



MINUTES

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.30 p.m. – 6.10 p.m.

20 May 2010

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Bradford, Driver, Fairbairn, Gihawi, Jago, Jeraj, Lubbock, Ramsay and Wiltshire

Apologies: Councillor Blower

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Councillors Jago, Lubbock and Ramsay as new members of the committee.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Wiltshire as Vice Chair for the ensuing civic year.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2010.

4. CONDITION OF ROADS IN NORWICH – POTHOLE

The Chair referred to discussion at the previous meeting concerning the committee's intention to consider the pothole resurfacing regime in Norwich. The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report and suggested that members consider the scope of the discussion topic to be considered at the next meeting on 24 June 2010. During discussion, members suggested various areas of concern that could be included within the scope of questions to be raised at the next meeting. These included the quality of maintenance work to roads and the time of year in which it took place; the criteria for deciding on when to instigate a complete resurfacing of certain roads; the type of materials used in road resurfacing; methods by which costs could be reduced within contracts and frequency of inspections of the entire road network.

The Head of Transportation and Landscape suggested that May Gurney, as principal contractor could attend the meeting to provide expert advice as part of the committee's deliberations. He suggested that discussion should be divided into operational considerations and strategic issues which would include the asset management functions carried out by the County Council.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) agree the methodology for the consideration of this topic as set out in the report;
- (2) invite the Council's portfolio holder with responsibility for highways, Head of Transportation and Landscape, May Gurney and representatives of the County Council to attend the meeting for this item;
- (3) include this topic as an item on the committee's agenda for the next meeting on 24 June 2010.

5. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE DATA

(Councillor Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance, attended the meeting for this item)

The Director of Transformation introduced the report which provided detail of progress against corporate plan commitments and performance measures during the fourth quarter of 2009-10. He also referred to the reduced number of corporate plan priorities for the forthcoming year which would need to be reviewed in view of the financial climate and the priorities of the new coalition government.

Members then considered the Council's performance against the priorities and indicators set out in the report. In response to a question, the Assistant Director (City Development) said that, although the status of the Homes and Communities Agency was to be reviewed by the new government, all the HCA regeneration projects managed by the City Council were on target to be completed by March 2011 and it was hoped that these projects would be allowed to continue to completion. The Director of Transformation said that the forthcoming Queen's speech would outline the immediate priorities of the new government.

Members then considered the progress in relation to the corporate priorities in 2009-10. In response to a members question concerning comparative statistics for museum attendance, average earnings and participation in sport and recreation, the Director of Transformation said that it would be helpful if members could provide advanced details of questions in order that detailed responses could be prepared in time for future meetings.

In response to questions concerning the performance of the Customer Contact Team the Deputy Chief Executive said that a number of new methods of data monitoring were utilised to improve the service. These included measurement of areas of avoidable contact, benchmarking with comparative authorities and mystery shopping exercises. She said that, whilst the first quarter of 2009-10 had been particularly

difficult for the Customer Contact Team, the improved methods of data collection would enable service improvement to be developed.

Members then referred to the impact on services to tenants as a result of the letting of 'blue collar' contracts to Connaught. Some members referred to particular problems that had been experienced regarding delays to repairs being carried out by the new contractor. The Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods) said that the re-let of these contracts had not progressed as anticipated because of the legal challenges to the letting process and the very short lead in time for the new contractor to mobilise. This had resulted in the commencement of the contract and mobilisation running concurrently which had created some operational problems. The new contractor had been very co-operative in dealing with the problems as they occurred and client officers from the Council had assisted in setting up the infrastructure to ensure levels of service were maintained. The Deputy Chief Executive referred, in particular to some areas of work which had not been completed by CityCare at the conclusion of their contract and other work which had been put on hold for the new contractor. Members expressed particular concerns that tenants were having to re-report problems to the new contractor in these circumstances.

During further discussion members expressed concern that further details of the processes being put in place to improve the voids re-letting procedure should be provided and questioned why data was still not available for the performance indicator N181 in respect of time taken to process housing benefit and council tax benefit claims.

Members then considered the impact on the corporate priorities as a result of the new government's recent announcements concerning its intention to halt the structural changes to local government within Norfolk, Suffolk and Devon. The Director of Transformation explained that, whilst the structural change orders were technically still in place and the Council had a duty to implement those changes, there would be a need to start scaling back on unitary preparations in view of the new government's intentions. It was yet to be seen how the government would implement their proposals and whether this would be considered as a priority within the legislative programme to be announced in the forthcoming Queen's speech. The outcome of the recent judicial review case was also not yet known. There was an obvious need to avoid unnecessary spending of financial resources until the outcome of these developments was known.

In response to further questions, the Director of Transformation said that whilst the number of corporate priorities for 2010-11 had been reduced to 27, the other priorities stated within the previous plan would be held in abeyance and retained as priorities for the longer term. The Deputy Chief Executive said that, with regard to single status, the Council was awaiting a response from Unison on its job evaluation proposals.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) note the report;
- (2) ask the Deputy Chief Executive to provide background information on the performance data used to measure the performance of the Customer Contact Team, via the e-councillor network;

- (3) provide background information on the measurement of performance indicator N181 with regard to housing and council tax benefit claims;
- (4) ask the Deputy Chief Executive to ensure that the new contractor provided contract performance data within future monitoring reports.

6. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the current work programme which had been circulated.

RESOLVED to approve the Scrutiny Committee work programme as set out in the report.

7. SAFER NORWICH PARTNERSHIP PLAN

The Head of Local Neighbourhood Services introduced the report and, in response to members questions, referred to a number of initiatives that were being developed to resolve some of the more embedded issues of offending such as the integrated offender management process used to break the cycle of offending. He also commented on a proposal to transfer the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership responsibilities to County level. There might be a need to adapt arrangements in the future whether they remained at City level or not.. However, the City Council considered at this stage it was important to retain the current structures as these best served the City's specific requirements.

RESOLVED to note the report.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of item 9 below because it would disclose confidential information given to the Council by a government department on terms which forbids its public disclosure under paragraph 11.1 of appendix 7 of the Constitution.

***9. SAFER NORWICH PARTNERSHIP SIX MONTHLY PERFORMANCE DATA**

RESOLVED to note the performance of the Safer Norwich Partnership for the 12 months ending 31 March 2010.

CHAIR