



Corporate Select Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 23 May 2022 at
2pm in Council Chamber, County Hall, Martineau Lane Norwich NR1 2DL

Present:

Cllr K Mason Billig (chair)
Cllr A Birmingham
Cllr N Daubney
Cllr L Hemsall
Cllr J James
Cllr B Price
Cllr V Thomson

Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Emma Corlett for Cllr T Jermy
Cllr Penny Carpenter (until 4.02pm) for Cllr E Colman
Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsburgh for Cllr B Duffin
Cllr Graham Carpenter (until 4.54pm) for Cllr S Clancy
Cllr Fran Whymark for the vacant position on the committee.

Also Present:

Cllr Tom FitzPatrick	Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance.
Cllr Andrew Jamieson	Cabinet Member for Finance

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Ed Colman (substituted by Cllr Penny Carpenter), Cllr Terry Jermy (Substituted by Cllr Emma Corlett), Cllr Barry Duffin (substituted by Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsburgh) Cllr Graham Carpenter for Cllr Stuart Clancy.

2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2022 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3 Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4 Items of Urgent Business

- 4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

5 Public Question Time

- 5.1 There were no public questions.

6 Local Member Issues/Questions

- 6.1 There was one local member question from Cllr Kemp. A supplementary question was asked:

Is the chair aware that the Local Government Information Unit is running a national conference this week about increasing trust in local government via accountability transparency and fairness and how is this possible that these constitutional changes before the committee could put South Lynn at the bottom of the queue for motions for every council meeting and stop Cabinet members being asked questions on their portfolio?

The Chair responded by saying that a written answer would be provided after the meeting.

7 Proposed Changes to the Constitution

- 7.1 The annexed report (7) was received and introduced by Helen Edwards, Director of Governance. The report outlined some proposed changes, including a tracked changes copy of the constitution that the committee were asked to consider. The Director of Governance outlined the timeline for the changes in which a series of workshops would happen before the final document was submitted to the committee on 11th July 2022 and then on to Full Council on 19th July 2022 for approval.

In addition to the workshops, a designated email address had been sent up for any member to put forward their thoughts and proposals for consideration. All proposed changes would be available on a log for all members to see during the process. Helen Edwards reminded the committee that the under the terms of the constitution it was the responsibility of the Director of Governance to propose any changes to the constitution, whilst any substantive changes must be approved by Full Council, after due consideration from the Select Committee.

- 7.2 In response to questions asked the committee discussed and noted the following:
- In previous times working groups had been set up to discuss and agree changes, prior to full council consideration, but these groups had not been as productive as desired.
 - Some members of the committee felt uncomfortable with giving delegated authority to the Chair of the committee to agree any additional changes suggested after the meeting.
 - Officers within the Governance department had an opportunity to discuss proposed changes and suggestions with the Director of Governance.
 - It was felt that questions to cabinet members are preferable if these are without notice, however there may be a better opportunity to get a more comprehensive answer if notice was given.
 - The member's allowance scheme is not under the control of Director of Governance but is reviewed by an independent panel. A review is due shortly by the panel and consideration will be given to those aspects covered within a quality impact assessment ensuring the Council is accessible to all, including those with a protected characteristic.

- Some members praised the process and felt that the workshops and opportunities within the committee debates both today and in July, before Full Council approval, was sufficient and would produce a good outcome.
- It was felt that changes to the 3 hour rule of Full Council meeting length needed particular consideration particularly with regard to motions that had not been moved.

7.3 Cllr Ben Price proposed a motion in 2 parts:

1. That the process of changes to the constitution does not proceed any further and that the committee sets up a cross party working group to discuss and agree proposals which will be brought back to the committee before moving on to Full Council for approval.
2. The cross party working group within its recommendations will look specifically at the frequency and length of Full Council meetings.

The motion was **lost** on a show of hands.

The Chair proposed that the recommendations within the report should be changed to reflect the desire that the committee wished to consider the proposed changes at the July 2022 meeting and that no delegated function would be given to the Chair of the committee.

The motion was **carried** on a show of hands.

8. **myOracle Programme update**

The committee received the annexed report (8) from the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services and was introduced by Cllr Tom FitzPatrick, Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance.

The report provided a substantive update to the committee since November 2021 and the 'go live' date in April 2022.

Sam Pittam Smith, Director of Transformation undertook a [presentation which is available on the committee website pages.](#)

8.1 In response to member's questions the following was discussed and noted:

- The *myoracle* project had been included on the corporate risk register since inception although as the go live had passed successfully the risk had been reduced.
- Processes were in place for the carry over of staff annual leave to be reflected in the *myoracle* software. This change has been further complicated by the switch to reflect leave in hours not days and also the alignment of all leave to start from 1st April to 31st March.
- The Director of Transformation and Strategy acknowledged that late or missing payments to third parties, especially the voluntary sector could have an impact but was not aware of any major issues in this regard. Any discrepancy identified was quickly resolved.

8.2 The committee **agreed** to note the work completed to date and the next steps and indicated any areas of assurance required for the next meeting.

9 **Smarter Working Update**

- 9.1 The annexed report (9) by the Executive Director for Strategy and Transformation was received and introduced by Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance.

The report provided an update for members and sought their support for the direction of travel. The initial stages of implementation had been completed and reported upon and a permanent Smarter Working Steering Group set up will provide strategic direction and implantation of future phases.

- 9.2 Sam Pittam Smith, Director of Transformation undertook a [presentation which is available on the committee website pages.](#)

- 9.3 In response to questions asked the committee discussed and noted the following:

- Members were reassured that any employee that wished to work from an office was able to do so.
- Given the size and geographical nature of the county some outlying premises would be retained but the trend had been to rationalise departments into County Hall.
- Staff wellbeing was a key priority and that opportunities for face to face meetings were being explored and expanded upon. This would differ from service to service, but it was thought that staff appraisals being face to face was an expectation that could be fulfilled.
- There was general support that central government should consider lifting the restriction on the ability to attend a meeting virtually.
- Cllr FitzPatrick committed to obtaining a written response from Cllr Peck, the Cabinet Member responsible for Asset Management, regarding the low occupancy of the new tier of the car park at County Hall.
- Concerns were raised that the carbon reduction emphasis on hybrid working was being transferred from the Council to the individual employee and that the impact of rising utility costs could impact some employees now working more from home.
- Hybrid working is having a positive impact in recruiting and retaining staff and was helping to shape future working practices.
- The delivery of services and the impact to end users was being closely monitored as hybrid working takes place.
- Solutions to hybrid working were at a local level and management had discretion to apply best working practices. There was not a 'one size fits all' mantra.
- Modelling was currently in progress regarding worker types and likely need to work from an office. However, not all jobs had essential office based aspects and consideration was required as to desirable face to face interactions with colleagues and teams.

- 9.4 The committee **agreed** to:

- Note the work completed to date, the next steps and gave assurance of requirements for the next meeting.
- Support the direction of travel for the programme.

The Committee took a short break and reconvened at 4.12pm

10. Norfolk County Council Draft workforce strategy

- 10.1 The annexed report (10) by the Executive Director for Strategy and Transformation Services was received. The report outlined a draft high level strategy to help support the 'Better Together for Norfolk' strategy to set out the workforce themes that are common to all NCC services and directorates to provide context for specific workforce strategies.
- 10.2 Kate Copplestone, Head of Organisational Effectiveness & Learning introduced the report and advised that this report was being shared with the committee at an early stage to gain valuable feedback. The document was 'work in progress' and was a broad overview from which at a later date more detailed action plans would arise.
- 10.3 In response to questions from members the following points were discussed and noted:
- It was thought that including measures to employ more individuals with disabilities was desirable although it was acknowledged that obtaining data as a reference point in this respect was more difficult as employees had to disclose their personal circumstances.
 - As part of the council wide organisational review, a partner company has been appointed to assist and will start engagement with a series of workshops to plan out a programme and define the scope required. This work will tie in with other initiatives such as the Newton Europe consultancy working with Adult Social Services.
 - Members agreed that including the use of apprenticeships and clearer defined career paths would be useful with the strategy.
 - The strategy was over arching and not intended to concentrate on 'hot spots' of recruitment such as the Care Sector. This could be achieved at more departmental level.
 - Members wished to see more on diversity and how the Council intended to support recruitment of a wider workforce, including those under 25 where numbers of staff were particularly low.
 - It was acknowledged that the council has an ageing workforce and that structural losses of experience staff could happen but was being managed by departments in line with their services needs.
 - Data on management training was considered to be an issue that required including within the strategy as well as the scope of training such as mentors and coaches.
 - Concerns were raised at the tone of the report around resilience. Members were concerned that workloads were manageable and that staff were listened to by line management.
- 10.4 The committee **agreed** to :
1. Note the draft strategy:
 - a. effectively supports the 'Better Together, for Norfolk' strategy,
 - b. accurately reflects NCC's ambitions and direction of travel as an organisation, and
 - c. provides context and direction for directorate-level workforce strategies
 2. and provide feedback on any NCC workforce themes which are felt to be missing or over / under emphasised.

- 11.1 The annexed report (10) by the Executive Director for Finance and Commercial Services was received and introduced by Cabinet Member for Finance Cllr Andrew Jamieson.

The report outlined the process for the Council's budget setting for 2023-24 in respect of the development of the saving proposals required. The process was acknowledged as being challenging with £15m worth of savings being required more quickly with £45m of savings being identified latterly through transformation of working practices and delivery of services.

- 11.1 In response to questions asked the committee discussed and noted the following:
- The grant funding available to councils to help support services through the pandemic was ending and the council would have to return to a more challenging prospect for 2023/24.
 - For the financial year 20/21, 91% of the savings earmarked had been achieved and that the County Council has a good record of savings achievements, largely because these are deemed to be realistic albeit challenging.
 - The overall savings target of £60m would always be subject to outside pressures such as inflation and higher wage demands but it was felt that the level of savings required was still applicable.
 - The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that at present he was not aware of any project or initiative not proceeding due to financial pressures.
 - Capital projects were subject to the effects of inflation, especially construction which is particularly high in comparison to RPI / CPI, however discussion with DoT regarding the external funding for the Norwich Western Link had not reached any conclusion as to whether inflation will be taken into account of the 85% of funding allocated by central government.
 - All capital projects carried a degree of risk and this risk was appropriately monitored on the corporate risk register.
 - There was no anticipation of having to use the Council's general reserves to meet any saving shortfall for 23/24. However, departmental reserves may be considered by Executive Directors if savings can not be achieved at the level required for any particular department.
 - Cutting staff costs by compulsory redundancy was not anticipated for the financial year 23/24 to meet the £15m immediate savings target. By way of assurance the Council has a staff turnover rate of 12% whereas a £15m saving would equate to a reduction of staff by 5%.
 - The bulk of the savings required to meet the £45m portion would be found through transformation. An example was provided as to how automation of a service could either reduce pressure in a department, reallocate resource elsewhere or provide a cost saving.

- 11.2 The committee **agreed** to

- To note the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy position as reported to Cabinet in April 2022 (Appendix 1), and in particular the following elements as set out in the appended report, which form the context for 2023-24 budget setting:

- a) the budget gap for 2023-24 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period.
 - b) the Departmental saving targets.
 - c) the outline timetable and approach to developing the 2023-24 Budget.
- To note the overall service strategies as set out within the 2022-23 Budget Book.
- To note the key issues for 2023-24 budget setting and the broad areas the Select Committee would recommend exploring for savings development as they pertain to the services within the Select Committee's remit, in order to provide input to the 2023-24 budget process and inform the saving proposals put forward to Cabinet later in the year. In particular the Committee is asked to note savings opportunities under the following headings:
 - New initiatives which would deliver savings;
 - Activities which could be ceased in order to deliver a saving;
 - Activities which the Council should seek to maintain at the current level as far as possible (i.e. areas where the Committee considers there is limited scope for savings);
 - Commercialisation opportunities.

12 Forward Work Programme 2022/23

- 12.1 The annexed note (12) by the Executive Director for Strategy and Transformation was received.
- 12.2 The committee **resolved** to agree the forward work programme.

Meeting concluded at 5.08pm