

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 23 January 2019 at 2.00pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: G Minshull, B Bernard, B Duffin, C Gould, L Hornby, T Lewis, T Palmer, R Savage and J Wilby

Cabinet Members in Attendance: Councillor: L Neal

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors: D Bills and V Thomson

Officers in Attendance: The Director of Growth and Business Development (D Lorimer), the Director of Communities and Wellbeing (J Sutterby), the Assistant Director of Resources (P Catchpole), the Head of Planning (P Courtier), the Head of Business Transformation (H Ralph), the Head of Environmental Services (B Wade), the Accountancy Manager (M Fernandez-Graham), the Business Improvement Lead (E Pepper) the Group Accountant (J Brown) the Capital and Management Accountant (H Craske) and the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard)

1241 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 21 November 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1242 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2019 - 2020

The Committee considered the report of the Business Improvement Lead, which presented members with the draft Business Plan for 2019-2020. The Business Improvement Lead outlined the key areas of the Plan, advising members that the 2019 – 2020 Plan focussed on the same corporate priorities and was presented in the same format as the previous year but that the activities had been updated to include the collaborative work with Broadland District Council. Members were advised of the changes made to the Plan, as a direct result of feedback received from members and officers, including the division of the Council's capital expenditure to distinguish between capital which was funded internally or externally.

Members considered the Plan, theme by theme, and officers responded to a number of questions on points of detail.

In response to a member's question regarding the intention to increase the number of households helped to achieve positive outcomes through the Help Hub service, the Director of Communities and Wellbeing advised that, rather than focussing on numbers, officers were committed to improving and refining the service to provide the right help to those who needed it. He explained that, although there had been no change to the partners who worked in the Hub, much work had been undertaken to ensure quality of service and to identify and provide solutions where gaps existed, such as the launch of the emotional wellbeing service which recognised low-level mental health problems, an issue which was not being effectively addressed elsewhere.

Members raised a question regarding apprenticeship placements throughout the District and whether the Council had active contact with apprenticeship providers. Officers advised that SNC took an active role in making connections with schools and job-seekers and that the Council itself currently employed 31 apprentices in its offices and leisure centres. Members were pleased to note that a number of staff at the Council had started their careers with SNC as apprentices. In response to a query regarding the number of apprentices employed by Broadland District Council (BDC) officers clarified that, as a smaller employer, Broadland was not subject to apprenticeship levy but that it was understood that there were some apprentices employed by BDC.

The Committee discussed the measures for customers using self-service and online forms to contact the Council and questioned the reasoning for a small target increase. The Head of Business Transformation advised that the Council had benchmarked itself against, and was on par with, other organisations and was continuing to look for ways to introduce and promote online interactions throughout its services. Members were advised that the percentage of people contacting the Council online was affected by demographics and the particular service being contacted, noting that leisure centre users were more likely to want to use self-service than people contacting SNC for other reasons. Members also suggested that many older people tended to prefer to speak to somebody in person. It was suggested and noted that the wording for measure HO1801, regarding self-service, should be amended to provide more clarity.

Members questioned the efficiency savings for 2019/20, as detailed in the Plan, and the Director of Communities and Wellbeing advised the Committee that the Council was constantly reviewing and refining its services to provide the most cost-effective ways of operating without reducing its standards of delivery. He explained that assessments were undertaken when posts became vacant which had resulted in some services being reorganised to absorb the work in a more streamlined manner. It was noted that the savings from the collaboration with BDC were not included in the figures and that these would be included in the budget papers which would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 6 February 2019, but that some of the on-costs for the collaboration were shown in the Plan.

In response to a member's question regarding the savings to be made from the Council's divestment of street lighting to town and parish councils, the Director of Communities and Wellbeing advised that agreements would need to be reached with towns and parishes which would absorb some of the monies which would

otherwise have been spent on maintenance. He explained that some street lights were located in the Council's own car parks so some costs to SNC would remain.

After discussion, the general consensus of the meeting was to commend the draft Business Plan to Cabinet however, Cllrs Lewis and Bernard reserved their positions on the matter.

It was then:

RESOLVED:

To note the draft Business Plan and **commend it to Cabinet**, subject to the wording for measure HO1801, regarding self-service, being amended to provide more clarity.

1243 REVIEW OF NORWICH CITY COUNCIL'S DECISION TO ADOPT A COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES RELIEF POLICY

Cllr Neal, in Cllr Fuller's absence, provided members with a brief introduction to the report which requested that the Committee consider the implications of Norwich City Council's decision to adopt a CIL Exceptional Circumstances Policy and to decide whether South Norfolk Council should provide a response.

The Head of Planning presented his report to the Committee, providing members with an overview of the Greater Norwich Partnership and the pooled CIL arrangements, as detailed in the report. He stressed that although Norwich City Council was entitled to make a unilateral decision to introduce an Exceptional Circumstances Policy and the implications to its partners was not catastrophic, the adoption of the Policy was contrary to the spirit of the borrowing agreement and undermined the commitment of the partners in the City Deal. The Committee's attention was drawn to the recommendation that the Scrutiny Committee make representation to Norwich City Council to amend the wording of their Policy to require them to consult the partners in order to assess the wider implications of any future claim for exemption made by a developer.

The Committee expressed their concerns and disappointment regarding the lack of consultation and collaboration by Norwich City Council when considering and adopting the Policy in view of its likely impact on the spreading of CIL receipts throughout Greater Norwich. Members considered the need to further discuss the matter at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. The Head of Planning noted the suggestion but confirmed that a paper was to be considered by the Greater Norwich Growth Board the following week so SNC might be advised to await the outcome of that meeting before deciding whether to further scrutinise the arrangements.

The Head of Planning stressed that, when applying the Policy, Norwich City Council was required to carry out various tests, as detailed in the report, including the need for any successful application for the Exceptional Circumstances Policy to demonstrate that it would not be viable without CIL relief. Members noted that,

in the event that a large scheme could not be delivered in Norwich, because it was not viable without relief, a development burden might be placed on all partners as housing would not be delivered.

In response to a member's question regarding whether it was possible to provide lower levels of CIL relief, the Head of Planning confirmed that the assessment for relief was only available in full but that, as it was assessed on a 'phase by phase' basis, it would be possible for some developments to achieve relief on some phases only.

Members discussed other partners within the Greater Norwich Partnership and it was suggested that the Council liaise with partners to provide a joint response to Norwich City Council. The Chairman advised that he would be happy to consult with the Chairman of Broadland District Council's Scrutiny Committee and Norfolk County Council's Committee Chairman for Environment, Development and Transport.

After discussion, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. representations are made to Norwich City Council to amend the Exceptional Circumstances Policy to enable the Greater Norwich partners to consider and contribute to the assessment of the wider regeneration benefits and exceptional circumstances associated with any claim for CIL relief received by Norwich City Council;
- and
2. the Scrutiny Committee Chairman liaises with the Broadland District Council's Scrutiny Committee Chairman and Norfolk County Council's Committee Chairman for Environment, Development and Transport.

1244 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND CABINET CORE AGENDA

The Committee noted the Work Programme, Tracker and Cabinet Core Agenda.

(The meeting concluded at 3:37pm)

Chairman