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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 14 October 2020 in the remotely via Zoom at 9.30 am

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| Committee | Mr N Dixon (Chairman) | Ms L Withington (Vice-Chairman) |
| Members Present: | Mr H Blathway Mr P Heinrich Mr G Mancini-Boyle Mrs E Spagnola Mr A Varley Mr C Cushing (Observer) Mr T FitzPatrick (Observer) Mrs P Grove-Jones (Observer) Mr E Seward (Observer) | Mrs W Fredericks Mr N Housden Miss L Shires Mr J Toye Mrs S Bütikofer (Observer) Mrs A Fitch-Tillett (Observer) Mr V FitzPatrick (Observer) Mr J Rest (Observer) |

Officers in Attendance: Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny), Chief Executive, Democratic Services Manager and Policy and Performance Management Officer (PPMO)

Also in attendance:

70 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

71 SUBSTITUTES

None.

72 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

73 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2020 were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- i. Cllr P Grove-Jones be listed as in attendance.
- ii. On page 6 Cllr W Fredericks asked for the North Walsham HAZ project monitoring to be added to the Committee's Work Programme.

74 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

75 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

76 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

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

None received.

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

- i. The DS&GOS informed Members that there were no responses from the Council or Cabinet, though Cllr E Spagnola had offered to provide an update on discussion of Ambulance Response Times that had recently taken place at NHOSC.
- ii. Cllr E Spagnola informed Members that it was now the third time NHOSC had discussed the issue since she had joined the Committee, and the issue had had still not been resolved. She noted that questions had been asked on the actions had been taken to address the issues and the ongoing impact on staff morale. It was reported that the Committee planned to revisit the item again in six months' time, as the Committee were determined to ensure that the issues are resolved. The Chairman stated that whilst it was encouraging to learn that the Committee continued to monitor the issue, it was important to remember that the ambulance trust was in special measures, and that larger issues might take priority.
- iii. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle asked whether the current ambulance response times were known. Cllr S Butikofer replied that she was part of a working group monitoring response times in rural parts of North Norfolk, and whilst they varied significantly, they were particularly poor in the Wells area. She added that she could provide more detailed information after the next working group meeting.
- iv. The Chairman noted that a request had been made for an update on the single point of contact for the Planning Department, to which the CE replied that he had spoken to the individual within the last week, and could report that the arrangements were working well with good response times. He added that the Department was still determining a high number of applications, with NNDC receiving 248 applications between March and September. It was noted that this was lower than average for NNDC, but still notably higher than several authorities within the County. Cllr L Withington asked when the outcome of the project would be reported back to Members, to which the CE replied that the trial was planned to run from July until the end of October, and the outcome could be reported once complete. He added that the trial had sought to develop a better understanding of Members enquiries to the Planning Department, and use this to help improve the service.
- v. The Chairman asked when the all Member Digital by Design briefing would

take place, to which Cllr S Butikofer replied that she had spoken to the two officers responsible some time ago, and expected it to have been arranged. It was confirmed that Democratic Services were awaiting the outcome of the management restructure, and this would now be followed up.

- vi. The Chairman asked whether a date had been established for the income generation and savings pre-scrutiny session, to which the DS&GOS replied that this was expected in November, which was confirmed by Cllr S Butikofer.

79 DELIVERY PLAN - RE-PRIORITISATION DUE TO COVID

Cllr S Butikofer introduced the report and informed Members that due to the significant impact that Covid-19 had on the Council, Cabinet and CLT had reviewed the delivery plan to focus on key priorities. It was reported that once priority objectives were completed, then new priorities would be added from the original delivery plan.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr L Withington referred to business growth and noted that in the performance report, it was suggested that the new development plan had been deferred, and asked whether these items should be developed in unison. The CE replied that the delivery plan did contain support for tourism businesses, for which the Council had secured £330k of funding. Referring to the development plan and engaging with businesses specifically, the CE stated that the project had not progressed as anticipated due to Covid, though a successful business survey had been completed in June with over 300 responses that was now being used to inform the work of the Business Growth and Economic Development Team. He added that a number of additional actions had been taken to support businesses, such as lobbying Central Government to support field study and outdoor visitor centres that would be unlikely to host school visits until 2021. It was noted that whilst tourism businesses had suffered during the initial lockdown, there had been a significant increase in business throughout July, August and September as a result of people taking more staycations. In summary, the CE stated that business support had been tailored during the pandemic, with £55m of Government grants paid to small businesses, and £2.76m in discretionary grants delivered by the Economic Growth Team, which had limited its capacity to focus on the other priorities contained within the delivery plan. The Chairman suggested that the question sought to address whether the two pieces of work ought to happen simultaneously, to which Cllr S Butikofer replied that the performance report focused on the first quarter only, and work would now have progressed beyond what had been reported. She added that this work would likely be covered in the performance report of the second quarter.
- ii. The CE informed Members that the performance report covered objectives set in the original delivery plan and covered quarter 1 from April to June, which had been significantly impacted by the Council's response to Covid-19. As a result, recognising this impact meant that it was appropriate to reprioritise the delivery plan objectives to match the Council's current capacity. It was hoped that by reducing the priorities from 90 to 18 key objectives, that the Council

would now be able to fully implement the delivery plan whilst responding to the ongoing crisis, and continue to delivery over and above its statutory obligations.

- iii. Cllr L Withington referred to the Customer Focus element of the delivery plan, and asked whether there was any progress to report on the customer charter, and whether a strategy would be used to develop the charter or vice versa. Cllr S Butikofer replied that she was in the process of developing the charter with senior officers and added that she did not feel the hard work of the Customer Services Team had been covered and wished to place on record her thanks for their hard work helping residents throughout the pandemic. In response to a question from the Chairman, Cllr S Butikofer informed Members that a customer service strategy would drive the process of developing the customer focus objectives.
- iv. Cllr L Withington referred to the Environment Forum meetings that had gained a large amount of support from the public, and asked whether the meetings could be resumed virtually or by some other means. Cllr S Butikofer replied that the Council had hosted three meetings prior to the pandemic, and would be happy to consider reconvening the meetings via zoom in the near future. She added that tree planting had been resumed which provided another positive opportunity for community engagement in responding to climate change.
- v. It was confirmed, following a question from Cllr J Toye that the overall aims of the Council had not changed, though priorities had been altered to account for the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's capacity.
- vi. Cllr L Shires stated that she fully supported further engagement with the public on climate change by resuming the Environment Forum meetings via Zoom. She then asked when the next performance monitoring report would come to the Committee, to which Cllr S Butikofer replied that the next report was due in December.
- vii. Cllr N Housden suggested that whilst Members do not normally get involved in operational matters, he felt that it was confusing to cross reference between the delivery plan and performance reports, and Members should focus instead on the content of the delivery plan.
- viii. The CE informed members in relation to comments on the Environment Forum that the Council had advertised positions for an Environmental Policy Officer and a Climate Change Projects Officer, in order to increase the Council's capacity to move these priorities forward.
- ix. It was proposed by Cllr P Heinrich and seconded by Cllr J Toye to note and agree the reprioritised delivery plan, and to recommend to Cabinet that consideration is given to resuming the Environment Forum Meetings.

RESOLVED

1. **To note and agree to the revised Delivery Plan priorities as detailed in the report.**
2. **To recommend to Cabinet that consideration is given to resuming the Environmental Forum meetings remotely, or by any other appropriate means, to maintain public engagement and support in the climate change agenda and the environmental actions of the Delivery Plan.**

80 MANAGING PERFORMANCE QUARTER 1 2020/2021

The PPMO introduced the report and informed Members that once approved, the key priorities of the corporate and delivery plans were placed into the new Inphase performance monitoring system, alongside operational performance data. She added that the new system would soon be available for Members to use online, and suggested that she would be happy to run a briefing session to fully introduce and train all Members on the use of the software in the near future.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle referred to the Council's work supporting communities during the pandemic on page 16, and asked whether this support would be scaled back in the near future. The CE replied that the community support programme had been implemented at the beginning of the national lockdown and noted that whilst the number of requests for assistance had declined significantly, the response could be stepped up at any time to respond to an increase in cases. The CE reported that the Council was also working with Community Action Norfolk to map the community support groups that worked with the Council, in order to develop a directory for future assistance.
- ii. Cllr N Housden asked whether the Council staffing situation was in anyway depleted by the first wave of lockdown, in respect of the impact this could have on responding to a second wave. The CE replied that staff were in no way depleted at the present time. Cllr N Housden then asked if the delivery plan was available on the Council's website, to which the PPMO replied that the delivery plan was available to view via Inphase hosted pages on the Intranet, and she would provide access to this following the previously mentioned briefing session.
- iii. Cllr C Cushing referred to delayed information contained within the report, and asked whether more up to date data could be gathered for each meeting. The PPMO replied that as a result of the Council's response to the pandemic, officers had been asked to delay inputting some performance data until August, to allow high demand service areas time to catch-up. She added that once Members were given access to the Inphase system, then performance data could be accessed at any point, meaning that Members could see the most up to date data available. It was noted that there could still be some delays to performance data, as it was added to the system on a pre-determined timescale. The Chairman asked how this process would impact the reports coming to Committees, to which the PPMO replied that the reports could only provide a snapshot of data, but it would be up to each Committee to determine what to review. It was confirmed that Councillors would be provided with login details at the start of the training session.

- iv. Cllr L Shires referred to the percentage of planning applications determined within the target time period on page 59, and asked whether data was available on those that had not been determined within the timeframe. The CE replied that whilst this data was not provided, he would seek to determine whether this could be included in future reports. The PPMO added that the indicators included in the report were a combination of national targets set by the Government, KPIs related to the Corporate Plan, management and service indicators. Cllr L Shires stated that she would welcome any additional information added to the system.
- v. Cllr J Toye sought clarification on whether the targets were nationally set, to which the PPMO replied that most operational matters had Government set targets that the Council was required to meet. She added that the Council often set its targets above Government expectations to ensure compliance. Cllr J Toye noted that some targets appeared to be falling, such as access to services via the Council's website, and asked whether there was an explanation for this. The PPMO replied that as services became available on the website, there were initial surges that declined once the service was established. She added that the relevant senior officer might be able to provide a better response on this specific matter.
- vi. Cllr N Housden asked whether it would be possible to differentiate between the targets once access to the system had been granted, and whether Members would be able to request or set different targets. The PPMO replied that this would be possible and Members were free to make target recommendations to Cabinet.
- vii. The Chairman referred to the zero based budgeting identified in the report and asked whether it was realistic given the timescale available prior to setting the budget. The CE replied that it was his understanding that this would be done on a trial basis for a limited number of service areas.
- viii. Cllr L Shires suggested in relation to Cllr J Toye's comments on falling targets, that he should also request information on when payments were expected throughout the financial year, as this would help identify trends. She then asked if there were other authorities in the region that used the Inphase system that could be used for performance comparisons. The PPMO replied that many other authorities used the system, including Norwich City Council and ideas could be drawn from this. Cllr L Shires noted that social housing figures were falling, which would have a significant impact on communities, and asked whether more could be done to address this issue. The CE replied that whilst Inphase provided performance data and some limited contextual data, he hoped that this could still be used to help the Council's partners address the issue. He added that the new system should be used in this way to help the Committee identify areas requiring greater scrutiny, in order to improve the Council's performance. The Chairman reminded Members that local homes for local people was a key theme of the corporate plan, and this should be remembered when addressing housing issues.
- ix. Cllr H Blathwayt referred to benchmarking against other Council's, and

suggested that it was important that these comparisons be made with similar Council's only. The PPMO replied that CIPFA provided information on similar Council's that grouped them into families for easier comparisons to be made.

- x. The PPMO provided a brief demonstration of the Inphase system to show housing waiting listing figures over the past three years.

RESOLVED

To note the report and endorse the actions being taken by Strategic Leadership Team detailed in Appendix A – Managing Performance.

81 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME SETTING 2020-21

The DS&GOS introduced the item and informed Members that as the municipal year had started during lockdown, a Work Programme had never been formally set. As a result, gaps were beginning to appear as Covid related reports began to subside, and it was now necessary for the Committee to agree new items of business. It was reported that three key items had been suggested by Committee Members which included; the affordable housing strategy, development planning performance, and a preventative maintenance schedule for the Council's beach huts and chalets. In addition, there were several regular items that were expected, such as enforcement board updates, waste contract monitoring, and the crime and disorder briefing. The DS&GOS noted that Committee Members should also bear in mind how to approach each item, such as pre-scrutiny or a more in-depth approach utilising working groups.

- i. Cllr L Withington stated that whilst she agreed with the proposed items, she asked whether the beach huts preventative maintenance issue should include all Council assets. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle stated that he had requested that the Council look at preventative maintenance, as in the long-term it would likely work out cheaper for the Council.
- ii. The DSM suggested that some items listed for discussion would be covered by the corporate and delivery plan, which meant that timing and outcomes required careful consideration.
- iii. Cllr P Heinrich suggested that the Council had good survey data on its assets, but he had never seen a maintenance schedule and agreed that the item should cover maintenance of all Council assets.
- iv. Cllr N Housden stated that looking at the performance management data using the Inphase system could generate too many questions for meetings, and asked whether a system was required for managing these questions. It was suggested that both submitting questions in advance of meetings and the use of corporate plan themed scrutiny panels could be a means of addressing any increase in workload.
- v. Members agreed that they were happy to progress the items submitted for inclusion on the Work Programme, subject to further discussion once the required work had been completed. Members also confirmed that enforcement

board updates should return to the Work Programme.

- vi. In reference to the crime and disorder update, Cllr L Shires noted that during his last briefing the PCC had referenced the seriousness of domestic violence in the County, and suggested that this could be a suitable item for the next briefing, with reference to the impact of Covid. On the planning performance item, Cllr L Shires suggested that this should coincide with a report on the outcome of the planning point of contact trial.
- vii. On discussion of website functionality, the DS&GOS suggested that some areas of the Council's website could be improved in conjunction with the digital by design proposals, and encouraged Members to raise this at the briefing.
- viii. Items considered suitable for the Scrutiny panels were discussed and the DS&GOS suggested that if Members were keen to pursue this approach, then he would prepare a draft terms of reference for the Committee to review, as a resolution would be required to formally establish the panels. It was noted that membership of the working groups would also be open to non-committee Members, so long as they were chaired by Scrutiny Members.
- ix. It was proposed by Cllr J Toye and seconded by Cllr G Mancini-Boyle to add the items stated within the report to the work programme.

RESOLVED

1. **To agree the following substantive items be added to the Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme for the remainder of the 2020-21 municipal year:**
 - **Affordable Housing Strategy.**
 - **Development Planning Performance Review.**
 - **Council Property Assets: Preventive Maintenance Strategy.**
2. **To agree to include any appropriate items from the potential items list that could fall within the scope of the OSC Working Groups, established to scrutinise the themes of the Corporate Plan, once the Terms of Reference for the Working Groups had been agreed.**

82 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The DS&GOS informed Members that the Council Tax Discount Determination and budget monitoring reports were both expected to go to Cabinet in November and as a result, would also come to Scrutiny, in addition to the existing planned items.

RESOLVED

To note the Cabinet Work Programme.

83 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The DS&GOS reminded Members that the waste contract monitoring report would come to the November meeting, as well as the income generation and savings pre-

scrutiny session, in advance of the MTFS in December.

RESOLVED

To note the Work Programme

84 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 11.55 am.

Chairman

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