

Economic Development and Cultural Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 12 March 2009

Present:

Mrs J R M Chamberlin (Chairman)

Mr J R Baskerville
Mr B J E Collins
Mr S Dunn
Mrs B M Hacker
Mr C E Joyce

Mr J M Joyce
Mr C Lloyd Owen
Mr G Nobbs
Mrs T I Paines
Mr A Pond

Cabinet Members Present:

Mr J R Gretton Cultural Services
Mr B J M Iles Economic Development

Deputy Cabinet Member Present:

Miss E Collishaw Economic Development

1 Apologies and Substitutions

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr R Goreham (Mr C Joyce substituting) and Miss E Collishaw.

2 Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2.2 A query was raised relating to anonymity within minutes. The Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services noted that style guidelines had been agreed by the Group Leaders and would be circulated to Members. It was noted that any Member had the right to request that their name was assigned to their comment within the minutes. George Nobbs and Christopher Lloyd Owen requested that their comments were attributed for the remainder of the meeting.

2.3 The government funding mentioned in paragraph 11.2 of the minutes was noted as being unconfirmed. Government guidance indicated that additional funding may have been available to source data that was over and above what the authorities collected as intelligence in their area. It was not clear how this would work in practice and how the case would be made.

2.4 The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. It was confirmed that the planned visit to King's

Lynn would take place when the heritage and cultural asset buildings review was complete.

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 No interests were declared.

4 Matters of Urgent Business

4.1 There were no matters of urgent business.

5 Public Question Time

5.1 There were no public questions.

6 Local Member Issues/Member Questions

6.1 There were no Local Member issues/Member questions.

7 Cabinet Member Feedback on Previous Overview and Scrutiny Panel Comments

7.1 The Cabinet Member for Cultural Services reported that the Norfolk Adult Education Service had been given a provisional grading of 'Good' within a recent inspection. A report and confirmation of the grading would follow. The Cabinet Member requested that his thanks to the Adult Education Team were recorded.

7.2 The Millennium Library had again been recorded as the most popular in the country.

7.3 A recent meeting in Ipswich relating to the Olympics took place, where positive comments regarding Norfolk's preparations were made.

7.4 The Cabinet Member for Economic Development noted that grants for projects were going well, and the forthcoming employment opportunities at Palm Paper in King's Lynn and within the Genome Analysis Centre (GAC) would both contribute to boosting Norfolk employment opportunities. It was noted that EPIC was feeling the effects of the recession, however the education sector was making good use of the facility.

7.5 A site visit to the GAC at the Norwich Research Park was suggested. It was noted that once set up, the GAC would undertake research into crop yields.

7.6 It was noted that the Palm Paper site would require a small number of skilled workers to be brought in, but that future staffing needs would see local staff recruited and developed. The company would also have export opportunities especially in light of the weak pound.

7.7 Christopher Lloyd Owen who requested that his name appeared in the minutes, noted that an exhibition of manuscripts had recently opened at the Archive Centre. It was noted that when the new Panel was formed after the elections, Members should be given the opportunity to tour the Archive Centre.

Items for Overview

8 Business and Tourism Opportunities for Norfolk from the London 2012 Games

- 8.1 The annexed report (8) was presented by the Head of Arts. It provided an overview of the business and tourism opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympics. It was noted that tickets for the 2012 Games would go on sale in 2010, and that this would present opportunities for tourism.
- 8.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:
- Christopher Lloyd Owen asked why only just over 50% of contracts appeared on the CompeteFor website, and where details of the remaining contracts were held. It was noted that the contracts were added as London 2012 became aware of them.
 - It was noted that in addition to key rail infrastructure between Norwich and London, the King's Lynn to King's Cross / St Pancras route provided a key transport link. Engineering works and quality of service would need to be addressed throughout the transport network. It was anticipated that partnership working groups between counties would be set up.
 - A suggestion was made that a dialogue could be opened with travel agents in Norfolk in relation to tourism opportunities and the Games.
 - The distribution of the cards advertising the CompeteFor website was considered, and it was noted that they would be distributed as far as possible through existing links such as Tourist Information Centres and BusinessLink.
 - A business-facing organisation was clarified as being one that worked with businesses, an example being the Chamber of Commerce.
 - A suggestion was made that local area tourism leads could be invited to a future, single topic scrutiny meeting to outline how they were developing their local area and preparing for the Olympics.
 - George Nobbs asked for clarification of the meaning of the term 'County Boundaries'. This was clarified as meaning county areas, taking into account unitary authorities as well as county and district councils.
 - George Nobbs asked for clarification surrounding the 75,000 contracts available. It was clarified that this was UK-wide.
- 8.3 The Panel **NOTED** the contents of the report and **AGREED** that the Panel would scrutinise the 2012 Games in relation to tourism and transport with key stakeholders. An update relating to the Games would be a regular item on the agenda.

9 Norfolk Guidance Service – An Overview

9.1 The annexed report (9) was presented by the Norfolk Guidance Service (NGS) Manager. It summarised the current role and activity carried out by the NGS.

9.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was noted that the NGS provided a range of services including assistance with completing applications for jobs, mock interviews, and gaining qualifications. NGS engaged with both employers and potential employees.
- It was acknowledged that there were not sufficient vacancies for those seeking employment. Those who were not in a position to be employed could be referred elsewhere, and then assisted into work at a later date.
- It was noted that a lack of funding for training could prevent potential employees from gaining qualifications. It was noted that funding within the JobCentre Plus (JCP) was restrictive, but becoming more flexible. NGS was looking at using money to plug this gap. It was acknowledged that some JCP's were experiencing stretched resources.
- It was noted that 70% of income was within one contract, where money was only paid on employment of the referred individual. It was acknowledged that during a recession, there were fewer jobs available, so this could potentially impact the level of funding NGS would receive. It was clarified that this income stream accounted for 20% of the total income. It was acknowledged that as unemployment increased, the income for NGS may decrease.
- It was noted that the JCP would not allow individuals to access certain services until they had been unemployed for 6 months. The NGS would see individuals as soon after being made unemployed as possible. NGS would also see those who wished to change career or re-train.
- George Nobbs asked what the overall budget for the NGS was? The budget was confirmed as £680,000.

9.3 The Panel **NOTED** the contents of the report.

10 Economic Development Service Planning 2009-12

10.1 The annexed report (10) was presented by the European and Performance Manager. It invited Members to review the Economic Development Service Plan for 2009-12 and consider any issues for further scrutiny and monitoring.

10.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- In response to a question from Christopher Lloyd Owen the European and Performance Manager confirmed that an update on the economic downturn and the 9 February special meeting on it would be provided, as a scrutiny item to the July Panel meeting.

- Invoices and purchase orders were discussed, and it was agreed that the Director of Corporate Resources and Cultural Services would request that wording could be added to the purchase order informing suppliers that they could request early payment if required.
- George Nobbs asked whether in the preparation of the economic assessment, the districts would be willing to co-operate with the County Council. It was noted that the statutory duty was on County and Unitary authorities, and that districts were participating on a voluntary basis. Partnership working was not predicted to be an issue, and districts seemed to be very engaged. It was noted that district and county Economic Development colleagues met regularly to discuss issues.
- In view of the plans to hold additional 'Meet the Buyer' events in other parts of the county, a request was made that local members were informed whenever such an event was to be held in their division.
- A suggestion was made that partnership meetings could be strengthened by inviting districts to meetings, and vice versa.

10.3 The Panel **NOTED** the contents of the report.

11 Economic Development Performance, Risk and Budget Monitoring Report 2008-9

11.1 The annexed report (11) was presented by the European and Performance Manager. It detailed the latest performance, risk and budget information for Economic Development, as at the end of January 2009.

11.2 It was noted that there was an overspend of approximately £180,000 and that discussions were ongoing with Finance as to how this could be accommodated.

11.3 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- The EPIC facility was noted as requiring grant funding from Economic Development until it reached the planned break-even point. It was confirmed that up to £120,000 funding would be given in 2009-10, reducing to £100,000 in 2010/11 and £80,000 in 2011/12, the final year of support.
- Although not relating to the Economic Development 2009/10 service plan, the funding gap within the Learning and Skills Council was highlighted, with particular reference to Norwich City College's re-building programme. The assistance that Norfolk County Council would be giving was queried. In reply it was noted that lobbying for the capital programme was taking place.
- It was asked whether money towards boosting 2012 tourism was being spent correctly. It was noted that the new strategy and action plan for tourism in Norfolk, compiled by all tourism partners had highlighted this as a key issue, Economic Development's support to the tourism sector in 2009/10 would be based upon commissioning delivery of specific outcomes from the strategy, which included 2012 support. Organisations would be funded only if they

delivered on the required outcomes.

- Christopher Lloyd Owen asked whether the gas pipeline mentioned in paragraph 2.2.1 on page 64 would still be moved? It was confirmed that this project, approved by Cabinet, was still expected to go ahead to unlock development of this key employment site.
- George Nobbs noted that the EPIC facility was originally not being funded by Norfolk County Council, and now required funding. It was agreed by members present that this was not the case – previous Cabinet papers outlined funding schedules (an extract of which was included in the paper) that showed the centre would operate at a deficit in the first few years until break even, which has just been delayed by the economic downturn and the delay in implementing the HD technology. George Nobbs requested a report on the anticipated levels of funding for the next meeting. These were given verbally by the Head of Economic Development in the meeting and are detailed in the first bullet point of paragraph 11.3 of these minutes.
- It was noted that EPIC provided a useful training facility for media students who would be able to gain employment in these fields locally. All money being invested within EPIC was being monitored, and budget allocation would be reconsidered if the economic downturn worsened.
- Christopher Lloyd Owen noted that EPIC had many creative purposes and income streams. The economic downturn had had an impact on the facility, and therefore it would possibly take longer to become profitable. The need to balance the money invested with the confidence that it would become profitable was highlighted.
- The £180,000 overspend was queried and it was clarified that this related exclusively to EPIC. A significant element of the overspend related to the rates bill for EPIC, which had not been accounted for due to delays in the assessment of the rateable value in 2008/9. This would not recur, as allowances had been made for future budgets, and appropriate corrections had been made.
- It was highlighted that work was underway to engage high schools in the Greater Norwich area in relation to EPIC.
- A query was raised concerning the outcomes for NCC from the EPIC facility. The Cabinet Member agreed to supply any further relevant information at the next meeting.

11.4 The Panel **NOTED** the contents of the report.

12 Cultural Services Performance and Budget Monitoring Report 2008-9

12.1 The annexed report (12) was presented by the Finance and Business Support Manager. The report provided information about the Cultural Services revenue and capital budgets, with forecasts of provisions and reserves at 31 March 2009.

12.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A member noted that the work within the mammals and birds gallery at the Castle Museum was taking longer. It was noted that this was due to the extent of infestation, which had to be properly cleared.

12.3 The Panel **NOTED** the contents of the report.

13 Cultural Services Department – Service Plans for 2009-12

13.1 The annexed report (13) was presented by the Head of Library and Information Service. The report provided information about the service plans for Cultural Services in 2009-12.

13.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Christopher Lloyd Owen noted pride in the Cultural Services department, and thanked officers for the work they had carried out.

13.3 The Panel **NOTED** the contents of the report.

Items for Scrutiny

14 Outline Programme for Scrutiny

14.1 The annexed report (14) was presented by the Policy Officer.

14.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was suggested that a scrutiny into broadband and telecoms provision in Norfolk could be carried out.

The Panel **NOTED** the contents of the report and the above suggested scrutiny item.

The meeting concluded at 12.05pm. The Chairman thanked retiring Members for their contribution to the group.

CHAIRMAN



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