

MINUTES

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16:35 to 18:55

25 January 2018

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Brociek-Coulton (vice chair) Bogelein, Bradford, Bremner, Grahame, Haynes, Jones (B), Malik, Manning, Ryan and Thomas (Va)

Apologies: Councillor Coleshill

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2017.

3. Update of the representative on Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

An update was circulated at the meeting.

RESOLVED to note the update of the representative on NHOSC.

4. Scrutiny committee work programme

Councillor Bogelein suggested that the scrutiny committee may want to look at the topic of viability assessments at the March meeting of the scrutiny committee, prior to a change in legislation in spring 2018. She suggested that there was a need to strengthen local policies and have input into revised guidance on how liability assessments would be calculated.

The head of regeneration and development suggested that it may be pertinent to wait for the national review of the process to understand how the council may be affected. He said that an all members briefing around planning policy and the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding may be of use to members.

After being put to a vote, with five members voting in favour and seven voting against, it was resolved to not include viability assessments on the scrutiny committee work programme for 2017-18.

The strategy manager highlighted the need for a clear scope for the remaining item on the work programme – review of enforcement services. He suggested that the lead member for this item, Councillor Grahame, should meet with the appropriate head of service and bring a suggested scope to the February meeting for approval.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) include an all members briefing on the topic of CIL funding in the members development programme for the next civic year; and
- (2) ask Councillor Grahame to liaise with the director of neighbourhood services to work up a draft scope for the enforcement item on the work programme and bring this to the February meeting for approval.

5. Environmental strategy progress update

The environmental strategy manager presented the report. He said that excellent progress had been made on the objectives within the environmental strategy and that the council continued to perform well in a changing landscape. He highlighted that the council had reduced its carbon emissions by fifty percent since 2008 and the per capita emissions had reduced by thirty eight percent over the same period. Housing stock efficiency had been improved with investment and private tenants had been helped through the 'Cosy City' initiative. The One Planet Norwich festival engaged citizens of Norwich and the use of social media continued this engagement work.

In response to a question from a member, the environmental strategy manager said that the next step regarding reduction of carbon emissions was a series of visioning sessions with expertise being brought in from the Tindall Centre at the University of East Anglia. There would be briefings and workshops for members to look into marrying finances and emission reductions within the resources the council had.

A member questioned how the work on reducing carbon emissions would continue. The environmental strategy manager said that the carbon management programme had ended but officers were working on the third edition of this. Realistic, affordable targets were being discussed and there were likely to be around 65%.

Discussion ensued on electric vehicle charging points. The head of regeneration and development said that the issue was high on the Government's agenda with a variety of funding pots available; however these were only offering up to 75% grants towards the cost. The environmental strategy manager said that work already happening within the county would inform any work by Norwich City Council on electric vehicle charging points. Work was already underway with the University of East Anglia (UEA) to install two rapid charge points at the university. Research showed that most electric cars within the country were used to go from commuter's

homes to work and then home again in one charge so any charging points would be geared towards those moving through the county.

A member referred to point 2.20 on page 47 of the agenda papers regarding air quality information and said that the air quality sensors that were being used were very poor quality and that there was a need to liaise with the companies that produced these.

In response to a member's question on spending less on fossil fuels, the head of communications and culture said that she would circulate some further information on this.

RESOLVED to ask cabinet to consider:-

- (1) working with partners to such as the BID and the UEA to facilitate the delivery of electric vehicle charging points,
- (2) working with producers of air quality sensors and researchers to ensure that good quality field data around air quality is produced; and
- (3) investigating the possibility of a social value and environmental framework to purchase assets

6. Pre-scrutiny of the proposed budget 2018-19

(The chair agreed to move this item up the agenda.)

The chief finance officer presented the report and gave a presentation to the committee.

In response to a member's question, the chief finance officer said that the council would have the ability to move money between ear-marked reserves and the general fund but having a specific ear-marked fund showed an intention for those monies. Regarding the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan, the council was considering opportunities for a 60 year plan.

A member referred to point 10 on page 103 of the agenda papers regarding charging for food hygiene training and advice. The head of culture and communications said that this was in reference to running additional training courses and charging accordingly for these.

A member commented that the figure of fifty percent of the council's income being made up of fees and charges was a huge change and that the public needed to be made aware of the size of the cuts having to be made.

In response to a member's question, the chief finance officer said that money had been spent on commercial acquisitions to gain revenue to fund core services. There was a distinction between these acquisitions and investment in heritage assets which needed regular maintenance to avoid catastrophic investment.

Discussion ensued around the returns on commercial property investment. The chief finance officer said that a financial appraisal of each property was undertaken including factors such as tenant finances and any structural problems. The rental income from a tenant had to cover any interest on borrowing for the property plus the Minimum Revenue Provision which charged a percentage over a fifty year period. This set money aside for repayment of the loan. The council would only invest in properties which met these and other criteria.

RESOLVED to note the pre-scrutiny of the proposed budget 2018-19

7. Access to justice - recommendations

The chair introduced the item and reminded members that they were considering recommendations based on the evidence heard at the November meeting of the scrutiny committee.

The strategy manager gave members an overview of the discussion at the meeting of the scrutiny committee on 23 November 2017.

Members discussed the issue of changeable funding and the need to make this more sustainable and predictable for long standing partners. The strategy manager said that it was accepted that this could be unsettling but budget constraints meant that the council could not commit to funding beyond next year. A solution could be to work with support organisations to look at their own sustainability of funding so that they were not overly reliant on one funding stream.

A member commented that a considerable amount of time went into applying for funding and reporting back. The strategy manager said that monitoring worked around the process already being used by partners but there was also a need for this to be transparent.

It was suggested that standardised forms, collecting the same information, could be used across partner organisations to make the funding application process easier.

(Councillor Bradford left the meeting at this point)

In response to a member's question, the strategy manager said that within the council's digital inclusion work, there was a planned Universal Credit work stream. This would involve working with digital hubs to train volunteers on Universal Credit and also the 'Better Off Norwich' platform. This website gave advice and showed which benefits a customer would be entitled to.

RESOLVED to ask cabinet to consider;

- (1) committing to a longer term for the council's funding for social welfare advice services in the city,
- (2) how to reduce burden on funded organisations by standardising application and monitoring process, and to explore this with other funders

- (3) including a link to the Better Off Norwich platform in all relevant communications sent to customers and within their online council accounts to ensure they are accessing their entitlements; and
- (4) working with digital hubs around Norwich to train volunteers on Universal Credit and the Better off Norwich platform.

CHAIR

