



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16:30 to 18:35

24 November 2016

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Maguire (vice chair) Bogelein, Bradford, Coleshill, Davis, Fullman, Grahame, Malik, Manning and Peek

Apologies: Councillors Packer and Haynes

Also present: Dave Moorcroft (Director of regeneration and development, Norwich City Council), Alan Waters (Leader of the council)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from councillors Packer and Haynes.

2. Public questions / petitions

No public questions or petitions were received.

3. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2016

5. Scrutiny committee work programme 2015 -2016

The interim strategy manager explained that two subjects had been put through the topic process: city accessibility, and flooding. The city accessibility item was originally due to be covered on 23 February 2017. He said that more of a steer was required on both items to allow the gathering of relevant information to inform the subsequent meetings.

At the suggestion of a scrutiny member, it was agreed that it would be appropriate to have a representative from the Norwich Access Group (or other applicable group) to be present at the meeting to provide additional insight.

One member said that the meeting planned for 23 February seemed rather crowded as food poverty was such a large item. It was suggested moving the accessibility item to allow proper consideration of both areas of work.

It was AGREED to move the item to 23 March along with the second session on food poverty. The interim strategy manager suggested that it would be possible to include both items on that agenda as long as members focused very clearly on papers distributed in advance.

The interim strategy manager suggested in addition to evidence from the Norwich Access Group, invites to attend a give short briefings could also include Norfolk and Norwich Association for The Blind, Equal Lives and the Royal National Institute of Blind People.

6. Greater Norwich Growth Board (GNGB) and New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) update

The director of regeneration and development highlighted the key headlines in the report. In response to a members question he explained that the GNGB was a piece of partnership working and that the NALEP was government-sponsored.

In response to a member's question, the leader of the council explained the counties of both Suffolk and Norfolk had representatives at the NALEP meetings, adding that the group strived to have a wide range of members and offered plenty of opportunities to meet representatives throughout the year.

The chair noted that following the government's autumn statement, a radical overhaul of the community infrastructure levy was being considered. The director of regeneration and development explained that a major review had been undertaken but formal findings had not yet been published.

In response to a member's question, the leader of the council explained that some representatives on the NALEP do pay the living wage but could not be sure if their employees were unionised. He said it would be possible to explore the living wage and union membership in relation to the work of the NALEP.

A number of members agreed that a trade union representation on the NALEP would be a positive move. The leader of the council explained that trade union representatives did exist on the group but those members had had to stand down for personal reasons; although he did say that he would continue to press for inclusion of trade union representatives.

Discussion ensued during which the following points were made:

- The focus of the LEP was to remain on growth.
- Concerns were raised regarding the Greater Norwich Local Plan and what appeared to be land-banking, due to the very few number of sites that had been bought forward within the Norwich City Council area itself. Further to this concerns were raised regarding the number of permissions that had been given for development but were simply being 'sat upon'.
- The director of regeneration and development explained that no set ratios existed within the report, as the planning team would make decisions as to when sites which had been put forward should be included in the overall plan. He went on to say that the issue of land banking represented a very difficult situation in which the city council was working proactively with government to incentivise faster use of sites. The chair of the scrutiny committee added that section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act meant that local government does have the power to intervene in such situations
- The director of regeneration and development explained that meetings had taken place with the NALEP to illustrate the priority of Norwich within the Eastern region. He said it was felt that better balance needed to be given to Norwich as an economic driver for the region.
- Concerns were raised regarding transparency and the ability to ask public questions at NALEP meetings. These concerns included agenda papers only being made available to the public after meetings had taken place; difficulties accessing governance arrangements; a lack of local engagement to encourage the public to attend.
- The leader of the council said that consideration could be given to allocating time at the beginning of each NALEP meeting to address any questions.
- A member said that within the list of grants given by the NALEP, Pastafoods stood out as the company appeared to be in trouble. In response to a subsequent question regarding how often companies who are in trouble come to the local enterprise partnership, the director of regeneration and development said that consideration was given to the importance of businesses to the local economy before any investment decisions were made.
- The director of customers and communication explained that governance regarding the distribution of grant money had been improved to ensure proper due diligence within the decision making process.
- A member questioned how close the relationship between the Business Improvement District (BID), the LEP and the GNGB was, wondering whether or not duplication of work was taking place. The director of regeneration and development explained that the BID had a very specific focus and area of activity, working closely with Norwich City Council to ensure that the centre of the city remained vibrant.

- Regarding the GNGB, a member suggested pushing for inclusion of public questions and the publication of papers in advance, adding that a motion for public questions to be supported at the GNGB meetings would be very welcome. To this end, it was agreed that letters would be written to the GNGB and the LEP. These would be drafted by the chair of the scrutiny committee.

RESOLVED that the chair would write to:

- a) The GNGB to request as a part of their meetings the inclusion of public questions and the publication of papers in advance of any meeting; and,
- b) The NALEP to request as a part of their meetings the inclusion of public questions and the publication of papers in advance of any meeting and to encourage trade union representation as a part of the group.

7. Education and social mobility

Following an introduction by the interim strategy manager, members suggested they would like to explore the opportunity to consider establishing a cooperative academy chain.

Additional details were given regarding the work of the Early Help Hub, explaining that it works with academies to support children from low income families. Members agreed that great engagement with academies should be encouraged.

It was agreed that a response should be given to with the government consultation explaining that selective schooling harms education of children and would not be welcome in Norwich. It was agreed that the cabinet member for fairness and equality and should provide the response to the consultation.

RESOLVED to

- a) Recommend to cabinet the establishment of a cooperative academy chain;
- b) Recommend to Norfolk County Council children's services that they encourage academies to engage more fully with the work of the Early Help Hub;
- c) Ask the cabinet member for fairness and equality to complete the government consultation entitled 'Schools that work for everyone'; and,
- d) The chair to write to the new head of children's services at Norfolk County Council, welcoming them to the role and asking that – given the state of educational outcomes in the city – what work was being planned around:
 - i) Vulnerable families; and,
 - ii) Lack of alternative provision.