

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**16:30 to 18:20****20 October 2016**

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

Apologies: Councillors Coleshill and Haynes

Also present: Paul Dunning (Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust) and Chris Hey (Norfolk County Council)

1. Declarations of interest

Councillor Wright declared an 'other' interest in item 6 below as he was a governor at a Church of England school which was connected with Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT).

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2016

3. Scrutiny committee work programme 2015 -2016

Members discussed the TOPIC process for putting an item onto the scrutiny committee work programme and the strategy manager confirmed that officers would do an initial check for an item against the TOPIC analysis and bring the item back to the next meeting.

Confirmation of the scope around the upcoming item on the neighbourhood model was requested from the committee. Members suggested that the report could include:

- How the public would be engaged in this - including what was being asked of residents, and what support would be available to them.
- How would the sustainability of initiatives that rely on volunteers be secured, for example ensuring resilience in the event of key individual residents disengaging/moving on
- How would councillors be involved?

- How would the resource allocated to the model reflect different patterns of deprivation in the city. For example, areas with more engaged citizens may have an excess of capacity whereas other areas may be less well-served

RESOLVED to:-

- 1) note the scrutiny committee work programme 2015 – 16; and
- 2) ask officers to consider the scope provided by members for the neighbourhood model item.

4. Consultation methods

The director of customers and culture presented the report and invited questions from members.

She said that the council was looking at ways of working digitally with the public and this included adding more self-service options to the website as well as researching automated processes for collecting email addresses of members of the public. Once this work had been completed, it could be used to email results of consultations to those who had responded to aid with transparency and accessibility for the public. By encouraging those who are able to access services online, it would leave more resources to help those who were not comfortable using online services.

In response to a member's question, the director of customers and culture said that having a panel of people scrutinising consultations could lead to small consultations becoming a very long process. This was used however for previous budget consultations and could be used again in the future.

Members discussed consultations around transportation and planning applications and that many applications were too far along in the planning process before the consultations began. The director of customers and culture said that transport issues were very complicated and Norfolk County Council had more responsibility for these than Norwich City Council.

RESOLVED to note the report on consultation methods.

5. Update of the representative on NHOSC

The representative gave a verbal update. He said that NHOSC had looked at a review of stroke services and that generally, there had been an improvement. In response to a member's question, he confirmed that the patient journey had been reviewed from the ambulance call through to rehabilitation.

Ambulance services had also been discussed and it was highlighted that there had been around a fifty percent increase in the number of calls to the ambulance service. Training for paramedics was under review with plans to phase the placements of trainees so that they were not all taken out of the service at one time and had to be covered by other staff.

RESOLVED to note the update from the NHOSC representative.

6. Educational outcomes for the young people of Norwich

The chair introduced the item and said it would be the next step of information gathering by the committee ahead of making recommendations at a future meeting.

Chris Hey, head of place, planning and organisation at Norfolk County Council introduced himself. He explained that his role was very much focused on forward planning, primarily around the provision of pupil places due to population growth. He said that the role of the local authority was to ensure there were sufficient school places, appropriate support for vulnerable learners and to facilitate a good education for every Norfolk learner. The academy system gathered accountability into the academy trust which was a key accountable body to the Secretary of State and not locally elected members which was a big shift. A new key role of regional schools commissioner had been set up which discharged the functions of the Secretary of State at a local level and would challenge underperformance for all schools in the area.

Paul Dunning introduced himself and explained his role as the CEO of the multi academy trust, DNEAT. He said that the Diocese of Norwich formed its own trust in response to the number of schools that were becoming academies. The trust had a number of schools choosing to join it and had some schools which had to become academies.

He said that all academy trusts were different and the Diocese of Norwich acted in a collaborative way. The board of trustees were responsible to the Secretary of State but devolved power throughout the local schools. The schools within the trust were grouped geographically with improvement officers working in each area. Driving up performance in primary schools was a large part of their focus. The groups met annually to report on performance.

DNEAT worked with the local community and had parent governors on their boards. There was a clear career development path for staff and they recognised the importance of empowering staff.

Chris Hey said that if a school were to fall into special measures, this would trigger a discussion with the local authority about finding an appropriate sponsor for the school and it transitioning into an academy. The system was designed to inject new governance at an underperforming school to drive improvements for a positive outcome.

In response to a member's question, Paul Dunning said that all schools needed high quality teachers. Academies did have more freedom around staffing than local authority schools with pay scales in place for unqualified teachers (usually those teaching vocational subjects). He said that recruiting teachers was a challenge across the country. DNEAT had recognised that many teaching assistants were talented graduates who could train on the job as long as the intention was to move them onto formal training.

(Councillor Peek left the meeting at this point)

Discussion ensued on exclusions and oversubscribed short stay schools. Paul Dunning said that there was just as much competition for main schools to produce good GCSE results. All schools wanted the best for their pupils and this had to be a collective responsibility. Free schools could add capacity for places and it would be helpful if more came forward.

Members discussed how academies would be financially held to account as they were also funded by tax payers. Paul Dunning said that any business dealings had to be declared in the academies' accounts (for example, if a person in a position of power in the academy were to sell its services from their own business) and a mechanism was in place to identify such incidents. The CEO of an academy trust was also the accounting officer and a report must be written and submitted on the academy's accounts. Chris Hey said that the public had to be satisfied with the checks and balances in place, however, the accounts were also subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

(Councillor Manning left the meeting at this point)

In response to a member's question, Chris Hey said that if a local authority school on county council owned land were to become an academy, the land must be transferred to the academy on a lease of 125 years. Any controls on this would have to be permitted by the Secretary of State.

(Councillor Malik left the meeting at this point)

Discussion ensued around the accountability of academy trusts to the local community. Chris Hey said that financial accountability was tracked through laws for charities and business finances and education outcomes were judged by Ofsted. Paul Dunning added that the role of the regional schools commissioner was created in response to the growth of academies and provided some local intelligence. Chris Hey said that local authorities had a legal right to commission new schools and suitable sponsors were appointed by the regional schools commissioner once an open competition for sponsors had concluded.

(Councillor Bogelein left the meeting at this point)

The chair thanked Chris Hey and Paul Dunning for attending and said that members would take the evidence gathered so far and form some recommendations at the next meeting of the scrutiny committee.

RESOLVED to note the evidence gathered on academies and educational outcomes

CHAIR