



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.35pm – 5.55pm

23 February 2012

Present: Councillors Stephenson (Chair), Bradford, Galvin, Gayton, Gee, Grahame, Jeraj and Storie

Apologies: Councillors Driver, Lubbock and Sands (M)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2012 subject to amending the second paragraph of the HRA Self-financing update discussion from “opportunity to include energy efficiency measures” to “opportunity to include renewable energy measures.”

2. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

(An updated copy of the forward agenda (appendix A) was circulated at the meeting)

The chair suggested that the scrutiny officer present a report, to a future scrutiny committee, on the Localism Act and how it may affect the role of scrutiny. The scrutiny officer said that guidance on the new legislation was still awaited, however the report could highlight what the committee may be likely to face and the different options to consider.

The strategy and programme manager explained that a report on the Localism Act would be taken to cabinet in March 2012, but only if the statutory regulations were made available in time. The report would specifically focus on the community right to challenge and how this would be taken forward.

In response to Cllr Jeraj’s suggestion to include an item on the work programme regarding revenues and benefits and the transition to universal credit, the scrutiny officer encouraged members to use the request forms to put forward topics for the scrutiny work programme, which would be considered and revised by the committee in May 2012.

RESOLVED to ask the scrutiny officer to present a report on the Localism Act and how it may affect the role of scrutiny, to a future scrutiny committee.

3. QUARTER THREE 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 which highlighted the performance headlines of the council.

Members put forward suggestions regarding the availability of the full performance report and suggested the inclusion of some context within the report, to illustrate how services were actually measured. The head of strategy and programme management said that a document could be prepared for the new corporate plan, to show how the performance measures would be measured. Members were encouraged to feed in any queries and suggestions which could assist with the development of the document.

In response to members' questions, the director of regeneration and development explained that the new voids target of 16 days, as set at council on 21 February 2012, would be challenging due to the number of long term sheltered housing voids which would be coming back into stock for more general needs use. He explained that the voids indicator was a combined figure of general needs voids and sheltered housing voids. A breakdown of the figure would help to illustrate what was happening around the stock. There had been a change in demand from sheltered housing to more specific housing with care. In the future, the council may need to work closely with other partners to ensure that need is met. In response to questions from Councillor Bradford he said that only a small number of sheltered housing units were long standing voids and that the council was not proposing to remove other sheltered housing stock into the general needs stock. The head of strategy and programme management said that the council aimed to maximise the use of adapted properties through the choice based lettings scheme, which allocated adapted properties to those with that housing need and requirement. People with specific needs would be identified on the council's 'assisted bidding list' and the home options team would work closely with them to ensure that a suitable property was allocated. Members asked for the opportunity to review the sheltered housing review report which would be considered by cabinet in June 2012.

Councillor Galvin asked whether responses to emails could be tracked and also whether, with channel migration, this should be included as a key performance measure. Members were concerned that anecdotal evidence suggested that there were long delays before emails were responded to. The deputy chief executive explained that all emails sent to 'info@norwich.gov.uk' or benefits enquiries could be tracked and data suggested that members of the public were receiving a response. The new customer service standards for 2012 would focus on resolving customer issues at the first point of contact and this would be assisted by the introduction of the integrated customer contact system. Specific measures would be used to assess the success of channel migration. Members acknowledged the encouraging results of the customer contact service and thanked officers.

Councillor Grahame queried the performance of planning applications, stating that the delay on a specific application had cost the applicant money, jobs and potential income. Councillor Gee was concerned that the lack of recruitment had resulted in a negative impact on the delivery of frontline services. The director of regeneration and development said that resource capacity and flexibility had been improved within

the planning department and that members should direct any specific planning application concerns to the head of planning.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) that a printed colour copy of the quarterly performance report be made available in each group room, in advance of the meeting;
- (2) that the chair and officers consider whether the quarterly performance report could be printed for scrutiny members, rather than receiving a copy with the cabinet papers;
- (3) to ask the head of strategy and programme management to:
 - i. circulate to members, the definition used to measure voids; and
 - ii. prepare a document for the new corporate plan, setting out how the performance measures would be measured;
- (4) to add an item to the work programme to pre-scrutinise the cabinet sheltered housing review report;
- (5) to ask the director of regeneration and development:
 - i. to circulate to members the total number of council owned sheltered housing units; % occupied; % vacant; average length void;
 - ii. to circulate to members details regarding planning applications performance; and
 - iii. to record future void information in the categories a) sheltered housing b) all other c) total for all dwellings;
- (6) to ask the deputy chief executive to circulate to members:
 - i. the last quarter performance data for email responses, including how long it took to respond and how many responses were outstanding; and
 - ii. an update on the introduction of the integrated customer contact system

CHAIR

Appendix A

Q3 Performance report - questions to heads of service and directors

PRIORITY – Safe and healthy neighbourhoods

SHN 03 - introduce four neighbourhood teams

1) Why has work on community plans stopped?

When the neighbourhood teams were established a menu of actions were identified that had the potential to be developed to shape local activity involving partners and residents and these formed part of the service performance dashboard. Community plans are one of these which apart for some initial work, because of other priorities and available resources have not been developed. Work is in progress to identify how local issues can be prioritised with partners and residents which could form rolling local action plans. The roll forward of service plans will provide the mechanism to review current priorities and targets to ensure they are focussed on the correct activities.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Jeraj asked how, without governing community plans in place, the priorities would be set. The head of local neighbourhood services said that the council was working with partners and councillors to collate the information already held, and to identify local priorities. The community plans had been resident led and it had been difficult to resource the variety of demands. In the interim, ward councillors could engage with neighbourhood managers to exchange information and also take part in the neighbourhood walkabouts, identifying local issues. Work was ongoing to develop the role of residents, acting as an advocate and talking to their neighbours and peers to encourage a change of habits, for example, to reduce fly-tipping. In response to a question from Councillor Galvin regarding a previously held members' briefing on neighbourhood agreements, the head of strategy and programme management explained that these were just one of the options available, along with neighbourhood plans and forums. Consideration would need to be given to how best to move forward with the resources available. In response to concerns raised by Councillor Bradford that some of the most deprived areas would require greater levels of support to engage, the head of local neighbourhood services confirmed that different areas of the city would require different resources and no one size fits all approach could be used. A variety of mechanisms would need to be provided and partners would need to work collaboratively to share information and ensure a focused and effective response. Protocols would need to be in place around sharing personal data.

PRIORITY – Opportunities for all

OFA 05 - equality standard

2) What is the council doing to encourage reporting of racial incidents given that this is below target?

Please refer to the equality information report recently published on the website which gives a clear picture of the number of incidents and crimes in Norwich as reported by the council and its partners for 2010/11.

The council is a member of the county community cohesion network & strategic board which includes a range of partners, which as part of its remit includes tackling hate crimes and incidents on a partnership basis. The cohesion network led on the work to develop the multi-agency protocol for the reporting of hate crime which the authority endorsed in November 2009. Two current key areas of work we are participating in include:

- A Norfolk wide campaign led by the Constabulary and Norfolk County Council to encourage the reporting by individuals of hate crimes (this will include, for example, advertising on buses, and the development of a website etc).
- The council are also encouraging reporting internally by launching an e-learning tool in April, which will help employees recognise and report incidents or crimes. How this training can be offered to members will be explored.

Please note that although racially motivated incidents and crimes are under-reported, it is not the only area of concern and following the review of the Fiona Pilkington case and the recent report from the Equality And Human Rights commission, *Hidden in plain sight*, it is recognised that the reporting of crimes and incidents that relate to disability, sexual orientation, transgender and religion and belief similarly requires a significant culture change and awareness raising to ensure incidents are reported and support provided to victims.

Councillor Jeraj suggested that the priority on the corporate plan should relate to hate crime in general and then to provide a breakdown if any particular issues arose. The head of local neighbourhood services said that the racist incidents measure was initially a best value indicator and that it was still valid. There was a need to obtain better information on hate crime and explore how to respond on a case-by-case basis or on a wider basis.