

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Tuesday 3 September 2013
10:00am Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Mr C Jordan (Chairman)

Mr B Bremner
Mr R Coke
Ms E Corlett
Mr A Dearnley
Mr T Garrod
Mr I Mackie
Mr J Mooney
Mr A Proctor

Mr R Parkinson-Hare
Mr D Ramsbotham
Mr W Richmond
Mrs M Somerville
Mr B Spratt
Mr B Watkins
Mr T White

Non-Voting Cabinet Members:

Mr S Morpew Finance, Corporate and Personnel

1 Apologies and Substitutes

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr S Clancy (Mrs M Somerville substituting), Mr P Hacon (Mr B Bremner substituting), Mr S Hebborn (Mr R Coke substituting), Mrs A Thomas (Mr T Garrod substituting) and Mr D Roper.

2 Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2013 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) and Other Interests

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/Member Questions

6.1 There were no Local Member Issues/Member Questions.

7 Cabinet Member Feedback

7.1 There was no Cabinet Member feedback.

8 2013/14 Resources Integrated Performance, Finance and Risk Monitoring Report

8.1 The annexed report (8) by the Head of Planning, Performance and Partnerships and the Head of Finance was received. The report provided an update on performance, finance and risk monitoring for services within Corporate Resources, and presented information on managing change, service performance, managing resources and improved outcomes for Norfolk people.

8.2 During the discussion the following points were raised:

- It was confirmed that income generation formed part of the budget consultation. Shared services formed the majority of the income for the department, and income from these would be included in the next update report on that area.
- It was confirmed that the £4.2M investment in frontline Children's Services would be drawn from the Finance General balance, and that scrutiny of how that sum was spent would sit with the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
- A planned £2.3M in Children's Services, as part of the 2014/15 budget proposals, had been taken into account when considering the overall funding gap.
- Recovery of investments made in Icelandic banks was controlled by their administrators and the Icelandic government. The Council was working closely with the Local Government Association as the lead body, however the only action available was to lobby for recovery as quickly as possible.
- Sustainability of the carbon reduction programme would be reported to the October Panel meeting. Although targets were challenging, good value for money had been key in helping achieve this.
- It was confirmed that there was no change in policy regarding the County Farms estate, and that this remained of importance to the Council. It was noted that agricultural land remained a good long term investment, and that the Council had recently allocated holdings to new tenants on ten year farm business tenancies.

8.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

9 Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

9.1 The Panel received the annexed report (9) by the Head of Democratic Services. The report asked Members to review and develop the programme for scrutiny. It was noted that a report on recruitment of senior managers would be presented in November, and a suggestion was made that the Norfolk Energy Futures Ltd Annual Report could be moved to November, to allow a report on opportunities for income generation in October.

9.2 During the discussion the following points were raised:

- It was confirmed that senior management structure proposals were being developed for the organisation. Arrangements for both the short- and long-term were being considered, acknowledging that different skills could be required during a period of change to those required to take the organisation forward. It was confirmed that an update on recruitment of senior managers would be given at the next Panel meeting.

9.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and **agreed**:

- That a full report on the recruitment of senior managers would be presented in November, with an interim update by the Cabinet Member in October;
- That a report on opportunities for income generation would be presented in October;
- That the Norfolk Energy Futures Ltd Annual Report would be presented in November.

10 Norfolk County Council's Usage of Water – Update Report

10.1 The annexed report (10) by the Head of Democratic Services was received. The report provided an update on progress in implementing the recommendations from the scrutiny working group. It was confirmed that this would be the final update report.

10.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- A good working relationship had been developed with Anglian Water as a result of the scrutiny, which would benefit the Council as well as schools in the future.
- There had been delays to the implementation of revised tariffs, relating to the control and management of premises. Where premises were in the sole control of the Council, decisions to change tariff could be taken with the Premises Manager. Schools were invited to agree via an opt-in arrangement, and work was underway with the Schools Forum to facilitate this. The most cost effective ways of making savings were being explored, and penalties for lower use were being carefully considered, with some premises being taken out of the scheme if savings may not be achieved. A regular tariff review arrangement was being set up with the water suppliers.
- The review of tariffs provided a real opportunity for savings for the Council and schools.

10.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and **agreed**:

- That future reporting of progress should be included within the performance, finance and risk monitoring report;
- That progress of work with schools to achieve the Council-wide target would be

reported to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel via the performance and finance monitoring report.

11 Norfolk County Council Workforce Profile

11.1 The annexed report (11) by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development was received. The report provided a profile of the current workforce and highlighted some of the future key workforce planning challenges facing the Council.

11.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- The variances in employee numbers showed an increase in staff within the Resources department as many staff from other directorates had been moved into shared services functions, for example finance, procurement, public consultation etc, which sat within Resources.
- Recording of reasons for staff departure from the organisation relied on input of text when selecting the 'other reason' box. The method of asking questions of this nature was regularly reviewed.
- Data on the age of staff leaving for new employment was not recorded.
- A comprehensive programme of support was available for staff who were approaching redundancy or retirement, which included CV writing, interview skills and starting a business. This support had been well received.
- The pilot commissioned by Community Services to support proactive management of staff absence was being reviewed. Before this could be rolled out further, resource implications would need to be explored. A targeted approach could be taken with departments experiencing challenging absence levels.
- No anecdotal evidence had been received that there was any correlation between the possibility of redundancy and increased staff absence. All departments had experienced a reduction in numbers of staff, and support was in place to improve sickness absence rates.
- An employee survey was being planned for later in the year. Staff morale and engagement were also assessed through various reference groups, where feedback was gathered and acted upon.
- The Bradford Factor pilot had informed the approach to sickness absence, and assisted with revising processes and trigger points. This had been taken forward through the work undertaken with Community Services.
- The planned recruitment of 40 social workers was a direct response to the OFSTED improvement plan, which gave just six months to improve. Gaps were being filled with professional, experienced teams of agency social workers who could provide immediate and effective support. The process of permanent recruitment had already begun.
- It was acknowledged that the pension strain costs associated with redundancy were

also a significant cost and that this factor was taken into account in any decision to accept volunteers for redundancy. Members requested that pension strain costs were also shown in the report in future.

11.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

12 County Hall Maintenance Programme

12.1 The annexed report (12) by the Head of Finance was received. The report provided information for Members on the key aspects of the County Hall maintenance programme.

12.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- It was suggested that a working group could be set up to oversee the maintenance programme and associated costs.
- It was suggested that once the refurbishment was complete, opportunities for income generation from the building should be explored.
- It was acknowledged that the refurbishment of the building needed to achieve a fit-for-purpose facility suitable for the twenty first century, while remaining cost effective. Opportunities to bring forward the internal refurbishment to dovetail with the external maintenance were being explored.
- Although six monthly update reports were being suggested, this would only report on routine matters; any urgent or significant matters would be reported to the next Panel meeting.
- A reduction in the number of staff would be not be a consequence of the refurbishment of County Hall, but would be a likely result of the forthcoming funding gap. The County Hall maintenance programme would bring new ways of working, with opportunities to rent office space to both the public and private sector. Staff office requirements would be met before consideration of rental opportunities.
- A report would be provided detailing the breakdown of works, timelines and added opportunities. Future reports would give an update on the budget for the project. Costs were being discussed with the Cabinet Member, with a view to affordability without reducing the outcome of the programme. A report would be presented to the November Panel meeting giving more in depth details of the project.
- Staff engagement was a key element of the project, with regular communication and liaison with staff. Staff moves were being managed with careful preparatory work.
- Travel to work options were being reviewed as part of the overall County Hall campus project. Staff were actively encouraged to use public transport or to walk or cycle.
- The overall plan was for a model of three office hubs in the county, in King's Lynn, Norwich and Great Yarmouth.

12.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and **agreed**:

- That a report would be presented to the November meeting giving more in depth details of the project.
- That update reports would be presented at six monthly intervals from March 2014.
- That any urgent or significant issues requiring Member involvement would be reported to the Panel separately as required.

13 Update on delivery of the Norfolk Community Engagement Framework Action Plan

13.1 The annexed report (13) by the Consultation and Community Relations Manager was received. The report presented a summary of how the Norfolk Community Engagement Framework 2012-14 and two year action plan was developed, and reported progress on its delivery. It was noted that the Your Voice consultation panel was made up of a cross section of 6,000 Norfolk residents. Your Voice was a partnership initiative which the district councils bought into, and provided an opportunity to advertise or consult with Norfolk residents to gain a representation of views. There was on average one involvement or consultation opportunity per week. It was confirmed that this would be one of many tools to promote and gain feedback on the budget proposals.

13.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- There were around 800 members of the Your Voice Panel in each district area. Contact with Your Voice members could be targeted by postcode area, so a good geographical spread could be gained.
- All 12 partners in the Your Voice initiative were from the public sector, with no partners from the voluntary sector. It was noted that the partnership cost would outweigh the benefit for the voluntary sector. Potential expansion to the private sector could be explored.
- Concern was expressed that a section of the population without means of electronic communication could be missed. Although the system was principally online, it was possible to carry out postal involvement and consultations. However it was suggested that as participants were required to register online, those without access to the internet could miss this opportunity. Postal addresses were taken on registration, so postal involvement and consultation could take place.
- The Norfolk Association of Local Councils had engaged in delivering a bespoke session on how consultation could benefit the parish and town council sector. Further opportunities were planned, including media and communication training opportunities. Norfolk County Council had a role as an enabler, where there was expertise to be shared. However, a query was raised as to whether this was duplicating the work of the Norfolk Association of Local Councils.
- Greater engagement via social media was supported, and acknowledged as an increasingly important communication channel. Facebook had been used to

promote the Youth Parliament elections, which had shown that a high number of young people had learned about the election process. Facebook and Twitter would be used throughout the budget consultation period, and Twitter particularly gave an opportunity to cascade information via retweets.

- Accessibility was an important issue, and Your Voice was just one of many ways of promoting the budget consultation. Other opportunities would include face to face contact at events, and a lot of work had been put in to devising a programme of engagement activities to reach those without IT.
- It was felt that the use of Your Voice would generate a high level of responses from interested people. It was important to reach a wide demographic through a variety of modern methods of communication.

13.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report:

14 Other Comments Relating to the Remit of the Panel

- 14.1 A suggestion was made that, in relation to the review of the system of governance currently being undertaken by the Constitution Advisory Group, the Group could be split into two, with a Conservative sub-group tasked with exploring an enhanced Cabinet, and the remaining Groups exploring a Committee system. It was confirmed that the Leader of the Council had commissioned CAG to explore and compare all options.
- 14.2 The Cabinet Member agreed to re-circulate an update on plans for the former RAF Coltishall site.

The meeting concluded at 11.25am.

CHAIRMAN



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact the Catherine Wilkinson on 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.