

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk District Council held on Wednesday 19 January 2022 at 9.30am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: J Hornby (Chairman), Y Bendle, B Bernard, B Duffin, J Easter, J Halls and T Spruce

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: J Rowe and J Wilby

Substitute: Councillor: K Kiddie (for J Wilby)

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director for Regulatory (N Howard), the Senior Environmental Management Officer (A Old), the Senior Governance Officer (E Goddard) and the Committee Officer.

1296 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8 December 2021, were confirmed as a correct record.

1297 REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY DELIVERY

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director for Regulatory, which sought to update the Committee on the effectiveness of the environmental strategy as well as progress made in achieving its outcomes. He also explained that amendments would need to be made to the environmental strategy in order to incorporate emerging developments/issues.

The Assistant Director for Regulatory then presented a verbal briefing to the committee based on the six themes of the environmental strategy and action plan:

Clean and Safe Environment

- Environmental Protection and Crime Prevention

Litter Picking

The Assistant Director for Regulatory advised that 17 litter picks had been carried out in 2020/21. He explained that due to Covid regulations fewer litter picks could be supported than originally planned. He added that normal service was expected to resume from April 2022, and that social media work was planned from March to May 2022 to increase public involvement.

Fly Tipping

The Assistant Director for Regulatory informed members that 890 incidents of fly tipping had been reported in 2020/21, he added that figures for 2021/22 were pending, however, incidents had been significantly lower in the first two quarters. He explained the mitigations which were to be implemented, including the establishment of a fly tipping focus team who would provide rapid response to new reports as well as patrol fly tipping hotspots across the district.

Members were then advised of the number of fixed penalty notices issued by the Council:

- 2018/19 – 1
- 2019/20 – 14
- 2020/21 – 14
- 2021/22 – 17 to date

The Assistant Director for Regulatory updated members on the enforcement work carried out by officers to date, which included:

- Multi-agency vehicle check days
- The recent high-profile conviction of a fly tipper
- Targeted campaigns

He then explained the future work planned by officers, which included:

- Education and awareness campaigns
- Proactive checks to identify unlawful waste carriers
- Intensive enforcement campaigns
- Localised surveillance focus

One member highlighted the need to educate residents on registered waste carriers, other members suggested that the Council compile a list of registered waste collectors which could be made easily available to the public. Another member noted that individuals and businesses also needed to be informed of the requirement to register as a waste collector as well as support to complete the necessary forms. The Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that a marketing campaign had been planned to cover this, as well as to invite individuals and businesses to the business support hub to provide one-to-one support.

In response to a query, the Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that the spike in fly tipping cases in 2020/21 could have been due to the lockdown, however, he also noted that the Council had changed its method of recording fly tipping cases which could account for some of the increase.

Some members felt that if it was clearer and simpler to dispose of waste that the number of fly tipping incidents would significantly decrease. Members suggested that the use of recycling centres (and what could be disposed there) should be publicised and that residents be provided with clear links to information on Norfolk County Council's website.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that information on what could be disposed of in household waste and recycling bins would continue to be published in the 'Link' magazine, and that other communication methods were being considered.

Review of Fixed Penalty Notice Charges

Members were informed of the recent review of the fixed penalty notice charges, which were approved by Cabinet on 4 January 2022.

Environmental Crime Strategy and Joint Working

The Assistant Director for Regulatory updated members on the progress made with regard to the Environmental Crime Strategy and joint working, which included:

- Dedicated Environmental Enforcement Capacity established
- Clear strategic brief guiding close enforcement coordination
- Closer working with Norfolk Constabulary

Strategic Objectives for Anti-Social Behaviour

The Assistant Director for Regulatory advised members on the six strategic objectives.

1. Deploy a **lean and agile joined-up service** to incidents and reports of anti-social behaviour.
2. Adopt a **preventative early intervention approach**, where possible getting to and **tackling the underlying and root causes**, and a focussed strategic commitment.
3. Develop and **optimise close partnership working**, founded on solid and rounded collective awareness of ASB.
4. Closely **work with local people and ensure ASB services are delivered with and not to them**, recognising the shared community responsibility for building strong communities.
5. Focus **programmed, intelligence-led and targeted operational ASB activity** in support of tactical planning, aims and objectives arising over time.

6. Drive down avoidable and wasteful demands, impacts and costs
on public services, local communities and community assets.

He further advised that cross working was established with the Communities Team to tackle crime relating to anti-social behaviour.

- **Land Quality**

The Assistant Director for Regulatory informed members that updated guidance was being produced to educate developers and consultants on what they had to submit (in terms of a sustainability statement or delivery statement) with their planning applications. He added that this guidance would be provided to developers and placed on the Council's website in quarter 4 of 2021/22.

Members were also informed of heating oil projects which had been planned for quarter 1 of 2022/23. The Senior Environmental Management Officer explained several reports had been received of oil spillages from oil heating tanks, she advised the committee of the serious environmental impact and costs associated with oil spillages, which were often a result of poor maintenance, vandalism or theft. She then advised the committee of the campaign to check the condition of resident's tanks, with the aim of reducing the number of oil spillages within the district. Members were informed of one case, where the resident had been displaced for 18 months due to the damage caused to their property by an oil tank spillage.

Members supported the campaign and its aim to prevent further oil spills but noted that many low-income households relied on oil heat as a cheaper source of heating, many members felt that replacement oil tanks or alternative heat sources would be too expensive. They suggested that officers investigate the availability of grants for the replacement of oil tanks.

After further discussion, which included alternative sources of heating, in particular green sources such as ground source heating, members suggested that officers utilise social media platforms to publicise green sources of heating to residents.

- **Water Quality and Management**

The Assistant Director for Regulatory advised the committee of the education which was to be provided to developers and consultants in terms of the water efficiency standard, he explained that this work was to be carried out as part of the Greater Norwich Local Plan, which was likely to be adopted in 2022.

Members were then informed that the Flood and Water Management Officer role and capacity had been expanded and that a full programme of work and priorities was to be developed in 2022.

Sustainable Communities

- **Climate Change adaption**

The Assistant Director for Regulatory advised the committee that this area of the environmental strategy was in development, and that to date Emergency Planning Officers had been working with Parish and Town Councils to develop and review their community resilience plans. Members were then informed of the planned programme of work that the new Flood and Water Management Officer would undertake in 2022/23, which included:

- High profile campaigns, eg, Ditchingham flood gates and flood preparedness
- Raise awareness of the need of property level adaptations
- Promote the use of sustainable drainage systems in new developments
- Promote the use of gel flood bags in addition to sandbags
- Proactive campaigns to focus on rainwater conservation and reuse, extreme weather and drought

One member referred to the ditch walking scheme, which was trialled in Long Stratton, and highlighted the need to aid residents in the maintenance of their ditches. The Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that the trial sought to inform and educate riparian owners on their responsibilities, not vilify and punish owners. He further assured members that enforcement action would only be taken where strictly necessary. Some members discussed the local knowledge of residents as well as Parish and Town Councils with regard to local flooding issues and it was suggested that volunteer flood wardens be appointed to assist the Flood and Water Management Officer and report flooding in the early stages. The Senior Environment Management Officer advised that the suggestion of flood wardens had been raised at the county level and was due to be discussed at the Norfolk Flood Group (chaired by the Council's Managing Director).

The conversation turned to community resilience plans, where members stressed the need for officers to provide training to Parish and Town Councils on the development and review of their plans. The Assistant Director for Regulatory confirmed that additional training sessions would be advertised shortly.

- **Planning Policy**

The Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that a local plan policy aimed at mitigating and adapting to climate change was being

implemented as part of the Greater Norwich Local Plan. He added that this planning policy would require that:

- All new developments will provide a 19% reduction against Part L of the 2013 Building Regulations
- Appropriate non-housing developments of 500m² or above will meet the BREEAM “very good” energy efficiency standard, or any equivalent successor.

The Assistant Director for Regulatory noted that the number of non-housing developments over 500m² achieving BREEAM “very good” was not yet quantifiable, he added that officers were investigating alternatives which would be quantifiable.

- **Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity**

The Assistant Director for Regulatory informed members on the progress made to date as well as the future work planned, which included:

Progress to date

- External funding obtained to increase the delivery of green infrastructure projects
- South Norfolk Council acquired the Queens Hill Country Park
- Opportunities were being taken to promote tree planting within the district, such as tiny forests, offer of trees to residents

What's planned

- Council due to commission a Green Infrastructure Strategy
- 10% biodiversity net gain was to become mandatory with the adoption of the Environment Act 2021
- The current lack of resource prevented the delivery of a number of projects. Officers to look at appointing a graduate apprentice to develop and deliver a range of energy, tree planting and biodiversity projects

One member felt that public perception was that tree planting initiatives were driven solely by Norfolk County Council and that residents were not aware of the hard work undertaken by the District Council and its officers. Members suggested that the work of the Council in planting trees be promoted.

With regard to the suggestion to appoint a graduate apprentice, members supported the suggestion and added that a dedicated Tree Planting Officer also be appointed to manage the tree planting schemes and investigate opportunities for grants and additional schemes.

Energy Efficiency

- **In-House Emissions**

The Assistant Director for Regulatory advised the committee that a baseline had been calculated in a carbon footprint report (the Carbon Audit), he added that the findings of the Carbon Audit were due to be presented to all members at a future informal briefing. The Senior Environmental Management Officer provided an overview of the findings to the committee and advised that the emissions figures for South Norfolk Council were good compared to other Authorities – although she noted it was not possible to carry out a like-for-like assessment. She added that the Carbon Audit determined that the main producers of emissions were:

- The diesel fleet
- Gas and oil heating

Diesel Fleet

The Assistant Director for Regulatory informed the committee that a trial was planned to switch part of the fleet to HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) fuel. He explained that following the trial a full assessment would be carried out to look at transferring the entire fleet to HVO fuel. It was estimated that it would cost the Council approximately £150,000 to switch the entire fleet the HVO fuel.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director for Regulatory confirmed that the Council collected vegetable oil, and that collection points could be found at main recycling points across the district.

Gas and Oil Heating

The Senior Environmental Management Officer advised the committee that South Norfolk House utilised gas and oil heat sources to heat the office. She explained that plans were in place to compartmentalise office areas when unoccupied to reduce heating costs and consumption of fuel. She added that longer-term work would be carried once the future accommodation of the One Team had been determined.

Members were then advised that a range of measures were being put in place to improve the Council's carbon emissions, this included building solar generation on the roofs of the leisure centre, and a planned move to a green energy supplier (pending the contract renewal date).

- **Supporting our Residents and Communities**

Members were advised of the work undertaken to date, to support residents and communities; this included the proactive enforcement of private sector minimum energy efficiency standards, and an increase in renewable energy production across the district. The Assistant Director for Regulatory then informed the committee on the number of residents

supported and homes improved through council organised or promoted schemes from April to September 2021:

- 27 grants for large energy efficiency measures
- 7 boilers, 1 high heat retention storage heater, 5 air sourced heat pumps, 13 insulation measures
- 226 registrants for big community switch
- 397 registrations for solar together

Waste Minimisation

- Waste Collection Service

Recycling

The Assistant Director for Regulatory informed the committee of the recycling rates for 2019/20 and 2020/21

- 2019/20 – 42.5%
- 2020/21 – 41.8%

He explained that despite the percentage decrease, the total tonnage had actually increased by approximately 2,500 tons in 2020/21, it was noted that the increase in recycling rates coincided with the Covid lockdown and a change in residents' patterns.

One member noted the reoccurring issue of the contamination of recycling and suggested that ongoing education and publicity was needed. The Assistant Director for Regulatory replied that awareness campaigns had been planned to educate and promote correct recycling.

Garden Waste

Members were advised of the garden waste recycling tonnage between 2018-2021, which amounted to:

- 2018/19 baseline: 9,762 tons
- 2019/20: 10,272.77 tons
- 2020/21: 11,162.85 tons

One member felt that as a large proportion of fly tipping cases involved garden waste, it would be beneficial to the Council to encourage the uptake of garden waste bins, and to offer a discount for second bins. Several members supported the suggestions, and the Assistant Director for Regulatory confirmed he would refer the suggestion to the Assistant Director of Community Services, along with the following questions from members.

- Was it economical for the Council to provide a garden waste collection service for 12 months a year?
- Had demand for garden waste bins increased from previous years?

- **Reducing Single-use Plastics**

The Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that the facilities team oversaw the contracts which involved the purchase of single-use plastics within the Council, and that procurement contract renewal work was planned for 2022.

Transport

- **Sustainable Transport**

The Assistant Director for Regulatory updated the committee on the progress made towards the delivery of sustainable transport, he advised that there had been an increase in the percentage green commuter journeys and that there was a Transport Strategy linked to the Greater Norwich Local Plan. The Senior Environmental Management Officer acknowledged that there were areas of the district with a lack of transport links. It was also noted that Covid had impacted the use of public transport.

With regard to the taxi fleet, the Senior Environmental Management Officer explained that updated licensing data on the uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles within the fleet was being obtained.

- **Staff Travel**

Members were advised that electric vehicle charging points were being installed at a number of council owned carparks, and that new developments were required to provide charging points. He added that it was planned to establish an Electric Vehicle Charging Point Strategy, the need to establish a sufficient charging infrastructure for electric vehicles to be viable was noted. One member felt that Hydrogen powered vehicles and infrastructure should be prioritised. The Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that Hydrogen was considered to be a next generation fuel source, as such there was no Government guidance on the use of Hydrogen fuel. The Senior Environmental Management Officer added that research on Hydrogen fuel was due to be carried out at a country-wide level.

The Assistant Director for Regulatory informed the committee of the new car leasing scheme for staff which was introduced in April 2020 and included options for electric and hybrid vehicles. He added that a review of the uptake of the scheme was scheduled in the future.

Members were then advised of the measures to reduce staff mileage. The Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that officers were working with Liftshare to assess the Council's commuting data, he added that further work was planned to identify scope to reduce staff commuting levels.

Members queried whether the proposed office accommodation move would increase officers' journeys. The Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that the majority of staff were spread across the county (or outside of the county) and so any move would be unlikely to impact the commute into the office.

In response to a question, the Senior Environmental Management Officer explained that staff could claim for an enhanced rate of mileage if they had car sharing passengers (additional 5p per passenger), the Assistant Director for Regulatory added that passengers could not make mileage claims as they did not bare the fuel costs.

Sustainable Procurement

- **Sustainable Procurement Strategy**
The Assistant Director for Regulatory advised members that progress on the delivery of this theme was pending a wider procurement review and partnership working exercise, he added that officers were working with procurement and utilising the new procurement strategy to maximise sustainability and carbon emission reductions when re-contracting.

Conversation turned to the recommendation for the investigation of extra resources to strengthen capacity to deliver the Council's Environmental Strategy. The committee expressed its support for the investigation to be carried out.

The Chairman summarised the suggestions of the Scrutiny Committee, listed below.

Suggestions of the Scrutiny Committee

- Compile a list of registered waste collectors that the public could be directed to.
- Investigate possible grants for the replacement of oil tanks.
- Utilise social media platforms to publicise green sources of heating
- Publicise the use of recycling centres, including links to Norfolk County Council's website
- Further assistance and training for Parish and Town Councils on Community Resilience Plans
- Promote the work of South Norfolk Council in planting trees
- That the Council recruits a dedicated tree planting officer
- The Council consider a reduction in charges for second garden waste bins
- Investigate methods of encouraging the uptake of garden waste bins

The Committee commended officers on their excellent hard work and after further discussion, it was

RESOLVED

To

1. Note the Contents of the report
2. Recommend that the suggestions outlined by the Committee (see above) are considered by officers and reported back to the Scrutiny Committee in 12 months, alongside an update/progress report on the effectiveness of the 2020-2025 Environmental Strategy and assessment of outcomes achieved
3. Recommend to officers the investigation of extra resources to strengthen capacity to deliver the Council's Environmental Strategy, as outlined in the conclusions of the report.

1298 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND CABINET CORE AGENDA

The Committee noted the Work Programme and Cabinet Core Agenda.

The Chairman updated the Committee on the Member ward grant – spend review, and advised that Cabinet had resolved to allocate any underspend of the member ward grant to the next financial years Community Action Fund budget.

(The meeting concluded at 11.49am)

Chairman