

Service Improvement & Efficiency Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Service Improvement & Efficiency Committee** held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on **Monday 12 March 2018** at **10.00 am** when there were present:

Mr G Peck – Chairman

Mrs J K Copplestone
Mrs M L Hempsall

Mrs J Leggett
Mr G K Nurden

Mrs K A Vincent
Mr F Whymark

Also in attendance were the Head of Corporate Resources, Service Improvement Officer and the Committee Officer (JO).

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Everett and Mr C Harrison.

31 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Minute no: 28 – Collaborative Working

It was confirmed that another joint networking event for Members was being arranged for 12 April 2018. This meeting would be a workshop that would focus on the five key areas and ideas that were being developed and would allow Members the opportunity to have a direct input into the interim feasibility study report.

32 COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Since the last meeting of the Service Improvement and Efficiency Committee two further joint workshops, with over 70 staff in attendance, had been held. The sessions had allowed staff to get to know each other's services in detail and to start to scope out potential opportunities for collaborative working.

Subsequently, staff in the service focus areas for the feasibility study had been working to produce clear comparative data, as well as gathering insights into the constraints, enablers and opportunities for future collaborative working. It was expected that each service area would have two or three ideas for collaboration with a total of around 15 for the interim report. It was notable that opportunities arising from collaboration were being identified where differences were apparent, as well as in areas where there were similarities. Two more staff workshops were to be held this week.

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It was emphasised that the interim report would focus on strategic opportunities, rather than minor proposals for service collaboration.

The Head of Corporate Resources advised the meeting that he had held a series of informal meetings with departments across the Council. The meetings had been very positively received and had allowed concerns to be addressed and a number of myths dispelled. One issue that had been emphasised was that if collaboration did proceed it would not be a rapid transformation, but a more organic emergent process that could take place over a number of years.

Members were asked to note that the key drivers for collaboration remained to seize the opportunities lost by the failure of the devolution deal, such as increased access to Government funding and to best place both authorities in the event of future structural changes to local government. Grant Thornton would be commissioned to conduct an independent assessment of this rationale by undertaking a study of other councils that were sharing services.

Both councils were already actively collaborating in a number of areas, for example: on preparation for the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation, which was due to come into force in May 2018. Teams across the two authorities had also submitted joint responses to consultations and the two planning teams were arranging a joint Business Breakfast with developers.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that aligning external partners was not being looked at currently, but it could be an area for future consideration and it was noted that Suffolk Coastal and Waveney Councils had identified an increased appetite from partners to work with them as a merged body.

A Member advised the meeting that staff concerns about the speed of bringing together a single workforce could be justified, as a restructure could take place over the course of a year. He also suggested that it had become more difficult to access Planning Officers since the joint Management Team had been established and he expressed concern that developers and the public might also be finding this to be the case. However, it was also noted that apart from the three senior officers in the joint Management Team the structure of the planning service had remained largely unaffected. It was also confirmed that the Planning Department interim arrangement was being reviewed at three, six, nine and 12 months and any concerns about a drop in the level of service should be raised with the head of service.

It was confirmed that there were areas being identified where there were significant differences between the councils, such as with ICT. These differences represented real opportunities, but would require careful consideration to identify the best collaborative way forward.

In response to a question about a timetable for sharing services, it was confirmed that it could take as long as the rest of the year before a new Chief Executive would be in place. It would then be for the post holder to decide on the future structure and roll out of any joint Management Team for both authorities.

The Chairman noted that the best means of gaining the co-operation of staff through a restructure was by utilising natural wastage and voluntary redundancies. It was also noted that sharing services could also result in improved job opportunities for staff.

33 WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted that the feasibility study would remain the main focus of the Committee for the immediate future.

The meeting closed at 11.07 am