



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 17:15

27 May 2021

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Fulton-McAlister (M) (vice chair following appointment) Carlo, Everett, Galvin, Giles, Hampton, Oliver, Osborn, Stutely Thomas (Va) and Thomas (Vi)

Apologies: Councillor Manning

1. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions

2. Declarations of interest

Councillors Fulton-McAlister (M) and Oliver declared an other interest as directors of NCSL.

3. Appointment of vice chair

It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Matthew Fulton-McAlister as vice chair for the ensuing civic year.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED, to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 18 March 2021 and 23 April 2021.

5. Appointment of representative and substitute to the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Oliver as the representative and Councillor Giles as the substitute to the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6. Appointment of representative and substitute to the Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny Sub Panel

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Giles as the representative and Councillor Oliver as the substitute to the Countywide Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny sub panel.

7. Setting of the scrutiny committee work programme 2021-22

The chair invited the executive director of community services to introduce the item. She suggested that scrutiny of the business plans for the council's two wholly owned companies – Norwich City Services Ltd and Norwich Regeneration Ltd could be standing items on the work programme. The committee also had the council's budget, the Corporate Plan and performance framework and the Equality Information Report as standing items for the year.

The the senior leadership team were looking at a twelve-month forward plan for cabinet which may help to inform the scrutiny committee work programme, so it was suggested that the committee allocate items for the June and July meetings only and hold an additional work programming meeting in September.

The chair highlighted some key dates for members:

Scrutiny training was to be held on 8 July at 4:30pm via Zoom

An additional meeting of the scrutiny committee would be held on 9 September to consider the remaining items for the work programme.

An additional meeting of the scrutiny committee would be held on 4 November to consider the NCSL topic in order to feed into cabinet.

The chair said that he suggested that the topic relating to bins on pavements and communal bins be taken together at the June meeting. There had been the following request from a member of the public to add the topic of air pollution from woodburning to the work programme and it was suggested that this was considered in July:

“Data released by DEFRA in February 2021 revealed that domestic wood burning accounts for 38% of all PM2.5 emissions (particulate matter). This is more than 3x the amount of PM2.5 produced by all road traffic in the UK (12%). PM2.5 are some of the deadliest pollutants, and are linked to a wide range of adverse health effects (including lung disease, heart disease, cancers, reduced IQ, low birth weights, poor mental health, and dementia). According to the WHO, “no threshold has been identified below which no damage to health is observed”, therefore the 2005 WHO guideline limits aim to achieve the lowest possible concentrations of PM. Local authorities should be doing all they can to reduce these emissions. There is a lack of public awareness around the dangers of air pollution, particularly from wood burning, and this puts the general public at great health risk. It is also important to note that there is a link between high air pollution and cases of Covid-19.

Recent years have seen an increase in the popularity of wood burning (both as a source of indoor heating, but also outdoors in the use of firepits, bonfires, and chimineas). The DEFRA data showed that 92% of people who burn fuel domestically have alternative sources of heat, meaning they are not burning out of necessity but for other reasons such as aesthetics or to create a homely feel. In addition, a huge amount of domestic wood burning - 46% - is from homes that are in the highest 2 social classes, while the greatest burden from air pollution falls on disadvantaged groups (children / elderly / those with pre-existing conditions): a clear social justice issue.

In the past 6 months I know of 2 pubs in Norwich that have installed wood burning stoves (The Stanley on Magdalen Road in NR3 and The Red Lion on Bishopgate in NR1) but there are likely more. The pub smoking ban was a huge win for public health, but the fashion for wood burning largely undoes this success. Pubs are particularly worrying, as they tend to burn wood for many more hours than private residences, putting staff (in particular) at great health risk which they are largely oblivious to.

In May 2021 there was a change in the law in an effort to reduce pollution from wood burning: bagged coal and wet wood of less than 2 cubic metres can no longer be sold, and wet wood in larger volumes must be sold with advice on how to dry it before burning. Exemptions for small foresters creates confusion (if a bag of wood lacks the new 'Ready to Burn' sticker it's not clear if that's because it's from an exempt supplier or if the regulations are being broken). In addition, businesses and individuals able to buy wet wood in large quantities are unlikely to wait 2 years for it to be seasoned properly, and there is no system in place to ensure that they do: hence much more education and awareness is needed on top of these new restrictions.

Norwich City Council has the ability to add new Smoke Control Areas: this would be a stronger additional restriction on solid fuel burning (with potential fines of up to £1000 for those who break the rules). NCC can also use its comms to raise awareness of the public health risk of woodburning: other councils are increasingly doing this – for example, in Winter 2020 a group of 4 councils (New Forest, Eastleigh, Southampton and Winchester) joined forces to send a leaflet to all residents asking them to burn less, and warning of the dangers of wood smoke.

Acting on wood burning in these ways would meet the People Living Well priority of the Corporate Plan. In addition, wood burning is worse for the climate than GFCH and other alternatives, and so action here would also meet the Great Neighbourhoods, Housing and Environment priority.”

A member said that although he did not dispute that air pollution from woodburning was a serious issue, he questioned what action could arise from scrutinizing the topic. The chair said that legislation allowed for smoke control areas to be brought in which could potentially link with the council's licensing and communications functions, as well as having a role in public health. The strategy manager added that data relating to air quality could be a good starting point and there may be some data available on housing stock heating provision. Officers could also provide member with data on related health conditions. The executive director of community services said that the report would highlight what was possible and members could consider those options.

A member commented that she had received a complaint from a member of the public on the topic of air pollution from woodburning and had asked if a piece could be

included in the council's Citizen magazine for the autumn on the dangers of woodburning. She had also brought a motion to council in 2018 on air quality and an update on the actions agreed could also be useful for the committee to consider.

A member said that any changes to licensing policy relating to woodburning would need to be considered by the licensing committee and agreed at council so it may not be possible for those actions to be put in place before the autumn. The chair said that he anticipated a mixture of outcomes from the piece of scrutiny, some of which could potentially be implemented straight away and some that would take more work.

Members discussed how best to take the two topics relating to bins – bins on pavements and communal bins – and considered how fly-tipping could be included with these. It was decided that two reports would be taken to the June meeting of the scrutiny committee, one on bins on pavements and one on communal bins including fly-tipping.

A member suggested that the March meeting of the scrutiny committee could consider the topic of the social inclusion and could be an outward facing piece of work with input invited from local charities to see what action the council could take on the matter.

A member commented that the topic of green financing would be useful to look at earlier in the civic year to inform budget setting and any reviews of assets.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Add the topics of bins on pavements and communal bins including fly-tipping to the scrutiny committee work programme for June
- 2) Add the topic of air pollution from woodburning to the scrutiny committee work programme for July
- 3) Note the dates of additional meetings on 9 September and 4 November; and
- 4) Note the scrutiny training date of 8 July.

CHAIR