



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 19:00

21 March 2024

Present: Councillors Ackroyd (chair), Thomas (Va) (vice chair), Carrington, Champion, Davis, Driver, Fox, Galvin, Osborn, Padda, Prinsley and Thomas (Vi)

In attendance: Councillor Giles, Cabinet member for Communities and Social Inclusion

Councillor Hampton, Cabinet member for Climate Change

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the held on 1 February 2024 and 29 February 2024.

3. A Parks and Green Spaces Strategy for Norwich – An Update

(Matt Davis, Fringe Project Manager, attended this meeting for this item. It was noted that Paul Rabbitts, Parks and Open Spaces Manager, was regrettably unable to attend the meeting.)

Councillor Giles introduced the report and delivered the presentation on the development of the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy for Norwich. (A copy of the presentation is available on the council's website with the agenda papers for the meeting.)

The cabinet member, the Fringe Project Manager, and the Executive Director of Regeneration and City Services, then answered members' questions on the emerging Parks and Green Spaces Strategy for Norwich. These are summarised as follows:

- What further information was required or missing from the strategy that would be there when it came back to the committee. It appeared that the committee was pre-scrutinising a strategy that did not have all the details. How would the current strategy build on previous strategies?

Councillor Giles replied that 100 sites had been audited, including all the parks but as the audit included every green space, play area and allotment area, the audit process had not yet been completed. There were management plans for individual parks but until now there was no overarching Parks and Green Spaces Strategy in Norwich. The strategy drew on all existing corporate and other strategies in the council, and would have a section interlinking it to other related strategies, such as the Playing Pitches Strategy adopted last year and the Biodiversity Strategy.

- In 2007, a needs assessment of open spaces in Norwich indicated a good provision of parks and green spaces across the city. That was over 20 years ago and did not take account of the increased number of residents who live in the city centre. The population in Mancroft Ward had increased in the period 2011 to 2021, from 7,600 to just over 10,600, yet apart from the Castle Green in the late 1990s there has been no sizeable increase in green space in the city centre. Pressure on green space was therefore high and noting the impact of overuse on green spaces, and the importance for health and wellbeing, how were new spaces going to be provided.

Councillor Giles said that overall provision of parks and green spaces was high and better than other authorities. He took on board the comments about people moving into the city centre. On completion of the audit, the results would be entered on to the GIS and it would be used to map out and provide localised information of lack of provision. He referred to the use of Biodiversity Net Gain from developers on site or if that was not viable in the local area, and therefore there was an opportunity to use this funding to enhance green spaces or provide pocket parks, with an emphasis on nature.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and City Services confirmed that the population of the Norwich had increased over time, particularly in the city centre. It was difficult to increase the quantum of green space, in the city centre, but the objective was to increase both the quantum and quality. There were plans to improve the Castle Gardens over the summer, as it was currently an underperforming open space.

- There were still some of the zig-zag type barriers to prevent cyclists etc in place that prevented access by people with disabilities to some green spaces or play areas in the city. Also, how could residents in housing estates be involved in consultation on green spaces and play area provision in their areas?

Councillor Giles confirmed that an inclusivity audit of all play areas had been commissioned that was expected to report back in August. There was £1 million in the capital programme for play area equipment provision over the next 3 years, and reflecting on the outcome of the inclusivity audit would enable it to impact on that programme. Accessibility was also included in the broader audit of the parks and green spaces and would provide evidence of where access was a problem that needed tackling.

The council involved DRAGONS (Disability Real Action Group of Norfolk), SEND Friendly Norwich and Inclusive Norwich, in consultations on play scheme improvements. There would need to be further discussion on the

consultation approach with external parties over smaller schemes on housing estates.

During discussion, a member pointed out the importance of consultation with residents and that play equipment needed to be age appropriate for the children or young people using it. Another member also said that it was important that hard to reach groups were also included and that families with children should be encouraged to comment. Councillor Giles said that there had been feedback on parks and green spaces from residents as part of the wider consultation on the council's budget and Corporate Plan. He explained that when a play area was upgraded, officers would go on site and spend time at the play area talking to parents/carers and children, and showing them plans and discussing options with them. This often resulted in children going on to the website and taking part in the consultation.

- A member commented that as fewer people were being buried, and there was competition from green burial sites outside the city, did this impact on the solvency of the cemetery. He suggested that the council considered sponsorship to maintain its fountains or other assets in parks, open spaces, including its cemeteries, and even reinstating a lido.

Councillor Giles confirmed that the consultation would be seeking views on sponsorship to maintain assets within parks and green spaces that the council could not afford to maintain. Sponsorship would need to be sensitive and not undermine the physical appearance of the asset. The cemeteries were owned by the council and covered by inhouse expenditure costs. A private company held the lease from the council to provide burial and crematorium services at Earlham Cemetery. Most burials were traditional, but the council might want to explore extending options for green burials, given the environmental benefits. There had been a lido at Wensum Park.

- A member commented on the alignment of this strategy with the council's other strategies, and asked how the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy would reflect the demographic of the city, in terms of background, gender, race, ability etc.

Councillor Giles said that nationally male users of parks and green spaces were significantly higher than female users. The parks and green spaces should be available to everyone, and therefore greater consideration was being given to ensure this. Multi-use sports areas and ensuring that parks were accessible could help address this. Many refugees came from countries without public parks. Waterloo Park was a place of sanctuary, reaching out to refugees so that they could use it.

The Fringe Project Manager confirmed that he worked with various communities, including combatting anti-social behaviour, and that by planting trees and wildflowers, it empowered people to take ownership in our parks and green spaces.

- What happened after the audit of parks and green spaces. What metrics were used. What happened if it was not possible to enhance the environment.

Councillor Giles referred to the report and said that details of the audit methodology could be shared with members if it was not subject to copyright. It included detailed information in subsections. The investment plan that would result from the audit would be dependent on funding sources and take account of values such as whether there was a friends' group in place to provide sustainability. There would need to be prioritisation as the council could not do everything and to avoid adding to its day-to-day expenditure costs.

Discussion ensued on the recommendations that the committee wanted to make to Cabinet on the draft strategy and consultation.

RESOLVED to recommend Cabinet, in relation to the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy:

- (1) Acknowledging the role of parks and open spaces in the mitigation of carbon emissions, lowering temperatures and flood prevention, to recommend that a metric is added to measure the cooling effect of parks and open spaces.
- (2) That consideration of the ratio of pavements to green spaces within parks and open spaces is made and prioritisation is given to address areas where the ratio is high.
- (3) As mitigation for climate change, explore the use of rain gardens, flood areas and fire breaks.
- (4) Ensure that Inclusive Norwich, SEND Friendly Norwich and DRAGONS, are included as consultees, and invited to comment on the draft strategy at an early stage and as part of the wider consultation.
- (5) That prior to approval at Cabinet, the strategy is reported back to the Scrutiny Committee and to note that the committee would like to invite representatives of Inclusive Norwich, and/or other consultees as required, to that meeting.
- (6) That the strategy identifies the small open spaces used for amenity within housing estates.
- (7) Ensure that the wider population of the city is engaged in the consultation, beyond current users.
- (8) Subject to the agreement of the appropriate Friends' groups, explore the expansion of the Parks of Sanctuary to all parks.
- (9) That the council works with Norfolk County Council to reduce barriers to residents wishing to place trees in planters on the highway.
- (10) Investigate the cost of providing Changing Places toilets in the council's main parks.
- (11) As part of the consultation, allow some eco-literacy to ensure rewilding can be considered as an option and not just discarded.

- (12) That the strategy reflects the populations of each ward, any fluctuations in population, and the ratio of green space to population on a ward-by-ward basis, to assist with the identification of potential new green spaces.
- (13) That commercial sponsorship should be investigated to provide funding for specific features, such as the repair of the fountain at Eaton Park.
- (14) That consideration be given to the potential to grow food as part of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

4. Love Norwich Review

(Lewis Parr, Clean Streets Delivery Manager, attended the meeting for this item.)

Councillor Hampton, Cabinet member for Climate Change, introduced the report which included the Cabinet's responses to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations (Scrutiny Committee, 14 July 2022) and provided an update.

Councillor Giles also commented as this initiative overlapped with his cabinet portfolio and spoke of the benefits of the completed community projects funded by the Love Norwich Grants scheme (page 41, of the agenda papers). Any Love Norwich funding remaining at the end of the financial year would be carried over. He pointed out that in December 2023/January 2024, the Land Audit Management System (LAMS) showed a 11.02 per cent improvement in sites audited in a n acceptable condition than in October/November 2023 and a 15.36 per cent improvement in August/September 2023.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager provided an update to paragraph 13 to the unexplained spike in figures for fly tipping in July to September 2024 and said that on further investigation it was due to a data processing error. (A table showing the number of fly tipping reports year on year 2020 to 2023 was circulated at the meeting and available on the council's website with the papers for this meeting.) A member pointed out that the figure demonstrated an 8 per cent increase in fly tipping in 2023 from the previous year rather than the 14 per cent reduction cited below the graph at paragraph 14 of the report on the agenda papers.

Members of the committee then asked questions which were answered by the Clean Streets Delivery Manager, together with the Cabinet members, Councillors Hampton and Giles.

- The waste amnesty did not work as residents had insufficient advance warning to book a collection, and there were difficulties if a resident of a tower block needed a large item removed and they could not get down the stairs or outside for collection. Could officers explain the rationale about deploying CCTV cameras to Knowland Grove. It was not in the top five of fly-tipping hotspots in the city, whereas Suffolk Square was either first or second. It also did not make any sense to target Northfields for secure closing bins as it was one of the lowest areas for fly-tipping. There was also an issue with the tamper proof bins opening backwards.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager took on board that the trial waste amnesty days, based on a single day, had not worked. The use of CCTV cameras at Knowland Grove had been a trial using existing cameras. Over the next 4 to 5 months there would be cameras in all the top fly-tipping hotspots. He would ensure that the issue of the tamper proof bins opening backwards was investigated.

Councillor Giles explained that there were other environmental factors taken into consideration when selecting areas for the trials, including grounds maintenance on hedges and shrubs and other demographic data was taken into consideration. A member suggested that housing and other council officers should be required to report fly tipping and that the council should not just rely on residents to report it.

- Has the council considered underground bins for new build in the city, as this would contribute to a reduction in fly-tipping.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager agreed that underground bins could be considered in the future but pointed out that fully enclosed bin stores were expensive. Lion Homes was providing fenced off community bin stores to its new build.

- A member referred to residents at Heathgate and said he was curious to understand that the trial schemes were not supported there, despite it being a fly tipping hotspot, and that residents relied on the council to remove their bulky items free of charge.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager said that it took time to change behaviours. Residents expected the council to remove their rubbish, including bulky items where there was a cost to the council. Some authorities continued to provide these services free of charge.

- A member asked why Mancroft ward, and the city centre were not included in the locations for the various trials as there were issues with fly tipping. Normandie Tower and other locations did not match up with the data. Enforcement of fly tipping was below the enforcement rate of other councils, including King's Lynn. There should be more enforcement where CCTV cameras were used.

Councillor Giles said that there were daily litter picks in the city centre but he would take on board the member's comments about the locations for trials to combat fly tipping.

- Residents did not know how to operate the lids of the tamper proof bins in communal areas, resulting in lids being left open.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager said that during the trial it had been decided to leave the lids on and look at the contamination rate. He took on board the comments about the lids and agreed that he would discuss it with Biffa.

- Could members recommend trials in their own wards or were they decided on data from LAMS. It appeared to be a post code lottery. Rouen Road was a long road but the issues around Normandie Tower made it a hotspot.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager said that all the top 10 locations were included. The CCTV cameras could be deployed to areas for a period to address fly tipping hotspots and cameras could be moved if in the wrong location.

A member observed that there should be communication with councillors and that they should be involved in the process of allocation of the cameras. Another member commented on the value of ward walk arounds with the Clean Streets Delivery Manager and his colleagues to identify problem areas.

- A member suggested that when a resident purchased new household goods, such as a mattress, etc, it should be the duty of the retailers or manufacturers to dispose of the original item. Also, the cost of fixed penalty notices should contribute to the funding of the waste removal. Another member said that there was potential for a startup company to pioneer disposing of these large items.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager said that enforcement levels had improved this year. Fixed penalty notices were charged at a fixed amount, but the council was looking at increasing the charge.

Councillor Hampton confirmed that the potential for startup companies to collect large items was being considered.

- What traction would there be to engage with residents through the promotion of the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign and resonate behaviour change.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager said that the network and forum were useful for best practice. There was a case study in Newham trialling the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign and lessons could be learned from that.

- A member asked what effective sanctions were there to deal with rubbish and increase recycling. The real issue was that there was rubbish which needed to be removed.

The Clean Streets Delivery Manager said that this was a valid point. The bulky waste collection service should be affordable to prevent fly tipping.

The committee then discussed its recommendations to Cabinet.

RESOLVED to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- (1) That ward councillors are consulted in future on the locations of CCTV cameras used to combat fly tipping in their wards.
- (2) Ask that ward councillors are permitted to access LAMS, subject to appropriate training on the system.

- (3) Consult with residents on the provision of the new tamper proof bins to avoid bins being left open, which are both smelly and attract vermin, and work with communities to ensure that bins are tested and used properly to avoid the costly removal of bins that are not used correctly and need replacing.
- (4) That officers explore ways to combat litter by working with local businesses to provide litter picking in areas where litter is generated by that business.
- (5) That officers explore best practice for waste management and recycling in the UK and abroad.
- (6) Investigate whether an annual “spring clean” waste amnesty would be widely used by residents if advertised in advance.
- (7) Provide the Scrutiny Committee with evidence of how the target locations for the trials to reduce fly tipping were selected.
- (8) Provide the Scrutiny Committee with a breakdown of how the £100,000 Love Norwich Scheme funding had been spent.
- (9) Provide information on how well the council has performed against its targets.
- (10) Ensure that in future consultations, or information about a service, that the council communicates with residents by text rather than relying on QR codes or emails.
- (11) Liaise with the Community Pay Back Scheme to arrange clean ups in areas that require it regularly but are more difficult to reach.

5. Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

The Interim Head of Legal and Procurement (Monitoring Officer) presented the report and explained how members could put forward topics for the committee’s consideration when setting its work programme for the next civic year. Two topics had been proposed for consideration in the new civic year, a review of the Biodiversity Strategy and a review of council consultations and communications, and a further topic form had been submitted relating to housing repairs (Appendix B of the report). It was proposed to circulate these as topics for consideration at the informal work programming meeting in May. Members could submit completed topic forms to the committee officers or by using the dedicated email address for the Monitoring Officer.

During discussion members commented on the topics that they had agreed or would like to be considered in the next civic year, which included:

- NCSL Business Plan
- Budget
- Parks and Green Spaces Strategy
- Future Shape Norwich

Members referred to the recommendation tracker and noted that it demonstrated the number of topics that the committee had covered in the past year.

The committee took the opportunity to thank Councillor Ackroyd for chairing the committee in this civic year.

RESOLVED to note the report.

6. Report from the Norfolk Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Prinsley reported on the meeting of the Norfolk Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee meeting (21 March 2024), which he had attended on behalf of the council.

There had been lively debate on the two substantive items: Holt Medical Practice's application to close Blakeney Surgery and OneNorwich Practices. Duncan Blake MP had attended to speak on the proposed closure of Blakeney Surgery on 7 May 2024, and said that it would be disadvantageous to people who could not drive or without their own transport. Emma Bugg, Associate Director of Primary Care Network Development Norwich, Norfolk & Waveney Integrated Care Board and David White, Interim Chair, OneNorwich Practices had attended the meeting for the item on OneNorwich Practices. The committee had discussed the governance and financial arrangements, and it was Councillor Prinsley's observation that doctors were not best placed to run the finances of clinical practices.

In reply to members, Councillor Prinsley said that he was reporting on the discussion of the Norfolk Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee meeting and could not comment in reply to members' concerns about the financial mishandling or conduct of the board at OneNorwich Practices.

RESOLVED to note the report.

7. Report from the Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership subpanel

RESOLVED to note that the subpanel had not met recently and therefore to withdraw this item from the agenda.

CHAIR