

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 10 February 2021 remotely via Zoom at 9.30 am

Committee Members Present:	Mr N Dixon (Chairman)	Ms L Withington (Vice-Chairman)
	Mr H Blathwayt Mr P Heinrich Mrs E Spagnola Mr C Cushing	Mrs W Fredericks Mr G Mancini-Boyle Mr A Varley Mr A Brown
Other Members Present:	Mrs A Fitch-Tillett (Observer)	Ms V Gay (Observer)
	Mrs P Grove-Jones (Observer) Mr J Rest (Observer) Miss L Shires (Observer)	Mr N Lloyd (Observer) Mr E Seward (Observer) Mr J Toye (Observer)
Officers in Attendance:	Democratic Services and Governance Officer (Scrutiny) (DSGOS), Chief Executive (CE), Democratic Services Manager (DSM), Director for Communities (DFC), Chief Technical Accountant (CTA), Policy and Performance Management Officer (PPMO) and Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth (ADSG)	

134 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr N Housden and Cllr P Fisher.

135 SUBSTITUTES

None.

136 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

137 MINUTES

Minutes from the meeting held on 13th January 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

138 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

139 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

140 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

141 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A

MEMBER

At the meeting held on 13th January 2020, Cllr A Brown requested that the Committee consider the viability of implementing a food waste collection service across the District. The DFC attended to provide an update on the process and implications of implementing a food waste collection service:

The DFC stated that during procurement of the current waste contract, a costed option for food waste collections had been included, which could be implemented at any point during the contract, provided reasonable notice was given. He added that there would be an additional cost to deliver this service, and at the time that the contract was agreed, it was not considered that the benefits would outweigh the costs. It was reported that the Government's Environment Bill was passing through the parliamentary process, and was likely to include a number of provisions included in the Waste and Related Services Strategy, such as the mandatory collection of food waste. It was noted that the Government were likely to introduce food waste collections in 2023, though this could be subject to change. The DFC stated that it was normal for the Government to provide additional burdens funding when introducing legislation of this kind, and it was therefore prudent to wait until the exact requirements were known prior to implementation.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr A Brown asked whether any preparations or discussions had taken place with the Contractors, or whether this would be delayed until the outcome of the Environment Bill was known. He added that he wished to place on record his thanks to the Waste Collection Team for their continued hard work under difficult circumstances. The DFC replied that conversations with the contractor on the introduction of a food waste collection service had taken place, and would likely resume once the outcome of the Environment Bill was known, though no discussions had taken place on the potential for an earlier introduction. It was noted that there would be significant costs involved in implementing food waste collections, and these would not be covered by new burdens funding if implemented prior to becoming mandatory. As a result, the DFC advised Members that it would be prudent to wait until the outcome of the Environment Bill was known, before implementing the service. He added that an independent review of a countywide food waste collection scheme had been completed, which included consideration of cost mitigation by County Council returning the benefit of avoided disposals to Districts as recycling credits. It was noted that this would only be viable if all avoided disposal costs were returned to Districts, and would also require residual waste to move to three or four weekly collections, which could be challenging for residents.
- ii. Cllr A Brown noted that food waste collection had been well received elsewhere, and noted that he was happy with the response at the current time. The Chairman suggested that it could be useful to request a report to consider the full implications of food waste collections at a more appropriate time, once the outcome of the Environment Bill was known. Cllr A Brown agreed and stated that he was happy to propose it be added to the Work Programme.
- iii. Cllr G Mancini Boyle suggested that it could be possible to move residual waste collections to three weekly, if food waste collections adequately reduced the amount of residual waste produced. The Chairman suggested that this could be considered as part of the report in the future.

- iv. Cllr P Heinrich noted that he would be very reluctant to see residual waste collections extended beyond the current two weeks.
- v. It was proposed by Cllr W Fredericks and seconded by Cllr A Brown to add review of the implementation of a food waste collection service to the Work Programme, at a time to be agreed, once the outcome of the Environment Bill was known.

RESOLVED

To request that the Director of Communities provide a report outlining the process and associated costs of implementing a food waste collection service in North Norfolk.

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

The DSGOS informed Members that the recommendations from the Car Parking Income Data report and the Base Budget report had all been accepted by Cabinet.

143 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2022-2025

Cllr E Seward – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets introduced the report and informed Members that whilst deficits were forecasted in future years, the Council continued to fund services and deliver a balanced budget. He added that whilst the Council remained prudent, it was uncertainty around future levels of financial support from Central Government that were the key cause of forecasted deficits. Cllr E Seward stated that it was important to ensure that the Council was operating as efficiently as possible, whilst still being able to meet its corporate objectives. He added that there had been plans to commence efficiency savings proposals in the 2020/21 financial year, but Covid-19 had limited the resources available to undertake these exercises. It was reported that work would soon begin on a zero base budgeting exercise, alongside a request for departments to consider the impact of a 10% reduction in service budgets, a review of fees and charges, and the creation of an asset repair fund.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The Chairman sought clarification that the approach to the Council's finances was a mix of prudence and patience, to wait and see what level of financial support would be offered by Central Government. Cllr E Seward replied that there was an element of waiting for the outcome of spending reviews, though there were also plans to implement several savings proposals in the summer. He added that some proposals would remain as back up options, if the financial situation further deteriorated. The Chairman asked for an indication of the urgency that the savings proposals identified in Appendix E would be treated. Cllr E Seward replied that these proposals would be considered in due course alongside those already mentioned, and added that some were more viable than others. He added that he was open to providing updates on the progress of delivering these proposals as and when available. The Chairman noted that some of the proposals would take considerable time to deliver, and asked whether this had been taken into account. Cllr E Seward replied that planning work would begin in March, with proposals ready for implementation in autumn.
- ii. Cllr A Varley thanked officers for the report and asked why the MTFS had

returned to the Committee as a separate report. The Chairman replied that the MTFS had always been a separate report on the Committee's Work Programme, and that this was the standard approach to review details of the strategy.

- iii. Cllr L Withington stated that the MTFS showed prudence and the planned consideration of options, and asked whether an update on the proposals could be provided in June.
- iv. Cllr W Fredericks reiterated her comments from the previous meeting, that the Council should continue to lobby Central Government and local MPs for greater clarity on future levels of financial support.
- v. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle referred to the spending required to maintain Comer Pier, and asked whether there was a long-term strategy or any fresh ideas. He then referred to gate fees for the District's recycling, and asked whether the substantial price increases had been factored into the budget. Cllr E Seward replied with regards to the Pier, that whilst it required significant funding that had been continually reviewed by different administrations, he was open to ideas for new funding arrangements. He added that the Pier remained crucially important to the tourism industry of North Norfolk. The CTA added that the Pier provided a direct income via a management fee, but was also a significant draw for tourism in North Norfolk. On recycling gate fees, the CTA stated that future costs had been given general consideration, but would be looked at in more detail when preparing the 2022-23 budget. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle suggested that it could be helpful to consider alternate options for funding the Pier's maintenance, and suggested holding a public consultation on the matter. In response to a question from Cllr W Fredericks on the listed status of the Pier, it was stated that the Council did have a responsibility to maintain the structure, as owner.
- vi. Cllr H Blathwayt stated that in his experience, the more commercial a Pier became, the less attractive it would be to visitors, and noted that he would be happy to provide input for consideration if required.
- vii. Cllr P Heinrich asked whether establishing a charity trust to fund the Pier maintenance could make it eligible for lottery funding. The CE replied that this could be considered, and noted that the Council had received lottery funding in the past.
- viii. Cllr A Brown referred to the financial outlook of the MTFS, and referred to an announcement of a 4.5% increase in core spending for Local Government, which he suggested was mostly the result of Council Tax increases. He added that over five years, financial support for local government had been reduced by approximately 30%, and asked whether this was sustainable. The CTA stated that should those cuts continue, then it would not be sustainable for any Council, and representations to this effect had been made in relation to the financial settlement.
- ix. Cllr L Withington proposed that an update be provided on the savings proposals as part of the budget monitoring process later in the year. Cllr A Varley seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED

1. To recommend to Full Council that the Medium Term Financial Strategy is approved.

2. To request that an update on the progress of savings proposals be included in the Outturn Report.

144 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2021/2022

Cllr E Seward – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets introduced the report and informed Members that it was a statutory requirement to agree the strategy on an annual basis. The CTA added that the strategy had to be approved in advance of the new financial year, and noted that there had not been any substantial changes.

Questions and Discussion

It was proposed by Cllr P Heinrich and seconded by Cllr W Fredericks that the report be recommended to Full Council for approval.

RESOLVED

To recommend to Full Council that the Capital Strategy and Prudential Indicators for 2021-22 are approved.

145 INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2021/2022

Cllr E Seward – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets introduced the report and informed Members that it was a statutory requirement to approve the Investment Strategy on an annual basis. The CTA added that the strategy had been updated following guidance from MHCLG.

Questions and Discussion

It was proposed by Cllr P Heinrich and seconded by Cllr H Blathwayt to recommend the report to Full Council for approval.

RESOLVED

To recommend to Council that the Investment Strategy is approved.

146 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021/2022

Cllr E Seward – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets introduced the report and informed Members that it was a statutory report that required approval on an annual basis. The CTA added that the strategy was a continuation from previous years with additional context in relation to the low interest rates caused by Covid-19.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr P Heinrich asked whether any modelling had taken place to determine the potential impact of negative interest rates. The CTA replied that the treasury advisors were closely monitoring the potential for negative interest rates to be introduced, though it remained unlikely. She added that whilst negative interest rates would have an impact on the Council, extensive modelling had not been undertaken at present, due to the low likelihood of them being introduced. It was suggested that more detailed modelling would be completed

if this likelihood increased.

- ii. Cllr A Varley proposed that the report be recommended to Full Council for approval and Cllr E Spagnola seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED

To recommend to Council that the Treasury Management Strategy Statement is approved.

147 DELEGATED DECISIONS (JANUARY TO FEBRUARY 2021)

The DSM introduced the report and informed Members that three decisions had been reported to Cabinet in February. The first related to the discretionary business grant scheme, the next on commencing consultation of the Council Tax support scheme, and the final decision related to a payment for supporting the test and trace scheme.

RESOLVED

To note the report.

148 SHERINGHAM LEISURE CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE: FEBRUARY 2021

Cllr V Gay – Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Wellbeing and Culture introduced the report and informed Members that there had been no change in the budget. It was reported that whilst careful consideration had been given to reopening the existing Splash facility, it had been determined that demolition would be brought forward in order to complete phases one and two of the project by 12th August. Cllr V Gay referred to previous discussion of the communications of the project, and noted that search terms had likely been the cause of updates not displaying correctly. She added that searching for Sheringham Leisure Centre would provide up to date news releases, time lapse videos and plans. The AD SG noted that there had been a request for the demolition costs to be outlined, which was reported as approximately £161k, with work to commence shortly.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr L Withington stated that there was a general understanding in Sheringham that the early demolition was the result of a change in circumstance caused by Covid-19, and that residents appreciated that Splash had been kept open for as long as possible. She added that given the cost savings, and taking into account that Splash may have only opened for a matter of weeks, it was now prudent to progress with an early demolition.
- ii. Cllr V Gay thanked officers and Members for their input monitoring the project and noted that the demolition costs were not additional and had been included in the original budget.
- iii. Consideration was given to the frequency of ongoing updates, and it was agreed that updates would continue on a monthly basis.

RESOLVED

To note the report.

149 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT QUARTER 3 2020/21

The CE introduced the report and informed Members that it covered the period from October to December 2020, during which time the District saw a rising number of cases leading to a second lockdown in November. It was reported that progress had been made on a number of corporate priorities including climate change, temporary accommodation and Sheringham Leisure Centre. The CE noted that a return to processing business grants had required considerable resource, though this had not impacted services, and that the report had been brought to Scrutiny in advance of Cabinet to provide information in a more timely manner.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr C Cushing referred to the installation of electric vehicle charging points in Fakenham, and asked whether any update on progress was available. Cllr N Lloyd replied that EVCPs in Wells, Sheringham, Cromer and Holt were online, and it was expected that Fakenham points would soon be connected, though he was yet to receive confirmation. Cllr L Shires added that she would seek to provide a full written answer, and noted that issues had arisen in North Walsham, and the Council was now looking for an alternative site which she would provide an update on in due course.
- ii. Cllr A Brown referred to housing delivery targets, and asked to place on record his thanks to officers for working hard to meet these targets, and for their efforts in preparing the new Local Plan.
- iii. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle congratulated relevant officers for preparing the carbon reduction strategy outlined in the report.
- iv. Cllr L Withington referred to progress on climate change actions, and asked whether these could be brought together in a wider briefing. The DSGOS noted that the draft Environmental Charter was expected to come forward for pre-scrutiny in the coming months, and there was potential for this to come alongside a wider briefing. The CE suggested that if Members wanted more information on actions taken to address climate change, then it would be possible to include additional information on request. The PPMO stated that performance data was now publicly available, with a single page for all climate related data and actions.

RESOLVED

To note the report and endorse the actions being taken by Corporate Leadership Team detailed in Appendix A.

150 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The DSGOS informed Members that the Committee had changed its working practices to factor in more pre-scrutiny, meaning that several items of business on the Cabinet Work Programme had already been reviewed or were planned for review by the Committee. It was noted that this included the Equality and Diversity Policy, that was expected to come for pre-scrutiny in March, and go to Cabinet for approval in April/May.

RESOLVED

To note the Cabinet Work Programme.

151 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The DSGOS informed Members that the crime and disorder briefing was expected to take place in March, and a request had been made for the PCC to address issues of domestic abuse and wider policing issues in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. He added that the draft Environmental Charter was expected in the coming months.

It was clarified, following a question from Cllr L Withington that the Committee would continue to adopt a pre-scrutiny approach where possible.

RESOLVED

To note the Work Programme.

152 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 11.15 am.

Chairman