



**Scrutiny Committee**

**16:30 to 18:35**

**29 February 2024**

Present: Councillors Ackroyd (chair), Thomas (Va) (vice-chair), Carrington, Champion, Davis, Driver, Fox, Galvin, Osborn, Padda, Prinsley and (Thomas (Vi)).

Also Present: Councillors Kendrick and Stonard

**1) Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2) The draft Corporate Plan 2024-2029**

Councillor Stonard, leader of the council introduced the item. The Corporate Plan presented a vision for Norwich to be a fair and thriving city full of ambition. The council consulted more widely than ever before on the draft plan, to develop a plan which responded to the aspirations of the people of Norwich and inspired the collaborative working which would be needed for its delivery. Councillor Stonard expressed his thanks to partners, residents and officers for their engagement in the process.

People surveyed said relayed that they had a great pride in Norwich but also that there were significant challenges to be addressed. This feedback in tandem with the wealth of information held by the council had been used to develop the Corporate Plan, a community led plan "We are Norwich". The plan outlined the council's new priorities, why these had been chosen and detailed what success would look like.

The next stage of the process would be to conduct more detailed work, setting out how the plan would deliver for the city and how the city could hold the council to account through the use of a clear action plan and new performance framework. All stakeholders would be reengaged with as part of this next stage. He was clear that the ambitions for the city could not be achieved in isolation and the council would need to employ its advocacy powers to achieve change in areas where outcomes were outside of its control.

He hoped that the resulting plan was clear and welcomed member's feedback.

The Strategy Manager provided a presentation available [here](#) and responded to member questions.

The chair referred to an email circulated by a member from Inclusive Norwich in response to the Corporate Plan consultation process and recommended the member

meet with the Strategy Manager and the Head of Strategy, Engagement and Culture outside of the meeting to discuss. The Strategy Manager emphasised that the development of the Corporate Plan was an iterative process and that there would be a process of reengagement with stakeholders as part of the business planning stage.

A member referred to figures for social mobility contained in the report noting that Norwich was in the bottom 10% nationally and asked if there had been an analysis of the success of the goals from the previous Corporate Plan.

A member asked how the voices of the most marginalised were included in the consultation and in particular if any young people had been spoken to directly. The Strategy Manager advised that as part of the on street engagement process young people were spoken to. He advised that the Mancroft Advice Project, an advocacy agency working with young people in the city considered that the views of young people would not have changed since the work undertaken to inform the City Vision.

The report highlighted that young people and other consultees reported experiencing consultation fatigue and the Strategy Manager advised this related to respondents believing that no action was taken after they were consulted. It was hoped that by codesigning solutions with partners and communities, including young people that the process of engagement itself would excite input.

A member noted that there were potential challenges to setting out the Corporate Plan for a significant length of time and asked what would prompt a further review. The Chief Executive Officer advised that there would be a rolling review process at least annually and the plan was designed to be flexible to respond to changing priorities as they emerged.

A member commented that there was only a passing reference to heritage in the new Corporate Plan and asked if there was a reason for not emphasising this. The Strategy Manager advised that the significant value of heritage to Norwich was recognised and the priority Prosperous Norwich talked about the offer to the nation in terms of tourism. The plan was based on the concerns raised as part of the consultation process and heritage was remarked on in terms of the fact it was enjoyed and could be shared better. The Chief Executive Officer referred to the statutory responsibility that the council had in terms of the conservation of the city and advised whilst not expressly mentioned in the plan this was a role the council continued to do.

A member noted that the plan referred to incorporating the views of young people in terms of who they would be in the future and noted that it was important to recognise and value them for who they were now. Further he flagged up that there was no specific mention of higher education establishments in the city and given that students were 10% of the Norwich population considered this should be addressed. In response to a member question the Strategy Manager advised that artificial intelligence was incorporated into the consideration for the plan.

In response to a member question, the Strategy Manager advised that it was best practice not to require demographic information for respondents as it deterred people from responding. There had been an option to provide this for respondents of the Corporate Plan but so few respondents had chosen to provide their demographic profiling data that the response was not indicative. He advised that the consultation

had included a wide range of diverse partners and as council data was incorporated into the plan it would ensure that it was representative of all communities.

A member asked why the Corporate Plan was being changed now when the current plan ran until 2026, was it that the identified priorities of that plan had been achieved and if so how was that evidenced. What review had been completed on the previous Corporate Plan priorities on whether they had been achieved or not. He noted that the previous Corporate Plan referred to early intervention work and work to help residents experiencing domestic abuse, hate crime and asked how this would be addressed going forward.

The Chief Executive Officer advised that it was considered that there had been significant changes since the previous Corporate Plan had been developed and approved. The council wanted to conduct a big piece of engagement work with the city post covid and the economic shocks which had been experienced. The Senior Strategy Officer advised that a statutory review of the Corporate Plan was conducted annually and the review published.

She noted that the council had a wealth of existing data on areas such as deprivation and social mobility and all this information was shared with researchers to be incorporated into the Corporate Plan. The information from the previous Corporate Plan, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy data, impact analysis of the Financial Inclusion Consortium, sat alongside the consultation feedback and was used to develop the plan.

She highlighted that the Norwich Health and Wellbeing Partnership was in place since the development of the last Corporate Plan and this forum picked up a number of key themes such as social mobility. In terms of the other points relating to domestic abuse, early intervention work this was referred to as community safety within the plan and more detail would be added as part of the business planning process stage.

A member referred to areas outside of the sphere of influence of the city council such as education, transport and public realm and asked what mechanisms or frameworks were in place for collaboration in these areas. The Strategy Manager advised that the plan sought to respond to the concerns raised by the people of Norwich. Networks which existed were the City Vision Partnership, the Norwich Health and Wellbeing Partnership and the Financial Inclusion Consortium and the networks which ran out of County Hall. The Chief Executive Officer referred to the peer review which had been conducted and highlighted the need for the council to work more effectively with its partners.

In response to a member question the Chief Executive Officer advised that round table discussions had been held with key stakeholders such as the Business Improvement District and the chamber of commerce and top of the agenda had been the need to work across partnerships.

The Strategy Manager advised that the Corporate Plan was the starting point and that the business planning process would build on this. The Fairer Norwich Theme in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan would address one of the key plan priorities (Fairer City) as would the Environmental Strategy in terms of climate responsiveness. The business planning process would align with the budget setting

process annually. The Chief Executive Officer advised that a new performance framework would ensure that the correct measures were identified and progress against them mapped.

In response to a member question on how employers were engaged with, and employment opportunities brought to the city. The Interim Executive Director of Major Projects referred to the Greater Norwich Local Plan which identified future sites for housing and employment in the area. He highlighted the East Norwich Masterplan which hoped to deliver 3,500 homes and 4,200 jobs, the council were working with the landowners for the East Norwich site and other public sector agencies to progress the project.

A member asked if there was enough resource to ensure that council housing reached net zero by 2045. The Chief Executive Officer advised that there was money set aside for the works in the HRA business plan, and the ambition to do them as soon as feasibly possible. There would be challenges that would be encountered in terms of supply chain, skills and expertise issues. However, it was in the business plan and was expected to be an area which would be focussed on as a priority.

A member asked what officers had learnt that surprised them and what they had changed as part of the new corporate planning process. The Strategy Manager reflected that he was surprised that people had not highlighted Climate Change as a priority. It had been highlighted by councillors and partners but not by people on the street. When analysed it was considered this was because people were concerned with the immediate situation in terms of the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The Chief Executive Officer commented that what she had clearly picked up on was that people wanted the council to hear their views and demonstrate a change to show they had been listened to. The Senior Strategy Officer advised that the process had reinforced what she thought that people loved Norwich and really wanted to work with the council.

A member referred to the forum as a great public space and asked if any engagement had been conducted at the location as it was used by a diverse range of communities. The Senior Strategy Officer advised that on street engagement was conducted at the forum with researchers attending for two half days over different days. She noted that the strategy was to piggy back on other events which were already drawing in footfall.

In response to a member question the Chief Executive Officer advised that the consultation on the Corporate Plan was front ended and the new plan would be emailed out to all involved in the consultation process. She emphasised the iterative nature of the process and highlighted that feedback would be incorporated into the business planning stage.

A member referred to the development of the Corporate Plan being data led and asked to see the data which showed that the previous Corporate Plan priorities had been met. He commented that domestic abuse and hate crime should be included as a priority in the new plan. In response the Chief Executive Officer advised that achievements against the previous Corporate Plan were reviewed in the summer and would be reviewed again this summer and reflected into the business planning process.

In response to a member question the Senior Strategy Officer advised that as part of the City Vision work a partner mapping exercise was being conducted. The State of Norwich, the dashboard used to measure how the city was fairing would also be reviewed with City Vision partners to ensure it was accurately telling the story of Norwich. As part of that exercise the voices of those with lived experience and different communities would be captured. The Chief Executive Officer advised that the Corporate Plan was not monitored on the council's risk register but via corporate performance measures.

Members considered which recommendations to propose and following debate it was:

**RESOLVED** to ask cabinet to:

- 1) Involve scrutiny committee in the development of the business planning process for the Corporate Plan and the associated corporate performance framework;
- 2) Conduct a consultation on the Corporate Plan with young people in primary and high schools;
- 3) Ensure that the Corporate Plan commits to provision of access to services for those individuals who do not have digital knowledge or access;
- 4) Explore ways to better capture demographic data to ensure that all appropriate communities have been consulted with without deterring people from responding; and
- 5) Add a section into the Corporate Plan that the Council will commit to create more posts that work with the community and more posts which will see people face to face.

### **3) Funding Approval for Three Carbon Reduction Projects**

The Interim Head of Finance presented the report, it incorporated three items, representing net zero sustainability opportunities for the council. Due to the timing of the pre election period, authority was being sought now to progress the projects. The first involved an application the council had made to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, (SHDF) a decision on which was expected imminently. If successful, authority was requested to accept funding of the grant, agree match funding and sign a memorandum of understanding.

The second related to a successful grant which had been received to install solar panels at Riverside Leisure Centre which also required a proportion of funding from the council and would result in £25,000 net savings being added to the Medium Term Financial Programme. The last asked for funding for feasibility work in relation to Heat Networks and was aimed at ensuring the council were best placed to apply for any available grant funding. He concluded by emphasising that the recommendations aimed to address the council's priorities in relation to Climate Change and its net zero aspirations.

In response to a member question the Carbon Management Programme Coordinator advised that it was central government policy that all housing not just social housing

be brought up to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) level C which for some housing would involve fabric improvement works such as insulation. Residents could find out the EPC of their property by searching the government register [here](#) which also provided recommendations on how to increase the EPC rating.

A member referred to a previous project, ECO4 which provided assistance to low income home owners to install insulation measures and commented that the project had a poor reputation. The provider had contracted out the works as the skills and infrastructure were not available in Norwich which had led to poor communication with customers. How would the SHDF project avoid making the same errors. The Carbon Management Programme Coordinator advised that a local principal contractor would be sought to deliver the project.

In response to a member question the Interim Head of Finance clarified the figures on the solar panel project, the installation would save £53,000 per year on energy costs and £25,000 was the net gain after factoring in the annual repayments on borrowing £375,000 to deliver the project.

A member asked why the proposals did not include decarbonising heat, the Carbon Management Programme Coordinator advised that if heat pumps were installed in properties without insulation measures being installed first, residents would see an increase in their bills.

In response to a member question the Chief Executive Officer confirmed that there was funding agreed in the recent budget to support some capacity within the housing team to undertake grant funded work.

**RESOLVED** to note the report Funding Approval for Three Carbon Reduction Projects.

(Councillor Prinsley left the meeting at this point.)

#### **4) Assets (Non-Housing) 5 Year Plan**

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources introduced the report, he supported the philosophy behind the plan and noted that the successful management of assets was fundamental to the financial security of the council.

The Head of Property and Economic Development referred to the Strategic Asset Management Framework which had been agreed by the council in 2022. Good progress had been made against the framework and it was considered to be a good time to revisit and update the action plan. It was determined that greater data on the asset portfolio was needed in particular in relation to the income earning portfolio and the revised plan would link the income earning assets to the Medium Term Financial Plan.

A surveying firm had been appointed and conducted a review of the portfolio of assets, to determine if the council were investing appropriately and had a clear plan in place in terms of the investment required for the assets it proposed to retain. The surveyor's findings were contained in the report and the Head of Property and Economic Development highlighted the finding that the council gained 80% of its income from

23% of its assets. One of the proposals was to reduce the number of assets retained to a smaller more manageable number and a small number of assets were being recommended for disposal.

The revised plan would ensure a sustainable future revenue stream, delivery would be monitored by the Asset and Development Board and six monthly updates would be provided to members. In terms of financial implications, the disposal of assets would bring in capital receipts and would reduce the council's capital liability but would reduce its income base, this could be offset by Treasury Management activity.

A member asked a question in relation to ongoing consultancy costs and the Head of Property and Economic Development advised that consultant support would be needed to provide data on some assets for example to provide local knowledge for rent reviews if they were out of area.

In response to a member question the Head of Property and Economic Development advised that the aim of the business case referred to in the report was to get to the stage of bringing a report to members for consideration.

**RESOLVED** to ask cabinet to provide the minutes of the Future Shape Norwich Board meeting which approved the business case for the Assets Five Year Plan.

## **5) Development Site Pipeline**

The Development Strategy Manager presented the report. He referred to the cabinet report on the Development Site Pipeline from December 2002 which had endorsed further feasibility works on sites which had now been conducted. Of the original 15 sites, six had been identified as priorities, three for disposal, one for land assembly before consideration for disposal and two sites for further feasibility for the council to commercially develop. An additional site not part of the 15 was also identified for disposal. Of the remaining nine sites, funding for further feasibility work was being sought and the sites would return to cabinet for consideration after this.

Delegated authority was sought to move forward over the next three months especially in relation to the recommended disposals.

**RESOLVED** to note the report Development Site Pipeline.

## **6) Items for the meeting on 21 March 2024**

The committee officer advised that officers scheduled to bring forward the Biodiversity Strategy item on the work programme for 21 March had requested that the item be deferred to the new civic year. If members agreed the proposed deferral there would be space at the meeting to bring forward the outstanding item on the LOVE Norwich Review.

**RESOLVED** to:

- 1) agree to defer consideration of the item on the Biodiversity Strategy to the next civic year; and
- 2) schedule the LOVE Norwich Review for the meeting on 21 March 2024.

## **7) Exclusion of the public**

**RESOLVED** to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of items \*8 and \*9 (below) on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

### **\*8) Assets (Non-Housing) 5 Year Plan – Exempt appendix (Para 3)**

This item was noted under item 4 above.

### **\*9) Development Site Pipeline – Exempt appendix (Para 3)**

The Development Strategy Manager advised members that if a discontinuation of existing stock was considered then residents and councillors would be consulted. In terms of how councillors could propose sites their input was welcomed.

**RESOLVED** to note the exempt appendix.

CHAIR