

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee of Broadland District Council, held on Tuesday 25 January 2022 at 6pm at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: J Thomas (Chairman), G Nurden (Vice-Chairman), T Adams, S Catchpole, S Holland, K Kelly, M Murrell, S Prutton and D Roper

Cabinet Member Present: Councillor: J Emsell

Officers in Attendance: The Director of Resources, Assistant Director ICT/Digital and Transformation, Assistant Director Finance, Revenues Manager, Assistant Director of Individuals and Families, Internal Consultancy Senior Lead and the Democratic Services Officer (JO).

54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bulman and Cllr Clancy.

55 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

Minute No: 5 - Planning, Regulatory, Housing Standards and Waste Team Services IT Migration

The Vice-Chairman asked why Cabinet had agreed with the officer recommendation and approved option 2, after the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recommended option 4.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Organisational Development confirmed that Cabinet had taken account of the views of

both Committee's, but following due consideration had determined that the best option was the one that had been recommended by officers.

56 SPARK TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Assistant Director ICT/Digital and Transformation introduced the report, which provided the Committee with an update on the major projects that were currently being progressed as part of the SPARK Transformation Programme.

The report noted positive progress throughout, with five Green, six Amber and no Red status projects. There was one change from the last report; Moving Towards a First-Class Customer Service was previously Green and was now Amber. This is mainly due to there being a delay in delivering the customer satisfaction survey as a result of resourcing issues and third party delays in system changes. This had resulted in the timeline being pushed back from November 2021 to January 2022.

Other areas to highlight were:

- Domain Migration of systems and services onto the new domain name was progressing well with scoping work being undertaken to ascertain project scope, expectations and resource requirement for the next steps.
- The rollout of the new Finance IT system was expected to go live from 1 April 2022.
- The Single IT System for Revenues and Benefits would be considered later in this meeting.
- Progress around the new Planning IT system and transformation was going well, with the appointment of a Project Manager to oversee its implementation.
- The Business Intelligence Project, which covered the introduction of data into the Council and developing insights which allowed evidence based decisions to be made was progressing well. The proof of concept had been completed and a business case would go to the Corporate Leadership Management Team next week. The next steps for the project would be to begin drafting the principles and standards for the use of data across the organisation.

In response to a query about the Joint Member Office Accommodation Working Group that had met earlier in January, the Director for Resource advised the Committee that the Working Group had met last week and had considered the legal issues if the Horizon Centre was purchased. They had also received updates on the surveys that had been commissioned and considered their Work Programme going forward.

There was no fixed timetable for the Working Group at this stage, as this was dependent on the completion of the surveys. It was confirmed that all of the surveys commissioned related to the Horizon Centre. However, there had been a Carbon Audit of the Council, the outcomes of which would be reported to members next week.

A member advised the meeting that he had asked the Managing Director for missed telephone call data at the December meeting of Council, but had had yet to receive the information. In response, it was confirmed that a customer baseline target had been established following the report to Council and this information would be included in future Performance Reports and that the Managing Director would be contacting the member in question shortly with the information he had requested.

AGREED

To note the content of the report with regards to the progress made with the programme.

57 ENFORCEMENT AGENT SERVICES

The Revenues manager introduced the report, which proposed that Broadland Enforcement Agent activity be moved to Anglia Revenues Partnership Enforcement (ARPE) with effect from 1 April 2022 in order to enhance the service to residents and the Council. This would also have the added benefit of producing an additional income stream.

ARPE was created as an internal local authority run enforcement service in 2015 and they recovered debts for all five partner authorities within the partnership and, since 2018, under delegated powers for South Norfolk Council. If a debt was uncollected it was passed on to an external company, Dukes PLC.

Broadland currently used the services of an external commercial enforcement agent, Marstons PLC. This service in the past had been good. However, in the last two years there had been problems particularly following the introduction of a new IT system at Marston's, which had caused difficulty for Council staff and considerable additional work. Collection performance had also declined.

Marston's were remunerated through charging the debtor a fixed fee at each stage of the statutory enforcement process. The fees generated fund the costs of the service and generate a profit/surplus for the company.

Marston retained all of the fees, unlike ARPE who operated a fee share scheme and returned a share of fees collected on Council Tax and Business Rates back to its partner local authorities. In 2019/20 this share was 17 percent for South Norfolk Council and totalled £18,700.

If the Broadland caseload was placed with ARPE they would increase the share of fee payment from 17 to 22% for both Councils.

It was, therefore, proposed to enter into an arrangement with ARPE that would move the Council to a streamlined locally delivered service and generate an estimated income of £17,500.

In answer to a question from the Chairman, the Revenues Manager informed the meeting that the fees were statutory charges set by Government to cover the cost of enforcement and were in addition to the recovered debt.

The Chairman noted that in 2020/21 Marstons had collected 33 percent of fees and ARPE 22 percent.

In response, the Revenues Manager advised the meeting that the pandemic had clouded the picture and that more recent data showed a marked deterioration in Marstons performance. The meeting was also reminded that the Council only retained eight percent of the debts recovered. By joining ARPE an income stream of £17,500 could be generated.

In answer to a query about working with residents to avoid enforcement and the level of control the Council would have over the collection of debt if it was handed over to Dukes, it was emphasised that the Council's Recovery Team were very good at negotiating with debtors and assisting them with help and advice. Moreover, the Team had built very good relationships with the Early Help Hub and particularly with the Community Connectors which enabled them to assist vulnerable people and those in debt who needed additional help. The Team could also offer assistance in the face of inflation and increasing energy costs.

A combination of the establishment of a Recovery Team and more effective negotiation with debtors meant that the number of cases being referred to Enforcement Agents was reducing. How the Enforcement Agents dealt with debt and managed their work was also monitored. The Council also met regularly with Citizens Advice to discuss its approach to debt.

Following a show of hands it was unanimously:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

That we enter into a delegated service agreement with Breckland Council to utilise Anglia Revenues Partnership Enforcement services for Broadland District Council's Council Tax, Business Rates and Sundry Debt's Enforcement Agent recovery from 1 April 2022.

58 WORK PROGRAMME

The Vice-Chairman of the Collaboration Working Committee informed the meeting that it was expected that the Working Group would have a report on its findings for the Committee at the 26 April 2022 meeting.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

59 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining items of business because otherwise, information which is exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, would be disclosed to them.

60 SINGLE IT SOLUTION FOR REVENUES AND BENEFITS

The Assistant Director for Individuals and Families introduced the exempt report, which presented a business case for a joint Revenues and Benefits IT solution.

It was explained that moving to a single solution would realise significant financial savings for both Councils in the form of reduced software licensing and annual support costs.

A single solution would also increase resilience across the service and the alignment of working practices, which in turn would improve the overall customer journey offered to residents and businesses.

It was confirmed that if agreed the Council would go through a full procurement process to secure the best product.

There would be a 12 month lead-in time from when the procurement process commenced in June 2022.

Following a show of hands it was unanimously:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. To endorse the business case attached as Appendix 2.
2. To delegate authority to award the contract for a single Revenues & Benefits solution to the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families in consultation with the portfolio holders for Finance and Housing & Wellbeing.

(The meeting concluded at 6.42pm)

Chairman