

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 14 July 2021 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am

Committee Members Present:

Mr N Dixon (Chairman)	Mr S Penfold (Vice-Chairman)
Ms L Withington	Mr H Blathwayt
Dr V Holliday	Mr C Cushing
Mr A Brown	Mr P Fisher
Dr P Bütikofer	

Members also attending:

Ms V Gay (Observer)	Mr R Kershaw (Observer)
Mr N Pearce (Observer)	Mr J Rest (Observer)
Mrs W Fredericks (Observer)	

Officers in Attendance: Democratic Services and Governance Officer - Scrutiny (DSGOS), Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager (HSDM-ND), Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager (HSDM-GC), Democratic Services Manager (DSM), Customer Services Team Leader (CSTL), Project Manager North Walsham Heritage Action Zone (HAZPM), Assistant Director for Organisational Resources (ADOR), Economic Growth Manager (EGM) and Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth (ADSG)

Also in attendance:

34 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr P Heinrich, Cllr N Housden, Cllr A Varley and Cllr E Spagnola.

35 SUBSTITUTES

Cllr P Bütikofer substituted for Cllr P Heinrich.

36 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

37 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 16th June 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

40 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

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

None received.

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

The DSGOS noted that at the meeting held on 5th July 2021, Cabinet accepted the recommendation to give consideration to the resourcing of the Planning Enforcement Team, in order to strengthen and support the Council's planning enforcement process. He added that the issue remained under active consideration, and any decision on whether additional resource was required remained outstanding. It was noted that the Planning Portfolio Holder had also requested that a briefing be arranged on the Enforcement process, with details to be shared in due course.

43 SHERINGHAM LEISURE CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE: JULY 2021

Cllr V Gay – Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Wellbeing and Culture introduced the report and informed Members that the completion date had been delayed until September, as a result of delays in the materials supply chain. She added that the new completion date given was considered a realistic estimate. It was stated that as this would likely be the last update prior to project completion, additional budget information had been included for consideration. Cllr V Gay added that to her knowledge, the project had not yet required borrowing, as adequate cashflow had been maintained.

Questions and Discussion

- i. Cllr S Penfold stated that he assumed the opening date would follow the completion date, and asked whether the opening would still take place in September or a later date. Cllr V Gay replied that a scheduled opening date was yet to be agreed, but it would follow the completion date once initial testing was completed. It was expected that the opening date might be in October, and Cllr S Penfold suggested that it would be helpful to know the specific date as soon as possible.
- ii. It was confirmed, following a question from Cllr H Blathwayt, that the new facility would have a soft opening prior to its formal opening to the public.
- iii. Cllr S Penfold suggested that it would be beneficial for Members to visit the facility once complete. Cllr V Gay agreed and stated that whilst smaller visits had taken place, Covid-19 restrictions had limited the number of visitors allowed on site, and suggested that she would seek to arrange a visit for all Members as soon as possible.
- iv. Cllr J Rest suggested that the delays caused by materials shortages highlighted the need for greater consideration to be given to using local

materials when undertaking projects of scale in the future. Cllr V Gay noted that the project had shown the number of materials that had to be imported, and agreed that it should be given consideration in the future.

- v. Cllr V Holliday asked whether the current budget position was as expected, to which Cllr V Gay confirmed that this was the case, as it had remained unchanged for considerable time following an adjustment in summer 2019.
- vi. The Chairman suggested that once the facility was open, it would be helpful for the Committee to receive a project review, to consider the process of development, the lessons learned and a review of the operating procedure. Cllr V Gay agreed that this would be a helpful exercise that she would be happy to facilitate.

RESOLVED

To receive and note the update.

44 NORTH WALSHAM HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION SCHEME PROJECT UPDATE - JULY 2021

Cllr R Kershaw – Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth introduced the report and informed Members that the HSHAZ project was a holistic programme of interrelated projects that aimed to improve the vitality and viability of North Walsham town centre. He added that the project was an opportunity for significant investment in the town to support residents and visitors, which would therefore require their agreement and support. It was reported that the project included a placemaking scheme, renovation of the Cedars, building improvement grants, a cultural programme, and a communication and engagement programme. Cllr R Kershaw informed Members that project governance had changed from a Working Party to Project Team, which met weekly to oversee the project alongside a project board, chaired by the ADSG.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The HAZPM and EGM provided an overview presentation of the project and noted that funding had come primarily from Historic England, in conjunction with match-funding from NNDC, followed by additional funding from the LEP and Historic England, to a total of £3.2m. The HAZPM informed Members that the project would focus predominantly on the town centre, in areas such as the Market Place, the area surrounding St Nicholas' Church, and the surrounding streets and lokes. An overview of the five key programmes was provided and it was noted that the placemaking scheme had reached the detailed design stage, utilising input from a range of stakeholders. It was noted that considerable consultation and engagement had taken place with local exhibitions in the town and at local schools.
- ii. The HAZPM informed Members that essential maintenance work on the Cedars had already begun, alongside a full conditions survey to ascertain the works required. She added that a detailed schedule of work and specification had been prepared that would be procured in the autumn, with renovations to begin soon after. It was noted that the building had already been marketed by the Estates Team to seek potential interest.
- iii. The Historic Buildings Improvements Grant Scheme was outlined as a means for private landlords to apply to improve existing historic buildings,

with 103 listed buildings in the town, it was hoped the scheme would help to return these buildings to their former glory. It was noted that the scheme was set to launch in approximately two weeks' time to cover repairs and renovation, with the expectation that it could bring neglected spaces back into use.

- iv. The HAZPM referred to the heritage research and training that would be undertaken as part of the project by Historic England, and noted that very little heritage research had been completed previously. It was reported that most of this research would be funded separately by Historic England, though the findings would be shared with officers to better inform the project. Alongside this work, it was noted that the Cultural Programme would be led by an independent consortium with £90k funding available over three years.
- v. The HAZPM informed Members that a Stakeholder Group had been established that met regularly to keep residents and businesses informed of project progress. She referred to the project budget and noted that to date, approximately £183k had been spent. It was suggested that there had been challenges such as material shortages, though efforts were being made to mitigate these impacts and the project remained on-track. The HAZPM stated that year two of the project would be critical, as most of the placemaking scheme funding would be spent, alongside the building improvement grants scheme, subject to match-funding from property owners.
- vi. Cllr S Penfold asked whether there had been any headline issues from the consultation events, and whether monitoring and evaluation of the project would be undertaken externally. The HAZPM replied that the general feedback received from over 200 consultees was supportive, with particular interest in green projects and engaging young people in the project. She added that there had also been considerable feedback received on the identity of the town, with several suggestions made. On monitoring and evaluation, it was stated that the HAZPM monitored the project deliverables such as the placemaking scheme and historic building projects, which she would then report to Historic England. It was noted that equipment had also been installed to monitor footfall in the town, which could be used to measure trends in visitor numbers pre and post project completion. Cllr R Kershaw noted that there was also a weekly monitoring meeting that took place with Members, Historic England representatives, NNDC and NCC officers, consultants and other interested parties.
- vii. Cllr V Gay stated that the Project Enabler deserved substantial credit for the work she had done to initiate the project, and suggested that a strong community presence had influenced Historic England to support the project. She added that support for the project from within the town had been inspiring, and thanked officers' for their ongoing support.
- viii. Cllr C Cushing referred to the budget figures in the presentation, and suggested that it would be helpful if these could be shared with Members. He then referred to the Cedars renovation work and asked whether any cost estimates were available, whether there was any interest in the building, and whether a sale or conversion into housing had been considered. Cllr R Kershaw stated that he would ensure the budget information was shared with Members and noted that a condition of the Historic England contribution to the renovation costs meant that the Council could not sell the property. He added that whilst housing could be an option, there had already been three

expressions of interest, with two for commercial use and one a café restaurant with accommodation above. It was stated that the Council would have to seek a commercial rent from the building, but would also take into account the community interest. Cllr C Cushing stated that it would be helpful for the project to be regularly monitored by the Committee.

- ix. Cllr P Bütikofer requested further information on the green credentials of the project. The HAZPM replied that a key brief given to architects working on the placemaking project was to consider sustainability and contribute to the delivery of the Council's environmental objectives. She added that Environmental Officers had been involved in the consultation stage and various issues had been considered to make the project as sustainable as possible.
- x. Cllr V Holliday praised the project and asked whether any similar would be considered for other market towns in the future. Cllr R Kershaw replied that the Council would certainly apply for funding if more was made available by the Government.
- xi. Cllr L Withington stated that a community project was taking place in Sheringham and suggested that beyond footfall, increases in income or revenue for the town should also be measured. She added that there was often a switch from retail to hospitality businesses as towns were developed, and it was important to ensure that essential retail shops were not lost. It was suggested that public transport should also be given consideration to ensure that access wasn't lost. Cllr R Kershaw replied that he was working with a business consortium to encourage economic growth in the town as well as encouraging new businesses into the town.
- xii. Cllr S Penfold referred to the learning opportunities presented by the project, and asked whether anyone had been tasked with ensuring that local schools and colleges had been contacted to determine their needs and develop learning opportunities. Cllr R Kershaw replied that the Council had engaged with local schools and was actively work on projects relating to history and culture, as well as training schemes for historic building restoration. Cllr H Blathwayt stated that as a Member of the Broads Authority Heritage Scheme, he knew that apprenticeships could be developed and the project offered a great learning opportunity.
- xiii. The Chairman noted that project risk had not been mentioned in the report and asked whether this was given regular consideration and whether there were any existing concerns. Cllr R Kershaw replied that it was a high priority of the Project Group that was regularly discussed, and could be included in future monitoring reports.
- xiv. It was proposed by Cllr C Cushing and seconded by Cllr S Penfold that the project be monitored quarterly, with the inclusion of budgetary and risk information.

RESOLVED

- 1. To receive and note the update.**
- 2. Quarterly project updates to be added to the Committee's Work Programme with the inclusion of budget/cash flow and project risks.**

45 **AMBULANCE RESPONSE TIMES: COASTAL PARISH WORKING PARTY UPDATE**

Cllr V Holliday introduced the report as Chair of the Coastal Parish Working Group, and informed Members that monitoring at Parish level had begun when the BBC reported that the area had the worst ambulance response times in the Country at 23 minutes for urgent calls and over three hours for non-urgent calls. It was stated that the complex issue was the result of a number of factors ranging from rurality to turn around times. Cllr V Holliday stated that the Group were now trying to work with the CCG to improve response times by addressing a range of issue and offering potential solutions. It was noted that Covid-19 had impacted progress, and evidence at the postcode level continued to show that response times in rural areas were far worse than urban areas. It was suggested that aiding the recruitment and training of Community First Responders (CFR), as well as retaining rapid response vehicles should be a priority. Cllr V Holliday noted that a stroke support ambulance had been trialed, and whilst expensive, suggested it could be considered for charitable support, taking into account that North Norfolk had the highest incidence of strokes in the Country.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The Chairman noted that the report showed there had been very little improvement, with targets still being missed. He sought clarification on whether the rapid response vehicles would be used by CFR or paramedics, to which Cllr V Holliday confirmed that they were used by highly trained paramedics. It was noted that these paramedics would be employed directly by EEAST, as opposed to local surgeries.
- ii. Cllr P Fisher stated that as the Member for Wells, he was acutely aware that beyond its remoteness, the significant amount of summer traffic and parked cars seriously hindered emergency services access. He added that for this reason, there were a number of wider issues that had to be resolved for response times to improve. Cllr V Holliday stated that she would raise these issues with the Working Group at the next meeting. It was noted that population growth was also a significant concern during the peak summer season.
- iii. The Chairman noted his support for the CFR, and stated that interventions within the first hour were crucial. Cllr C Cushing asked whether a map of CFR coverage of the District was available for consideration. Cllr V Holliday stated that she would seek this information from EEAST to share with the Committee. Cllr V Gay stated that she had also requested this information and hoped to have it soon.
- iv. The Chairman asked whether the Committee were supportive of a further update being provided in twelve months. Cllr L Withington stated that she had concerns that the rapid response vehicle funding was due to finish in the months ahead, and suggested that support should be offered to retain the vehicles.
- v. Cllr N Pearce stated that a six-monthly review could be useful to take into account both summer and winter demand. Cllr V Holliday agreed and suggested that she would be happy to provide six-monthly updates.

- vi. The Chairman proposed that in addition to noting the report, the Committee should write to EEAST to express its support for retaining the rapid response vehicles, request further ambulance response times updates on a six-monthly basis and seek to determine the location of the District's CFR. Cllr L Withington seconded the proposals.

RESOLVED

- 1. To receive and note the update**
- 2. To write to EEAST on behalf of the Committee to express support for retaining the Community First Responder's - Rapid Response Vehicles.**
- 3. Six-monthly updates to be added to the Committee Work Programme.**
- 4. To request information on the geographical location of the District's Community First Responders.**

46 NEW HOUSING STRATEGY: 2021 - 2025

Cllr W Fredericks – Portfolio Holder for Housing and Benefits introduced the report and informed Members that housing was a top priority for the Council. She added that the new Strategy would build on existing work to improve housing conditions and provide more housing throughout the District. It was noted that current achievements included the purchase of fourteen homes for use as temporary accommodation, the delivery of the first extra care scheme in Fakenham, and the delivery of new affordable homes above annual targets. Cllr W Fredericks stated that the Strategy had four key themes of increasing the supply of housing, improving housing conditions, making best use of existing homes, and supporting vulnerable residents' housing needs.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The Chairman asked what had changed from previous strategies to address the supply of affordable housing in the District. The HSDM-ND replied that whilst there was no easy solution, there were a range of actions that could help. She added that whilst the targets for affordable homes were close to being met, with future targets predicted to be surpassed, the key issue was the high number of property disposals by housing associations. It was suggested that working with housing associations to address the number of disposals would be crucial to retain as much social housing as possible, in addition to ensuring supply through new development proposals. The Chairman said that despite these actions, net deficits of affordable housing remained a concern. Cllr W Fredericks stated that despite the issue of disposals, she was confident that the Council would meet its affordable housing targets.
- ii. Cllr N Pearce stated that he felt the strategy was high risk, as many residents did not want affordable housing built in their communities. Cllr W Fredericks replied that Town and Parish Councils had been involved in the development of the Strategy, and suggested that most residents accepted that more affordable housing was needed for young people to purchase their own homes. She added that there was also a Community Liaison Officer within the Housing Team that worked with communities to address concerns and mitigate objections to affordable housing developments. The Chairman noted

his appreciation of this role, given the entrenched resistance seen amongst communities.

- iii. Cllr C Cushing referred to the affordable homes targets and suggested that these should take into account the disposals or loss of affordable homes, as well as those delivered. He then referred to the overall Strategy, and stated that vague explanations did not provide clear guidance on how targets would be achieved. Cllr W Fredericks replied that each potential disposal was given thorough consideration to determine viability, and in some cases disposals were unavoidable. She added that the Strategy would continue to develop in order to address issues and meet targets.
- iv. Cllr S Penfold stated that whilst the Council was exceeding its targets for developing affordable homes, more needed to be done to avoid the loss of social housing via disposals.
- v. Cllr V Holliday referred to the term affordable and suggested that was a broad term that may require further explanation. She then referred to the issue of second homes, and suggested that there were a number of ways that the Council could address this, and asked whether the Council could do more. Cllr W Fredericks replied that the term affordable took into consideration the demographics and wages of the District, with a formula used to determine affordability set by Central Government. She added that second homes remained a policy issue, with disposals covered by a covenant that limited second home use. The HSDM-ND stated that the issue of second homes had been discussed at length during the development of the Local Plan, and whilst there was an option to place restrictions on new homes, it was determined that this would have a knock on impact on existing homes that made the proposal unviable. She added that Section 157 restrictions were placed on right to buy homes that required buyers to have worked and lived in Norfolk for three years. Cllr V Holliday suggested that other local controls on second homes should be reconsidered.
- vi. Cllr A Brown stated that the issue of restricting second homes in the District had been given consideration on a number of occasions by PPBH WP, which had reluctantly determined that the issue was better managed with national controls. He added that extensive research had been undertaken to consider the impact of restrictions on second homes, and where restrictions had been placed on new homes, this had only passed the issue onto existing properties. It was suggested that the restrictions were not therefore, a dependable solution. Cllr A Brown stated that there was scope to use Section 106 funding to create affordable housing on rural exception sites, or a requirement for 25% of new developments to be made available exclusively to first time buyers. He added that if there was a solution that was fully effective in addressing the issue of second homes, then it would have been considered. Cllr A Brown asked whether a distinction could be made on the number of property disposals between right to buy and housing associations. The HSDM-ND replied that the majority of disposals in previous years had been voluntary, though the number of right to buy properties was now low, suggesting that the number of disposals would continue to fall. She added that she would share figures on the number of right to buy vs housing association disposals after the meeting.
- vii. Cllr L Withington referred to the North Norfolk Town and Parish Forum, who were working to address the issue of second homes, and stated that there

was a general expectation that anyone could buy a second home wherever they wanted. She suggested that a more realistic approach to address the issue would be to mitigate the negative impacts of second home ownership. It was suggested that affordable homes in many cases were still not affordable to local people, therefore more affordable rental properties may be required. Cllr L Withington stated that more emphasis should therefore be placed on developing affordable rental properties within the Strategy. The HSMD-ND replied that she would emphasize the point accordingly, and noted that the viability of higher discounts of up to 50% on affordable homes was being considered. Cllr A Brown stated that the new first homes scheme gave Council's the opportunity to link affordability with local income or property prices, and it was the Council's intention to link with income. It was noted that ensuring developers met their obligation to deliver affordable homes remained a significant challenge for the Council.

- viii. Cllr S Penfold referred to the number of affordable homes delivered and asked whether more up to date figures could be provided, given that the Strategy covered the period up to 2025.
- ix. Cllr H Blathwayt referred to house clearances for use as AirBnB rentals, and asked whether there was any evidence of this within the District. The HSMD-ND replied that it was difficult to determine, though there had be a year on year increase in second and holiday home ownership, with the majority of holiday homes commercially let, though it was difficult to determine whether these were previously privately rented homes. It was noted that short-term holiday lets were seen as more profitable, though evidence was not yet available to determine whether this was a trend in North Norfolk.
- x. It was proposed by Cllr A Brown and seconded by Cllr H Blathwayt that the Strategy be recommended to Council for approval, subject to the amendments raised by the Committee.

RESOLVED

- 1. To recommend that Council approves the Housing Strategy, subject to amendments raised by the Committee.**

47 PRE-SCRUTINY: CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY

The ADOR introduced the report and informed Members that Draft Customer Services Strategy was a revision of the previous document, as it was a primary aim of the Corporate Plan to realign its focus on the customer experience when accessing Council services. It was noted that the Strategy was still awaiting an equality impact assessment, which was being undertaken externally and expected in the coming weeks.

Questions and Discussion

- i. The Chairman noted that the Committee had reviewed Customer Service performance and identified several concerns, then asked to what extent these learning points had been addressed within the Strategy, and whether any examples were available. The ADOR replied that the Strategy would clearly define the level of service that could be expected from each point of contact provided at the Council. He added that better statistical information would also be provided to allow comparison between the level of service

provided and the level promised within the Strategy and Customer Charter. The Chairman asked whether officers were confident that customers would understand the service standards set out within the Strategy, to which the ADOR stated that the Council would endeavor to make this information as easily available and simple as possible. It was noted that the complaints policy and process would also be revised to be as clear and transparent as possible, so that customers could understand how issues would be resolved.

- ii. Cllr C Cushing suggested that it would be helpful for key metrics to be included within the body of the Strategy rather than the appendix. He asked whether any comparison had been made with the digital access offerings of other Council's, to which the ADOR replied that whilst authorities measured their services differently, comparisons had been made with neighbouring authorities where possible. It was noted that unlike some authorities NNDC had not removed telephone access, which some Councils had replaced entirely by digital access channels.
- iii. Cllr L Withington noted that as a result of Covid-19, many services had been adapted to allow more digital access which had been helpful for many, and asked whether more emphasis could be placed on digital access within the Strategy. The ADOR replied that subsequent action plans would include steps to further improve digital access to services. He added that with the reduction in Covid-19 restrictions, access messages had changed to allow customers more access to face to face services, though digital access would continue to be promoted where possible.
- iv. Cllr V Holliday commended the language used in the Strategy and asked what audience the information was intended for. The ADOR replied that officers were seeking to make guidance as easy to read and understand as possible, to ensure access for all. Cllr V Holliday asked whether web content would continue to be improved, and it was suggested that each service area would soon be given the ability to manage its own content, to improve and update information where necessary. It was reported that at present, NNDC was rated 27th in the Country for website accessibility, which was a substantial improvement.
- v. Cllr S Penfold asked whether services were available in different languages. The ADOR replied that the organization subscribed to the Intran service, as well as additional 'real-time' translation services that provided a significant range of language options.

RESOLVED

- 1. To review and comment on the draft Customer Services Strategy.**

48 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

- i. The DSGOS informed Members that financial reports expected in July would go to the September meeting, as well as the Customer Services Strategy just reviewed by the Committee. He added that there was an additional Cabinet meeting planned to take place on 19th July, as a result of a property transaction.
- ii. The DSGOS reported that the Cabinet Working Party that would run parallel to the Scrutiny Panels was likely to have its first meeting in September, after

which the Scrutiny Panels could review reports.

RESOLVED

To note the Cabinet Work Programme.

49 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

- i. The DSGOS informed Members that as with the Cabinet Work Programme, several routine financial reports were expected at the September meeting. He added that as per the Committee's request, the Beach Huts and Chalets monitoring had been delayed until October to allow for full summer occupancy levels to be included within the report.
- ii. In reference to the outcomes and actions from the previous meeting, it was noted that a response was yet to be received from CLT, but would be shared when available.
- iii. The Chairman informed Members that to follow-up informal actions, he had requested the creation of an actions log, that would outline the status of agreed actions by relevant officers.

RESOLVED

To note the Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme.

50 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 11.52 am.

Chairman