



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16:30 – 18:55

30 September 2014

Present: Councillors Wright (chair) Barker, Bogelein, Carlo, Galvin, Herries, Haynes, Howard, Manning, Maxwell, Packer, Ryan and Sands (M) (substitute for Woollard)

Also present: Councillor Arthur

Apologies: Councillor Woollard

1. Declaration of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2014.

3. Draft corporate plan 2015 – 2020

The chair agreed to take this item first. The Leader of the council presented the report.

Discussion ensued about the consultation document in which members debated the use of a ranking system for the first question. Some members thought that this may be limiting for the respondents, by funnelling their choices too early in the process. They felt that as all five themes were priorities, it would be difficult for respondents to give more weighting to one than another. It was argued that an open question as the first question on the consultation could make it possible for respondents to explain why a theme was a priority for them. The Policy and performance manager said that it was possible to extract broad themes from the answers to an open question.

Officers explained that by ranking priorities in the consultation document, the public could assist the council when it came to overall resourcing but emphasised that this did not mean that any of the priorities would be cut.

The Executive head of strategy, people and neighbourhoods reminded the members that the corporate plan reflected the council's duties and responsibilities and it may be the case with certain approaches that the council will receive comments from the

public on things that cannot be influenced. A member suggested that this could be mitigated with a brief opening paragraph outlining the services that Norwich City Council was responsible for in order to make a clear distinction between City and county responsibilities.

A member commented that the corporate plan needed to be explicitly linked to the consultation document to give respondents as much information as possible. It was suggested that this be achieved via a link in the electronic version and that paper copies also be readily available.

It was also suggested that the consultation document emphasised that not all questions need to be completed and that they can be skipped if the respondent wanted to.

Also relating to accessibility, it was suggested that there be a staff presence available to assist anyone wishing to take part in the consultation by using the computer in the customer contact centre.

The Policy and performance manager said that the consultation document had been evolving over a number of years and that work had previously been undertaken with focus groups and professional companies with expertise in the field.

In response to a member's question, the Executive head of people, strategy and neighbourhoods said that this was an annual consultation and the opportunity was used to test other ideas that were important to the council at the time. A piece of work on channel shifting was being undertaken, along with work on 20mph speed limits which was why those two topics were specifically mentioned.

RESOLVED to:

1) Ask cabinet to consider the following amendments to the draft corporate plan consultation document:

- a) Provide a concise list of the council's main responsibilities with the document
- b) Provide a link to the draft corporate plan with the electronic version of the consultation document and to make paper copies available
- c) Start the consultation with an open question designed to capture overall ideas or suggestions for priorities for the corporate plan
- d) Retain the ranking of the 5 corporate priorities as already proposed
- e) For the electronic version use 'skip logic' so that people can jump over questions or sections they do not wish to fill in and make this explicitly clear that people can do this on the paper copy also
- f) Include a question to ascertain people's views on how the council could make it easier for residents to access services via the website.
- g) In the final section include the question; "Do you work more than one job to make up your income?"

- h) To ensure the final document is easy to access for all especially in terms of language, layout and length

2) To place a member of staff in the customer contact centre to assist anyone who wishes to use a computer to take part in the consultation

4. Private rented housing market

The Strategic housing manager presented the report and gave a short presentation on the work of the private sector housing team.

A member raised concerns about electrical and gas safety in the private rented sector with regards to unqualified contractor carrying out works. The Strategic housing manager said that there was a requirement for a gas safety certificate to be given to the property and this was enforced by the Health and Safety Executive. A notice could be served to a landlord if an electrical fault was found. He said that influencing safe choices when it came to using contractors would be part of the proposed accreditation scheme. In a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) there was a requirement to have adequate fire precautions and these were published under national standards.

(Councillor Sands left the meeting at this point)

In response to a member's question, the Housing strategy officer explained that the team had good engagement with landlords but struggled to engage with private tenants. The team wanted to engage with private tenants to ascertain what they would want to gain from an accreditation scheme and to educate private tenants on their rights. The Strategic housing manager said that this type of work had already been undertaken in partnership with the University of East Anglia (UEA) student's union.

Members were informed that the proposed licensing and accreditation process would allow the private sector housing team to make the best use of the resources available by helping landlords to identify problems with their properties, as the property would be accredited rather than the landlord. National conditions would form the basis of the accreditation scheme along with local conditions that would be relevant to Norwich.

(Councillor Haynes left the meeting at this point).

The Strategic housing manager confirmed that the accreditation system would be voluntary as the law was limited around mandatory schemes, however, HMO licensing would be mandatory. By introducing mandatory licensing schemes to cover HMOs not in an accreditation scheme, the number of HMOs covered by such schemes would rise from 160 to approximately 3000. If the standards of the accreditation scheme were not met, landlords would instead be licensed which would be more costly for the landlord.

(Councillor Howard left the meeting at this point).

The Housing strategy officer said that a draft marketing plan was being developed in conjunction with the communications team. A suite of postcard publications were being designed along with press releases, Citizen articles and launch events. A system of 'star ratings' was also being proposed with a minimum requirement to join the scheme. This would mean that prospective tenants could research landlords in advance.

(Councillor Manning left the meeting at this point)

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Ask the scrutiny committee members to pay regard to the cabinet papers for the cabinet meeting on 12 November regarding the accreditation
- 2) Ask the Scrutiny officer to collate any comments from scrutiny members on the above report and forward these to the appropriate officers by 12noon on Monday 10 November; and
- 3) Ask the Strategic housing manager to consider development of tenant engagement with the council within the private rented sector.

5. Scope of the topics on the scrutiny committee work programme 2014 - 2015

The chair suggested that any comments on items on the scrutiny committee work programme could be picked up throughout the year as this would be a standing item on the agenda.

RESOLVED to agree the report.

CHAIR