences and play areas. He added that the Council had also been successful in securing £1.17m of funding from the Getting Building fund, which would support the delivery of the North Walsham Heritage Action Zone project. With regards to the Council's leisure contracts, it was reported that there had been funding pressures for the Council as it was obliged to support the facilities during closure, though the leisure centres had been reopened for dry sports from 15th July, and swimming facilities in Sheringham and North Walsham had reopened from 20th August. The CE noted that officers and Members continued to take part in the Norfolk Resilience Forum, and the new Health Engagement Board to ensure that Norfolk's Coronavirus response remained in-line with national guidelines.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The Chairman noted that he understood North Norfolk had one of the lowest infection rates in the country, then asked whether the recent outbreak that had occurred south of Norwich had any impact on the District. The CE replied that there was an understanding that meat production plants were particularly vulnerable to wide scale transmission, though Norfolk was a pilot for the local outbreak control plan, and Public Health Norfolk had maintained clear lines of communication whilst handling of the event. He added that there were no factory employees resident in North Norfolk, but County-wide sharing of knowledge and best practice had taken place as a result of the crisis. The CE stated that the low rate of infection in Norfolk following the outbreak, suggested that it had been handled appropriately, and hopefully this approach would continue.
- ii. Cllr J Toye stated that there were concerns that when children returned to school, hidden cases of domestic abuse may become more visible, and asked if there had been any indication of this, and whether any support was available for victims. The CE replied that the Council was party to multiagency response networks for these circumstances, though he was not aware that there had

been any significant increase reported in the District. He added that some referrals for homelessness, loss of tenancies and subsequent family crises had been referred to the Council, and suggested that he could report back if these were above historic levels. The Chairman noted that a number of tenants had lost their accommodation during the crisis, and asked if there was any further information on the reasons for this, as it was his understanding that an eviction ban had been in place. The CE replied that he would look to provide more detail on the issue following the meeting.

- iii. Cllr L Shires referred to point 2.8 on p37 regarding mobile testing facilities, and raised concerns that many residents were not able to access adequate testing. She asked if the issues would be resolved soon, and whether NNDC had been informed of any remedial action. The CE replied that the Council had not received any complaints on testing up to the last few weeks, though as children returned to school across the country, this had increased pressure on the testing system. He added that he and the leader had raised concerns with Members of Parliament, though testing capacity was a national issue that required Central Government action to resolve.
- iv. Cllr H Blathwayt stated that he had been very impressed by the Council's response to the crisis, but asked if there had been a democratic deficit caused by the remote nature of Councillor's work. He added that in some cases responses from the planning department appeared to have been delayed by staff absences, then asked if the number of delegated decisions had increased as a result of the crisis. The CE replied that the lockdown had required a number of delegated decisions to be made, mainly with regards to the closing and reopening of public conveniences and play areas, which had been reported to both Cabinet and OSC meetings. With regards to the potential issues of democratic deficit, the CE stated that with the current restrictions in place on public meetings, remote working had provided a transparent way for Council's to continue to operate. Finally, on the planning issues, it was reported that a single point of contact had been put in place for the department to monitor the response times of different teams, though this would be kept under review and feedback was appreciated. Cllr H Blathwayt replied that the planning contact had been excellent, though it may be necessary to appoint a deputy to cover absences.
- v. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle asked if there were to be a local Covid outbreak within the District, was there a working plan in place to control this. The CE confirmed that there was a plan in place, which included a locally managed contact tracing system for Norfolk, with an NNDC team available to make house-calls if necessary.
- vi. Cllr P Heinrich referred to the possibility of a second lockdown and asked if contingency measures were in place to manage this. The CE replied that plans were in place and the local coordination centres could be re-established if required, to deliver food and medicine. He added that social distancing measures remained in place following the end of the peak tourism season, and there was anecdotal support for these to remain in place for the foreseeable future.
- vii. Cllr L Shires noted that the majority of the public appeared to have accepted

wearing masks and sanitising when entering shops, and asked whether there were any plans to reissue these guidelines to reassure higher risk residents. The CE replied that as a public authority NNDC would continue to promote the national safety messages which at present was hands, face and space. He added that this message would continue to be promoted through all Council channels, in addition to other messages such as the rule of six. In reference to the still shielding individuals, it was hoped that as tourism numbers began to fall moving into the winter, that high risk residents may begin to feel safe and reassured about going out in public.

- viii. The recommendation was proposed by Cllr H Blathwayt and seconded by Cllr L Shires.

RESOLVED

To note and comment upon the Council's actions during July and August in supporting communities and businesses across North Norfolk in managing Recovery from the Coronavirus Pandemic; and in preparing for an anticipated increase in infections during the autumn and winter months ahead.

64 NORTH WALSHAM TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

Cllr E Seward introduced the item and stated that it was an exciting opportunity to make significant improvements in North Walsham that he hoped would last for years to come. The HECD added that the funding award granted to the Council was a very significant sum of money that would enable placemaking on a scale that would achieve the original ambitions of the bid, as well as increasing footfall and creating a more useable town centre for residents and visitors alike.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The Chairman stated at the September Cabinet meeting he had noted the project's contribution to both the business growth and quality of life themes of the Corporate Plan. As a result, he had asked what the specific outcomes of the project would be, how they would be measured, and whether there had been any cost-benefit analysis attached to these outcomes. He added that it was his intention to take an objective approach to the project, so that it could be adequately reviewed once complete.
- ii. The recommendations were proposed by Cllr P Heinrich and seconded by Cllr A Varley.

RESOLVED

- 1. To recommend to Full Council that the success of bid by this Council be noted and that the sum of £1,170,000 (from a grant received from the Getting Building Fund) be allocated in the budget towards the town centre placemaking elements of North Walsham High Street Heritage Action Zone.**
- 2. Authority be delegated to Cabinet, in consultation with the North Walsham Town Centre Heritage Action Zone Working Party, to determine the terms of the implementation of the scheme, including the involvement of interested parties, scheme design and implementation.**

65 OFFICER DELEGATED DECISIONS (AUGUST 2020)

- i. The CE introduced the report and stated that he was happy to take questions if required.
- ii. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle proposed to note the report and was second by Cllr W Fredericks.

RESOLVED

To note the report.

66 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The DS&GOS informed Members that a number of property transaction reports had gone to Cabinet in September, though they were not deemed necessary for review by the Committee. It was stated that the MTFS was expected in October alongside a performance management report.

RESOLVED

To note the Cabinet Work Programme.

67 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

- i. The DS&GOS reminded Committee Members that an email had been shared requesting suggestions for the Work Programme, which had included guidance on the selection criteria. He added that a Work Programme setting session could take place at the next meeting, in addition to the anticipated items.
- ii. Cllr L Shires asked if suggestions for the Work Programme should be made in addition to the outstanding items, to which the DS&GOS replied that additional items would be preferable, though requesting that existing items be brought forward could help to prioritise topics. Cllr Shires asked if staff absence data would be included in the performance management report, to which the CE replied that it could be provided. The DS&GOS added that the new performance management software would enable data to be taken and reviewed in real time at meetings, as opposed to reviewing all data. The Chairman reminded Members that OSC was entitled to ask questions on all areas of Council business, and should bear this in mind when submitting items for the Work Programme.
- iii. Cllr W Fredericks asked if the Committee would receive regular updates about the North Walsham HAZ project. The DS&GOS replied that the Committee would be able to request updates if required.
- iv. Cllr L Shires asked if the Digital by Design briefing was still planned to go ahead, to which the Chairman replied that he expected this would take place in October. The CE stated that once the management restructure was complete, there would be a responsible officer to deliver the presentation

- v. Cllr H Blathwayt referred to waste contract monitoring and asked if this should be more frequently reviewed than six-monthly. The Chairman noted that it had been appropriate to wait for six months to allow time for the new contractors to settle into the role, however this could now be brought forward if necessary. The CE stated that pressure had increased on the contractor during the peak tourism season, though NNDC had been one of the few local authorities in Norfolk to maintain a full service throughout lockdown.
- vi. The request to bring a waste contract monitoring report to the November meeting was proposed by Cllr A Varley and seconded by Cllr J Toye.

RESOLVED

- 1. To note the Work Programme**
- 2. To request that a Waste Contract Monitoring Report is added to the Work Programme for the November meeting.**

68 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was proposed by Cllr P Heinrich and seconded by Cllr L Shires to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public.

RESOLVED

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A (as amended) to the Act.

69 SHERINGHAM LEISURE CENTRE OPTIONS

The HECD introduced the report and informed Members that it contained the costs and/or benefits of an earlier than anticipated closure of the existing facility, with the caveat that the analysis was based on a number of assumptions with regards to Covid-19. He added that the report outlined a number of trigger points as a result of changes in circumstances, e.g. a future lockdown that may trigger reconsideration of the decision.

- i. The Chairman sought to ensure that Members were happy that the report answered the original question as intended, and whether the necessary options had been considered.
- ii. It was proposed by Cllr H Blathwayt and seconded by Cllr E Spagnola to note the report and Cabinet's response.

RESOLVED

To note the content of the report and Cabinet's decisions in relation to the report's findings.

The meeting ended at 11.40 am.

Chairman