

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on **Tuesday 17 March 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 N J Harpley
Ms S I Holland
Mr K S Kelly

Mr D King
Mr M L Murrell
Mrs S M Prutton
Mrs C E Ryman-Tubb

Also in attendance were the Director Resources, Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer), Senior Governance Officer and the Committee Officer (JO).

123 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Nurden and Mr Shaw.

124 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2020 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Minute no 117 – Community Lottery

The Chairman advised the meeting that the Committee's recommendation to insert a 12 month break clause in the initial two year Community Lottery contract had been rejected by Cabinet.

The Chairman requested that Members be provided with a summary setting out the number of recommendations made by the Committee that were accepted by Cabinet over the last five years.

The Vice-Chairman advised Members that he was very disappointed by the number of Committee recommendations that were rejected by Cabinet. He questioned the value of the Committee continuing to review the Cabinet Agenda as a critical friend, if the views expressed by Members were not taken into account.

125 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised the meeting the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer) would provide Members with an update

on the Council's response to coronavirus situation after the meeting.

126 LOCAL AUTHORITY COMMERCIALISATION

The Director for Resources gave a presentation which looked at commercialisation activities at local authorities across the country and some of the opportunities that might be considered by Broadland, according to the Council's appetite for risk.

The Localism Act 2011 allowed local authorities for the first time to set up trading companies that could generate a profit that could be reinvested in Council services.

The main driver for commercialisation was to generate income to fill the revenue budget gap, due to the likelihood of a reduction in New Homes Bonus, and other Government funding. With the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, a reduction in Business Rates retention was also now likely. The Council also had a large capital programme that required significant investment in the waste service and IT.

Commercialisation was a common approach to this problem and as of September 2018 there were 743 Local Authority Trading Companies (LATC) in Great Britain, with 59.2% of local authorities owning at least one. Commercial property companies made up 23.2% of all LATCs.

Examples where commercial enterprises had been established were:

- Birmingham City Council which had raised income from cafes and gift shops.
- Warrington Borough Council had raised a £150 million Consumer Price Index linked bond to support a range of financing initiatives including developing the new Local Authority Mortgage Scheme concept, which had realised over 200 loans valued at £5.5 million.
- Cheshire East Council had recognised a skills shortage in their area and set up a company to provide training in specific areas needed in the locality. This had helped local people stay in the area, supported local businesses and generated a profit.
- Sevenoaks District Council had a property investment portfolio, which included an office block, a petrol station, a working men's club and transformed a car park into a new hotel to be lease to a hotel chain. Sevenoaks had also developed their own bespoke staff training programme that delivered an excellent return on investment. Moreover,

performance had increased by 41 per cent, productivity was up by 45 per cent and resident satisfaction was up to 80 per cent

- West Lindsey District Council had bought and now ran a staff agency they had been using.
- Nottingham City Council's in-house waste service had seen a reduction in marginal collection cost of 14.6 per cent per tonne of commercial waste and a reduction in operating costs for domestic waste by £575,000 per annum. Nottingham also operated trade waste collection services for a number of local businesses and neighbouring local authorities.
- Birmingham and Derby Councils had founded the Council Advertising Network, which allowed councils to charge for website advertising and had earned £1m in their first year.

Local authorities with property investments include:

- Luton Borough Council, which owned London Luton Airport.
- Winchester City Council, which had built a doctor's surgery
- At South Norfolk, Big Sky Housing was developing for the public good rather than purely for monetary gain, with high design and build standards.
- Rutland County Council had purchased a former prison for conversion to affordable office, industrial and leisure premises.
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council had partnered with a Scottish charity to build a specialist children's home.

Norse Group was owned by Norfolk County Council and was by far the largest LATC in the country with an annual turnover in excess of £250 million. The Group covered facilities management, property design, management consultancy; and residential care homes and employed over 10,000 people nationwide.

There had been failures, however, Bournemouth Borough Council established a 'Bank of Bournemouth' in 2014 as a community finance company, which was forecast to return up to £24m over its first 10 years. However, it was forced to close in 2015 after lending to just 22 businesses in 18 months.

In 2012 Shropshire Council agreed to set up Inspiring Partnerships and Enterprises, to sell the council's services to outside bodies, but was forced to close in 2016 after securing minimal external business and suffering from huge overheads.

Lessons learnt from other local authority ventures included:

- Engage Members, staff and trade unions at an early stage.
- Align commercialism with the broader council agenda.
- Be bold and opportunistic and be prepared to think outside of your comfort zone.
- Establish a broad set of success criteria.
- Take appropriate external professional advice.
- Understand risk and be risk aware not risk adverse; the risk of doing nothing could sometimes be greater.
- Ensure that there was the commercial acumen to develop a robust and deliverable business plan.
- Ensure a good governance model was adopted.

The Director of Resources confirmed that ideas for commercial ventures from Members and staff would be welcomed and Member engagement workshops would be held to help develop ideas. As resources were limited, any ideas would be subject to a 'quick and dirty' appraisal to assess if they had merit before any further more detailed research was done. However, the final decision on pursuing commercial ventures would be made by Members.

There were also a number of different fees and charges that the Council could increase to ensure full cost recovery. They included, leisure services, licensing, trade waste, grounds maintenance and parking charges. The Council had already agreed to implement a range of charges for pre-application planning advice.

The Chairman emphasised the importance of commercial projects having a good business case and not being driven by political motivation.

A Member advised the meeting that he was working with officers to establish a Community Land Trust in Taverham. Community Land Trusts developed and managed affordable housing and other assets locally and the Leader had

been very supportive of the initiative. A proposal for the scheme would be brought to Members in due course.

In answer to a query the Director of Resources confirmed that Big Sky Developments' income from housing rental was approximately 3.5 to 4 per cent of its income, as it only had 25 properties currently. The optimal number of dwellings would be around 80.

The Chairman thanked the Director of Resources for her comprehensive report.

127 NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Council's representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, provided a report on the meeting held on 13 February 2020.

The Committee had received a report on the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn, which had received an 'inadequate' rating by the Care Quality Commission in spring 2019. Since then a number of improvements had been made and it was anticipated that the rating would be improved when it was next assessed in autumn 2020.

The Committee also received a report on the Fairstead branch surgery, which it had now been decided to refurbish, instead of closing.

128 RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

The Committee noted that the EcoCube Time and Task Panel's recommendations had been agreed by Cabinet and were being implemented. The final set of Minutes from the Time and Task Panel would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chairman noted that the Panel had carried out a very good piece of scrutiny.

129 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Governance Officer informed the Committee that dates for the items on the Work Programme were not yet available until the Programme of Meetings was agreed by Council on 24 March 2020.

The Chairman advised Members that the letter to parish and town councils requesting topics for the Committee's Work Programme had yet to be sent out. He noted that by sending out a formal letter, it would ensure that the

matter was given due consideration on the Agenda of parish council meetings.

The Committee confirmed that they wished that the letter be sent out as soon as possible.

It was confirmed that arrangements for the Apprenticeships Time and Task Limited Panel to meet would be made in due course.

A five year summary of recommendations made to Cabinet, setting out how many were agreed and how many rejected was added to the Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 11.48am.