



## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**4.30 p.m. – 6.45 p.m.**

**11 February 2010**

**Present:** Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Blower, Dylan, Fairbairn, Jeraj, Little (A) (from middle of item 3), Offord and Wiltshire

**Apologies:** Councillors Watkins (Vice-Chair), Bradford, Cannell, Driver and Gihawi

### **1. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2010.

### **2. REVIEW OF NORWICH HIGHWAYS AGENCY AGREEMENT**

The Head of Transportation and Landscape presented the report. The County Council's Cabinet would be considering the review of the Norwich Highways Agency Agreement at its meeting in March. The City Council was expected to make a decision at on its preferred option at its meeting on 24 February 2010. The Norwich Highways Agency Committee, a joint committee with the County Council, had considered the report at its meeting on 28 January 2010. The County Council's Planning and Transportation Scrutiny and Overview Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 6 January 2010.

The Head of Transportation and Landscape said that the Council had benefited from the Agency Agreement in the past and had been the first in the county to implement 20mph zones because of it. More recently the city had benefited from the Public transport major scheme and mixed priority route scheme in Prince of Wales Road and was working with the County Council on growth point projects such as the St Augustine's gyratory. He then outlined the 4 options. Option 3 was a similar process to that used previously when the agency agreement was up for renewal. The County Council had taken over the civil engineering functions for structures such as bridge building whilst the City Council had retained its strengths in landscape design. Option 1 was to terminate the agreement, whilst option 4 was to terminate it but retain the joint committee. The County's Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Norwich Highways Agency Committee had both chosen option 3 as the preferred way forward.

Discussion ensued. Councillor Dylan suggested that in the light of the Local Government Review and the strong possibility of Norwich becoming a unitary

authority it might be a waste of time and money to review the highways agreement at this time. The Head of Transportation and Landscape said that the review options would need to be worked through by the autumn but could be used towards the setting up of in-house highway functions for a unitary authority.

Councillor Jeraj said that the democratic arrangements for the Norwich Highways Agency Committee should be included in the review with each authority having more voting members each rather than the current arrangements with only 2 voting members and 3 supporting members each.

The Director of Regeneration and Development and the Head of Transportation and Landscape then answered questions on the authorities which had terminated their agreements. In Hertfordshire and Essex there had been different arrangements with the County and district councils and therefore there were cost savings by putting these together. In Kent there had been a multitude of agencies and in some places agency agreements had terminated as authorities had become unitary ones. There were still two agreements in Suffolk and some in Hampshire and North Yorkshire. The Director of Regeneration and Development said that the agency agreement in parts of St Edmundsbury had been withdrawn on the grounds of cost, efficiency and consistency of service. The service did not change but did have implications for local accountability and democracy. Options 3 and 4 both retained the democratic option by retaining the joint committee.

Members then discussed the merits of option 3 and were advised that option 2 was for minor changes to the current agreement. Supporting option 3 meant that the Council was prepared for change and would result in a more detailed analysis of what the agency agreement could do. The reduction in capital works meant that it was unsustainable to retain specific skills such as bridge and structure building and was cost effective to share this function between the authorities.

**RESOLVED** to recommend:-

- (1) that the Executive supports:-

Option 3 – Develop a new agency agreement within which some services are undertaken by the City where there is a clear benefit from local accountability, for example acting as first point of contact for enquiries, but others are undertaken by the County if cost savings or robustness of skilled staff can be achieved in the medium term.

- (2) recommend that the membership of the Norwich Highways Agency Committee is reviewed and that the number of voting members is increased to 4 members, instead of 2, for each authority, with no non-voting members.

### **3. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT**

(Councillor Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance, attended the meeting for this item.)

The Policy and Performance Manager presented the report, and together with the Deputy Chief Executive, the Director of Regeneration and Development and the Head of Customer Contact, answered questions.

Detailed discussion ensued. The Policy and Performance Manager explained the traffic light system and that accompanying text gave further explanation. Councillor Waters said that the information on the coding should be a standard feature of each of the monitoring reports.

Councillor Fairbairn referred to the assessment of the development opportunities for the City Hall site. The Director of Regeneration and Development said that this would not take place in the current financial year but that a bid had been included in the budget proposals for 2010/2011. There had been an initial options appraisal. The police were considering relocating its operations from Bethel Street. The offices would then revert to the Council and, together with the vacant site to the rear of city hall; there would be an opportunity to undertake a full assessment of the development options on this site.

Councillor Wiltshire referred to the success of Planning Services in processing planning applications against targets but cautioned that some of this could be attributed to the current economic climate and a fall in the number of planning applications being made.

In response to a question on N1 166, the Policy and Performance Manager said that the data for the median, full-time earnings for people working in Norwich was based on a relatively small sample but that he would look into whether data was available on part-time earnings.

Councillor Jeraj referred to the NI 8(\*) and asked if the drop in adult participation in sport and recreation also applied to recreation activities where people did not have to pay. The Policy and Performance Manager said that he would investigate whether an additional breakdown of the data was available.

In response to a question from Councillor Blowers, the Director of Regeneration and Development said that there had been reduction in the void turnaround. In the period from April to August performance had been poor and had risen to 60 days. This had been reduced month by month and 31 days had been achieved and it looked as if this would be back on track by the end of the financial year. Sustainable improvements had been put in place with changes to the structure to ensure that Council officers managed voids. Some of the reasons for voids were out of the Council's direct control such as delays caused by choice-based lettings and the contractors, although there was optimism that the new contract arrangements would continue this improvement.

In response to a question members were advised that the advantage of software on housing energy efficiency over Excel spreadsheets was that it would show the profile of the property taking into account its history of upgrades and age of property etc. The Director of Regeneration and Development updated members on the Renewables East project and the work on private sector homes. Assessments of energy efficiency were by a questionnaire approach to 10,000 householders with an expected 20% take-up of free or low cost insulation provided by energy providers from 1 April 2010. It was expected that up to 2,000 households would benefit and

these would be in vulnerable and low income groups. This would be picked up in future monitoring reports and a briefing note could be provided to Scrutiny Committee members.

Discussion ensued on the Citizen's Panel and the Place Survey, which was conducted every 2 years. It was noted that people on the Citizen's Panel were more engaged than other residents, but the swing in satisfaction could be due to outside influences or a specific event but it was difficult to attribute the cause of the shift.

There was considerable discussion on NI 186 and NI 185, in which members noted that the measurement was collected nationally and fed back to individual authorities but that there was a lead in time of 2 years. Councillor Waters pointed out that the Council monitored its own carbon reduction. Members expressed concern that the data for NI 185 was not clear as the Council did not know what the emissions of CO<sup>2</sup> were. Members were advised that the Council had a rolling target of a 12% reduction over 2 years. There had been an underachievement in the year 1. The Environmental Strategy Officer could provide further details.

Councillor Little queried the value of using a performance indicator such as NI 186 when it was out of date by the time the data became available and therefore 'not smart enough to be effective' and asked what amount of money was used to hit this target. Councillor Waters said that the Council was working to reduce its carbon footprint and as to the cost, the energy saving benefits actually saved the authority money and referred to the 'Spend to Save' project. Discussion ensued on the various projects such as the £5,000 granted to the Norwich 21 for boxes to schools project and ongoing work as part of a broader programme with energy efficiency homes, Norwich Area Transport Scheme (NATS) and the promotion of public transport, cycling and pedestrian route ways. Councillor Little considered that the key information was lacking as it was not possible to discern what percentage of CO<sup>2</sup> was attributed to transport. Councillor Waters said that under comprehensive area assessment part of the work had been to look at the range of beneficial outcomes from CO<sup>2</sup> reduction and that this was a real challenge as the Council was relying on partners to provide information so that it could respond to it. The Deputy Chief Executive pointed out that when the Executive had selected its priorities it could not know how useful a particular indicator would be or that data would be out of date before it became available. The revised Corporate Plan was an opportunity to revise the performance indicators that the Executive wanted to track.

Discussion on the waste management targets, NI 191 and NI 192, and it was noted that there was a delay in receiving data from the County Council. Councillor Wiltshire suggested that the target should be updated as it was exceeded last year.

Councillor Wiltshire referred to the performance indicators EX 6 and EX 7, and said that attendance of elections events for young people had been disappointing. Councillor Fairbairn referred to the census information and that it was known that there was an element on non-recording and asked how certain was it that all residents were included on the elections register. Members were advised that the elections event had been part of a variety of events organised as part of the annual local democracy week and that a note on this and the arrangements for the compilation of the electoral register would be provided to members.

The Head of Customer Contact and the Deputy Chief Executive then responded to questions on the performance indicators NI 043, 044 and 055 and explained how the customer contact service operated and dealt with peaks and troughs caused by external factors such as snow and activities such as sending out council tax letters, by using messages on the automatic telephone response and on the website. The rise in the number of applicants for housing benefit had increased demand on the service. She also explained that the introduction of the '03' number meant that telephone providers included it in their packages of local numbers. '01603' numbers were not given out as it would bypass the call system of people trained to deal with enquiries. Councillor Wiltshire referred to the performance indicator NI 14, avoidable contact, and asked if the collection of data one day a month was sufficient. The Head of Customer Contact said that the Council was taking steps to ensure that a customer's first contact was right first time.

The Deputy Chief Executive then explained the situations where the Council's IT system had failed due on one occasion to a problem of the air conditioning system overheating and the other from a power failure affecting the entire city centre, and said that this had been followed through with Steria, the Council's contractors. Councillor Offord asked whether the relocation of Steria's call centre was in breach of the terms of the Council's contract with them and was advised that the contract preceded the Council's current procurement policy. Councillor Wiltshire pointed out that unlike employees; councillors did not receive a satisfaction survey when they had assistance from Steria. The Deputy Chief Executive said that this was an important point as Steria provided a service to councillors and would look into the contract arrangements and get back to members. The renegotiation of the Steria contract had resulted in efficiency savings. The Budget for 2010/2011 included an ICT review and this would be one way of testing whether Steria was value for money.

Members were advised that the missing figures in the comments section of the table in relation to NI 181 would be inserted before the report was presented to the Executive.

**RESOLVED** to note the report and that additional information, as minuted above, would be collated and circulated to members of the Committee.

#### **4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY – MONITORING OF PROCESS**

(Councillor Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development, attended the meeting for this item.)

The Head of Community Services presented the report together with Councillor Blakeway and pointed out that the strategy had been introduced in May 2009 and in place for less than a year.

Councillor Blakeway answered questions on capacity building to ensure sustainability and said that the individual or committee identified their own needs and the level of support required.

In response to a question, the Head of Community Services said that national indicators were only part of the story and could not be the whole measurement of the success of the community strategy and community engagement.

Councillor Blakeway and the Community Engagement Manager explained how Planning for Real exercises were used and that this was a successful tool to find out what was important within a community.

**RESOLVED** to:-

- (1) note the report; and,
- (2) the success of Planning for Real exercises.

**5. NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – UPDATE**

**RESOLVED**, in the absence of Councillor Bradford the Committee's representative, to defer this item to the next meeting.

**6. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Officer said that there would be no meeting in April if local elections were going ahead. The Deputy Chief Executive said that it would depend on orders from Parliament to suspend the local government elections in Norwich if unitary status was going ahead.

The Scrutiny Officer said that he was working hard behind the scenes to get more information on the NELM Development Trust initiative and partnerships.

**RESOLVED** to note.

CHAIR