

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**16:30 to 18:04****22 September 2016**

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Maguire (vice chair), Bogelein, Bradford, Coleshill, Davis, Fullman, Grahame, Haynes, Malik, Packer and Peek.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Manning.

2. Public questions / petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2016

5. Scrutiny committee work programme 2016 - 2017

General discussion ensued around the work programme, where the following points were made:

- Members agreed that when any new subjects were brought forward for possible inclusion on the work programme, the TOPIC process must be properly applied every time.
- It was also agreed that the TOPIC process should also be applied retrospectively to all items on the work programme due before the scrutiny committee prior to Christmas.

- A future item was suggested for the January meeting: Flood prevention plan improvements. It was noted that this particular subject was very planning-oriented but applying the TOPIC process would see if any areas of this work were suitable for scrutiny. It was agreed that this could be fleshed-out and bought back to a future meeting.
- It was also agreed that a member briefing would be the best way for councillors to fully understand the Switch and Save process.
- A process was suggested for members to raise specific areas of interest by suggesting subjects to the scrutiny liaison officer for triage and suitable topics could then be moved on to officers to provide reports etc.

RESOLVED to:

1. review items currently on the work programme to ensure they meet the requirements set out in the TOPIC process;
2. flesh-out the subject of flood prevention plan improvements to be bought back to a future meeting; and,
3. draft a subject submission process involving the scrutiny liaison officer as a method of triaging potential new work programme items.

6. Evidence gathering – educational attainment and academies

The chair explained that part of the task of the scrutiny committee was to examine whether or not school structures influence later life achievements.

Scott Lyons, Joint Division Secretary for Norfolk NUT, introduced himself, explaining that he does work at an academy and spends four days in his NUT role. He also said that he had both at school and Academy experience.

The chair explained that the general secretary of the NUT had given an example of a free school in London where the spend per pupil was disproportionately large due to low pupil numbers.

Members expressed concerns regarding three schools; including those that had had previous debts wiped, thus allowing them to start with an advantage. One member questioned why funds used for wiping school debt could not be put into enabling a school to remain open instead of forcing it to become an academy.

Scott also echoed such concerns regarding accountability of free schools, although he did say that he hadn't dealt with many in his current role.

A member of the committee said that marketing of free schools have not lived up to expectations with many failing. He questioned whether such problems had a knock-on effect to higher schools and whether any safeguarding was in place should a free school file.

The chair pointed out the U-turn from the secretary of state regarding parent-governors, raising concerns that a local parent link had been lost when it comes to school governance and accountability.

Discussion ensued during which members made the following points:

- There was a lack of understanding as to how academies would be held accountable as it was felt that children's prospects and future livelihoods were at risk in the name of profit.
- It was considered that negotiation with national chains of academies would prove very difficult and it was not easy to understand where serious concerns could be raised.
- A greater understanding of what the city council could do to affect positive changes in this scenario was required - including a full understanding of what the current state of play with schools and academies meant for the future of Norwich as a whole.
- Greater insight would be required into the ways in which questions and concerns could be put in front of those people who made important school and academy-based decisions.
- Scott said that the media had been very helpful insofar as raising awareness that parents need to be challenging schools and academies directly.
- The idea of junior schools becoming primaries was also raised and it was felt that this had worked for a number of schools in Yarmouth particularly.
- Concerns were expressed regarding teachers fearing that if they spoke out or went on strike they would face the sack. Scott said that the NUT were aware of this scenario and had actually intervened in a number of such cases.
- Discussion took place regarding whether or not the county council could form a cooperative school as the co-op model seemed to have been successful elsewhere.

Scott said that he would be happy to answer for the questions in the future and welcome to the work of the scrutiny committee in examining schools and academies in the Norwich area.

RESOLVED to continue receive evidence at the October scrutiny committee meeting from further stakeholders.

7. Update of the representative for the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (verbal update)

The representative for the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported a growth in the number of unexpected deaths under the aegis of the mental health trust. He explained that the majority of these were suicides and that this trend had

been noticed by the trust. He said that the resulting investigation examined data and carried out interviews with people but it was felt that the report was inadequate.

He went on to say that families and service users had not been directly invited to take part in producing the report and had had to demand an input.

Members agreed that a formal request to the chair of the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be submitted via the scrutiny officer. This should explain that the scrutiny committee believes that families and service users should be invited to participate in such important work.

RESOLVED for officers to provide instructions to scrutiny committee members to sign up for direct county council committee paper notifications.

CHAIR