



Corporate Select Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 10 July 2023 at

10:00 am in Council Chamber, County Hall, Martineau Lane Norwich NR1 2DL

Present:

Cllr R Oliver (Chair)
Cllr A Birmingham
Cllr D Bills
Cllr D Roper
Cllr A White
Cllr B Price
Cllr V Thomson
Cllr W Nunn (Vice Chair)
Cllr C Smith

Substitute Members Present:

Cllr J Fisher
Cllr L Bambridge
Cllr S Morpew

Also Present:

Kat Hulatt	Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Gail Harvey	Digital Inclusion Strategy Programme Manager - Digital Services, Strategy and Transformation
Geoff Connell	Director of Digital Services - Digital Services, Strategy and Transformation
Sarah Rank	Head of Business Partnering, Digital Services, Strategy and Transformation
Adrian Thompson	Assistant Director of Finance (Audit)
Derryth Wright	Assistant Director of HR (Health, Safety and Wellbeing; Performance, Governance and Improvement)
Cllr A Jamieson	Cabinet Member for Finance
Alex Cook	Senior Budgeting Accountant
Paul Cracknell	Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation
Maisie Coldman	Trainee Committee Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Hemsall (substituted by Cllr Bambridge), Cllr Clancy (substituted by Cllr Fisher), Cllr Jermy (substituted by Cllr Morpew) and Cllr G Carpenter.

2. Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2023 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 were no member issues/questions.

7. Upcoming Constitutional Changes

7.1 The committee received, and was introduced to, the annexed report (7) by Kat Hulatt, the Director of Legal Services (nplaw) and Monitoring officer.

7.2 The following points were noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- The work being carried out around strengthening the policy framework was felt to be worthwhile irrespective of whether the full council agrees to change the governance structure to a Directly Elected Leader (DEL) model.
- Members of the committee requested to know how much third-party involvement was costing and how this was being funded. The committee would be informed of this.
- The role and capacity of the scrutiny function were currently being explored and the involvement of a third party was thought to be a useful opportunity to explore this question. Discussion and ideas following the engagement would be feedback to the committee. Additionally, communication with the chairs of the Scrutiny and Select Committees would be happening to understand their views. Plans would be shared as they are established.
- Concerning the increased partnership work that would occur alongside a DEL, the committee was advised that methods to develop, manage and scrutinised partnership work was being explored.
- The central government's summer recess was not anticipated to interrupt the timeline. The results from the consultation process were

requested before the summer so that work could commence on the draft order conferring power to the Norfolk County Council ahead of the decision in December 2023.

- A DEL could not be removed by the council as it was the decision of the electorate, thus, they would follow the same code of conduct as elected members.
- A DEL would have the same powers as the Leader currently holds, and the scrutiny function and call-in process would remain the same. Thus, if there was a disparity between the decisions taken by the DEL and the agreed policy framework and budget, avenues would be available to hold a DEL to account.
- Cllr Price questioned whether the current timeline would cause conflict and proposed that the election of a DEL was brought in line with the Norfolk County Council elections. The proposal did not receive a seconder.
- Members heard that communication between other councils, who have also been offered a deal, was occurring and that insights were being shared. Although direct comparisons are hard to make given that each area has different priorities, the experiences of other councils have reaffirmed the importance of communication and equipping members with relevant information.

7.3 The Select Committee agreed to **endorse** to the future workplan and the approach to constitutional changes as proposed.

A recorded vote was requested.

Cllr Oliver	For
Cllr Thomson	For
Cllr White	For
Cllr Fisher	For
Cllr Bills	For
Cllr Nunn	For
Cllr Roper	For
Cllr Bambridge	For
Cllr Morpew	Against
Cllr Birmingham	Against
Cllr Price	Against

The motion was **carried**.

7.4 The committee also **agreed** to request more information to confirm the cost and funding of the third-party resource.

8. Norfolk's Digital Inclusion Strategy and "Tech Skills for Life" Pilot in West Norfolk Update

8.1 The committee received, and was introduced to, the annexed report (8) by Geoff Connell, Director of Digital Services.

8.2 Gail Harvey, Digital Inclusion Strategy Programme Manager, presented the annexed presentation (item 8, appendix 1) to the committee highlighting partnership working, the Digital Inclusion Strategy and how the Tech Skills for Life pilot in West Norfolk was operating.

8.3 The following points were noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- A person-centred, place-based approach was taken to support people to become more digitally included. An individual would be able to determine what level of inclusion was satisfactory to them and have goals that are tailored to their needs and desired outcomes. By supporting people to gain digital skills in areas that interest them, it was thought that these skills may then encourage the use of other digital tools and online services such as the NHS app and online forms.
- Despite the offer of support, members heard that some people are unwilling or unable to learn digital skills.
- Part of the Digital Inclusion Strategy and "Tech Skills for Life" Pilot was to raise awareness of existing offers, for example, the social tariffs.
- West Norfolk was selected for the pilot study based on several factors including the existing support available in the area, the demographic, and the level of connectivity. It was confirmed that whilst the tech coaches are based in Hunstanton and Downham Market, they cover, and support, the whole of West Norfolk.
- As part of the pilot in West Norfolk contact has been made with many voluntary and community organisations, parish councils, and local community events to build connections and opportunities to support more people. Conversations have also been had with Curry's and the Digital Poverty Alliance around partnering further through Tech 4Families scheme and the pilot. Also working with local schools to commence a child and adult family afterschool club for tech related learning and skills.
- Members heard that the distribution of 5000 laptops to school children during the pandemic happened alongside school involvement. Headteachers identified digitally excluded students who then received a laptop to enable study to continue. Since then, Digital Services have refurbished over 1000 council laptops annually which get distributed to the community. They are currently working with both public and private sector to increase this number.

- The issue of online scams was discussed, and it was confirmed that raising awareness of this was included within the work being done.
- The impact of the work being carried out was being measured through different means such as the number of laptops given to people and the uptake of courses. Impact stories are also being collected from people who have received support. Members of the committee heard one account of the impact that receiving a laptop had made on a young lady.
- Members shared anecdotal evidence that in some rural areas, smart meters are unable to be fitted or are not working. It was confirmed that whilst a move towards broadband was being encouraged, smart meters are reliant on mobile connectivity to operate, thus, explaining the difficulties experienced in rural areas. Members of the committee were welcome to share their experiences concerning poorly connected areas.
- With respect to Norfolk County Council digital services, an update would be provided to the committee about the website, how it was audited, and the feedback received from users of the services. A member shared anecdotal evidence of long wait times on the phone with the council. It was hoped that the more digitally included the Norfolk population was, the more resources would be available to those that are unwilling or unable to learn digital skills.
- Money has been acquired through the Local Enterprise Partnership to run a trial in rural locations where connectivity was poor. The trial would involve the use of low earth orbit satellites and it was hoped that this would improve connectivity from 1-2 megabits per second to 50 – 60. Half a dozen rural buildings and village halls have agreed to take part in the trial to provide the community with Wi-Fi and to host events.

8.4 Having reviewed and commented on the progress on delivering the Digital Inclusion Strategy and the Tech Skills for Life pilot in West Norfolk, the Select Committee resolved to note the information.

9. Modern Slavery Statement 2022-23 and approach to the action plan

9.1 The committee received, and was introduced to, the annexed report (9) by Adrian Thompson, Assistant Director of Finance (Audit).

9.2 The following points were noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- Following a members comment noting concerns that they had received, the routes to follow to raise a concern were clarified. If the person was in immediate danger the police need to be notified. If the person was not in immediate danger, the concern can be raised with Norfolk County Council through the Multidisciplinary Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Advice, resources, and contacts can also be found on the Norfolk Anti-Slavery Network website.

9.3 Having reviewed the Action Plan on modern slavery activity, the Modern Slavery Statement, and the Equality Impact Assessment, the Select Committee resolved to note the information.

10. Workplace Wellbeing Strategy 2023 -2026

10.1 The committee received, and was introduced to, the annexed report (10) by Derryth Wright, Assistant Director of HR.

10.2 The following points were noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- The manager-employee relationship was noted to be important in promoting wellbeing. Managers are offered learning and development resources to equip them to have wellbeing related conversations with their team. Additionally, all managers are expected to complete the mental health first aid training
- It was confirmed that Norfolk County Council was committed to working in a hybrid way. Different services and job roles influence how much someone was expected to be in the office. It was noted that there needs to be a balance between ensuring service delivery, whilst also being flexible to meet the needs of staff. It was confirmed, however, that staff are not required to work from home, and they can choose to work from a work location if that was preferable. The flexible working policy was recently updated, this included removing core hours for most staff (some services must operate within set hours). Staff are not required to input their hours into the HR and finance system, instead, hours are recorded locally and managed by managers. Hybrid working does not change the way that wellbeing is measured. Managers are equipped to manage in a hybrid way.
- A four-day week was not something that had been explored and employees had not been asked their views on this. It was felt that the flexible working approach allowed staff to adopt a working pattern that best suited them and their service. There was also the option to work compressed hours. It was clarified that the same number of hours are required to be worked under the flexible /compressed working arrangements.
- Several general measures are reported on to measure productivity, including vital signs that include HR measures which are reported to the council quarterly. Work was being done to establish clear measures for the strategy and the team have access to a benchmarking group to enable comparison with other authorities when helpful. The annual progress report would include data relating to the agreed measures.

10.3 Cllr Ben Price proposed a motion that the committee should recommend that a four-day week be explored.

The motion was seconded by Cllr Nunn.

The motion was **agreed** on a show of hands

10.4 Having reviewed and commented on the proposed strategy, the Select Committee resolved to:

- Endorse the proposal that update reports should be presented to Corporate Select Committee annually.
- Endorse the proposal that recommend that a 4 day week be explored.

11. Strategic and Financial Planning 2024-25

11.1 The committee received, and was introduced to, the annexed report (11) by Cllr Andrew Jamieson, Cabinet member for Finance.

11.2 The following points were noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- The Capital Programme was being reviewed in the context of the increased cost of borrowing within the wider economy. At the same time the Council was earning additional interest on its cash balances due to higher rates.
- The Council borrows to manage its overall treasury position, but borrowing is not directly linked to specific capital projects or schemes. The profile of maturity of borrowing is managed by the Treasury function to avoid significant peaks or troughs. The Council has the facility to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb). Treasury management activity aims to secure borrowing at the most advantageous rates available (i.e. the objective is that borrowing is undertaken when required and when rates are lower).
- The council was always looking to maximise the value of its assets and therefore keeps the asset base under review to evaluate whether assets held are appropriate for the needs of the council. For example, the amount of office space required in the context of the increase in flexible working. The Committee was reassured that there is no “fire sale” of assets being undertaken.
- In response to questions, it was confirmed that there is a member Treasury Management Committee, that meets three times a year to review and scrutinise treasury management processes.
- In response to a question regarding savings, it was noted that historic delivery of savings was around 85 percent, some of this non-delivery of savings is due to implementation timing and that a smaller amount of

savings was required to be reversed in the next year budget setting. Members were assured that the finance department was managing this.

- Figures in relation to overnight rates, the cost of borrowing £1m, and capital earmarked reserves would be circulated to the committee.

11.3 Cllr Price raised that the committee has not yet received a report that was recommended during the meeting on the 11 July 2022, noted at 10.3 of the minutes.

The Chair and the Executive Director for Strategy and Transformation apologised to the committee for not having received this report and noted that the recommendation would be looked into.

11.4 Having reviewed the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy position, the Select Committee resolved to:

- note in particular:
 - a.) the budget gap for 2024-25 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period.
 - b.) The Departmental saving targets.
 - c.) The overall timetable and approach to developing the 2024-25 Budget.
- endorse:
 - a.) The overall service strategies as set out within the 2023-24 Budget Book.
 - b.) The budget setting principles set out in Section 3 of the appended Cabinet report, which will provide the broad framework for savings development for services within the Select Committee's remit.
- Agree that the Committee will provide input to the 2024-25 Budget process in July (this meeting) and in November, with the latter (November) report providing an opportunity to comment on the detailed savings proposals being taken to public consultation.
- There were no specific areas of activity that the Select Committee would recommend exploring for savings development, in order to provide input to the 2024-25 budget process and inform the saving proposals put forward to Cabinet later in the year.

12. Forward Work Plan 2023

12.1 The committee resolved to **agree** the forward work programme.

Meeting concluded at 12:11 pm

Rhodri Oliver Chair

Corporate Select Committee



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