

Special Meeting of the Economic Development Sub-Committee

**Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 09 September 2016
at 2pm in the Edwards Room at County Hall**

Present:

Mr S Clancy - Chairman

Mr M Castle

Mr J Childs

Mr C Foulger

Mr B Iles

Mr I Mackie

Mr J Timewell

Mrs C Walker

Mr A White

Also Present:

Tom McCabe

Simon George

Adrian Thompson

Richard Porter

Councillor A Dearnley

Councillor B Spratt

The Executive Director of Communities and Environmental Services

The Executive Director of Finance

The Chief Internal Auditor

County Farms Manager

1. Apologies and Substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mr T Jermy (Mick Castle substituting) and Ms C Bowes (Ian Mackie substituting)

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 None were declared.

3. Items of Urgent Business

- 3.1.1 The Chairman updated the Sub-Committee that Councillor Nobbs intended to stand down as the Council's representative on the Norwich Business Improvement District Board (BID). The BID wished to address the upcoming vacancy on the Board swiftly.

3.1.2 The Chairman proposed Councillor Whitaker be appointed to this position.

3.1.3 The Sub-Committee agreed to appoint Councillor Whitaker as the Council's representative on the Norwich Business Improvement Board.

4. Public Question Time

4.1 None were received.

5. Local Member Issues / Questions

5.1 None were received

6. County Farms

6.1.1 The Sub-Committee received the report introducing the minutes of the County Farms Advisory Board meeting of the 27 May 2016, the County Farms Governance Arrangements audit report and County Farms Lines of Enquiry audit report.

6.2. The Chairman introduced Councillor Spratt who had requested to speak at the meeting. Councillor Spratt spoke positively about the audit reports, and asked the Executive Director of Finance whether any of the tenant farmers had reported cash flow problems to officers following this year's harvest.

6.3. The Executive Director of Finance gave a brief update to the annexed reports and asked the Sub-Committee to note that the audit regarded both governance work and public complaints received regarding the County Farms estate.

6.4.1 Through discussion the following points were raised:

6.4.2 Discussion was held regarding the time taken to complete the audit and for the subsequent reports to be brought to the Economic Development Sub-Committee, having been completed as of April 2016.

6.4.3 Discussion was held over the recommendations in the audit reports, particularly regarding decision making and selection of tenants, and the recommendations in the report; there was discussion over whether the actions taken forward should reflect the April audit report findings.

6.4.4 Discussion was held over the County Farms Advisory Board processes, and some Members voiced concern over the perceived reputation placed on Norfolk County Council by the historic complaints raised about the County Farms estate.

6.4.1 Mrs Walker **moved an amendment** to the recommendations, **seconded by** Mr Timewell as shown:

6.4.2 Recommendation 1

- To note the key findings and recommendations of the 18 April internal audit report on the Governance of the County Farms (Annex B), and the conclusions made in the final report on County Farms Lines of enquiry (Annex C), including specifically the last paragraph of 1.4. For the avoidance of doubt, this would mean that Members no longer have a direct role in the selection of County Farm tenants. Members would continue to set policy direction for the County Farms estate (including the lettings policy) via decisions at the relevant committee. Place the County Farms function of decision making with Policy and Resources Committee.

Recommendations 2, 3, 4, and 5

- Delete

Recommendation 6

- To note with concern that full and final responses have been made to all but four complainants; and that a County Farms systems audit has been included in the 2016-2017 Internal Audit Plan for November/December 2016, which would include following up the agreed actions, to be reported to the January 2017 Audit Committee.

6.5.1 Debate ensued:

6.5.2 There was discussion and debate over the recommendations in the audit reports, past activities and actions undertaken by the County Farms Advisory Board, opinion and feedback received from constituents, actions undertaken by Officers, the decision making process related to County Farms and tenant selection and changes made since the publication of the two Audit reports.

6.6.1 Mrs Walker **moved to a vote** on the proposed motion:

6.6.2 With 3 votes for, 5 against and 1 abstention, the **motion was lost**.

6.6.3 Mrs Walker and Mr Castle chose to leave the meeting.

6.7.1 The Chairman **moved to a vote** for the original recommendations outlined in the report:

6.7.2 With 5 votes for and 2 abstentions the **Sub-Committee agreed**:

6.7.3 1) To note the key findings and recommendations of the 18 April internal audit report on the Governance of the County Farms (Annex B), and the conclusions made in the final report on County Farms Lines of enquiry (Annex C).

2) To agree that the Executive Director of Finance prepare a report for the next meeting of the Economic Development Sub-Committee, that;

a. Presents options for how the Council's constitution could be amended to allow for members to make decisions as to the awarding of Farm tenancies.

b. Present options for ensuring that the tenancy shortlisting process is formalised to include appropriate officer assessment and advice.

3) To agree that a report be submitted to a future Economic Development sub-committee by the Executive Director of Finance to consider and approve:

a. A County Farms Strategy and Policy, in line with the recommendations in the audit report, including;

i. Transparent and strengthened criteria for the selection of new tenants for County Farms

ii. The purpose of the Estate

iii. The practical management of tenancies; and

iv. The relationship with tenants

b. The action taken on the recommendations in the audit reports to strengthen internal controls for County Farms.

4) To note the views of the County Farms Advisory Board, recorded from the 26 July 2016 Board meeting and appended at Annex A.

5) To agree that it is no longer necessary to convene a Task and Finish Group, and to ask the Audit committee to reconsider its request that one be established, as reviewed by the County Farms Advisory Board and this committee has effectively undertaken that role.

6) To note that full and final responses have been made to all but four complainants; and that a County Farms systems audit has been included in the 2016-17 Internal Audit Plan for November/December 2016, which would include following up the agreed actions, to be reported to the January 2017 Audit Committee.

6.7.4 Mr Timewell expressed his intention to step down from the County Farms Advisory Board.

The meeting closed at: 14:37

Chairman



If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact the Customer Services Team on 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we would did our best to help.