

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on 25 September 2019 at 9.30am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: G Minshull, V Clifford-Jackson, B Bernard, B Duffin, R Savage and J Wilby

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: J Rowe, T Spruce and J Worley

Cabinet Members in Attendance: Councillor: J Fuller

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director, Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Group Accountant (J Brown), the Management Accountant (G Harvey), the Trainee Management Accountant (J Head) and the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard)

1253 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 28 June 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1254 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMERCIALISATION STRATEGY

Cllr Fuller introduced the item, providing members with details of the background and the Council's rationale and objectives leading to Cabinet's agreement to implement the Commercialisation Strategy in June 2017. He explained that South Norfolk Council had responded to the reduction in government funding by resolving to seek opportunities and develop commercial ventures in order to generate additional income rather than to remove or reduce services. Members noted that the Strategy was not merely focussed on making money for its residents but also about producing quality housing, demonstrating leadership in industry, and providing health benefits through its leisure offer. Cllr Fuller reminded members that South Norfolk had been placed in the top six Commercial Councils of the Year at the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) annual awards, which he regarded as an outstanding national achievement.

The Group Accountant presented the report which sought to update members on the progress in implementing the priority opportunities and the key focus areas in the medium to long term, as outlined in the Council's Commercialisation Strategy 2017-21.

In response to a member's question regarding the Council's attitude towards investments outside of the district, Cllr Fuller advised that although South Norfolk Council had financial interests outside of its area, such as CNC Building Control and through its partnership with other Norfolk councils, the aim was to focus mainly on commercial projects within South Norfolk.

The Committee considered the report, page by page and officers responded to a number of general questions and agreed to reply to several individual queries outside of the meeting.

Regarding the refurbishment of Wymondham Leisure Centre, Cllr Fuller confirmed that, due to further investment, the centre was now returning a profit and providing an excellent service to deliver health and leisure benefits to residents of Wymondham and the surrounding area. He was pleased to report that the refurbished facilities far exceeded the expectations of a council-run leisure centre.

In response to a question regarding community lottery schemes, it was clarified that these were projects run by local community groups but licensed by the Council.

Members discussed the digital transformation programme and were pleased to note that over 70% of routine customer enquiries were resolved online. In response to a member's question regarding customers who were unable or did not wish to contact the Council online, it was confirmed that South Norfolk Council operated a freephone telephone number and that, by dealing with over 70% of its enquiries online, more resource was available to deal with those residents choosing to make contact by phone or in person.

The Committee considered the collaboration with Broadland District Council and the potential commercial opportunities which could be explored. Whilst welcoming ideas, Cllr Fuller stressed that it would be premature to further consider possible projects until the staffing restructure had been completed and the Council had a stable officer platform. Members were reminded that the Scrutiny Committee's role was to monitor the progress of the Commercialisation Strategy for South Norfolk and to endorse the proposal that a Joint Commercialisation Strategy be developed to reflect the opportunities which would arise from the collaboration with Broadland District Council.

It was then:

RESOLVED:

1. To note the Council's progress in delivering the Commercialisation Strategy;
and
2. To endorse the proposal to revise and adopt a new Commercialisation Strategy, at the appropriate time, to reflect the collaboration with Broadland District Council and the opportunities which will arise from this.

1255. WORK PROGRAMME

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

It was suggested and agreed that the meeting scheduled for 30 October 2019 be cancelled and the item on Empty Homes be deferred until the meeting scheduled for 27 November 2019. It was also agreed that the Scrutiny Committee consider a report on the Council's internal and external funding of debt and welfare support, including the Citizens Advice, at the November meeting.

(The meeting concluded at 10.48am)

Chairman