



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 18:50

16 March 2023

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Carlo, Champion (substitute for Councillor Young) Driver, Fulton-McAlister (M), Galvin, Huntley, Osborn, Padda, Stutely, Thomas (Va) and Thomas (Vi)

Apologies: Councillors Brociek-Coulton and Young

(Also present Councillor Giles, cabinet member for community wellbeing and Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources).

1. Declarations of interest

During discussion on item 6 below, Councillors Osborn and Galvin declared an other interest in that they worked for MCS charitable foundation which was developing proposals for property link financing.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 19 January 2023 and 2 February 2023.

3. Scrutiny committee work programme 2022-23

The chair introduced the report and highlighted the recommendations.

A member asked whether the scrutiny tracker document could be brought to the committee to allow groups to consider TOPIC forms for the next civic year.

In response to a member's question on the outcomes of the peer review, and how these would be incorporated into the work of the scrutiny committee, the chair said that he understood that the recommendations would be rolled into the updated Corporate Plan. The Head of legal and procurement added that the committee may want to look at the report on those recommendations, before it was considered at cabinet.

A member asked if the committee could meet before the work programme setting meeting to consider the recommendations around scrutiny that had come from the peer review. The Head of legal and procurement replied that options would be considered and circulated.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Agree to add the item on 'the purpose and efficacy of council consultations' as attached at appendix B, to the 2023-24 scrutiny committee work programme;
- 2) Use the format of an informal workshop to discuss work programming on 25 May 2023, with the first part to review scrutiny specific recommendations from the Peer Review; and
- 3) note the deadline of submission of TOPIC forms for the upcoming civic year of Friday 28 April 2023

4. NHSOC

As Councillor Brociek-Coulton had given apologies for the meeting, there was no update. The chair invited questions from members that they wished to be raised at the next meeting of NHSOC.

A member commented that NHOSC would be considering the closure of the walk-in centre at its June meeting and asked that the representative contacted Councillor Bogelein for her comments on the consultation to be fed back.

Another member added that the consultation document around the walk-in centre closure was very long and only available in English.

The substitute member, Councillor Stutely, was present at the meeting and agree to take those points forward.

RESOLVED to ask the NHOSC representatives to take the points minuted above to the next meeting of the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5. Scrutiny review of welcoming Refugees and Asylum Seekers to Norwich and overcoming obstacles to their smooth integration

The chair introduced the item and highlighted the recommendations. The Head of legal and procurement presented the report. In January, the committee had agreed terms of reference, which included the suggestion of a survey being sent out to different groups to gather views, however, one of the organisations was uncomfortable with this approach.

The committee was being asked to consider next steps for the piece of work. If the appetite was to take the topic forward into the next civic year, there would need to be consideration around the scope of the work to narrow the focus.

A member thanked all involved with the event at the Zainab Café which provided a valuable insight into people's experiences. As there had not been a particularly high response to the consultation from service providers, she suggested that the scrutiny committee could take the work forward by scoping a consultation, in partnership with

relevant organisations, that would give options to understand the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, and the barriers that they faced. A survey would need to have an ethical basis for the research and participants would be assured that taking part would not affect their personal circumstances. There was a need to collect good quality data on the topic and work could be done with partner organisations to design an acceptable survey that would give robust data.

In response to a member's question, the Head of legal and procurement said that the main concerns from one of the organisations approached to complete the survey, was that those that were asylum seekers and refugees may not have had positive engagement with government organisations and a survey from the council could act as a deterrent. A member commented that as someone that had worked with those who were refugees and asylum seekers during his career, they tended to have very different experiences of formal organisations and said that he did not believe that a survey was the best way to engage.

A member added that surveys were not always the best way to reach 'hard to reach' stakeholders and that there were many other methodologies available. She accepted that surveys were useful to establish a baseline of data, but other approaches could be considered going forward.

A member asked whether the Community Connectors could be used to conduct surveys as they were trained in questioning and engagements. She added that it would be helpful to be clear about desired outcomes.

The cabinet member for community wellbeing suggested that ward councillors could get in touch individually with venues in their areas to set up 'drop in' sessions which could make the experience much more informal.

A member referred to page 65 of the agenda papers and that a volunteer had tried to contact the council 15 times for translation services but had been unsuccessful. He asked if there was any additional information on this and whether this was usual. The Head of legal and procurement replied that she would ask the appropriate manager to ensure that all customer contact assistants were fully aware of the Intran services available and that the availability of the service was advertised.

The cabinet member for community wellbeing said that he was concerned that a resident was not able to access the translation services and said that he would raise this with the cabinet member with responsibility for the service. There had been positive examples of using the Community Connectors so he would be supportive of expanding their work to assist with this. The topic was a very board one and if the continued work required more officer resource, it would be useful to identify specific issues or services to focus on, that the council was responsible for.

In response to a member's question on data sets that were already available, the Head of legal and procurement said that quantative data would be held by various different organisations due to the variety of services provided.

A member commented that within his ward, there were views that needed to be challenged on the use of the West Earlham community centre and asked whether the Community Connectors could work with local schools to build bridges within that

community. The cabinet member for community wellbeing replied that he was happy to discuss the issue with ward councils and the communities team on how to address these specific issues.

Members discussed the need for the Zainab project to have a more permanent base from which to operate out of and a member asked if there were any council owned properties that the project could be based at. A member added that it would be useful to understand what the requirements were for the premises to ensure that any options were suitable. The Head of legal and procurement agreed to raise this with the council's property team.

RESOLVED to

- 1) Investigate with partner organisations, and decide upon, a method of approach that is acceptable to asylum seekers and refugees, that allows the committee to gain data directly from service users so that the committee can understand the level of need within the city.
- 2) Ask the Head of legal and procurement to ask relevant managers to ensure that all customer contact assistants were aware of the Intran translation service and that the availability of the service was advertised.
- 3) Ask officers if any data sets around refugees and asylum seekers were already available
- 4) Ask officers to investigate if there were any council owned properties that the Zainab Project could use as a base; and
- 5) Review the list of issues raised by service users at the Zainab Café and ask for an update to be brought to a meeting of the scrutiny committee early in the civic year.

6. Recommendations on green financing

The chair introduced the item and asked Councillor Stutely to introduce recommendations for each of the five sections covered in the original presentation to the committee from the Green Finance Institute.

Regarding local climate bonds, a member said that the council would not be able to address the need for retrofitting without using blended financing. There was a need to start piloting these models and it was suggested that retrofitting of the council's community centres could be a viable option. Members agreed that a targeted approach was needed.

Members discussed the Green Mortgage Campaign and that there were already examples of local councils working with land trusts on these. A member referred to an organisation called 'Lendology' which was a company that would lend to homeowners to undertake retrofitting. They were underwritten by the UK investment bank and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

There would need to be further research undertaken to understand how the Council could be part of the initiative and also into the details of Green mortgage providers.

With regards to integrated retrofit financing, members agreed that it was important to look beyond Government grants for retrofit funding. Work needed to be undertaken across the greater Norwich area, alongside partner organisations, as the model was more attractive to investors with a larger pool of houses. A member commented that the council already had a good relationship with the Greater Norwich Growth Board and should explore the possibility of working with them on the initiative.

A member added that there needed to be better information from the council on funding schemes that were already available to homeowners, to ensure that residents understood the value of retrofitting.

Members discussed the idea of green rental agreements which would ask landlords to charge a single amount to renters which would include energy bills. This would incentivise landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties.

A member commented that the fluidity of energy prices could be an issue with these kinds of payments and there could be a danger that tenants would be paying more than necessary. A member replied that the idea was not that landlords would make profit from the payments, it was about landlords investing in making properties energy efficient. The private rented sector was the worst performing in terms of energy efficiency and there needed to be more investment in decarbonisation.

A member said that there were 740 properties in the city with a G EPC rating and landlords were not replying to communications from the council. The housing team needed more resource to take enforcement action and incentivise landlords.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to ask cabinet to consider the following recommendations:

Local Climate Bonds

- 1) To begin piloting blended finance models and identify a project to invest in, potentially the retrofitting of community centers.

Green Mortgage Campaign

- 2) To seek further analysis of green mortgage providers and to understand how Norwich City Council can be a part of this and seek opportunities to work with partner providers, such as Lendology.

Integrated retrofit finance:

- 3) To obtain statistics regarding take up rate from the pilot in Manchester, with a view to promoting such a campaign in Norwich and gather information on how the projects were delivered,
- 4) See if the additional benefits data was available; and

- 5) Explore working with partners, such as the Greater Norwich Growth Board to expand this work within the Greater Norwich area.

Green rental agreements:

- 6) To seek clarity on how green rental models work in practice, how these protect tenants and how tenants can be involved in the process, with LetNCC being considered as a pilot model.

Property link finance:

- 7) To support the concept of property link finance and seek to be considered for a UK pilot or early adoption, whichever comes first.

General recommendations:

- 8) To increase capacity for the delivery of green finance projects and seek assurance from cabinet that the council has the resources for these.
- 9) To investigate how Norwich City Council can benefit as a landlord from these projects
- 10) Investigate how the council's wholly owned companies, NCSL and NRL can be part of the retrofit programme
- 11) To ask cabinet to provide the scrutiny committee with details of the work already underway on whole house retrofit pilots, including details of funding.

CHAIR