



### SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**4.30pm – 5.40pm**

**6 December 2011**

**Present:** Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Bradford, Driver, Galvin, Gayton, Gee, Grahame, Jeraj, Lubbock, Sands (M) and Storie

**Apologies:** Councillors Fisher and Grenville

#### **1. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2011

#### **2. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor Sands, chair of the task and finish group, introduced the report.

Councillor Lubbock queried where the topics had come from and whether any background papers existed. The chair explained that they were topics suggested by members at previous meetings. She said that any member could suggest a topic for consideration by scrutiny, which would then undergo the PICK analysis to decide whether it should be included on the scrutiny work programme. She suggested that in future, members could complete a form, to outline what topic they were suggesting for inclusion and why it should be considered. With regards to the community centres, the head of local neighbourhood services said that background papers were not available. However recent work had been completed on the state of assets and the financial implications of repair needs; uses of the community centres; and the capacity of community associations currently undertaking the activities.

In response to questions from Councillor Galvin, the deputy chief executive said that the role of the review of community centres task and finish group would be to help shape policy and assist with the development of the assessment criteria. The criteria would be used to identify, assess and guide the future use of centres. This work would not be time critical. In response to a question from the chair, the director of regeneration and development said that the review of the community centres formed part of the council's overall asset management review, ensuring that assets were fit for purpose; meeting the needs of the community; and ensuring facilities were available at a local level. Following discussion, Councillors Galvin, Gee, Sands (M) and Storie volunteered to make up the task and finish group. It was also suggested that the portfolio holder be invited to attend in an advisory capacity.

The director of regeneration and development explained the reasons for the inclusion of the asset management strategy on the scrutiny work programme in

January 2012. The committee would need to consider the relationship between the criteria to dispose of assets and the investment strategy and the capital resources programme, to understand how the income would be spent. In response to Councillor Bradford's suggestion to include the original reason for purchasing the asset, he said that on this occasion, officers were looking at the investment portfolio, from which the council could create a source of revenue.

The head of local neighbourhood services explained that the new policing structure would be in place at the beginning of January 2012. It was suggested that a members' briefing be held with the police commander in February / March 2012, to allow time for the new structure to embed. Councillor Driver was disappointed that members would not receive a briefing until a later date and said that reduced police presence could be detrimental to the community. Following a suggestion from Councillor Gee, the head of local neighbourhood services said that the briefing could be combined with an update on the new arrangements for dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB) in neighbourhoods.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (1) that Councillors Galvin, Gee, Sands (M) and Storie form the task and finish group for the review of community centres;
- (2) to invite Councillor Westmacott, portfolio holder for environment and neighbourhoods, to attend the task and finish group for the review of community centres, in a non-voting and advisory capacity; and
- (3) ask members to send any questions in advance, to the scrutiny officer, for the asset management strategy scrutiny at the 26 January 2012 scrutiny committee.

### **3. QUARTER TWO PERFORMANCE REPORT**

(A copy of member questions and the responses were circulated prior to the meeting and are attached at appendix A to these minutes, together with any supplementary questions)

The head of strategy and programme management presented the report and provided members with an update on performance data regarding household waste and recycling, both of which were improving.

Councillor Lubbock congratulated officers for the improved re-let of council housing and queried the increase in the processing time of council tax benefit. Councillor Waters, portfolio holder of resources, explained that the increased processing time was due to an increased number of claimants. Councillor Jeraj said that it would be useful to know whether additional officers had helped to reduce the overall processing time or whether other options were available.

Councillor Gayton said that additional debt advice would become more important in the next few months. In response, Councillor Waters referred to a recent seminar which had highlighted the need to review the issue and also to consider a strategy on how to deal with the requirement for additional debt advice. Members would receive an update on financial inclusion activities as part of the next future shape and priorities of the council report.

In response to a statement from the chair, the director of regeneration and development said that an all members' finance briefing had been held and members supported a review of the impact that universal credit changes would have on people in Norwich. Councillor Bradford said that there was a need to recognise where the external pressures were coming from so that members and managers could support officers.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) note the performance update.
- (2) request an update on the processing time of council tax benefit in the next quarterly performance report.

CHAIR

## **Appendix A**

### **Q2 Performance report - questions to heads of service and directors**

#### **PRIORITY - Safe and healthy neighbourhoods**

##### **SHN 02 – responsiveness of staff and contractors**

**Question 1 - Why are the targets for the neighbourhood areas so far behind? Is this connected with the closure of the Local Housing Offices and the lay off of staff?**

The answer to the first part of this question is covered in the response to question 3 below. With regards to the second part of this question, it is unrelated to the closure of any office accommodation.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Gee asked whether the initial delays had caused the subsequent work to fall behind. In response, the head of local neighbourhood services said the actual activities and performance information had not been updated on the system. A diversity impact assessment (DIA) had been completed on both neighbourhood offices and service areas. A final DIA on neighbourhood working in the four neighbourhoods was due for completion in March 2012.

**Question 2 - What was the original date for the merging of the neighbourhood offices?**

The answer to this question is covered in the response to question 3 below.

##### **SHN 03 – introduce four neighbourhood teams**

**Question 3 - Why are most plans rated green when only 2 are at 100%, 3 at 75%, 1 at 60% and 1 at 10%? What has happened to delay what appear to be important initiatives?**

The corporate priority commitment SHNO3 was to introduce four neighbourhood teams. This was successfully completed with the establishment of the neighbourhood offices at the end of March 2010. Under that corporate priority commitment a number of related sub actions are shown that were taken from the relevant service plan. For some of these there are couple of phases to the work. These have been assessed as green as they are on track in relation to the relevant phase. However, the baseline dates were not updated at the end of the first year to take account of the next phase of work in a number of the sub actions and so progress and timescale do not look aligned. This will be corrected moving forward.

## **SHN 07 – increase investment in council housing**

### **Question 4 - What is the current position on investment and contracts let for new windows, boilers, doors and kitchen?**

The contract for PVCu window replacement was awarded earlier this year and installations began in October. The programme for the entire contract period (18 months to two years) is being finalised and will be published later this month. This contract also includes an allowance for the replacement of some doors where the current condition is such that they will not last until a replacement programme is introduced to follow on from the windows.

Interim contracts for boilers, kitchen and bathrooms (awarded in January 2011) have been completed and delivered on time. In addition to these contracts procured by the Council we also joined the Eastern Procurement Consortium earlier this year (a consortium of local Registered Providers who gain economies of scale by jointly procuring maintenance and improvement works) in order to deliver the remainder of the capital programme. This contract, which includes boilers, kitchens, bathrooms, larger disabled adaptations and roofing, started on site in October and is currently on programme for completion within this financial year. The combination of these contracts will deliver the capital programme for 2011/12.