

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**16:30 to 18:20****28 January 2016**

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Maxwell (vice chair), Bogelein, Coleshill, Grahame, Haynes, Herries (substitute for Manning), Peek, Packer, Raby, Ryan, Sands (M) (substitute for Sands (S)) and Schmierer

Apologies: Councillors Manning and Sands (S)

Also present: Councillors Waters and Stonard
Richard Balls, communications manager

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2015.

3. Scrutiny committee work programme 2015 -2016

Members discussed the upcoming item on the Push the Pedalways scheme, which was added to the work programme for the meeting on 17 March 2016. The chair said that various groups would be invited to send a representative to the meeting and each representative would be given five minutes to address the committee. The public would be invited to submit questions in advance of the meeting in order to identify common themes.

In response to a member's question, the cabinet member for resources and income generation said that an itinerant meeting to view sections of the pedalway would need to take in both areas that are doing well and not so well. This would ensure that the committee could have a balanced discussion. It was agreed that the viability of an itinerant meeting prior to the 17 March meeting would be considered.

RESOLVED to:-

- 1) Note the scrutiny committee work programme 2015 – 16; and
- 2) Ask the chair to provide members with an update on the co-operatives briefing.

4. Pre-scrutiny of the Environmental Strategy 2015 – 18

The environmental strategy manager presented the report. He said that this strategy was more public facing than the previous two environmental strategies. He highlighted some of the points in the report and advised members that there had been a 30% decrease in Norwich City Council's carbon emissions.

As the report involved many service areas, it was decided that any questions on specific details in the report would be emailed to the environmental strategy manager in the first instance, who would collate responses from the appropriate head of service.

RESOLVED to:

- a) Note the Environmental Strategy 2015 -18; and
- b) To ask members to forward any detailed questions in the first instance to the environmental strategy manager for inclusion on the scrutiny tracker.

5. Pre – scrutiny of the proposed budget for 2016 - 17

The chair agreed to take items 7(a) and 7(b) separately.

The chief finance officer presented item 7(a).

The cabinet member for resources and income said that there were still unknowns at this time. Raising council tax by 1.95% showed a good balance between being aware of financial pressures on residents and raising income. Smoothing of savings was very important to ensure that the council did not lose services in the future.

The leader of the council said that the local government financial settlement figures had still not been received by local councils which led to a degree of uncertainty. He reminded members that the recommendations to council may change before the meeting as the financial landscape was constantly shifting.

The communications manager gave members some information around the public budget consultation. He said that around 260 responses to the consultation had been received and the majority of these had been online. Many questions had been open questions in line with member's feedback around consultations. A general overview of the comments received had identified some common themes including:

- Transport and the Pedalways
- Sharing services with other authorities
- Council tax reduction scheme

Discussion ensued in which the chief finance officer answered member's questions. In 2017 – 18 the council would be using reserves because of reductions in grant funding, which would take them down towards the minimum, prudent level. She explained that some councils would find themselves in the position of having negative Revenue Support Grant (RSG) due to the way RSG has been calculated in the provisional settlement.

The chief finance officer presented item 7(b). She said that the budgets had been built on the basis of accommodating the 1% rent reduction. The determination figure for high value voids was still an unknown. This could mean an amended budget being taken back to council later in the year.

Members discussed the right to buy legislation. The chief finance officer said that she thought it was unlikely that the council would be able to recoup costs by buying back properties sold under the right to buy legislation. She said that the council did have some protection around new build properties.

In response to a member's question, the chief finance officer said that there was a baseline standard of housing that the council had to provide but Norwich City Council had the Norwich Standard which was above this. The strategy manager said that legislation was being considered around the lowest SAP rating that private rented accommodation could have. He agreed to find this information and circulate it to scrutiny committee members.

RESOLVED to note the pre – scrutiny of the proposed budget 2016 - 17

6. Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of item *7 (below) on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

(The committee officer left the room at this point. The strategy manager recorded the minute for the item below.)

***7. Pre – scrutiny of the proposed budget 2016 – 17 Appendix 5**

The chief finance officer presented the report and answered member's questions.

RESOLVED to note the pre – scrutiny of the proposed budget 2016 – 17 Appendix 5

CHAIR