



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16:30 to 18:50

29 January 2015

Present: Councillors Wright (chair) Maxwell (vice chair), Barker, Bogelein, Carlo, Galvin, Haynes, Herries, Howard, Manning, Ryan and Woollard

Apologies: Councillor Packer

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2014.

3. Scrutiny committee work programme

Members discussed the forward agenda and asked that the report on establishing a local housing company be brought to scrutiny before going to cabinet.

RESOLVED to ask officers to bring the report on establishing a local housing company to the scrutiny committee before going to cabinet.

4. Corporate plan 2015 – 2020

(The cabinet member for resources was present for this item.)

The executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods presented the report and answered member's questions. He said that the ranking question within the consultation gave a sense of priorities and informed how to approach future consultations.

It was explained that the corporate plan was a framework for many different plans, including action plans. He said that members were entitled to see all service delivery plans, regardless of whether they were brought to a scrutiny meeting.

A member suggested that there could be a target for the key performance measure surrounding maintaining the historic character of the city, of a percentage of listed buildings in good repair. The cabinet member for resources said that the *Heritage Management Strategy* may be a useful tool to inform this. The executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods said that a suitable measure for this would be investigated by officers.

In response to a member's question, he said that the key performance measure for empty homes brought back into use should include 'long term' to read 'the number of long term empty properties brought back into use.' These were properties which had been empty for six months or longer. A baseline figure for a city the size of Norwich was around five hundred long term empty properties. It was proposed that this target be expressed as a percentage to allow for any economic fluctuations. It was queried whether a target of 75% satisfaction for parks and open spaces was ambitious enough. The executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods said that benchmarking figures showed that the current percentage of just under 75% was good, therefore a 75% target was stretching yet realistic. The policy and performance manager added that targets were reviewed annually therefore if the target needed to be amended, it would be brought to scrutiny in the first instance.

(Councillor Woollard left the meeting at this point.)

A member referred to 'Prosperous and vibrant city' priority and said that there should be a focus on the outcomes of economic development and regeneration activities and that the delivery of the regeneration action plan could be a useful measure to include. It was also suggested that the measure for 'Number of people who feel that the work of the home improvement agency has enabled them to maintain independent living' be changed from a figure to a percentage. The committee were reminded that although officers would look into this, the service was oversubscribed and the ageing population meant that it was likely that there would always be more people that require assistance than the target figure.

Discussion ensued surrounding 'Value for money services' and the channel shift measure. A member expressed concern that some customers preferred to speak to an advisor face to face and did not want this to be lost within the measures. The executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods said that the principle of the channel shift measure was not just to shift to online contact but to ensure that customers contact the council in the manner most appropriate for them.

RESOLVED:

- 1) to make action plans available to members, once completed, so that members can review them for possible inclusion on the future scrutiny work programme,
- 2) to ask officers to investigate an appropriate performance measure regarding listed buildings,
- 3) to amend the performance measure for 'number of empty homes brought back into use' to a percentage of the total brought back into use,

- 4) to include the delivery of regeneration action plans as a performance measure under prosperous and vibrant city,
- 5) to amend the performance measure for 'those who feel that the work of the home improvement agency has enabled them to maintain independent living' to a percentage of those who have been assisted; and
- 6) Where the corporate plan refers to the high level of inward travel to Norwich, to acknowledge the positive effects this has on the city.

5. Pre-scrutiny of the proposed budget 2015 – 16

The chair agreed to look at items 7(a) and 7(b) separately.

The chief finance officer presented 7(a). She said that the figure of £17, 056m in recommendation (a) of the report may be subject to change before the final report to council, as the financial settlement had not yet been confirmed. She also explained that the figure on page 69 of the agenda showing the Contribution to/from balance was an assumption based on expected business rates. Recommendation (e) had been amended in the report to cabinet to read that 'a new general fund earmarked reserve be set up into which all Section 31 Business Rates Relief grant monies are transferred until applied to offset related business rates deficits as they arose.' The Greater Norwich Growth Board programme had been to cabinet and the leader of the council had asked for the programme to be agreed at full council. It would therefore be appended to the General fund revenue and non-housing capital programme report to council.

A member asked for more detail surrounding two projects; Hurricane Way and Waterloo Park pavilion. The executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods explained that Hurricane Way was a new housing development and he would ask officers to prepare a briefing note for circulation on the Waterloo Park pavilion.

The chief finance officer presented 7(b). She explained that on page 99 of the agenda, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) balances were reducing as these were deliberately being used before borrowing any money. This was to avoid interest charges where possible. In response to a member's question, the executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods said that this year, the tenant involvement structure had been engaged when consulting on the HRA budget but officers were in discussion regarding widening this in future years.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) ask the head of communications, customers and culture to circulate a briefing note explaining the £30,000 expenditure on City Hall external lighting,
- 2) ask the head of citywide services to circulate a briefing note detailing the works on the Waterloo Park pavilion; and

- 3) ask in the future that wider consultation on the HRA budget is undertaken and that a request is made to the tenant involvement panels regarding the potential for joint scrutiny.

6. Draft environmental strategy

(The cabinet member for environment, development and transport was present for this item.)

The executive ahead of strategy, people and neighbourhoods presented the report. He highlighted that priority one on page 148 of the agenda should read as 2.4%. He advised that two recommendations had been agreed by the sustainable development panel on the environmental strategy which were:

- 1) To investigate a way to work with the UEA and the Tyndall Centre to further break down carbon usage data; and
- 2) To look at opportunities for co-designing and co-developing the taking forward of the action programme and future strategy development with stakeholders and the public.

The cabinet member for environment, development and transport added that some projects in the strategy were already ongoing. He said the strategy would be reviewed on an annual basis with regards to technology, effectiveness and resources. The implementation of the strategy was built into the day to day work of the council.

Discussion ensued in which officers answered member's questions. The executive head of people, strategy and neighbourhoods said that work was still being undertaken with Norfolk County Council to develop a Norwich based measure for buses and public transport. He also explained priority nine of the strategy regarding improvement in air quality. He explained that the national measure for this was due to change shortly and the environmental strategy would be updated to reflect this. A comprehensive engagement and communication plan was in development to share the strategy on a wider level. The environmental strategy manager said that the first element of this would be a sustainable living festival on the 8 and 9 March 2015 at the Forum showcasing businesses, charities and council services; and including lectures from the UEA.

In response to a member's question, the executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods said that a measure regarding biodiversity in the built environment may be measured through the 'building for life' mechanism.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) ask the Public protection manager to produce a briefing note on the compliance with national air quality standards,
- 2) ask group leaders to consider the inclusion of a member briefing on engaging the public in environmental issues by the Tyndall Centre, for inclusion on the member briefing programme,

- 3) include ward members when drafting an engagement and communications plan for the environmental strategy; and
- 4) ask officers to investigate a suitable performance measure in relation to biodiversity in the built environment, relating to new developments.

7. Verge and pavement parking update

RESOLVED to note the verge and pavement parking update, and to consider this item for inclusion on the new scrutiny committee work programme.

(Councillors Bogelein and Herries left the meeting at this point.)

8. Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of item number 9 below on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of the Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

9. Pre-scrutiny of the proposed budget – appendix 5

Members considered the appendix and the executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods, along with the chief finance officer, answered member's questions.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) note appendix 5 to the general fund revenue and non-housing capital programme 2015-16; and
- 2) ask officers to look at how the council will engage members in scrutinising and assessing and future commercial arrangements between the council and the private sector.