

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on **Tuesday 28 January 2020** at **10.00 am** when there were present:

Mr S Riley – Chairman

Mr A D Adams  
Mr S C Beadle  
Mr N J Brennan  
Mr P E Bulman

Ms S J Catchpole  
Ms S I Holland  
Mr M L Murrell  
Mr G K Nurden

Mrs S M Prutton  
Mrs C E Ryman-Tubb  
Mr N C Shaw

Mrs J Copplestone, Mr J Emsell, Mrs L Hemsall, Mrs J Leggett, Mrs T Mancini-Boyle, Mr S Vincent and Mr F Whymark were in attendance for item 96 – Budget Questions for Cabinet.

David Allfrey, Infrastructure Delivery Manager Community & Environmental Services – Highways was in attendance for item 97 - Broadland Northway.

Also in attendance were the Director Place, Director Resources, Assistant Director Finance, Senior Governance Officer and the Committee Officer (JO).

### **94 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Harpley and Mr Kelly.

### **95 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2020 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### *Minute No: 93 Renewal of Microsoft Licencing*

The Chairman of the Audit Committee asked Members to note that this item had been presented by an officer, which, in his opinion, had been contrary to the new process that he had proposed. He considered that reports for expenditure above £100,000 should be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the respective Portfolio Holder, not an officer. This would demonstrate that that Portfolio Holder had ownership of the decision and would be fully accountable for it.

In response the Portfolio Holder for Finance confirmed that Portfolio Holders presented reports at Cabinet already, but if given notice in a timely manner would be willing to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well.

### 96 BUDGET QUESTIONS FOR CABINET

The responses from Cabinet to the Committee's questions were tabled at the meeting and are appended to these Minutes at Appendix 1.

The following additional comments, responses and supplementary questions and were noted by the Committee:

- (1) Is the budget adequate to support all the objectives regarding transitioning and fit in with the four-year plan?

*The Committee were satisfied with the response received.*

- (2) Are you going to make more innovative use of the Council's usable reserves (e.g. Community Land Trusts)?

*Initial discussions regarding Community Land Trusts had taken place and there was a desire to promote such schemes. Funding for this would be from existing resources, but officers would also seek to access external funding as well. If any additional resource was required it would be brought to Cabinet on a case by case basis with a business case.*

- (3) What is the size of the Council's usable and unusable reserves and what are they committed to?

*The Committee was advised that a large part of the Council's unusable reserves were due to the Council's liabilities in relation to the deficit of the Norfolk Pension Fund.*

- (4) Are you incorporating the Broadland Business Plan into the Medium-Term Financial Plan?

*The Committee were satisfied with Cabinet's response.*

- (5) Has the Greater Norwich Local Plan been incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Plan?

*The Committee were satisfied with Cabinet's response.*

- (5a) What financial plans to deal with the infrastructure requirements of the Greater Norwich Local Plan were in place?

*There were a whole range of sources of funding for the delivery of the Local Plan, including private sector, Business Rates and even EU funding.*

*The three Greater Norwich Councils were the only local authorities in the country to pool their Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This money was then drawn down to fund a range of infrastructure projects set out in the Joint Five Year Investment Plan. CIL was going to be reviewed shortly and one of the matters to be considered was if it should be used to fund health facilities.*

- (6) How are different budget allocations for the same service managed across both Councils by one officer team?

*The Committee were satisfied with Cabinet's response.*

- (6a) Has account been taken of the cost of Planning Officer time to support the additional Local Plan work that South Norfolk Council was undertaking on 'Village Clusters'?

*Yes, all funding for this additional work on the Local Plan is to be paid for by South Norfolk Council. Both Councils were sovereign authorities and would each fund separately any activities that were not aligned.*

- (6b) Where was the evidence that the 45/55 split had been revisited and agreed by External Audit as sound?

*This had been reviewed by the Joint Lead Members Group. The ambition was to move to a 50/50 split eventually, but if this was done now it would lead to a significant increase in Council Tax in Broadland. Confirmation of the opinion of External Audit regarding this would be forwarded to Members following the meeting.*

- (7) Is there a sufficient budget for IT and phones to ensure that the Council can deliver what is required?

*Members were also advised the Council had paid its £560,000 commitment to the Better Broadband for Norfolk project in July 2019.*

- (8) Is there sufficient budget available for advertising posts etc. and ensuring that we recruit the best staff to enable the Council to progress?

*The Committee was informed that an additional provision to pay relocation expenses if required to attract the best staff had been made available.*

- (9) Is there budget available for providing Councillors with the equipment that enables better functionality and allows Councillors to do their job in the best way?

*It was acknowledged that there were some mobile phone connectivity issues in some parts of Thorpe Lodge for some networks and although the Council would not be investing directly to improve coverage at Thorpe Lodge. Broadland might consider investing in mobile phone infrastructure as part of its income generation strategy in the future.*

*The Council also had Public Sector Network Accreditation and had a comprehensive disaster recovery strategy in place for IT security.*

*A Working Group was also going to be convened to review Member IT and further training that would meet all levels of IT competency was to be provided.*

- (10) Is there sufficient budget available to provide training for Members to enable them to undertake their role in the best way and ensure sufficient skills are in place?

*It was noted that Members had recently been sent a questionnaire on their training requirements and it was confirmed that the budget for training was flexible enough to meet the needs of both Members and staff.*

- (11) What is the plan for the Member Ward Grant? and is there a plan to (a) review the level and (b) look at providing a wider pot of money to allocate to a community grant scheme?

*There were no plans to increase this sum, as take up had been low. It was also noted that only six members attended a training session that had been held for the Member Grants programme. The 2019/20 scheme ended on 1 March 2020 and Members were encouraged to contact the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families, if they wanted to assistance with the grant process. It was confirmed that smaller bodies also could access CIL funding by applying to their local parish or town council.*

- (12) In order for Overview & Scrutiny to be able to appropriately research topics, it is necessary for the Committee to be given appropriate officer support. Will Cabinet ensure that there is Budget provision to continue to employ a dedicated research officer; maintained on a part time basis of 15 hours per week, specified in the Members' Overview and Scrutiny hand book and previously supported with in the budget?

*The Chairman advised the meeting that the Committee would be better served by a dedicated Scrutiny Research Officer, than a Senior Governance Officer.*

*However, the Leader confirmed that the draft 2020/21 budget retains provision for flexible support to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee according to its Work Programme and it was for the Committee to direct the Senior Governance Officer to coordinate projects that it wished to investigate.*

### 97 BROADLAND NORTHWAY

David Allfrey, Infrastructure Delivery Manager Community & Environmental Services – Highways gave a monitoring and evaluation presentation on Broadland Northway, as well as a brief look at other major projects that would be coming forward in Norfolk over the next few years (attached at Appendix 1 to the signed copy of these Minutes).

Following the presentation Members raised the following issues regarding Broadland Northway:

- The roundabouts on the road were dangerous and needed more signage/lighting/speed awareness signs.
- Side road approaches to roundabouts were not wide enough to allow left turning traffic to filter through, causing long tailbacks.
- A lot of trees had been lost on the embankments due to unfavourable weather conditions.
- The signage at the Postwick Interchange was very confusing.
- The access roads at Honingham were over-engineered and should be reduced in size.

In response the Committee was advised that work was to be undertaken to make the roundabouts safer and more accessible. However, although the accident rate was high it was on a downward trend and most accidents were low speed collisions. There was no identified trend for a greater number of accidents at night and, as additional lighting could have an adverse effect on bats, it was not intended to install more. The trees that had been lost along Broadland Northway were to be replaced

The Committee also raised the following issues regarding forthcoming projects:

- The proposed viaduct for the Western Link was in an area of outstanding natural beauty and should be as attractive as possible to complement this. It should also have a cycle/footpath if possible.

- Were the costs of the projects likely to rise considerable, as had been seen with HS2?
- Had the lessons learnt been shared with other authorities?
- Did Transport for Norwich focus solely on urban areas?
- Would the Long Stratton bypass be a single or dual carriageway?

In response to these questions it was confirmed that work was ongoing on with the Planning Team regarding the viaduct, although a cycle path/walkway along it was likely to be financially unviable given their likely level of use.

Costs for the projects were well focused and managed, so should be on target. Lessons learnt had been shared with Suffolk County Council in respect of the third river crossing at Lowestoft and the DfT was to be contacted regarding identifying other authorities carrying out similar schemes.

Transport for Norwich focused on rural, as well as urban areas, and the Long Stratton bypass would be single carriageway.

The Chairman thanked David Allfrey for his comprehensive presentation.

### **98 LOCAL AUTHORITY COMMERCIALISATION**

This item was deferred to the 17 March 2020 meeting.

### **99 RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**

The Committee went through the items on the Recommendation Tracker.

The Member representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee confirmed that she would discuss gaps in mental health support with the Democratic Support and Scrutiny Team Manager at Norfolk County Council in due course.

It was confirmed that the query regarding the NEWS JVC's payments of Directors' fees, which were contrary to the Articles of Association, would need to be raised through Broadland's representative on the Board.

It was confirmed that the EcoCube recommendations had been agreed by Cabinet and were being implemented.

### 100 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme was amended to reflect the role of the Senior Governance Officer in supporting, coordinating and enabling the Work Programme. Minor amendments were also made to confirm who were the responsible officer for a number of topics on the Work Programme.

It was:

#### **AGREED**

that the following items would go to the 17 March 2020 meeting

- Local Authority Commercialisation
- Annual Overview and Scrutiny Letter to Parish and Town Councils

The reconvening of the EcoCube Time and Task Limited Panel would also be added to the list of Time and Task Panel reviews.

It was confirmed that a meeting with the Chairman and the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee at South Norfolk would be arranged to consider a joint scrutiny of Housing Allocations Policies and Affordable Housing Provision at both Councils.

*The meeting closed at 2.00 pm*