

## **Corporate Affairs Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

### **Minutes of the Meeting Held on 22 July 2009**

#### **Present:**

Mr M Brindle  
Mr S Clancy  
Mrs D Clarke  
Mr B Collins  
Mr J Dobson  
Mr R Hanton  
Mr C Jordan

Mr M Langwade  
Ms J Mickleburgh  
Mr A Proctor  
Mr R Smith  
Ms J Toms  
Mrs C Walker  
Mr A White

#### **Substitute Members Present:**

Mrs D Irving

#### **Cabinet Members Present:**

Mr A Williams	Corporate & Commercial Services
Mrs J Chamberlin	Partnerships and Performance

#### **Deputy Cabinet Members Present:**

Mr J Herbert	Corporate Affairs and Human Resources
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Please note: the following items appear in the order that they were discussed at the meeting and not in the order they are presented on the agenda.

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr J Carswell (Mrs D Irving substituted) and Mr S Dorrington.

#### **2. Election of Chairman**

Mr C Jordan was elected as Chairman for the ensuing year.

#### **3. Election of Vice Chairman**

Mr A Proctor was elected as Vice Chairman for the ensuing year.

#### **4. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**5. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**6. Matters of Urgent Business**

There were no matters of urgent business.

**7. Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

**8. Local Member Issues**

There were no local member issues.

**9. Cabinet Member Feedback on Previous Review Panel Comments**

There was no Cabinet Member Feedback.

**10. Norfolk People Feel They Can Influence Things**

10.1 The Panel received and considered the annexed report (10) by the Director of Corporate Resources which provided Members with the proposed Terms of Reference for the new scrutiny topic.

10.2 Mr Adams, Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services, informed Members that the results of the Ipsos MORI 'Place Survey' were pertinent to this proposed scrutiny topic as they showed that 32% of the public who had responded to the poll felt that they could influence things; placing Norfolk top of all the counties. Members noted that this measurement was also included as part of the new indicator (NI 4) which Members would receive as part of the Performance and Resources Monitoring Report and therefore it was suggested that this scrutiny should be a low priority.

10.3 Mrs Chamberlin, Cabinet Member for Partnerships and Performance said that this she would be looking personally to ascertain where people were less assured and she would report further information to the 23 September meeting.

**Resolved:**

10.4 That this proposed new scrutiny topic 'Norfolk People Feel They Can Influence Things' be deleted from the Forward Work Programme.

**11. Forward Work Programme: Scrutiny**

11.1 Members considered the outline programme for scrutiny.

11.2 Members noted that previous members of the Corporate Affairs Overview & Scrutiny Panel had found the scrutiny of the Breckland LSP very useful. Both the Chief Executive and Leader of Breckland District Council (who was also the

Chairman of the Breckland LSP) had attended the scrutiny meeting to provide information.

11.3 Members agreed that the Review of the Council's Constitution would require detailed work which should be undertaken by a Working Group. The Chairman said that a Working Group should be established on the basis of 4:1 members.

11.4 Mr Williams, the Cabinet Member for Corporate & Commercial Services advised Members that the Cabinet had adopted the Corporate Asset Programme, which would look at buildings on a corporate basis, at their last meeting and this included a target to reduce floor space by 25% over the next three years. Members felt that it would be timely to undertake a review of the effective use of Council buildings and their adequacy and that a Working Group should be established with a composition of 4:1 members.

**Resolved:**

11.5 To continue with the following scrutiny topics:

- Partnership Reviews (of those partnerships that fall within the remit of this Committee)
- To establish a Working Group with a composition of 4:1 members to review the Council's Constitution
- To establish a Working Group with a composition of 4:1 members to review the effective use of the Council's buildings

**12. Sickness Absence**

12.1 Members received the annexed report (18) and noted that during discussions of the Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring Report at Cabinet on 23 June 2009, Cabinet had agreed that the Corporate Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Panel should consider detailed analysis of sickness absence to establish whether any action could be taken to reduce the average number of working days lost.

**Resolved:**

12.2 To establish a Working Group with a composition of 4:1 members to consider sickness absence.

**13. Corporate Procurement Unit Annual Report**

13.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (12) which provided an overview of achievements and activities completed by the Corporate Procurement Unit (CPU).

13.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- It was confirmed that this report covered revenue and not capital expenditure.
- In response to a question about whether costings included manufacture through to disposal and whether the carbon footprint was taken into consideration, the Head of Corporate Procurement said local councils

were struggling with whole life costings and must also consider the impact on society, for example, working conditions across the world.

- Mr Williams advised that a Project Board, set up under Peter Hawes, the Managing Director of Norse Commercial Services, had been tasked to install Category Management, which would provide economies.
- Members noted that the £1m of savings required this year were the savings from within the Corporate Procurement Unit. It was suggested that the authority needed to be a lot more ambitious in key achievements because this reflected only a 1% saving. The Head of Corporate Procurement said that the savings shown were real cash savings which would help to alleviate other pressures. Mr Williams said that the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership had chosen procurement as a quick win and Category Management would also give some quick savings.
- To support local contractors and small businesses, NPS had run two 'Build Norfolk' campaigns and contractors and small business had been invited to attend to allow the authority to become familiar with what these contractors and small businesses could provide; contractors and small businesses are also encouraged to apply for contracts on-line. The Head of Corporate Procurement said that a lot of work was undertaken with small businesses to ensure our systems were easy to use. Whilst it must be recognised that the authority must be open and transparent and cannot favour local businesses, they can be enabled to compete for business.
- In terms of multi-agency working, the Head of Corporate Procurement advised that the authority works with district councils to share best practice and ideas and most district councils do link up with the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO). Work was also ongoing with Improvement East to link in with the health sector, police and other bodies in the region.
- Members heard that the standard terms for paying invoices was 30 days and businesses which experience cash flow problems are able to receive earlier payment, upon request.
- It was suggested that the individual department improvement plans should reflect the Council's common themes and overall objectives, for example the sustainability of climate change.

**Resolved:**

- 13.3 To note the annual report and especially the efforts of the Corporate Procurement Unit and purchasing managers across the Council in support of the achievement of the 2008/09 objectives
- 13.4 To endorse the forward procurement programme and the Council-wide savings target for 2009/10.

**14. Performance & Resources Monitoring Report**

- 14.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (13) by the Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services which included integrated

performance and financial monitoring for the year-end 2008/09, end of year performance for 2008/09 for the performance indicators relating to the Panel, together with information on key areas for improvement.

14.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- The Council's Use of Resources score for 2008 was Level 3 and a question was asked concerning the cost implications of the authority attempting to reach a Level 4 score or whether there had been a Member decision to stay at Level 3. The Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services said that there had not been a formal Member decision about whether to invest to achieve a Level 4 score. Mr Williams agreed to take this point back to the Cabinet but he said Members should be conscious that 'gold-plated' standards would carry cost implications.
- 22 staff were currently working towards the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) Professional Awards in Customer Services and Members were informed that this would build a good foundation for future training. The Head of Policy and Performance said that she would provide Mrs Clarke with details of the total number of staff who would receive this training.
- 77% of staff had received appraisals, an improvement of 18% since the last survey. However, it was recognised that more work needed to be done to improve on this figure. The Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services said that whilst the Council had an aspirational target of 100% for appraisals, a barrier to reaching this target was the diversity roles within the Council and consideration must be given to more appropriate ways of appraising some members of staff, particularly those who normally worked remotely from their managers, eg many library and home care staff.
- The slight increase in sickness absence with 9.18 average working days per full-time equivalent employee lost over the past year was noted and the question was asked whether the target for sickness was low enough as there appeared to be a growing gap between the private and public sectors with the Council's target being 8.5 working days. The Head of Human Resources (HR) and Organisational Development (OD) advised that there was data available in the Workforce Profile about comparisons between the public and private sector. She clarified that the CIPD figures were per employee and the Council's figures were for full-time equivalent employees.
- The end of year data showed that 96.5% of invoices paid by the authority in 2008/09 were within 30 days, which exceeded the target of 90%. Members heard that any business that experienced cash flow difficulties could request payment on immediate terms. However, it should be recognised that if immediate invoice payment was introduced as a matter of course then this would impact on the Council's cash flow and could lead to a higher level of council tax.
- Whilst the report outlined different strands of diversity in the workplace, it was suggested that it did not provide information on elderly people who have a wealth of experience.

- The Disability Working Group had been set up because the authority's Disability Equality Scheme needed to be reviewed. This was in the context that the required target of 2.54% for the number of employees declaring a disability under the DDA definition had not been met.
- The Council, as part of the 2009-10 budget, had agreed that the remaining balances on the LPSA Pump Priming and Interest Equalisation Reserves be placed in a new 'Organisational Change Reserve' to deal with the outcome of the Local Government Review and the current financial downturn.
- The Head of Corporate Accounting and Exchequer Services advised that the unprecedented financial events, including the Icelandic Banks issue, had led the Council to set up a Treasury Management Panel. The Council has not made any investment in the Icelandic Banks since April 2008 when it became aware that the credit ratings had fallen and the authority no longer makes any overseas investments. Guidance received from the Government and the Audit Commission had been reviewed and the authority was following best practice. The decision had also been made to use the Government's regulations to defer the Iceland Banks losses until the 2010-11 Council budget.

**Resolved:**

14.3 To note the report.

**15. Efficiency Savings Programme**

15.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (14) by the Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services which provided a review of progress against the Council's 2009-2010 efficiency targets.

15.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- It was agreed that because most Members of this Panel were new to the Council that in future the report should show the programme of activity and savings generated in relation to each activity. Further, the link between cashable and non-cashable savings would be shown in future reports. It was suggested that there should also be a direct link between the budget and efficiency savings shown in the report to enable Members to see how savings were being achieved.
- As part of the Efficiency Projects and AES Savings noted in the report, the Head of Efficiency agreed to provide clarity on the composition of the 2008-09 chart and advice on how this translated to the 2009-10 chart.
- Members heard that the Human Resources department were currently working on the approach to be taken concerning organisational change.
- With reference to the Carbon Management Programme, it was suggested that the County Hall building be included in the buildings identified for support by the Carbon and Energy Reduction Fund (CERF) which had been launched to allow technical improvements to buildings to be funded.

The Head of Efficiency said that he would check whether County Hall had been included.

- With reference to the staff vacancies savings, this did not relate to particular posts remaining vacant for long period of time, instead it referred to departments managing vacancies for a short period of time to draw out savings.

**Resolved:**

15.3 To note the report.

**16. Risk Management within Norfolk County Council and the Departments of Chief Executive and Corporate Finance**

16.1 Members received and considered the annexed report (15) by the Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services and the Head of Corporate Finance which provided an update on the approach being undertaken to formally manage risk within the services covered by this Panel, as well as corporately across the Council.

16.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- The Audit Committee, which has responsibility for the adequacy of risk management arrangements, had identified that Members needed urgent training in risk management processes. The Senior Risk Officer advised that a risk management induction would be put in place for Members during August or September and advice would be sought from Democratic Services concerning the timing of this event.
- Members requested that the risk management information should, in future, be presented in a different format. The Senior Risk Officer commented that the issue of how the information was presented to Members would be covered as part of the Member training and then reflected in future reports.
- There were three climate change risks included within the P&T risk register and it was suggested that these should be included on the corporate risk register. The Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services would ask the Chief Officer Group to consider whether these risks should be considered at corporate level.

**Resolved:**

16.3 To defer commenting on the report until Members had received appropriate training.

**17. Corporate Health & Safety Annual Report 2008/2009**

17.1 Members received the annexed report (16) by the Corporate Health and Safety Manager which provided an overview of the activities of health and safety advisers during 2008/09, along with an overview of Norfolk County Council's health and safety performance.

- 17.2 Members noted that almost half the reasons for work related sickness absence related to stress; a very high proportion. In response the Corporate Health and Safety Manager advised Members that the total number of sickness absences showed what had been stated on the sickness absence forms. Members heard that the causes of stress were many and complex. However, data was available which showed that the majority of people (75%) contacting the Counselling helpline had indicated that their stress was due to personal rather than work related issues. However, it was acknowledged that there may be some elements of work which added to the stress. CTD offer a stress management training event for managers to help them manage stress and understand the causes/symptoms.
- 17.3 The Corporate Health and Safety Manager advised that there had been no enforcement actions at all during 2008/09 - the report included a narrative from the HSE inspection that had taken place in January 2009. Stress and lone working were recognised as two key priorities for the organisation.

**Resolved:**

- 17.4 To note the report and the draft key activities for 2009-12.

**18. Norfolk County Council Workforce Profile**

- 18.1 Members received the annexed report (17) by the Head of HR and OD and were advised that the outcomes of the employee survey conducted by Ipsos MORI showed that Norfolk County Council was in the top 10% of councils to work for nationally, if not the top 5%.
- 18.2 During discussion the following points were noted:
- The report showed that the Council had increased the number of staff employed over the last year and the question was asked, was this sensible given the current financial situation and given the fact that the Council would have to reduce the level of staffing by 18% as part of the next round of funding cuts. In response, the Head of HR and OD said that many of the staff increases were related to staff employed in schools. This was the biggest staff growth area and the authority had no control over the number of staff that schools chose to employ. All departments monitor recruitment very carefully.
  - The Council does have a policy of flexible working, where appropriate, but the needs of services and operational requirements must take precedence. Staff were able to take a limited number of hours as flex time but it would be very unusual for this to be transposed into a cash payment.
  - It was suggested that the age profile charts should relate to individual departments as this might help to show where departments had particular pressures. The Head of HR and OD advised that this information was available and was being considered carefully by management teams and the information could be included in future reports.
  - It was suggested that the number of work placements noted in the report did not show the quality and range of opportunities. In response, the Head of HR and OD said that work placements were a priority area and



temporary additional resources had been put in place through the Strategic Ambitions Reserve to provide support for this. Significant improvements had been achieved in both the number of placements offered and take up since the beginning of the year.

**Resolved:**

18.3 To note the report.

The meeting closed at 12.05pm

**Chairman**



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