



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.35pm to 6:05pm

20 June 2013

Present: Councillors Stephenson (chair), Bradford, Brociek-Coulton, Brimblecombe, Carlo, Galvin, Manning, Maxwell, Sands (S), and Storie

Apologies: Councillors Lubbock (sub Wright), Howard and Grenville (sub Barker)

In attendance: Councillor Arthur (Leader of the council) and Councillor Waters (Deputy leader and portfolio holder for resources).

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2013.

3 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The scrutiny officer presented the report. He explained that the content of the meetings of the scrutiny committee had been programmed to fit in with corporate activities and to allow optimum time for scrutiny of each topic. He drew members attention to the outcome column of the draft work programme and asked them to review the information in this column and let him know at the next scrutiny meeting if there were any changes to be made.

Members suggested that both outcomes of the welfare reform workshop should be considered by the scrutiny committee.

RESOLVED:

- (1) to note the work programme;
- (2) to finalise the scope of the scrutiny topics on the work programme at the 18 July meeting of the scrutiny committee;
- (3) to consider the 'overview of the council's preparedness for dealing with the implications of welfare reform' at the September meeting together with revenues and benefits performance; and
- (4) To look at 'how the council may work with other bodies in addressing fairness and inequality issues in Norwich' at the October meeting and in doing so invite Norfolk community advice network to take part.

4 NORMANDIE TOWER LIFTS

The deputy leader of the council introduced the report as the chair of the NPS Norwich liaison board.

Chris Rayner (Head of property services) said that the new approach to communication with tenants and leaseholders included door knocking as well as sending letters about work that was being undertaken. In response to a member's question, it was explained that the communication process was the same for leaseholders as it was for tenants. In addition, he confirmed that statutory consultation processes were always followed and often went beyond the basic requirements.

Councillor Waters explained the Councillor Lubbock had attended a meeting of the liaison board and as a result of this was content that communications issues had been addressed. Councillor Wright confirmed that Councillor Lubbock was pleased that the scrutiny process, as a result of a public request for scrutiny, had led to an improved communications process for tenants and leaseholders.

RESOLVED :

- (1) to note and welcome the report and the lessons learned and that there were now improvements in working practices around communication with leaseholders and tenants; and
- (2) to ask the Head of housing to make tenants and leaseholders aware that the scrutiny committee was available if future issues arose that were not be solved via all other appropriate options.

5 QUARTER 4 2012-13 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The chair reminded the scrutiny committee of the new arrangements for analysing the quarterly performance data as decided at the scrutiny meeting on 6 June 2013.

The leader of the council introduced the report. She highlighted that the majority of targets had been achieved but there were still areas for improvement. She stressed that food recycling may be affecting the performance target SCC2 as not so much food was entering the waste system due to households being less wasteful in times of austerity.

The target for processing benefit claims remained below target and the leader of the council said that she received a weekly update on this. She explained that Local Government Shared Services (LGSS) had appointed a Head of revenues and benefits and he was overseeing the service at Norwich and was working on site in Norwich three days a week.

In response to a member's question, the Executive head of business relationship management reported that there were approximately 809 outstanding new benefit claims, approximately 370 claims that were 0 to 21 days old, approximately 200 that were 22 to 40 days old and there were no claims over 100 days old. To address the backlog, the teams had been split into three. One team was processing the new claims that were less than 21 days old and the second team was working to reduce the outstanding claims that were over 21 days old. The third team was working on the approximately 8000 outstanding change of circumstance claims with between 1500 and 2000 change of circumstance claims being received each week.

The executive head of business relationship management explained to the committee that the appointments based system for new benefit claims was being brought back into use and that a telephone system for taking new claims was being considered.

A member queried the adequacy of the staff to claims ratio. The Executive head of business relationship management reported that the LGSS Head of revenues and benefits was engaging with specialist employment agencies to procure additional trained staff. He also said that agency staff could be located at Northampton (where it is easier to attract temporary staff to) and work remotely on the Norwich claims. Members were concerned that agency staff were more expensive than permanent staff and the Executive head of business relationship management explained that although the agency rate was higher, this included associated costs for leave and pensions.

In response to a member's question, the Executive head of strategy, people and democracy explained that there were a number of ways that customer satisfaction was recorded by the council. A document would be circulated to the scrutiny members which showed the methodology for each service area.

A member expressed concerns about the increase in people presenting themselves as homeless to the council. The Executive head of strategy

people and democracy explained that the council had several ways to help citizens who need help with housing. They could speak to a housing advisor who would talk them through any options available to them, the private sector housing team could help to resolve problems with private landlords or help with deposits and links with supported housing and hostels could be used. If these were unsuccessful, the person could be referred to specialist officers in the housing team who would provide further assistance. He reminded the committee that this performance indicator only measured the number of individuals who presented themselves to the council as being homeless.

Referring to a recent seminar that some members had attended regarding 20mph zones the Executive head of strategy, people and democracy explained that a range of work was taking place on this. He said that when the council looks at infrastructure developments, the appropriateness of introducing 20pmh zones is considered and the council would liaise with the county council on this.

A member said that the integrated transport budget had been reduced by ninety percent since 2010 and asked if the committee could discuss this issue at a future meeting to see if there was a possibility of the county council reconsidering the budget allocation.

The Executive head of strategy, people and democracy explained that the target for the number of private households where council activity had helped to improve energy efficiency was higher than predicted as work had been undertaken to ensure as many private households as possible were able to take advantage of government grants. He added that there was work underway to develop the council's approach to the green deal, work planned with the voluntary sector to make packs available that contained energy saving aids and work planned with NHS over the provision of warm and well packs to vulnerable people.

In response to a question, the Executive head of strategy, people and democracy explained that the council was working on improving recycling rates through promotions, education and community events. He said that eight special litter bins and twelve multi recycling bins had been installed in the city. It was suggested that local estate agents may be a useful medium in disseminating information on local recycling practices to private tenants. It was agreed that this would be looked into.

The deputy leader of the council presented the draft revenue and outturn report and reminded members that it was a snapshot and would be reconciled into the final accounts of the year 2012 – 2013. He explained that most departments were not spending their entire budget and any surplus would be added to reserves.

RESOLVED:

- (1) to note the report;
- (2) that a note be circulated by the Head of city development to the scrutiny committee members outlining the legislative context regarding the aspiration on 20mph zone limits throughout the city; and
- (3) to ask the Head of citywide services to look into the use of local estate agents to disseminate information on local recycling practices to private tenants.

CHAIR