



Environment Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 16 March 2011

Present:

Mr A Byrne (Chairman)

Mr A D Adams

Mr A P Boswell

Mrs M Chapman-Allen

Mr N D Dixon

Mr P Duigan

Mr T East

Mr M Hemsley

Mr B Illes

Mr J Joyce

Mr M Langwade

Mr B Long

Dr M Strong

Mr J Ward

Mr A M White

Mr R J Wright (Vice-Chairman)

Substitute Member:

Mrs D Irving for Mr P G Cook

Non-Voting Cabinet Members:

Mr G Plant

Travel and Transport

Mrs A Steward

Sustainable Development

Non-Voting Deputy Cabinet Member:

Mr B H A Spratt

Travel and Transport

Mr J Mooney

Sustainable Development

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr P G Cook (Mrs D Irving substituted).

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Panel Meeting held on 12 January 2011 were confirmed by the Panel and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

Mr A Byrne declared a personal interest in item 13 concerning events on the highway because he was a Member of the Police Authority.

Dr M Strong declared a personal interest in the presentation given at item 8 concerning the Floodline Direct Warning System because she was a Flood Warden.

4. Matters of Urgent Business

There were none.

5. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

6. Local Member Issues/Member Questions

There were no local issues/member questions.

7. Cabinet Member Feedback

The annexed joint note (7) by the Cabinet Member for Travel and Transport and the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development was received and noted.

Scrutiny Items

8. Forward Work Programme: Scrutiny

The annexed report (8) by the Director of Environment Transport and Development was received.

The Panel considered the Outline Scrutiny Programme (at Appendix A to the report) and agreed the scrutiny topics listed and the reporting dates.

The Panel then went on to receive a presentation about the Environment Agency Floodline Warning Direct Service from Guy Cooper and Carol Mayston of the Environment Agency located at Ipswich. This team covered the Norfolk Coast between Old Hunstanton and Great Yarmouth, and Broadland. The coast of West Norfolk was covered from Brampton. Mr John Ellis, Resilience Manager, also attended the meeting for this item.

During the presentation and the ensuing discussion the following key points were made:

- The Environment Agency aimed to provide 24 hours prior notice of flooding from main rivers and from the sea.
- Flood guidance was provided up to five days in advance.
- The Environment Agency can give 10 hours warning of a high tide.
- The Floodline Warning Direct System was a national system that had the ability to distinguish between separate communities on the Norfolk Coast and the ability to be customised to individual requirements.
- Panel Members heard the Floodline Warning Direct telephone messages that were available on 0845 9881188.

- The Floodline Warning Direct Service warned the following users of the service:
 - Those who were registered for the service (it was possible to be registered to receive warnings for more than one locality).
 - Members of the public within the flood plain.
 - Property owners within the flood plain.
 - Professional partners that included: the County Council, District Councils, Blue Light Services, Flood Wardens and the Media.
 - The principal method of warning people was by telephone messages directly to landline numbers via Floodline Warnings Direct. Approximately 90% of those people who were registered had registered a landline number. Faxes, e mails and texts were also used. Along the Norfolk coast (Eastern Area) there were 10,665 properties at risk of flooding of which 8,478 (79%) received Floodline Warnings Direct messages. All calls were monitored for the time that they took to go out. In the 2007 surge, 27,000 messages were issued. The Environment Agency was able to follow up any telephone numbers that failed.
 - Leaflets and booklets that explained the new flood warning icons were made available for Members to take away from the meeting. In reply to questions it was pointed out that the booklets were available from the Environment Agency in four different languages.
 - The Extended Direct Warnings (EDW) were only used in the largest of flood warning areas. All information on EDW customers was protected.
 - Some of the disadvantages of the Floodline Warnings Direct System that Members pointed out in the meeting included:
 - Not everyone was prepared to listen to the full recorded Floodline Warning direct message, or had the ability to comprehend what it meant. Some tourists and second home owners were not prepared to familiarise themselves with the system and were more likely to hang up the phone in the early stages of the message after mistaking it as an unwanted call. Some members of the public did not have English as their first language. Some members of the public were not prepared to listen to messages delivered by a robotic sounding voice. It was noted, however, that the voice used to deliver the messages was subject to review.
 - A failure in the electrical supply meant that cordless telephones did not work.
 - It was pointed out that the Floodline Incident Management Team actively went into local communities to share information. The Team encouraged people to sign up to the Floodline Warnings Direct System and advised on Community Emergency Plans where flooding was a major hazard.

Members asked to be kept informed of developments in the Floodline Warnings Direct System.

Thanks were placed on record to Guy Cooper and Carol Mayston from the Environment Agency's Flood Incident Management Team in Ipswich for attending the meeting and explaining the system to Members.

(Mr R J Wright, Vice Chairman, took the Chair for the following item)

9. Broadband and Mobile Phone Coverage for Rural and Urban Areas in Norfolk – Scrutiny Progress Update

The annexed report (9) by the Chairman of the Scrutiny Working Group was received.

The Panel received an update from Phillip Duigan, Chairman of the Scrutiny Working Group, and Karen O'Kane, the Head of ICT, on progress made by the Scrutiny Working Group since the last report in September 2010.

During the course of discussion the following key points were made:

- Some disadvantaged areas of the country had benefited from European funding for broadband and mobile phone services. This funding was not available to Norfolk
- At the end of 2010 the Government had launched a Broadband Strategy aimed at the rapid roll-out of superfast broadband across the country. The County Council has until 18 April 2011 to submit a bid for funding from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK).
- The Working Group was focussing its work on the provision of broadband services rather than the wider digital network.
- A number of important lessons had been learnt from the pilot of local Wi-Fi technology that had been carried out in Hilgay and further pilots of long-range Wi-Fi technology were being planned at Hilgay and West Dereham.

The Panel noted the useful work that had been successfully carried out by the Working Group, with the support of Karen O'Kane, the Head of ICT, including a high level of lobbying to Government and to BT, and that this work would continue.

(Mr A Byrne, Chairman, in the Chair)

Items for Review

10. Service and Budget Planning 2011/14

The annexed report (10) by the Director of Environment Transport and Development was received. The Panel received an update on the Revenue Budget, and Capital Programme for Environment, Transport and Development Service agreed by full Council as well as details of the specific grants relevant to the Panel.

In the course of discussion the following key points were made:

- A number of phase 2 transport schemes, including a transport scheme that would be of particular long-term benefit to those living in Costessey, had been delayed due to a lack of funding. The Cabinet Member for Travel and Transport said that the County Council had not lost sight of the importance of such schemes and that they could continue to be supported when funding became available.
- The Director was questioned about the withdrawal of the use of concessionary bus passes by the blind before 9.30am. In reply, the Director said that passes were not being withdrawn, and that the statutory minimum scheme was being introduced, which the Panel supported. He also confirmed that an Equality Impact assessment on the proposal had been carried out and was included as an appendix to the paper presented to cabinet on 24 January.
- It was noted that plans for organisational changes in the day-to-day management of permanent sites for gypsies and travellers were due to be implemented over a 2 year period.
- Some concern was expressed about how the ending of the County Council's support of asbestos disposals at waste sites could lead to increased levels of fly-tipping, if in the future these sites were to stop taking asbestos. The Assistant Director Environmental and Waste, Mark Allen, confirmed that the sites would continue to accept asbestos but individuals would not be able to reclaim the cost of doing this from the Council
- There was also concern expressed about how the review of historic buildings work could result in the loss of significant levels of support to Norfolk's medieval churches. These churches were a national treasure and their importance to the historic Norfolk landscape must continue to be recognised. This budget change had been approved by full Council

The increase in the budget for Climate Change related to the new duties under the Flood and Water Management.

The Panel noted the revenue budget and capital programme for Environment, Transport and Development Services for 2011/14 and the development for 2011/14 Service Plans.

11. Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring 2010/11

The annexed report (11) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received. The Panel noted that the report provided an update of the latest progress made against the 2011/13 Service Plan actions, risks and finances for Environment, Transport and Development.

It was pointed out that the figures included in Appendix A to the report (the Highways Capital Programme) needed to be updated, and that an amended version would be sent to Members shortly.

12. Regional Permit Scheme Update

The annexed report (12) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received.

The Panel noted that it was proposed not to take part in the Anglian Sub-Regional Permit Scheme for the reasons set out in the report. The Panel supported the work being done by Officers in developing a scheme more appropriate to Norfolk's needs and that the preferred solution at this time was based on the county's Traffic Sensitive Network plus the Priority 1 and 2 gritting routes. It was pointed out that when the revenue implications of the preferred permit scheme had been fully assessed, and Officers had an idea of how many other Local Authorities might want to take part, a further report would be submitted to the Panel.

13. Events on the Highway

The annexed report (13) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received.

The Panel received a report that set out options for simplifying the processes required for communities and the County Council to be involved in dealing with requests for events on the highway. It was noted that the proposed changes did not require a change in the County Council's Constitution.

The Panel carefully considered which of the reported options for formal road closure orders should be taken forward for approval. Some of the options minimised the financial burden on the County Council by seeking to recover all the costs incurred, and other options retained the current approach, which shared the financial burden between the County Council and the event organiser.

The Panel supported the approach set out as Variant D (suggested in paragraph 4.4 of the report) with Fee Regime A (as set out in paragraph 5.1).

The Panel did not recommend any changes to the range or nature of events that are exempt from paying the Council's fees.

The proposals set out in paragraph 6.5 of the report to relax the requirement in respect of public indemnity insurance and allow organisers of local neighbourhood events to decide for themselves whether or not to take out such insurance was supported by Panel.

The Panel also supported the Cabinet Member for Travel and Transport in making representations to Government on changes to legislation, as set out in paragraph 6.7 of the report, to further ease the burden on Local Authorities in administering the Highway approvals required to enable events on the highway to take place.

14. EPIC Performance Update

The annexed report (14) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received.

In reply to questions, it was noted that EPIC's studio and editing facilities were able to work with high definition recording material. The Centre's Advisory Board closely monitored EPIC's business plan and risk register and updates were taking place to progress the development to the next stage.

The Panel noted progress and developments that had taken place in 2010/11.

15. The Future Role of the Forestry Commission Estate in Norfolk

The annexed report (15) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received.

It was noted that the Government intended to set up an independent panel to examine forestry policy, the role of the Forestry Commission and the future of the Public Forest Estate.

Members discussed the important role that the Forestry Commission had in the economy and well-being of Norfolk. It was pointed out that public access to Forestry Commission land was particularly important in a County that relied on tourism. In addition most of the holdings north of Norwich were leasehold and were likely to be sold off.

The Forestry Commission did much to support the timber industry, by using its 'selling power' to help support the market. Most of the Public Forest Estate was designated as open access and while access rights were unlikely to alter, in practice, a new land owner could do quite a lot to discourage access, whereas the Forestry Commission was effectively encouraging it.

Officers agreed to come back to the Panel with further details when the Government's intentions became known, and in the meantime the Panel placed on record its opposition to the sale of any Forestry Commission land in Norfolk.

16. Exclusion of the Public

The Director of Environment, Transport and Development presented the following reasoning for exclusion of the public and conclusion in respect of the public interest test.

The appendix to the minutes contained sensitive business and financial information that could impact on the Authority obtaining best value in future negotiations.

Resolved

That the public be excluded from the meeting under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 for the following item of Business on the grounds that it involves a likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

17. Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 January 2011

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2011 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting concluded at 12.35pm.

Chairman



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