

Infrastructure and Development Select Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Wednesday 13 September
10.00am, held at County Hall, Norwich

Present:

Cllr James Bensly – Chair

Cllr David Bills
Cllr Graham Carpenter
Cllr Claire Bowes
Cllr Chris Dawson
Cllr Brenda Jones
Cllr Jim Moriarty

Cllr William Richmond
Cllr Catherine Rowett
Cllr Chrissie Rumsby
Cllr Vic Thomson
Cllr Brian Watkins
Cllr Tony White

Also Present:

Cllr Graham Plant
Cllr Eric Vardy

Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Highways and Transport
Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

Also Present:

Grahame Bygrave
Al Collier
Helen Corina
David Cumming
Katy Dorman
Jon Franklin
Nicola LeDain
Steve Miller
Katy Owen
Sarah Rhoden
Chris Starkie

Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services
Director of Procurement and Sustainability, CES
Transport Planner, CES
Strategic Transport Team Manager, CES
Apprenticeship Strategy Manager, CES
Strategy, Resourcing and Intelligence Manager, CES
Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Director of Community, Culture and Heritage, CES
Protected Landscapes Manager, CES
Director of Community Learning and Information, CES
Director of Growth and Investment, CES

1. Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies received from Cllr Rob Colwell (substituted by Cllr Brian Watkins), Cllr Robert Savage (substituted by Cllr Graham Carpenter) and Cllr Maxine Webb (substituted by Cllr Brenda Jones). Apologies were also received from Cllr Andrew Jamieson, the Cabinet Member for Finance.

2. Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair with one amendment. Cllr Tony White explained he had put in apologies for the last meeting; however, this had not been recorded.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 Cllr Jim Moriarty declared an “other” interest as he is the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Development and Regeneration at the Borough Council of

King's Lynn and West Norfolk.

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 received.

6. Local Member Issues / Questions

6.1 There were no members questions submitted.

7. Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan (2019-24)

7.1 The Select Committee received the revised management plan, which had been updated through collaborative working with all local authority partners for endorsement.

7.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:

- Members asked if the management plan should cover a period between 2023 and 2028. Officers explained the current plan had been extended to 2025. The Council was due to enter a year's redevelopment for the new management plan. A significant revision is expected, however updated guidance from the government was still awaited.
- Members expressed concern that the management plan may be out of step with national guidance, with various inaccuracies recorded. Officers responded that the document had already been scrutinised by four authorities and apologised for any errors that were not highlighted beforehand. The difference between AONB plans was due to guidelines and different composition of governance between authorities, and documents are tailored towards needs of each area. The Council must work within the limitations of the framework, however with the Environment Act the framework will be significantly overhauled in the near future.
- Members expressed concern regarding sewage entering the sea in Norfolk and the effect of climate change on the marine environment, and asked if the council could act on this issue. Officers stated that the AONB did not have the legal authority to challenge companies about water quality, as this was under the remit of the Environment Agency. However, the AONB did have contact with the water companies and could lobby for change. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste stated that the Environment Agency had been challenged by local campaigners. It was mentioned that Anglian Water had previously attended meetings with the council, including Scrutiny Committee, regarding water quality. It was remarked that some British farmers were alleged to be using pesticides which were not authorised by the European Union. The Cabinet Member responded stating a framework was in place to reduce usage of such pesticides in Norfolk. Officers included that farmers and landowners in Norfolk have invested in methods which are more environmentally friendly.
- Members thanked the officers for their contributions and reports to the committee, while also asking for reassurance that the committee was continuing to engage with the Council's partners relating to the AONB. It was confirmed that correspondence was still taking place on a regular basis. There

were many stakeholders attending consultations, in readiness for the next Management Plan. Further workshops were planned. Officers expressed hope that the next framework/guidance would be further streamlined and simplified and a mission statement and vision document would be drafted.

- Members asked about the decline of traditional industries on the North Norfolk coast and what strategies were in place to attract new employment. It was questioned whether there are any plans to protect and enhance natural beauty in this area, ensuring there is resilience in the face of climate change and loss of biodiversity. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste responded, stating that the improved management plan would tackle this subject in a sustainable manner. There were plans to set up apprenticeships for young people in areas such as nature management and land recovery, in order to develop skills which can be utilised locally. Discussions with educational facilities in Norfolk have taken place. Green industries could reuse skills lost from the decline of the fishing industry in North Norfolk.
- A member expressed disappointment that the document was not as ambitious as it could be, given what has been discussed by the committee, and the Council could have pushed forward on this subject further than the government has. Officers responded that the Council must operate within the guidelines set out by Natural England, and that any documents required sign-off by the Secretary of State.

7.3 The Select Committee **RESOLVED**:

- To **endorse** the Norfolk Coast AONB Management Plan.

8. Climate Action Plans, Tranche 1

8.1 The Select Committee received the report, which set out how the Council could address its own carbon footprint and its role in supporting Norfolk's transition to become a greener and more resilient county. The action plans are to be reported and refreshed annually to provide accountability for the delivery of the Climate Strategy. The report proposed that action plans were brought to the Select Committee in three tranches, with the first tranche of actions provided for the committee to review.

8.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:

- Members asked about the timeline for each tranche, and requested if the reports could be brought back to the committee in six months rather than a year. Officers agreed to make a recommendation to Cabinet, although noted that the other two tranches would be reported to this committee over the coming six months.
- It was mentioned that the plans require broad support amongst the councillors and the general public. Further details are required as to how this support will be garnered. Questions were raised regarding funding to decarbonise buildings, and if there is a contingency plan should funding not be available. Members asked if Norse had drawn up a decarbonisation plan, and if any further help could be made available to bus operators in Norfolk. A member asked if the Council had abandoned their plan to plant 1 million new trees in Norfolk by 2025. Officers mentioned the plans will be

brought back to the committee each year to ensure accountability. Further government funding has been made available to decarbonise buildings and the County Council has already provided £26.5m towards this initiative to date. A new contract with Norse was being negotiated at present. The county had recently been awarded £50m in Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding from the government, along with £25m Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) funding. This will allow First Bus to introduce a new fleet of zero-emission electric buses later in 2023, and their depot would receive infrastructure upgrades to support this fleet. The first new bus recently arrived in Norwich and would enter service shortly. The government has confirmed there will be a second round of ZEBRA funding, and officers are discussing opportunities with Norfolk bus operators regarding potential bids.

- The Council had pledged to plant one million new trees in the county by 2025. A member commented that the target may be missed and asked how the Council planned to achieve this. Officers mentioned discussions have taken place with stakeholders and delivery is ongoing. Members commented that it is an ambitious target, but that the Council should always strive to achieve more. A member commented that the survival rate of new saplings is more important than the numbers of new trees planted. Officers acknowledged the approach is science-based, to ensure the right species of tree is planted in the right area and that they are maintained. Future plans for the Long Stratton bypass and Norwich Western Link will include plans to ensure new trees are maintained to improve the survival rate, using lessons learned from the Northern Distributor Road (NDR) project.
- A member queried about the targets for certain sectors set for 2030, asking if there were strategies to ensure modal shift onto public transport, provision of charging points supplied by renewable energy, and whether tariffs need to be considered. Officers confirmed this would be covered by Tranche 3 of the plans.
- Members asked if rural broadband installations would make use of local equipment. Officers responded to say there is a pilot installation planned for Norfolk, for which funding had been agreed for. Concern was expressed regarding the installation of fibre cables in Poringland, as there appeared to be a lack of coordination between service providers. Officers stated mentioned that there are several different providers due to the government's free market tender programme, CityFibre and Openreach being two such providers.

8.3 The Select Committee reviewed and commented on the report and **RESOLVED** to:

- **Note** the proposed approach to climate action planning.
- **Note** the first tranche of actions.
- **Endorse** the approach and actions to progress to Cabinet.

9. NCC Apprenticeship Strategy

9.1 The Select Committee received the NCC Apprenticeship Strategy 2023-2025, which set out a strategic vision, aims and objectives and an operational delivery plan for apprenticeships across all areas of Norfolk County Council (NCC), cohesively bringing together the three strategic priorities from three directorates (as identified by the 2018 Local Government Association (LGA) review); Children's Services, Growth & Investment and Human Resources.

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

- Members asked how the strategy would benefit the rest of Norfolk and not just the Norwich urban area. Officers responded support had been made available for stakeholders and for small and large companies in Norfolk, to ensure the fund is spent and not returned to the government as a levy.
- A member praised the strategy regarding young people in rural areas, and asked officers how it would be funded. Officers confirmed the funding would be obtained via a mixture of partnerships between the Council and stakeholders.
- Members queried regarding the apprenticeship levy. Officers mentioned that NCC has an apprenticeship levy and has utilised it for a long time. We are also able to pull in levy from national companies. Concern was expressed that Norfolk's levy could be spent in other counties. Officers stated the money is included a national pot and explained how companies can utilise it. Only 25% of the levy can be transferred. NCC was a levy broker as some companies and supply chains are not set up to handle it.
- A member asked if there was a breakdown of apprentice numbers by gender, and whether any support was available for apprentices and for companies that offer apprenticeships. Officers stated Norfolk County Council currently had 406 apprentices on payroll, of which 64% were female and 36% male. Across Norfolk as a whole, the gender split was 52% female and 48% male, comparable to the whole of England figures (51% female/49% male). Apprenticeships were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Council has looked into increasing support by establishing an Apprenticeship Project Manager position, which would enable support to be built into existing apprenticeships. Children's Services would continue to help with support for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Officers stated that English and Maths qualifications remain mandatory for apprenticeships. Extra support for young people was required, and the Council was working closely with local training providers to build relationships in this area. A member stressed that apprentices could be from any age group and would not necessarily be from the youngest age groups.
- The ambition to increase the number and range of apprenticeships in Norfolk was praised, however concern was expressed about only two providers out of nine having the 67% achievement rate required. Members asked if plans were in place to raise standards and pass rate, while ensuring that disadvantaged groups had equitable access to apprenticeships and training. Concern was also expressed regarding a lack of apprenticeships in green

industries. Officers explained that Norfolk saw 18% growth in new starts over the last year, double the national average of 9%. It was acknowledged that there had to be a focus on green skills in future apprenticeships. A green apprenticeship focused workshop was run in June, and ways to expand green skills to every sector were being considered. Officers mentioned that green apprenticeship vacancies, along with ones which paid the Living Wage were being spotlighted on Norfolk social media.

- A member asked if there was class-based analysis of the apprenticeship data. Officers responded to say datasets did not contain class information, and that age was quantified in a large category known as 25+, which made it difficult to differentiate age groups. Economic factors and pay rates were factors that contributed to apprenticeship retention rates.
- Concern was expressed about apprenticeship take-up in deprived areas of Norfolk, and whether anything could be done to push employers to offer apprenticeships which pay the Living Wage. Officers agreed that companies should offer the Living Wage as standard, and there was scope to educate employers about the benefits of such a scheme. The Chair asked officers if employers could still access the apprenticeship levy. Officers confirmed this was still the case, and that more support could be made available. A mentoring programme would continue into 2025. At present the levy totalled £400,000, and discussions were taking place with around 15 more companies to expand the scheme.

9.3 The Select Committee reviewed the report and **RESOLVED** to:

- Provide feedback on the proposed Norfolk County Council (NCC) Apprenticeship Strategy and Operational Delivery Plan updated for 2023-2025.

10. **Draft Norfolk Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Strategy Consultation 2023**

10.1 The Select Committee received the report, which contained the draft strategy consultation in Appendix A. Comments would be considered ahead of obtaining an Individual Cabinet Member Decision to launch a public consultation on the draft strategy. Following the consultation, the responses would be analysed, with necessary amendments to the strategy document made. The updated strategy would then return to Infrastructure and Development Select Committee for comment before submission to Cabinet for final approval and adoption in 2024.

10.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Committee:

- Members asked if this strategy would give the council more powers to deal with landowners. Officers confirmed this was under consideration.
- A member expressed surprise that the government's Net Zero strategy was not mentioned within the report and asked how targets for cycling and walking by 2030 would be achieved. It was queried as to whether Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), school streets and rural speed limits would form part of the Council's strategy. Officers confirmed the strategy would help Norfolk

reach its Net Zero target, however it was acknowledged that the cycling/walking target would be challenging, requiring a comprehensive joined-up infrastructure network. The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Highways and Transport mentioned that school streets were covered in the Council's recently approved Norfolk Speed Management Strategy. It was remarked that there was 6,200 miles of road in Norfolk and the safest option for all road users had to be considered, with compromises required where necessary. Concern was expressed that pedestrians and cycles are seemingly being grouped together in this strategy.

- A member stated the strategy appeared to be aimed at urban areas rather than rural areas, and asked how the consultation would reflect this divide. Officers confirmed the strategy was for urban and rural areas and that the responses to the consultation would be brought into the final strategy for consideration.
- Members stressed that the consultation must be accessible to all age groups in Norfolk along with disadvantaged groups, with consideration given towards printed media rather than a purely online focus.
- Members stated that logistical issues to modal shift must be considered in the strategy. Single-occupancy car journeys would need to be tackled for Norfolk to achieve longer-term objectives. Public transport should be made more affordable and attractive. The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Highways and Transport mentioned that a £2 maximum fare on Norfolk buses was being charged at present with government support, and priority infrastructure for bus services was being installed in parts of Norwich. Officers confirmed there were plans within the strategy to investigate ways of increasing bus service provision.
- Concern was expressed by members about disabled groups being unable to travel on buses until 0930 on weekdays, along with pavement car parking affecting access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters across Norfolk. Officers mentioned the strategy was not a one-size-fits-all and would be dependent on local factors. Infrastructure issues would need to be reported to highway agencies for observation and potential remedial work.
- Additional government funding was secured for additional Beryl Bikes in Norfolk along with Beryl Trikes. Members asked if child seats could be included in the Beryl Bike offer.
- A member stated that buses in other countries can carry cycles in racks fitted to the vehicle, and asked whether this could be implemented in Norfolk. Officers confirmed the proposal would be highlighted to the bus operators for consideration. However, it was noted that a bicycle-carrying trial had been previously conducted on the Coasthopper service in North Norfolk. Longer dwell times at bus stops had been observed to load and unload cycles and this needs to be balanced with ensuring a fast and reliable bus service. It was also highlighted that the £50m received from the government's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) fund would enable various bus stops in market towns to be upgraded.

10.3 The Select Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

- **Provide** views on the Draft Norfolk Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Strategy 2023 before public consultation.

11. Forward Work Programme

11.1 The committee received the report by the Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services, which set out the Forward Work Programme for the committee to enable the Committee to review and shape.

11.2 Members requested that reports relating to pollinators and waste items remained on a future agenda, in addition to items which related to road safety and trees. Officers confirmed these items would all stay on the forward plan.

11.3 The Select Committee **RESOLVED**:

- To **agree** the Forward Work Programme for the Select Committee, as set out in Appendix A.
- To **agree** that the motion set out in Appendix B should be considered by Scrutiny Committee and to identify any key lines of enquiry the Select Committee may wish to suggest are explored.

The meeting closed at 13:18pm

James Bensly, Chair



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