



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 18:30

18 November 2021

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Carlo, Driver, Everett, Galvin, Giles, Haynes (Substitute for Councillor Osborn), Maxwell (substitute for Councillor Matthew Fulton-McAlister), Sands (M) (substitute for Councillor Manning) Stutely, Thomas (Va) and Thomas (Vi)

Apologies: Councillors Fulton-McAlister, Manning and Huntley

1. Declarations of interest

Councillor Driver declared an other interest in item 4 below as a council tenant.

Councillor Vaughan Thomas declared an other interest in item 4 below as a welfare rights officer working in the advice industry.

2. Minutes

Subject to the following corrections to item 5:

- To amend the first sentence of the fourth paragraph to read “The fuel poverty and energy officer referred to the report taken to CEEEP on retro-fitting energy efficient appliances in council properties and the initiatives being taken by the council.”
- Remove the words “into said that” at the beginning of the following sentence
- Remove ‘be’ before ‘become’ in the same sentence.
- For clarity, amend the second sentence of the fifth paragraph to read “Regarding airport expansion, the chair speculated that the airport’s plans could be reviewed in light of the impact on travel of the pandemic.”
- Amending resolution 6 to read “recommend that when the BEIS per capita figures are reported in council reports that it is stated that the BEIS data set does not include production, consumption, shipping and aviation.”

It was **RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2021.

3. NHOSC update

The representative gave a verbal update. The committee had discussed eating disorders with a particular focus on young people. He had asked about acute hospital facilities supporting young people subjected to additional trauma due to tube feeding and heard that numbers receiving this treatment were low although overall numbers of those with eating disorders had increased.

There had been discussion on the closure of the mental health facilities at Hellesdon Hospital which were due to reopen in December. A decision on making the facility women only had not yet been taken.

With regards to housing, there had been a suggestion that district councils were responsible for the high numbers of patients in beds when they were fit enough for discharge. The representative had highlighted the pressure on Norwich City Council for housing and would report back to NHOSC on those pressures.

The committee had also heard a report on a review of safeguarding at Cawston Park Hospital.

Any further questions for NHOSC could be directed to Councillor Stutely, the representative on NHOSC.

A member asked if there was any work being done to follow up on eating disorders in over 18 year olds as there were issues with the system when patients transitioned from under to over 18. The representative said that eating disorders amongst all age groups were discussed and he would forward some data around this.

A member commented that an item had been taken to the September meeting of NHOSC on vulnerable adults primary care service and she had a number of questions about this. The representative said to forward any questions to him directly.

RESOLVED to note the update of the council's representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. The emerging new social inclusion agenda following Covid-19

The chair welcomed officers and the leader of the council in the absence of the portfolio holder, Councillor Karen Davis, who sent her apologies due to needing to self-isolate.

The strategy manager presented the report. It set out the council's approach to reducing inequalities in a number of areas and identified lessons learnt from the early stages of the pandemic. There had been locality based work undertaken where the greatest disadvantages had been identified in areas such as food and fuel poverty, digital inclusion and diversity and equality.

The paper showed that Covid-19 had the worst effects on those already facing significant disadvantage. The council had been able to move quickly on work around this due to strong partnerships and this would be built on using the existing reducing inequalities action plan.

The chair commented that the Living Wage was very important to help with reducing inequalities and invited the leader of the council to give an overview of the work being done around the Living Wage in the context of social inclusion.

The leader of the council said that the Living Wage foundation had launched that week. There was an ethical responsibility to have a well supported workforce with good working conditions. An additional thirteen businesses had joined the Living Wage network in 2021 which was uplifting in light of challenges such as Covid-19, zero hours contracts and the transition to a low carbon society. There was a three year programme put in place to establish Norwich as a Living Wage city.

A member asked if there was any data to indicate that those in receipt of the living wage were still using mechanisms such as food banks or several jobs and added if there would be any assurances that those areas in receipt of additional resources for pilot schemes would remain in place. The leader of the council said that part of the Living Wage Foundation Strategy was looking into 'living hours' and pension schemes as those that worked less hours would still be at a disadvantage.

The neighbourhood and community enabling manager added that the pilot scheme in the Lakenham area was based on a finite amount of funding but opportunities for more funding were always being sought. Resilience within communities needed to be built into the work to create structures that could use additional grant funding and those resources would be deployed wherever it was most appropriate within those areas.

A member asked if there were figures available on how many employers that were Living Wage accredited were paying low wages before the accreditation or were businesses that were already paying significantly above the living wage. The leader of the council said that within the profiles of the workforce of those accredited businesses there would always be staff who were in receipt of wages above the Living Wage but would also have lower paid staff who would benefit from the accreditation. There was also a requirement that all those who were directly employed had to be paid the Living Wage so it was a significant piece of work for companies to ensure all of their roles were compliant. The additional employers joining the scheme meant that around 8,000 employees would benefit.

A member referred to the overlap in areas regarding Reducing Inequalities Target Areas (RITA) and asked if there was a way to give a very focussed local approach to an area. The neighbourhood and community enabling manager said that the council was looking at how best to capture conversations within the community with council staff, such as housing officers, and share that information across services areas. Internally, there was a reducing inequalities group which made the most of those connections to understand how services could work together.

A member highlighted that the heat map in the report showed that the RITAs were sometimes not in direct correlation to need and asked what the long term strategy was

on those initiatives and the process for the council to listen to the community and measure how these had worked alongside records of how the money had been spent to achieve those outcomes. The senior strategy officer said that in order to define the areas for a RITA, there was an extensive exercise with partners using outcome data to pinpoint wards and then streets that were the most disadvantaged. The maps within the agenda pack were developed to test whether the areas identified post lockdown were still the most appropriate and broadly the initial areas identified were felt to be still the key areas of need that the work would focus on. In the long term, the approach would be to bring in resources in those areas by working together with partners and looking at what a shared outcome framework might look like. The framework would be a tool to understand community issues and identify partner outcomes and individual projects would take community views into consideration.

In response to a member's question on the council's legal ability to consider not using companies which employed people on zero hours contracts, the council's monitoring officer said that she would need to look into the issue and come back to the member outside of the meeting.

A member asked if those inequalities identified were getting better or worse with interventions. The neighbourhood and community enabling manager said that there were always challenges around quantifying inequalities and the council did not want to overburden individuals with evaluation. There was a need to understand what the council had control over and what could be measured with pilot work. Individual projects could have specific outcome goals but wider projects may not see change for a generation so where data could be collected more frequently to show correlations it would be although it was a difficult and delicate process. The senior strategy officer added that where approaches to issues had worked for partners, these could be replicated by the council.

A member commented that there was a divide between the public and private sector with the private sector making donations to projects but still producing problems, such as having low paid staff who still needed to make use of food banks. Those people living within Norwich were often on lower wages than those that came into the city to work so there was work needed to integrate with the private sector. The strategy manager said that the Good Economy Commission and the City Vision Partnership would be an important part of that work along with the Living Wage group to get all institutions working together. The neighbourhood and community enabling manager added that part of the CRF bid was working with businesses in the community to understand how they could contribute to that work.

(The leader of the council left the meeting at this point).

A member referred to the maps showing areas of deprivation and asked if there was any work being done around unemployment and the wait for benefits which would have a knock-on effect around deprivation. The financial inclusion liaison officer commented that the council's hands were tied regarding Universal Credit legislation but it did have a Council Tax Reduction Scheme which helps to mitigate the impact of Universal Credit legislation. There had also been work done around debt and early intervention to get support for people as soon as possible and to make referrals quickly. There were weekly meetings with multiple service areas to discuss solutions

for those needing additional support but there was no quick fix. Out of the sixteen Living Wage employers, nine of those were private sector businesses so progress was being made. There was also learning from other cities which had been through the Living Wage City process and a robust three year plan was being formulated.

In response to a question on citizen participation, the neighbourhood and community enabling manager said that there had been a lot of research undertaken to understand the key principles and methodologies and engagement work had been done with community groups. The next phase of work would be take those principles and look at actions to be worked on against them. There was a need to understand how to get residents to talk to the council and to show that they would see change as a result of their participation. There was a pilot scheme for a community connector role which employed local people from a particular area on a living wage and four appointments had been made to those roles so far. The council wanted to listen to and act upon feedback from local communities. The member commented that residents sometimes felt that they did not get feedback from the council or a satisfactory response to queries which impacted on trust in the council, so a wider look at how the council communicated with residents would be welcome which could include making the language of communications from the council as accessible as possible and making it clear who residents needed to contact for advice and solutions to issues. The executive director of community services said that this would be a very large piece of work but there was an awareness that work needed to be undertaken on communications with tenants. The member offered to feed in examples of improvement which may help.

(At this point in the meeting, members took a five minute adjournment and resumed at 18:10)

Members discussed the concept of social supermarkets and the value they brought to local communities. The neighbourhood and community enabling manager said that these were identified as a useful resource as part of the Food Poverty Action Plan. There was a social supermarket already planned in the city which had utilised the community asset transfer model with a local café and The Feed had been successful in its bid to run the café element. People could visit to use the café or to get subsidised fruit and vegetables so there was no stigma in visiting. It was linked to the community hub model and there were plans to look at the holistic needs of those who would visit the supermarket so that appropriate referrals could also be made. There were also potential plans to fund workshops and training programmes around cooking.

A member asked if there was a timetable for opening the social supermarket and funding for staffing. The neighbourhood and community enabling manager answered that the process for agreeing licenses for The Feed had started and it was hoped that the venue would be open in the new year. A staff member was already in place and The Feed had external funding for that position.

It was **RESOLVED** to

1) ask cabinet to:

- a) ask cabinet to commission a background report on inequality in Norwich with benchmarking from other cities and long term trends to inform an evidence

based framework which would set and link to existing Key Performance Indicators (not to be to the detriment of on the ground work)

- b) consider whether it is legally viable to begin establishing a matrix in accordance with procurement strategy which also includes trade union recognition, lack of use of zero hours contract and broadly comparable gender pay gap with the council
 - c) ensure that appropriate resources are available to ensure that the good work on social inclusion projects continues
 - d) resource staffing to seek new venues and funding for social supermarkets across the city and to increase provision and extend existing projects.
 - e) Engage with communities to ensure participatory budgeting processes.
 - f) ensure digital inclusion work continues and is extended where possible.
- 2) ask for the topic of ward breakdown of project delivery to be considered by the scrutiny committee in the new civic year and
- 3) To receive an update on work being done to improve communications with tenants.
- 4) To note that the scrutiny committee recognises the link between inequality and education and would like to consider this as a piece of future scrutiny work, to include how the council works with partners on this issue.

5. Scrutiny committee work programme 2021-22

The chair presented the report.

The meeting scheduled for 2 December 2021 to consider the business plans for NRL and NCSL would instead take place on 10 or 11 January 2022 and would be a remote meeting.

The topic for the meeting on 16 December was designated to consider the Corporate Plan but as this was a full review and not an annual refresh, it would be considered at the meeting on 20 January 2022. Instead, the committee would consider the Equality Information report.

The item on a sustainable and inclusive Norwich economy following Covid-19 would move to the meeting on 17 March 2022.

A member commented that she had submitted a TOPIC form on health and safety compliance in council homes to ask for the compliance issues and contract management to be considered by the scrutiny committee as a substantial amount of information around this topic had not been discussed at meetings of scrutiny and cabinet on 12 November 2021. There was an urgent need to look at the processes

around contract management and what went wrong to ensure that it did not happen again.

The chair referred to the meetings held on 12 November and said that the request for the issue to be looked at by the scrutiny committee had been reflected in the minutes of that meeting. At the meeting of the scrutiny committee, members voted against a recommendation to consider a piece of work reviewing what went wrong to ensure that resources were used to implement the compliance plans. The member said that she wanted to bring the issue to the scrutiny committee again as she did not feel that it was looked at in enough detail.

The councils monitoring officer referred to the constitution and highlighted that a motion that had already been decided within the last six months could not be considered and the request to add the topic to the scrutiny work programme was substantially similar to one considered on 12 November 2021 by the scrutiny committee which had been defeated. The procedure rules were written with full council in mind but did apply to other committees.

The chair added that the scrutiny committee would be looking at various elements of housing safety compliance in the future so although this particular request had been defeated, there were other resolution passed which meant that the topic would be considered. Processes within the constitution had been followed and the committee had spent considerable time at the meeting on 12 November 2021 dealing with its concerns.

The monitoring officer added that a resolution had been passed at that meeting to look at progress around compliance and the details of the scope of that piece of work would be considered nearer the time by the committee. Members commented that resource should be prioritised immediately to fix the issues but there would be opportunities in the future to review the topic in detail.

RESOLVED to note that:

- 1) the meeting to consider the NRL and NCSL business plans would take place on 10 or 11 January 2022
- 2) the meeting on 16 December 2021 would consider the Equality Information report
- 3) the Corporate Plan would be considered at the meeting on 20 January 2022; and
- 4) the item on a sustainable and inclusive Norwich economy following Covid-19 would move to the meeting on 17 March 2022.

CHAIR