

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16:30 to 17:40

14 December 2017

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Brociek-Coulton (vice chair), Bremner, Coleshill, Grahame, Haynes, Jones (B), Malik, Manning and Ryan.

Apologies: Councillors Bradford, Bogelein and Thomas (Va).

1. Public questions/petitions

No public questions or petitions were received.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2017.

4. Update of the representative on the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny committee (NHOSC)

The representative summarised the outcomes and actions from the NHOSC meeting of 7 December 2017 and said she would circulate this report to the committee along with the forward plan.

In response to a question from a member the NHOSC representative agreed to circulate the figures listing what each Clinical Commissioning Group spent on mental health services.

RESOLVED to note the update from the NHOSC representative.

5. Scrutiny committee work programme 2017-18

The chair provided an update on a scrutiny conference he had attended at the Centre for Public Scrutiny in London.

The leader and chief executive of Rotherham Council spoke at the conference and said that lack of appropriate scrutiny contributed to the child sexual exploitation issues that they had experienced.

Clive Betts MP, who sat on the communities and local government scrutiny select committee, suggested that when councils were agreeing contracts with external providers, they could negotiate that officers from these suppliers be available to attend scrutiny committee if requested.

The chair reflected that the committee was doing well in terms of looking at bigger issues and had good representation from senior offices attending. He noted an area for development was to balance the focus on external areas of scrutiny with internal areas.

The chair presented the report on the work programme.

The Private Rented Sector (PRS) was on the programme for February and the chair asked for suggestions on the scope.

A member suggested that as a large number of occupants in the PRS were students or former students, the committee could hear from the University of East Anglia's (UEA) student union to understand the work they are undertaking within the sector.

The director of customers and culture said in response to a question that the building regulations update on cladding in terms of safety and had not been published. There was an update on work on these blocks and she would circulate this.

Members noted that it would be interesting to follow up on the progress of the recently introduced landlord accreditation scheme. It would be useful to hear from the UEA student union and also suggested a representative from a landlord association such as the Eastern Landlords Association be invited. A member suggested looking at student blocks, plans for those being built or those already built especially in the city centre.

The chair commented that Universal Credit would be pivotal especially how landlords interacted with existing and new tenants who were claiming it.

A member suggested asking St. Martin's Housing Trust for an update on how easily people were able to access the PRS.

The strategy manager said that to look at an achievable scope which was meaningful in the context of one meeting, the committee could consider looking at the landlord accreditation scheme and use this as starting point for looking at the PRS. This could include an update on how the scheme was progressing and at the issues that it was attempting to address.

The strategy manager provided an update on the scrutiny committee's recommendation to cabinet on the city access charter. This would now go to officers to consider and return to cabinet for consideration and would be brought back to scrutiny.

A member asked if officers would work with the Norwich Access group. The director of customers and culture said that the charter was in development but needed to be pulled into a draft document and then consulted on. In response to a question from a member, the director of customers and culture said the council could consult widely and that specific timings were not in place yet but she anticipated this would take place before the end of the civic year.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the work programme 2017-18; and
- (2) to agree the scope for the Private Rented Sector would be to look at the landlord accreditation scheme, including an update on how the scheme was progressing and the issues that it was attempting to address.

6. Draft corporate performance measures

The strategy manager presented the report. He stated that the majority of measures were recommended to stay the same in order that a comparison with previous year's data could be made.

The new local area survey methodology had changed; previously it was a phone based survey at the end of a customer's contact with the council's customer contact centre. It was now a text based survey sent to a wider pool of residents. The targets based on the old methodology were no longer appropriate and new targets were proposed that reflected the change in methodology.

In response to a question from a member the strategy manager advised that telephone numbers used to text residents were provided via the CIVICA system which recorded contacts with the council across different services. The former system was disproportionately disposed to council tenants as it was they who were contacting the council and the new text based service got to a broader representation of residents.

In response to a member's question the strategy manager advised that whilst the target VFM9 (Delivery of local democracy engagement plan) was being deleted, this was a target which referred to activities which took place during local democracy week. These events would still take place but would not form part of the corporate plan.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the report; and

(2) to recommend the draft corporate measures 2018-19 to council for approval.

7. Draft Equality Information Report

The strategy manager presented the report. The equality information report was to be published by the end of January 2018 which was a statutory requirement to comply with the council's duties under the Public Sector Equality Act.

Most of the data had not shifted much from last year. However, there was a widening gender gap in the median income of residents, with male wage levels being higher than females. Norwich residents median income levels were behind both those for the region and nationally.

Norfolk Constabulary provided the figures on hate crime. They had changed how these are recorded and therefore comparison with last year were not straightforward. The committee noted that there was a spike in incidents recorded during the Brexit referendum.

In response to a question from a member the director of customers and culture said that the council's HR department were trying a number of methods to increase representation from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community on the workforce. She noted that it might be that the nature of the jobs available at the council did not match the communities' skillset. BAME's were well represented in highly skilled roles with the NHS for example.

In response to a question from a member the strategy manager advised the report did not cover figures for staff who were carers as this was not a protected characteristic within the equalities act.

It was noted that it was a Police Community Support Officer's (PCSO) role to report on hate crime issues and complete work in this area, the committee questioned how this work would be completed with the removal of PCSOs in Norfolk and asked officers to provide an update on this.

In response to a question the strategy manager confirmed that race and nationality were protected characteristics within the Equality Act and therefore when a crime was reported if the individual felt nationality played a role in the crime it would be recorded as a hate crime.

RESOLVED to note the draft equality information report.

8. Access to justice

Due the leader member for this item sending apologies for the meeting, members agreed to take this item at the January meeting.

RESOLVED to defer consideration of 'Access to justice – recommendations' to the scrutiny committee meeting on 25 January 2018.

9. Emerging position on the 2018-19 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and HRA Business Plan

The chief finance officer presented the report.

She emphasised that this was the emerging budget position rather than a draft and was subject to change. The figures for local government settlement were not yet available. The draft budget report would be available in January by which time there would be an additional two months data and figures would therefore change. In particular, years three, four and five were very provisional as confirmation was awaited on business rates, local government review and fairer funding. The report currently assumed the status quo.

She reminded members that the report should be read in conjunction with the chief executive's report 'Fit for The Future' which was considered by cabinet on 13 December 2017.

RESOLVED to note the Emerging position on the 2018-19 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and HRA Business Plan.

10. Exclusion of the public.

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of item *10 (below) on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

***10. Emerging position on the 2018-19 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and HRA Business Plan (Paragraph 3)**

The committee discussed the service efficiencies relating to the budget which had been tabled at the meeting.

In response to a question the director of customers and culture said that the information could be presented differently to members. The chair reminded the committee that the information was presented in a short timeframe and that the budget report was a work in progress.

RESOLVED to note the Emerging position on the 2018-19 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and HRA Business Plan.

CHAIR