

Corporate Affairs Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 21 January 2009

Present:

Mr A Adams	Mr C Jordan (Chairman)
Mr J Baskerville	Mrs B Lashley
Mr J Collop	Mr J Pitt-Pladdy
Mrs I Floering Blackman	Mr T Tomkinson
Mr P Harwood	Ms J Virgo
Mr C Hull	Mr M Wright
Mrs S Hutson	

Substitute Members Present:

Mr C Joyce
Mr P Moore
Mr T Paines
Mr B Spratt

Cabinet Members Present:

Mr H Humphrey	Human Resources, Finance, Property and Corporate Affairs
Mr A Williams	Commercial Services and Efficiency

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr P Morse (Mr P Moore substituted), Mr A White (Mr B Spratt substituted), Mr R Goreham (Mrs T Paines substituted) and Mr P Hacon (Mr C Joyce substituted).

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2008 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Matters of Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

5. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

6. Local Member Issues

There were no local member issues.

7. Cabinet Member Feedback on Previous Review Panel Comments

There was no Cabinet Member Feedback.

8. Effective Use of Buildings

8.1 The Review Panel received and considered the annexed report (8) by the Corporate Affairs Review Panel Effective Use of Buildings Group and the Managing Director of NPS Property Consultants Ltd.

8.2 Mr M Britch, Managing Director of NPS Property Consultants Ltd and Mr M Albanie, Property Asset Manager, attended the meeting to provide information to the Panel.

8.3 Members were informed that the authority contributes to a number of bodies by providing running costs and performance data and was also in discussion with a number of county authorities within East Anglia with a view to developing a local benchmarking network.

8.4 Members noted that the rationalisation of the office estate would lead to seven workstations being shared by ten full-time equivalent staff and concern was expressed that this could lead to DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) issues which should have been noted in the report.

8.5 The Managing Director of NPS Property Consultants Ltd confirmed that Local Members would be consulted concerning any property disposals in their local area and their view would be taken into account prior to disposal.

8.6 It was suggested that the report should include the final sale prices of property disposals alongside the initial estimates.

8.7 Members were advised that EEDA had expressed an interest in the way the Council undertakes asset management and are keen to develop a public sector asset strategy with Norfolk.

8.8 The 'Effective Use of County Buildings' Scrutiny Working Group had identified a number of important issues in the Council's estate in King's Lynn, as shown in the report. It was recognised that similar issues occur across the County and the Working Group's work on the King's Lynn area could be used as a template for the rest of the County. Once the outcome of the Local Government Review was known the Panel agreed that they may wish to commission a further piece of work to be undertaken to identify options for addressing the issues the Working Group had identified in the report.

9. Progress Report on the Review of Lone Working Management Systems

9.1 The Review Panel received and considered the annexed report (9) by the Corporate Health & Safety Manager which updated members on the

continued review of lone working management systems as part of the Corporate Health and Safety Plan for 2008/09.

- 9.2 Ms A Gibson, Head of Human Resources, and Ms D Wright, Corporate Health & Safety Manager, attended the meeting to provide information to the Panel.
- 9.3 The Head of HR advised Members that some members of staff who had identified themselves to be category 3 lone workers were in reality not Category 3. Concern was expressed that some lone workers had stated that they were not aware of the systems in place for lone working and as a consequence it had been suggested that a Working Group be set up to talk to members of staff about this issue as the responsibility to ensure the safety of lone workers lies with County Councillors. Members were advised that staff perception was not ignored and discussions would be held with teams to discuss their perceptions. Members of staff have to sign to confirm they had undertaken training.
- 9.4 Members were informed that refresher training would be undertaken for staff to enable them to understand the lone worker systems available to them. The lone worker policy requires that all lone workers attend one-day training on an annual basis. The risks to councillors had been identified and some councillors had attended training and had been issued with a reminder card. The Head of HR said that this report sets out the current position and priorities were currently being addressed; clear actions were in hand and refresher training was being put in place. The Panel would receive an update at the 7July meeting.
- 9.5 In response to a question concerning possible conflicts of interest between the health and safety of a staff member and the health and safety of a client, members were advised that, as an example, all Children's Services staff received mandatory training and also receive guidance on issues such as calling the police.

10. Planning, Performance and Resources Monitoring Report and (11) The 2008-09 Finance Monitoring Report

- 10.1 Members received the annexed reports (10 and 11) by the Director of Corporate Resources which they agreed to consider together. The Planning, Performance and Resources Monitoring Report included a brief update on planning and performance issues. The 2008-09 Finance Monitoring Report detailed the latest projected outturn for the 2008-09 Capital Programme, General Balances forecasts for the Council's Provisions and Reserves at 31st March 2009.
- 10.2 Mr H Bullen, the Corporate Revenue Manager, attended the meeting to provide information to the Panel. He advised members that:
- Unless Cabinet takes the decision to use some of the funds in the General Balances, it is expected that £14.956m would remain at year-end. No major change was expected in the level of reserves and provisions.
 - The £0.002m forecast under-spend within the Chief Executive's (Corporate HR) related to the fact that all the requested lone-worker units

had now been issued. The Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services confirmed that this provision could be carried forward.

- The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) funding comes from within the dedicated Schools Grant. The Council is responsible for this grant and allocates this to schools, the PRU and other provisions. The Assistant Director, Resources and Efficiency, Children's Services could provide further information if required.

11. Breckland Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

- 11.1 The Review Panel received the annexed report (12) which provided members with the results of the questionnaire looking at the Breckland Local Strategic Partnership.
- 11.2 Ms D Bartlett, Head of Policy and Performance, introduced Mr Mark Fretwell, LSP Officer for Breckland.
- 11.3 It was suggested that all the LSPs should be called in for scrutiny as this would ensure that all members have a full understanding of the work of the LSPs. The Head of Policy and Performance said that this scrutiny had come from the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee whose work on partnerships had led them to ask all Overview and Scrutiny committees to use the questionnaire to help review the County Council's engagement in a number of partnerships.

Resolved:

- 11.4 Members **agreed** that they wished to meet with all the individual LSPs, starting with Breckland and that the Chief Executive and Leader of Breckland District Council therefore be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss the achievement of the Breckland LSP.

12. Forward Work Programme: Scrutiny

- 12.1 Members considered the outline programme and agreed the topics and reporting dates as listed.
- 12.2 Following the discussion concerning the LSPs, meetings would be arranged and included on the forward work programme.

13. Service and Financial Planning 2009-12

- 13.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (14), which updated Members on proposals for service planning for 2009/10 – 2011/12.

Resolved:

- 13.2 Members considered the proposals and agreed the prioritised bids for capital funding.

14. Summary of Service and Financial Planning 2009-12

- 14.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (15) by the Director of Corporate Resources, and noted the summary of the budget proposals considered by all of the Overview and Scrutiny Review Panels at their January meetings.
- 14.2 Mr H Bullen, the Corporate Revenue Manager, advised members that:
- the expenditure for the capital accounting costs reduced the income shown with regard to the County Farms.
 - election costs were not included in the budget on a yearly basis but had been shown as a one-off cost in-year.
 - the Council's inflation costs do not follow the RPI; pressures and savings are identified within departments and the Chief Officers decide on the pressures and priorities within their departments.

15. Strategic Ambitions Reserve – update report

- 15.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (16), by the Director of Corporate Resources and Head of Finance which showed the latest position on the use of the Strategic Ambitions Reserve (previously called Invest to Improve/Save Reserve) and set out the criteria for approving funding from the Reserve.
- 15.2 Concern was expressed about how the Local Authority Business Growth Initiative (LABGI) Grant had been used and it was suggested that there was a very powerful business case for this grant to be used for young people. In response, the Cabinet Member for Human Resources, Finance, Property and Corporate Affairs confirmed that the Strategic Ambitions Reserve had been used for young people, for example 'early interventions', the Children's Services Family Group Conferencing.
- 15.3 It was suggested that members should be allowed to use the Strategic Ambitions Reserve funds in their divisions and that they should be involved in deciding what projects should receive funding. The Cabinet Member for Human Resources, Finance, Property and Corporate Affairs said that if members had any suggestions on where this money could be used they should contact the Chief Officer for the service department concerned and the Chief Officer would then take the business case forward; the final decision on allocations from the Reserve were taken by the Leader and then subsequently reported to this Panel and Cabinet.
- 15.4 The Director of Corporate Affairs and Cultural Services confirmed that the Genome Centre funding now came from the capital programme.

16. Post-Election Induction Programme 2009

- 16.1 Members received the annexed report (17), from the Member Support and Development Advisory Group which outlined the areas to be covered, along with a timetable for events for an induction programme post-2009 local elections.

- 16.2 Mr G Insull, Assistant Head of Democratic Services, advised members that currently elections were scheduled for 4 June. In response to a question, Mr Insull said that on the current timetable, it was expected that the Secretary of State would announce her decision on the unitary issue by the end of March at the earliest.
- 16.3 Members suggested the following additions to the induction programme:
- Lone worker training
 - Importance of member/officer relationships
 - Guide to the County Hall site and a list of other Council owned properties
 - Meeting structure including a list of Committee Officers, Member Liaison Officers, Scrutiny Officers, etc
 - An early informal meeting between new members and Chief Officers
 - Summary of each overview and scrutiny panel's remit
 - Speed reading training
- 16.4 Corporate Parenting had been identified as an important area and its importance would be emphasised as part of the induction arrangements.
- 16.5 As previously, new Members would be allocated an officer adviser, and part of this element of induction could include discussions on the importance of member/officer relationships.

Resolved:

- 16.6 To approve the induction programme as presented.

The meeting closed at 12.35pm.

Chairman



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