

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held by video link on **17 November 2020** at **10.00am** when there were present:

Cllr S Riley – Chairman

Cllr A D Adams  
Cllr N J Brennan  
Cllr P E Bulman  
Cllr S J Catchpole

Cllr S I Holland  
Cllr C Karimi-Ghovanlou  
Cllr K S Kelly  
Cllr M L Murrell

Cllr G K Nurden  
Cllr S M Prutton  
Cllr N C Shaw

Cllr J Copplestone, Cllr J Emsell, Cllr K Leggett, Cllr T Mancini-Boyle, Cllr L Hemsall and Cllr S Vincent also attended the meeting.

Also in attendance were the Managing Director, Director Place, Director Resources, Director People & Communities, Assistant Director Planning, Assistant Director Finance, Assistant Director Governance & Business Support (Monitoring Officer), Assistant Director Individuals and Families, Assistant Director Regulatory Services, Governance Manager, Communities Senior Manager, Housing Enabling Officer, Growth Delivery Manager, Senior Governance Officer (SW) and the Democratic Services Officers (LA and JO).

### **197 APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Harpley.

### **198 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

*Minute No: 186 – Budget Update Report*

The Chairman advised the meeting that Cabinet had not agreed to the Committee's recommendation to increase the IT budget to fund laptops for Members. They had, however, agreed to a £35,000 increase in the IT budget to fund potential changes following a review of Members' IT. There had been no commitment, however, for this sum to cover laptops for Members.

### **199 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman reminded Members that the Committee's annual budget review workshop would be held on 24 November 2020 at 10.00am.

### 200 FUTURE OF COMMUNITY GRANTS – CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had called-in the following Cabinet decision relating to the Future of Community Grants.

#### RESOLVED

1. That the Member-led Ward Grant system would remain unchanged for 21/22; and
2. To introduce a start-up grant; linked to the new Community at Heart Lottery.

The reasons for the call-in were:

- a) *The Members grant scheme is not supported in line with Officers recommendations and the Overview and Scrutiny recommendation to Cabinet following a review of operating experience and Members feedback for community support.*
- b) *The recommended mechanism for ensuring no underspend would allow it to be used where need is greatest.*
- c) *More accessibility for community groups to input to the application process, including bank details given direct.*
- d) *The introduction of a more formalised branding and promotion of the scheme.*
- e) *The Members Grant Scheme is not supported in line with the Overview and Scrutiny recommendation to increase the grant funding. The total funding of just £23,500 represents just 0.1 of one percent on budget or available resurveys, is not adequate to support self-help groups and community needs and undermines current Council policies in respect of Wellbeing and the Council's policy statement on Community at Heart and community support.*
- f) *The original risk as outlined in the portfolio holders PH1 decision submitted and subject to the previous call-in, was still of concern regarding Council policy.*

The Assistant Director of People and Families advised the meeting that it was good practice to review community grants on a regular basis to ensure that they were meeting the needs of residents and communities. He emphasised that it had been important to consider community grants as a whole when conducting the review, which had looked at a number of proposals. He noted,

however, that any increase to the Member-led Grant funding would need to come from budgets elsewhere.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development informed Members that it had been the intention for Member Grants to enable Members to work closely with residents to problem-solve and assist communities with a budget that was considered adequate for this purpose. She also reminded the Committee that the Council did have a duty to protect the public purse.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development noted the underspend from last year and that Cabinet had considered the proposed mechanism to address this, but had concluded that it was fair and equitable for all Members to receive the same £500 pot. Cabinet had also considered the proposals for increased accessibility for community groups and a review of the branding, but had considered that the grant was something Members should promote as part of their role. The Committee was also reminded that the scheme had been successful and had featured in a good news story in Broadland News which detailed how the grants had been spent over the year.

Members raised various points of concern. These included: the areas in need in the District being denied through lack of a mechanism to distribute the underspend; that there was no means to fund awards retrospectively, and that the pot should be increased.

In response to a suggestion that officers at the Council should deal with bank details of the applicants, the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families advised the meeting that, as it was a Ward Member Grant, the Member was the data controller and had responsibility for the security of that data. He also confirmed that there was an audit trail for all grants that would show that the ground rules for making awards were being adhered to.

It was suggested that the £500 pot was not large enough in many cases and should be increased to £1,000. However, other Members considered that any increase in the grant should be discussed as part of the wider debate on the budget. A Member also suggested that £500 was enough and it was the Member's responsibility to identify separate sources of funding to complement the grant.

In summary, the Chairman noted that there was a need in the District for Member grants that was not being met and he proposed that a vote be undertaken to decide whether reasons: B, C D and F, as detailed above, should be referred back to Cabinet.

Following a vote on these four issues, items C, D, and F were lost, but recommendation B, that an underspend mechanism be reconsidered by Cabinet, was carried.

### REFERRED BACK TO CABINET

To reconsider introducing changes to the member-led ward grant system to utilise underspend in February each year.

*The Committee adjourned at 11.24am and reconvened at 11.32am, when all of the Committee Members listed above were present.*

### 201 RELOCATION OF THE ONE TEAM SERVICE AREAS

The Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer) introduced her report, which had been requested by the Committee at its meeting on 27 October 2020, in response to concerns raised by Members about the relocation of the Planning department to South Norfolk House.

Joint team structures had been in existence since January 2020 and the Planning department had been a pilot service for working together since January 2018.

Covid-19 had an almost overnight impact on the way staff worked at the Council, with a reduction from 71 percent working in the office to about 12 percent working in the office and the remainder being provided with the equipment to work from home.

The importance of promoting the wellbeing of staff was an important element within the Council and, from an ongoing wellbeing survey, it had become apparent that staff had the desire for a hybrid approach to working, with some of the time being office-based and some of the time home-based. From discussions with every single member of staff in terms of their personal preference for working, the Council had been able to achieve an almost 90 percent match with the business need.

The wellbeing survey also highlighted that staff increasingly felt the need to be able to come together at one location as a service.

Therefore, a review had been undertaken to allocate a primary site for each service area. This was done on a Directorate basis to enable complementary services to be based near each other.

Risk assessments had been carried out to ensure that both offices were Covid-19 secure and assessment had also been undertaken to ensure a presence at each site, should a business need exist.

On 4 September 2020, following discussions with the Leaders and Deputy Leaders, an email had been sent to all Members confirming the steps that

were being taken with regards to Directorate locations. The key points from the email were:

- Not everyone would return to the office full time.
- Having two sites enabled more people to have a working from home / office balance that staff asked for in the wellbeing surveys.
- The decision had been made as to where / which office services would be primarily based, recognising the need for a presence at the other site in some areas.
- Human Resources were now all based at South Norfolk House, as their primary site with a presence at Thorpe Lodge.
- The Elections Team were now primarily based at Thorpe Lodge. The Team had taken the opportunity of the cancelled elections to install a new IT platform and had benefited greatly from being based at the same location.

On 5 October 2020 the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee received a report titled New Ways of Working Update, which covered office location and this item remained on their Work Programme.

It was important to note that Members would still have access to staff and support from officers, as they had done throughout the pandemic, either by phone, virtual meetings, or, when safe to do so, in person in the relevant office.

In response to the concern regarding the location of the Planning department it was important to consider it in the context of all services. For example, the Place Directorate, which Planning was part of, was primarily based at South Norfolk House, with a presence still available at Thorpe Lodge. A key customer service within the Place Directorate was CNC Building Control, a service which operated from The House for a number of local authorities.

It was clear that customers for the Planning service were much more willing and able to meet in ways other than face to face. Agents were more than happy to meet virtually, or attend Planning Committees over Zoom. Importantly, as already noted, it allowed staff to be able to work together as a team.

In contrast, the primary site of the People and Communities Directorate was Thorpe Lodge, with a presence at The House. Again, when discussions had taken place, it was felt that Thorpe Lodge, being closer to the City, would provide the best location for the service, due to the customer profile of the Directorate.

In response to some queries regarding the terms and conditions within the employment contracts of staff, the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer) advised the meeting that the terms and conditions within the new staff contracts introduced at the start of the year were being achieved. The contracts stipulated that employees could be expected to work from either site, although many worked from home. Mileage allowances could still be paid, if appropriate. All staff had discussed their individual situations and preferences with their line managers and arrangements could be put in place to best accommodate their needs. Most staff had expressed a preference, however, for a mix of working from home and coming together as a team in one location, which was proving to be a very effective means of working.

The Chairman suggested that the main driver for relocating the Planning department at South Norfolk House was co-locating with CNC.

In response, the Assistant Director Governance and Business Support (Monitoring Officer) advised the meeting that there was no main driver for locating this service at The House, but the decision had been based on the best way for staff to work effectively and their wellbeing, as well as the best solution for customers.

Conversely the customer profile of the People and Communities Directorate leant itself to a location closer to the City. There were no figures at this stage on any savings that could be made; but the main driver remained the delivery of a high quality service to residents.

The Chairman advised the meeting that the main issue why the Committee had requested the report was the lack of transparency with the process and concerns over service provision and costs for residents, if they wanted to speak to officers as well as additional costs for officer travel between sites.

In response, the Director of Place reiterated that the location of the department would not have a detrimental effect on the service delivered to Broadland's residents, who would have access to a presence at Thorpe Lodge and if necessary access to a duty officer via Zoom at The House.

In response to a number of queries, the Managing Director advised the Committee that this issue related to the management of staff and how services should be organised to most effectively respond to the pandemic. It was clear, however, that working from home would remain a large element of staff deployment even after the pandemic, as it made for an agile and flexible workforce that could work in a number of ways according to the needs of the service. He emphasised that the most important factor was the delivery of services, rather than where staff were located.

The Leader advised Members that establishing one team of staff across the two Councils had been a key principle for collaboration and had worked well.

An accommodation review had also been part of the Feasibility Study from the start and the Covid-19 pandemic had accelerated this process. He emphasised that it was difficult to predict what office accommodation would look like in the future, but it would be very different from that prior to the pandemic.

The Leader noted that the decision had been made to locate the Planning department in a Covid-19 safe environment that solved the problem of bringing together the team in one space when they came into the office. He added that he was sure that the Planning service would continue to deliver the high quality service that it had always done.

A Member suggested that the process of relocation had been flawed, as there had been no consultation and that whilst rationalisation was acceptable, customers would prefer to meet officers in person, rather than talking to someone who was working from home. He also suggested that this could be the beginning of the diminution of the sovereignty of each authority.

Another Member raised further concerns, such as how the service would be measured to ensure that there was no adverse effect on the residents of Broadland and questioned who had made the decision on where the Directorates would be located.

In response Members were advised that the performance of the Planning department would be reported in the usual way through the quarterly Performance Reports to Cabinet.

The Leader added that consideration of the accommodation review had been considered by the Joint Lead Members Group over the summer and, as already noted, by the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee.

The Managing Director advised the meeting that Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972, gave him, as Head of Paid Service, authority to deploy staff in order to deliver the best service. The decision to exercise this authority had been taken following consultation with the Joint Lead Members Group and after the plans had been communicated by email to all Members with no adverse response. He added that the office environment had now changed significantly, with desks cleared and positioned to allow for social distancing, and that he did not expect to see this change post-pandemic.

The Chairman suggested that although the deployment of staff was a matter for the Head of Paid Service, it still could have been communicated to Members in a clearer and more transparent manner. He also questioned whether the new ways of working would cost more.

In response to the Chairman's last question, the Managing Director cited the example of the Elections Team, which was scheduled to be delivering some very complex elections in May 2021 and because they were now consolidated

in one place would be able to deliver this with no increase in resources, at present. Similarly with the HR Team based at The House, savings were being made in line with the £8m projection in the Feasibility Study.

In response to the Chairman's suggestions about better communication, the Managing Director suggested the following wording in order to give some assurance to Members:

*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.*

### **AGREED**

1. To note the position with the location of the One Team; and
2. To confirm 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.

*The Committee adjourned at 13.05pm and reconvened at 13.10pm, when all of the Committee Members listed above were present.*

## **202 AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY UPDATE**

The Housing Enabling Officer introduced her report, which provided an update on the delivery of affordable housing across the District, as well as the impact that Covid-19 had on projected affordable housing completions and an update on the activity of Registered Providers.

Members were asked to note a typographical error at paragraph 3.2, which stated an affordable housing target of 33 percent. This should, in fact, be 28 percent, which was in line with the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Broadland had achieved above this figure in most recent years with affordable housing delivery of 30 percent of all new build sites. The majority of these dwellings were Section 106 properties delivered by developers as part of their planning obligations. However, Members were asked to note that delivery of affordable housing was expected to be lower for the current financial year due to the pandemic. The delay had been around three to six months and it was anticipated that this would pick up once the pandemic was over.

Registered Providers were bringing forth a range of schemes across the District. Clarion was taking additional open market units at a site in Newton St Faith to increase the on-site affordable housing delivery from ten percent to 49 percent. Clarion had also confirmed that it saw Broadland as a high



priority local authority for the eastern region. Many other Registered Providers were also looking to expand their stock of social housing by purchasing open market properties in Broadland.

In response to a query raised at an earlier meeting regarding the lead-in time for delivery of one and two bedroomed housing in and around the City, it was understood that the query related to private rented stock and, therefore, it was a question of whether private developers were providing these properties, rather than relating to affordable housing. Appendix 2 to the report showed that Broadland had delivered a very good mix of properties during 2019/20, with 43 1-bedroomed and 61 2-bedroomed properties out a total of 137 affordable homes.

A shift in need had seen a greater requirement for 3-bedroomed family homes recently and the Enabling Team at Broadland was now putting a greater emphasis on developers providing this type of property.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that although only a relatively small number of wheelchair adapted properties had been delivered, the Enabling Team was seeking to increase this number.

### **AGREED**

To note the delivery of affordable housing in the District.

## **203 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

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

As an update to the published Work Programme, Members were advised of the following:

A report on Early Intervention and Public Safety would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 26 January 2021 to enable members to make timely comments and recommendations to officers, prior to a final report being considered by Cabinet in May 2021.

A report on The Provision of Leisure Principles would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 March 2021, prior to the drafting of a report for the May 2021 Cabinet, to allow for early input from the Committee.

It was noted that the item on Broadband and mobile phone coverage in the District, was on hold until after January 2021, when it was expected that data from Openreach would be available regarding the two percent of properties with no connectivity in the District.

Following a brief update from Cllr Copplestone, the Council's representative on Water Resources East, regarding Water – supply, management and climate change, it was agreed that updates would be provided to the Committee as and when appropriate. The Work Programme would be updated accordingly. The Committee was also advised that a Water Cycle Study was also being carried out as part of the Greater Norwich Local Plan.

The Senior Governance Officer advised the Committee that she would be arranging training for Members in the New Year.

*The meeting closed at 1.45pm.*