

Economic Development and Cultural Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 16 July 2009

Present:

Mr S M Clancy	Mr M C Langwade
Mr J Dobson	Mr P D Morse
Mr P Duigan	Ms J A Murphy
Mr S Dunn	Mr G Nobbs
Mr R Hanton	Dr M Strong
Mr M Hemsley	Ms H Thompson
Mr G R Jones	Mr T Tomkinson

Cabinet Members Present:

Mr D Murphy	Cultural Services
Mr B J M Iles	Economic Development

Deputy Cabinet Member Present:

Mr B J E Collins	Economic Development
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1 Apologies and Substitutions

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr M Carttiss (Ms A Thomas substituting), Mr G Plant, Mr R Rockcliffe and Ms F Williamson (Mr P Morse substituting).

2 Election of Chairman

2.1 Mr R Rockcliffe was elected as Chairman for the ensuing year.

3 Election of Vice Chairman

3.1 Mr M Langwade was elected as Vice Chairman for the ensuing year. In the absence of Mr Rockcliffe, Mr Langwade chaired the meeting.

4 Minutes

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2009 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 Declarations of Interest

5.1 Dr Strong declared a personal interest in relation to the Norfolk Credit Unions mentioned in item 13, with reference to the Wells Area Community Bank.

6 Matters of Urgent Business

6.1 There were no matters of urgent business.

7 Public Question Time

7.1 There were no public questions.

8 Local Member Issues/Member Questions

8.1 There were no Local Member issues/Member questions.

9 Cabinet Member Feedback on Previous Overview and Scrutiny Panel Comments

9.1 The Cabinet Member for Cultural Services reported that the bid for EU Interreg funding for the Time & Tide Museum had been successful and £100,000 was available.

9.2 The Cabinet Member for Economic Development noted that the reports contained useful information about the development of ideas concerning the recession and that a great deal of work had been carried out since this began.

Items for Overview

10 Library and Information Service Annual Plan

10.1 The annexed report (10) was presented by the Head of Library and Information Service. It reviewed the key achievements of the Service in the past year and outlined key targets for 2009/10.

10.2 The national 'refreshed vision of libraries' had been delayed until September. Wymondham library had been open for 8 months and had seen a 70% increase in usage compared to the previous building. Two awards had been received for the new library building.

10.3 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was clarified that the Home Office provided funding for all prison library services.
- It was noted that libraries were assisting with the economic situation by providing free access to information via the internet, and by promoting services provided by NCC departments such as Trading Standards and Economic Development. A report detailing this would be presented at the next meeting.
- It was noted that the average age of the lending book stock was around 6 years, and the level of stock fund had maintained in recent years. The stock contract had been recently renewed. Further information detailing the stock levels and purchases would be made available at the next meeting.
- The library service was highlighted as an excellent service with impressive statistics. A query was raised concerning the socio-economic breakdown of service users. It was noted that information from the marketing tool Mosaic had

just started to be used, and analysis of the community groups using PCs had been recently undertaken. Use of marketing analysis would be developed in the future. It was noted that information could be seen on the Norfolk Insight (formerly Norfolk Data Observatory) website. Each library has a community profile and service delivery is developed to meet the needs of the community.

- Concern was raised about smaller villages missing out on library services. The mobile library service was highlighted as providing library facilities in rural areas and members were signposted to the website for further information.
- A query was raised concerning payment for the use of libraries as a PCSO beat base. It was noted that although there were no financial contributions from the Police, there was a mutual benefit in changing the perception of libraries beyond traditional services as well as the visible police presence. A suggestion was made that where there were limited or no fixed library facilities in an area a PCSO presence on a mobile library may be beneficial. This was actively encouraged and some PCSO's did attend mobile libraries. It was noted that the arrangements at Poringland differed because the Police had their own beat base linked to the community centre.

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

11 Cultural Services Performance, Risk and Budget Out-turn Report 2008/9

11.1 The annexed report (11) was presented by the Finance and Business Support Manager. It presented a performance, risk and budget out-turn report for the Cultural Services department together with an early view of progress with the 2009/10 budget.

11.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- The zero figure shown in item 1.2 on page 35 was queried. It was confirmed that item 1.2 showed the actual income and expenditure, with NGS having zero budget. The tables later in the report showed actual expenditure budgets.
- A query was raised concerning the number of adult learners going from non-accredited courses to accredited courses. This information could not be immediately provided but would be supplied separately.
- A request was made for details of the number of visitors to the Cultural Services facilities.
- It was clarified that the projected out-turns in Appendix 3 concerned the electricity contracts which had been recently reviewed. It was noted that these were a pessimistic view and would be updated.
- The significant slippage detailed on page 37 was highlighted, and queries raised concerning the schemes affected and whether these were to do with the recession. It was noted that the libraries slippage was due to the purchase of books. It was noted that the s106 funding was not subject to annual time limitations, and some had been stretched over a number of years. In addition,

where housing developments had been put on hold, the corresponding library spend would also have to have been put on hold.

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

12 Economic Development Performance, Risk and Budget Monitoring Report 2008/9

12.1 The annexed report (12) was presented by the Economic Policy and Performance Manager. It invited Members to review the Economic Development performance, risk and budget information as at the end of 2008/9.

12.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Confidence in the robustness of the EPIC business plan was questioned. Assurance was given that a break even budget was expected for EPIC, and that this was being closely monitored by the executive group. The business plan would be circulated.
- A suggestion was made that the EPIC facility could be developed for the use of the wider community to minimise the risk of lack of use. It was noted that wider community usage was being developed. A suggestion was made that the Panel visit the EPIC studios, which along with Hethel Engineering Centre had been planned as a visit within the Greater Norwich area tour as part of the Member Induction programme. These would be rescheduled for later in 2009. It was noted that EPIC also had post-production facilities, and that TV production would be monitored after the recession.

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

13 State of the Economy Update

13.1 The annexed report (13) was presented by the Business Development Manager. It updated the Panel on both new and existing actions being taken by NCC to address the economic downturn. It was noted that Cabinet had supported the credit union current account initiative, and the development of a loan fund for businesses was being pursued. It was noted that the Future Jobs Fund had been successful in the first round and had gone to the next stage of the process.

13.3 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- A query was raised concerning the funding for jobs in green sectors after the 18 months to April 2011. In reply it was noted that funding was for the short term, however it was hoped that continued funding would be agreed. A proportion of jobs would continue particularly where connected with social enterprise.
- It was noted that the Learning and Skills Council was mentioned throughout the report as a funder or leader. There was confidence that this expertise would be available after April 2010 when the LSC would close. Funding for pre-19 would be allocated regionally, however post-19 funding was less clear. An employment skills partnership in Norfolk would be created, and plans were

underway to transfer LSC staff into the local authority.

- It was noted that the Future Jobs Fund was predominantly for 18-24 year olds, as well as residents in areas of deprivation.
- Concerns were raised about rail transport links and the ageing rolling stock on the Norwich to London line. It was noted that Shaping Norfolk's Future had a transport and infrastructure group focussed on addressing these types of issues. It was noted that a rationalisation of services at Liverpool Street would be taking place, with the possibility of additional platforms for the Norwich-bound services. It was noted that a report relating to this would be useful.
- It was noted that Essex County Council had launched a bank and the question was raised as to why Norfolk County Council had not considered a similar initiative. It was noted that Norfolk County Council's proposals to work with Foundation East followed similar principles to those Essex were using to establish the bank. It was noted that Essex County Council were also putting in considerable amounts of reserves. NCC was taking a more cautious approach especially as it was not clear whether the problems that existed earlier in the year with regards to lending still existed to the same extent.
- It was noted that the closure of the LSC would have a significant impact in Norfolk. It was suggested that additional work could be carried out to look at this. It was noted that NCC had active engagement with the establishment of the new Skills and Employment Board and Members would be kept updated with progress.

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

14 Economic Development Strategic Priorities

14.1 The annexed report (14) was presented by the Head of Economic Development. The report set out strategic priorities for the Economic Development Unit for 2009-10 taking into account the impact of the recession and the County Council's role with Shaping Norfolk's Future.

14.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was noted that poor transport facilities affected employment. It was suggested that Cabinet could look into improved transport links.
- It was noted that the poor broadband services in Norfolk affected the ability to set up and sustain businesses in Norfolk. This was a key issue which had been included on the scrutiny programme. A meeting with BT had been set up to discuss issues and solutions and a working group was in place in King's Lynn to look at alternative providers.
- The £150,000 for the credit union project was highlighted and an explanation of how this was filtering into local areas was requested. It was clarified that this sum was to set up the credit union current accounts, and therefore local unions would not see the money but would see the services.

- It was noted that some of the language within the report was difficult to understand and that the image was difficult to view. This was acknowledged and assurance given that future reports would be more reader-friendly. It was noted that a colour version of the map was available on the committee papers website.
- A query was raised regarding the growth area job figures for Thetford and whether these included Breckland. This was clarified as being only Thetford, which was one of the East of England's growth areas within their plan. It was acknowledged that other areas for growth in Norfolk existed, primarily in Norwich and King's Lynn.
- Apprentice schemes, with particular reference to those in Norfolk County Council, were highlighted. It was noted that there had been a drive from HR for apprenticeships and that there were apprenticeships available in Norfolk especially in the area of RAF Marham, which were being actively promoted with a first-refusal policy for Norfolk people.
- A question was raised concerning how closely the County Council was working with the planning authority. In reply it was noted that the Council did work closely with district councils, for example with the relocation of the gas pipeline for the Nar Ouse project.
- An update for 2009 was requested for the business competitiveness and performance figures. It was noted that these were not available yet.
- The lack of 2009 National Indicator targets in the table in appendix B was questioned and it was clarified that these had not been set because no benchmark figures were available and those responsible for setting the targets were largely external from the Council.

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

Items for Scrutiny

15 Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

15.1 The annexed report (15) was presented by the Policy Officer.

15.2 During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was noted that the presentation of the work programme was not objective enough, and the scrutiny should be set with a view to an achievement. A working group to produce a scrutiny work programme was suggested. This would look at urgent scrutiny items as well as the prioritisation of existing suggestions.
- It was noted that broadband was an urgent issue and councillors were being lobbied by their residents. In addition it was suggested that mobile phone coverage could be scrutinised.

- It was noted that the report lacked scrutiny items for Cultural Services, and these should also be considered.
- A scrutiny of how the authority put together bids for European funding was suggested.
- The impact of green industries as a good economic opportunity was put forward and noted as being on the scrutiny plan.
- The working group was discussed and the political representation suggested at 4 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat. The Panel voted 8 in favour and 4 against that the working group was set up with this proportional representation. It was agreed that the working group would be Mr Dobson, Ms Murphy, Mr Langwade OR Mr Rockcliffe and Mr Duigan. The Liberal Democrat representative would be nominated following discussions within the group.

The Panel **NOTED** the contents of the report and **AGREED** to set up a working group as stated above.

The meeting concluded at 11.50am.

CHAIRMAN



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