



# **Norfolk** County Council at your service

## **Environment, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 July 2012**

#### **Present:**

Mr A Byrne (Chairman)

Mr A Adams

Mr B Bremner

Mrs M Chapman-Allen

Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh

Mr P Duigan

Mr T East

Mr M Langwade

Mr N Dixon

Dr M Strong

Mr T Tomkinson

Mr J Ward

Mr A White

Mr R Wright (Vice-Chairman)

#### **Cabinet Members present:**

Mrs A Steward

Economic Development

#### **Deputy Cabinet Member present:**

Mr J Mooney

Environment and Waste

Mr B H A Spratt

Planning and Transportation

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr B Borrett, Mr H Humphrey, Mr G Plant, Mr A Boswell, Mrs H Thompson, Mr P Rice and Mr J Ward.

### **2 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2012**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2012 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman, subject to Dr Strong's declaration of interest being amended to read that she was a resident of Wells-next-the-Sea which, although not at personal risk, was in a flood risk area.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

Mrs A Steward declared a personal interest in item 12 (ETD Integrated performance and Finance Monitoring Report 2012/13) as a Director of Hethel Innovation Centre.

The following Members declared a personal interest in item 10 (Sustainable Drainage Systems Approving Body (SAB) – Commissioning):

- Dr Strong, as a resident of Wells-next-the-Sea which was a flood

risk area.

- Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh as a Member of the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Internal Drainage Board.
- Mr Tomkinson as a resident of Chedgrave which was a flood-risk area.
- Mr Langwade as a Board Member of the King's Lynn and West Norfolk Internal Drainage Board.
- Mr White as a Member of the Internal Drainage Board.

Mr East declared a personal interest in item 11 (Equality Assessment of ETD Services) as a disabled person and as a member serving on the Strategic Equalities Group.

#### **4 Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### **5 Public Question Time**

No public questions were received.

#### **6 Local Member Issues/Member Questions**

There were no Local Member issues or Member questions.

#### **7 Cabinet Member Feedback on previous Overview and Scrutiny Panel comments.**

The Panel received the annexed report (7) by the Cabinet Members for Planning and Transportation, Economic Development, Environment and Waste, and Community Protection, providing feedback on items discussed at Cabinet which had previously been discussed at an Environment Transport & Development (ETD) Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development updated the Panel on the progress with broadband access, which although slow, was moving in the right direction. Further information would be reported to Panel as it became available.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

#### **8 Forward Work Programme: Scrutiny**

The annexed report (8) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received by the Panel. The report set out the forward work programme for scrutiny.

Members requested the Future Role of the Forestry Commission Estate in Norfolk remain on the forward work programme and to scrutinise the topic once the Government had responded to the Independent Panel on Forestry report they had commissioned and had published their recommendations.

Following a suggestion that the Panel scrutinise how to maximise the benefits to Norfolk of the Olympic games, the Assistant Director for Travel and Transport Services said that the Corporate Events Team were already looking at all the benefits of the Olympics to the county as well as any economic benefits. An update would be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## **9 Highway Asset Performance**

The Panel received the annexed report (9) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development, outlining the suggested priorities for 2013-14 for highway maintenance with the four higher priorities receiving 2/3rds of the available funding.

Members noted that the inclement weather had been causing some problems for surface dressing works and the programme of work was therefore approximately two weeks behind schedule.

Following Member questions, the following points were noted:

- The work of the Highway Rangers was praised; they had been very successful in identifying and reporting problems with the highway.
- The Norfolk County Council internet site contained a link for members of the public to report highway problems to the Highways Agency or the County Council. This page could be found at <https://online.norfolk.gov.uk/HighwayProblemReport/>
- The most effective treatment for filling potholes on minor roads was to use bitumen and chippings which gave a flexible surface and which could be laid in varying thicknesses and allowed work to be programmed quickly to ensure roads were made safe. New products and materials for filling potholes were regularly being offered and tested, although the extra costs for some of these materials did not necessarily mean extra benefits.
- If a minimum whole-life cost programme of resurfacing roads was implemented the cost would be approximately £45m per year which was not an affordable option. By treating potholes early and patching minor deterioration with surface dressing, repairs could be made in a cost effective manner and further potholes prevented from forming. Although surface dressing was not the perfect solution, it was an effective treatment.

- No significant increase in compensation claims for damages after vehicles had hit potholes had been received from members of the public.
- The condition of the Fen roads was continually being monitored. It was recognised that the foundation of these roads did shrink in drought conditions due to the combination of soil they were built on, which expanded and contracted according to the weather. Although drought conditions did cause some problems on the highway, the winter months had more of an impact when water froze, thawed and then re-froze.
- A detailed programme of work had been identified and the Fen Road works had been given priority. Extra Government funding had been requested for repairs to Fen roads, but this had been refused. The County Council would ensure roads were made as safe as possible, with the programme managed within the budget available.
- High-tech equipment, as well as visual inspection by staff, was effectively used to assess road conditions, undulation and cracks.
- Surface dressing was a good method of repairing roads as this kept water out and gave a better chance of pothole repairs lasting, although continual investment was needed.
- The weakest point of a repair was the interface between the new repair and the old road. Hot bitumen had previously been used round the top of a repair, but this had left a pool of bitumen on the surface which could become slippery and the practice had been discontinued. Vertical sealing was still used and no evidence had been received that this was not working efficiently.

**RESOLVED to**

1. endorse the proposed use of reserves of £1.2m for fen roads and £0.5m for surface dressing to support structural maintenance funding for 2012-13, as outlined in the report.
2. agree the revised priorities and budget need for 2013-14 in paragraphs 6.4 and section 9 of the report.
3. support the proposed in-year changes to the Transport Asset Management Plan for 2012/13, in paragraphs 10.3 for approval by Cabinet and the County Council.

**10 Sustainable Drainage Systems Approving Body (SAB) - Commissioning**

The Panel received the annexed report (10) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development setting out the commissioning options available for the delivery of the County Council's Sustainable Drainage System Approving Body statutory duties.

The Assistant Director of Environment and Waste mentioned that of the four commissioning options to be considered, the preferred option was option 1

(Approvals undertaken at district level and the County Council for County Council applications), which would aim to dovetail the new SuDS approval process with the existing planning structure.

Members were asked to consider making this a cost-neutral service in that general pre-application advice would be provided free of charge, and individual application specific pre-application advice would be charged for.

The following points were noted during the discussion:

- The Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste said he was pleased that officers were looking to align SuDS with the planning process. He also thanked officers for the excellent report and asked Members to note that further information from government on this issue was awaited. He commended option 1 to the Panel to provide a cost-neutral service.
- The Government were in negotiation with insurance companies to ascertain what help could be provided for residents of homes in flood-risk areas. Any further updates would be reported back to the Panel at a future meeting.
- The aim to dovetail the SuDS approval process with the planning process at district level was supported, although it was felt the County Council would still be required to have a strategic overview of the delivery of the County Council's SuDS and flood risk functions as there may be circumstances where the County Council would want to call in decisions. This may relate to circumstances where the decision to approve a scheme was contentious or where the liability to the County Council was great.

**RESOLVED to recommend to Cabinet that**

1. The Sustainable Drainage System Approving Body approvals would be undertaken by Local Planning Authorities and the County Council for County Council applications, with an interim service drawing on the resources available as part of ETD's existing Partnership contract with Mott MacDonald if required.
2. General pre-application advice would be provided free of charge, and individual application specific pre-application advice would be charged for, to deliver a cost-neutral service.
3. A further report would be brought to the Panel once the Government had responded to the consultation and the detailed service design had been worked up.

## **11 Equality Assessment of ETD Services**

The annexed report (11) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received by the Panel. The report set out the key findings of a pilot equality assessment of Environment, Transport and Development

services. The purpose of the assessment was to examine whether ETD services impacted on any particular groups of potentially vulnerable residents and if so, to what extent their needs were being met across services commissioned and delivered.

The following points were noted during the discussion:

- The assessment had both confirmed and identified that a wide range of activities were taking place within the Environment, Transport and Development service to enhance accessibility.
- The three recommendations to the Panel had been informed through work carried out with service users, and engaging in dialogue with disabled people to identify the best way forward.
- A Reference Group of disabled residents had been formed in an effort to identify issues and then to work with ETD officers to address the challenge of balancing those needs against time, resource and other constraints.
- The Reference Group had undertaken a site visit to a proposed junction improvement in Norwich to look at how the junction improvement would effectively meet the needs of blind and visually impaired people who relied on appropriate tactile paving arrangements and pedestrian crossing arrangements to ensure that they could cross the junction safely.
- The Panel thanked officers for the excellent report and expressed a wish that this initiative be extended to other service areas within the County Council.
- A suggestion was made that Norfolk County Council rent a shop to provide shop mobility assistance on Castle Meadow and at other transport interchanges such as the railway station and in other key hubs around the city.
- A programme was currently underway to train disabled people to undertake a mystery shopping exercise on First buses. Mystery shoppers would have a range of questions to ask, including questions about attitude, access, etc. It was hoped that this initiative would be rolled out during August/September, after which feedback would be given to the bus company. It was hoped that this initiative could then be rolled out to include all bus companies.
- The Cabinet Member for Economic Development said that following her recent injury where she had needed to use crutches for a short time, she had been frustrated by the lack of recognition for people with short-term injuries as there was no provision made for parking nearer buildings, or blue badge facilities for that group of users.

**RESOLVED to**

1. Note the findings of the assessment report.
2. Endorse the recommendations and specific actions as detailed in the assessment report.
3. Monitor progress against ETD equality actions in the ETD performance dashboard.

**12 Environment, Transport and Development Department Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring Report 2012/13.**

The annexed report (12) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received by the Panel. The report provided an update of the progress made against the 2012-15 service plan actions and the Panel noted that no significant variation had been identified.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development drew the Panel's attention to the following:

- Referring to the Norfolk Economic Intelligence Report at Appendix D of the agenda papers, the Cabinet Member said she was delighted to bring this report to the attention of the Panel. The report showed how much work was being done by the County Council in recognising the importance of the energy sector.
- The Hethel Engineering and Innovation Centre was now nationally recognised by other Councils as a centre of excellence.
- Following the very successful visit to China undertaken earlier in 2012, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) had made an approach to the County Council about the support that could be given in forging economic links with India.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were noted:

- The ETD Energy (fossil fuels) consumption 2010/11 (CO2 emissions) was an annual figure and continued to show red. The updated figure would be available at the end of July. The adverse weather had impacted on this target in 2010/11, although positive trends had been identified this year.
- The target set out in the LDF for net additional homes to be provided would not be achieved in the current housing market, but it had been deemed appropriate to leave this target on the scorecard as a reminder to the Panel of the importance and scale of the issues.
- Norfolk County Council was working in conjunction with King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council to deliver housing directly.

## **RESOLVED to note**

1. the progress against ETDs service plan actions, risks and budget and considered whether any aspects should be identified for further scrutiny.
2. the contents of the Economic Intelligence Report.
3. the transfer of an additional £0.5m into the Highways Maintenance Fund to enable the £3.5m approved by County Council in February for additional highways maintenance to be increased to £4m.
4. the transfer of £0.100m to the Waste Management Fund to support Community recycling Schemes.

(The meeting closed at 11.30am)

**Chairman**



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