

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a remote meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Broadland District Council, held on Tuesday 30 March 2021 at 10.00am.

Committee Members Present: Councillor: S Riley (Chairman), A D Adams (Vice-Chairman), N J Brennan, P E Bulman, S J Catchpole, N J Harpley, S I Holland, C Karimi-Ghovanlou, K S Kelly, D King, M L Murrell, G K Nurden, S M Prutton and N C Shaw.

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer), Skills Development Officer, HR Business Partner, Senior Governance Officer (SW) and Democratic Services Officers (LA, JO)

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman took the Chair.

245 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

246 MATTERS ARISING

Minute No: 239 – Strategic Performance and Finance Report for Quarter 3

The Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer) confirmed that she would forward details to members of working days lost due to long-term staff sickness following the meeting.

Minute No: 242 – New Homes Bonus Consultation

Members were advised that the Consultation response would be submitted shortly.

Chairman in the Chair.

247 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised members that item eight on the agenda, the Provision of Leisure Principles, had been deferred as it would now not be considered by Cabinet until 14 September 2021.

Therefore, the Assistant Director Individuals and Families would present his update and full costings to the Committee at its meeting on 15 June 2021, which would allow members the opportunity to input into the process before the final report was drafted.

248 APPRENTICESHIPS LEVY

The Skills Development Officer introduced the report, which provided some background to apprenticeships and explained the impact that the implementation of the Apprenticeship Levy has had on the take up of apprenticeships in Broadland. The report also set out the overall approach being taken by the Council to support and promote apprenticeship participation.

Members were advised that the Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in May 2017 and was intended to allow employer's greater power and choice over the provision available.

However, this choice came at a cost and it was, therefore, unsurprising that employers took the opportunity to focus on helping their existing employees gain a funded higher or degree level apprenticeship and that this had impacted on the recruitment of 16-18 year old apprentices.

This was clearly demonstrated by a 23 percent reduction in apprenticeship starts across all ages and levels with the exception of recruitment to higher and degree levels which had enjoyed a 95 percent increase since the Levy was introduced.

Similarly, the age group that were least affected was the 25+ group which had reduced by 8.8 percent in contrast to a reduction of 25.8 percent for 16-18 year olds and 34.4 percent for 19-24 year olds.

In response to declining apprenticeship recruitment the Council was working closely with the Apprenticeship Norfolk Network, which was run by the County Council. The network was currently delivering financial incentives for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) who took on apprentices.

The Council was a member of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Workforce Work Stream, which saw apprenticeships as a key solution to the economic challenges facing young people and businesses post pandemic. The group, which included the DWP, education providers, the Chamber of Commerce and other local authorities was actively seeking funding opportunities for the provision of apprenticeships.

Broadland was also working with the Greater Norwich Manufacturing Group to deliver an apprenticeship pilot programme designed to develop an accessible engineering apprenticeship route, which it was hoped would begin in September 2021.

Currently there were nine apprentices employed within the One Team, working in areas such as Marketing, HR, Business Support and Ground Maintenance. An Apprenticeship Strategy was also being developed to further invest in staff, with a range of areas that were being looked at.

Members expressed concerns that the Apprenticeship Levy was disadvantaging young people and it was suggested that more work should be done in schools to encourage more vocational learning.

In response, the Skills Development Officer agreed that it was tremendously important to provide good advice to young people at an early age, but that employers also had a duty to work in a coordinated way and make it clear what they wanted from young people. She also emphasised, however, that the Council was in a good position to encourage businesses to view apprenticeships as a good way to plan their workforce.

A member expressed concern that a lot of young people were missing out and being left behind and that the same few employers were utilising employment schemes for young people that had few long-term jobs prospects or opportunities for career progression.

In answer to a query about the dedicated manager employed by the LEP, the Committee was informed that £300m in unused Levy was returned to the treasury last year. The manager's role was to encourage Levy payers to transfer up to 25 percent of their unused Levy pot to support apprenticeships at no cost to SME's, which was of benefit to all concerned.

In response to a query regarding the Apprenticeship scheme, it was noted that although the salary was £4.15 an hour for the first year an employer could choose to top this up if they wished and after the first year it would increase to the National Minimum Wage.

The Committee was also informed that young people could work with multiple employers through an agency called Trac, which managed learners and provided them with opportunities to learn a trade across a number of employers. There was also a similar agency for adults called Talent Share.

Officers were currently working on a report that set out Broadland's approach to skills and training, which would be brought to members later in the year. The Council would also continue to build on existing partnerships with local stakeholders to develop and deliver initiatives to reduce further slippage in apprenticeship recruitment.

Some members expressed disappointment that T-Levels required the majority of the courses to be spent in the classroom, rather than the workplace and it was also noted that the Council had previously run a very successful apprenticeship scheme from Carrowbreck and it was suggested that this might be reintroduced.

In response, the Skills Development Officer acknowledged the quality of the courses provided at Carrowbreck, but advised members that the decision to close the training facility had been taken against a background of declining funding, increasing costs and the inability to compete with alternative providers. She emphasised that the Council had a duty to consider the funding available, which at its current levels would make it impossible to reinstate Carrowbreck as a training centre.

The Chairman noted the concerns raised by the Committee and proposed the following additional recommendation arising from the report:

That the Council should make representation to the Secretary of State in light of the detrimental effect that the Apprenticeships Levy was having on 16-19 year olds and that officers should draft a report to support this recommendation to Government.

The proposal was duly seconded.

Following a show of hands it was unanimously:

AGREED

1. That the Council should make representation to the Secretary of State in light of the detrimental effect that the Apprenticeships Levy was having on 16-19 year olds and that officers should draft a report to support this recommendation to Government; and
2. To note the findings in the report and support the continued building of existing partnerships with local stakeholders to develop and deliver initiatives to reduce further slippage in apprenticeship recruitment and to ensure this remains an inclusive programme for all.

249 PROVISION OF LEISURE PRINCIPLE

This item was deferred to the 15 June 2021 meeting of the Committee.

The Committee adjourned at 11.24am and reconvened at 11.31am, when all the Committee members listed above were present.

250 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Senior Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer presented the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which set out the work it had undertaken over the last year and reported to Council its outcomes and achievements.

Members' attention was drawn to the following reviews undertaken since last July:

- Staff Turnover at Broadland District Council – this was still subject to an investigation by a Time and Task Limited Panel.
- Relocation of the One Team Service Areas
- Affordable Housing Delivery
- Early Intervention and Community Safety
- Apprenticeships and New Schemes – details of the discussion from today's meeting would be added to this review before presentation to Council.

The Annual Report noted the work undertaken by the Committee in its scrutiny of Cabinet and provided details of a call-in of the Member Grant Scheme, as well as the Committee's meeting with Cabinet to discuss the budget.

The Report also highlighted the training undertaken by the Committee on 15 March 2021, which had focused on developing effective scrutiny questioning skills.

A record of the recommendations made by the Committee when reviewing the Cabinet agenda was also appended to the report, which highlighted any discrepancies between the recommendations made by the Committee and the decisions made by Cabinet.

The Chairman commended the Senior Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer for her excellent work in drafting the Annual Report.

Following a show of hands it was unanimously:

AGREED

1. To recommend the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2020/21 to be presented to Council;
2. That any revisions made by the Committee will be updated in the report with the final wording to be agreed by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and

3. That the report will be updated following the consideration of other items at the meeting held on 30 March 2021, with the final wording to be agreed by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

251 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer took the Committee through their Work Programme.

Members were asked to note that, as referred to in minute 249 above, the item on the Provision of Leisure Principles was to be considered by the Committee at its 15 June 2021 meeting. Also at that meeting the Committee would receive a report on the reserves set aside for the maintenance of bridges. In response to a query about the reserve set aside for Reedham Quay, it was confirmed that the Committee would be emailed a response following the meeting.

The 15 June 2021 meeting was also due to receive a Community Safety Update. It was still to be confirmed if the Head of Community Safety at the Norfolk County Community Safety Partnership would be available to present the update.

At the 24 August 2021 meeting the Committee would consider an item proposed by Sprowston Town Council, which requested the production of a planning guidance document on the allocation of public open spaces. At the same meeting the Committee would consider an item on Engagement in Public Consultation, which had been proposed by Cllr Shaw.

The 2 November 2021 meeting would review the Housing Allocations Policy and also review the Member Grants Scheme to ensure that the Committee could put forward its views before the Cabinet report was drafted.

As noted above, at minute 250, the Staff Turnover Time and Task Panel investigation was ongoing. The Panel's next meeting was scheduled for 22 April 2021. A final report would be presented to the Committee once their work was concluded.

The next addition of *Broadland News* would include an article about the work of the Committee and invite residents to submit topics for future consideration.

The Broadband and Mobile Phone Coverage item had been delayed due to the pandemic. The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development had reported that she hoped that an all-member briefing on Better Broadband for Norfolk could take place during the summer, 2021.

There was no update on water supply, management and climate change at the present time. A report would be brought to the Committee in due course.

The Chairman noted that the additional report requested by the Committee on the Apprenticeship Levy (minute 248 above refers) would be added to the

Work Programme.

A Member suggested that an item on any plans to relocate Broadland staff outside the District and the possible detrimental effect this could have on services for residents be added to Work Programme.

In response, the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer) advised the meeting that the Council was only in the very early stages of assessing how the offices would look post-Covid and there were a lot of benefits and risks that needed consideration before any firm proposals were put in place, so at this stage there would be nothing to bring to the Committee.

Members were also reminded that at the 17 November 2020 meeting of the Committee the Managing Director had made a commitment that in the event that a matter was deemed to be novel or contentious and was not otherwise reported elsewhere, a report would be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

Members confirmed that they were satisfied that this commitment would ensure that they were kept informed of any further staff relocation proposals.

(The meeting concluded at 11.59 am)

Chairman