



Corporate Select Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 11 March 2024 at
10:00 am in Council Chamber, County Hall, Martineau Lane Norwich NR1 2DL

Present:

Cllr D Bills
Cllr G Carpenter
Cllr B Price
Cllr D Sayers
Cllr A White
Cllr V Thomson
Cllr W Nunn
Cllr D Roper
Cllr A Birmingham

Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Fisher
Cllr Jones

Also Present:

Sam Pittam-Smith	Director of Strategy, Design & Delivery
Maisie Coldman	Trainee Committee Officer
Gail Harvey	Digital Inclusion Strategy Programme Manager
Geoff Connell	Director of Digital Services
Cllr Jane James	Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation & Performance
David Thom	Continuous Improvement Lead
Paul Cracknell	Executive Director for Strategy and Transformation
Titus Adam	Assistant Director of Finance (Deputy S151 Officer)

1. Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Smith (substituted by Cllr Fisher), Cllr Jermy (substituted by Cllr Jones) and Cllr Oliver.

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair, Cllr Nunn, took the Chair.

2. Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair subject to the following correction:

- Cllr White has been recorded on the minutes twice, this would be corrected.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

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.

6. Local Member Issues/Questions

6.1 There were no member issues/questions.

7. Norfolk's Digital Inclusion Strategy and "Tech Skills for Life" Pilot in West Norfolk next steps

7.1 The Select Committee received and was introduced to Norfolk's Digital Inclusion Strategy and "Tech Skills for Life" Pilot in West Norfolk by Cllr Jane James, Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation & Performance. She highlighted that the "Tech Skills for Life" pilot was a placed based approach that worked alongside partners and residents to aid the access and use of technology. The report noted the pilot specifically, the ambition to extend this work following a successful bid for funding and the overall Digital Inclusion Strategy. The committee was encouraged to read pages 20 to 22 which included examples of individual impact of the work occurring in West Norfolk.

7.2 Gail Harvey, Digital Inclusion Strategy Programme Manager, presented the appended presentation (Appendix A, pages 29 – 41 of the agenda) to the committee which provided an overview of Norfolk County Council's (NCC) Digital Inclusion Strategy and additional details of the Tech Skills for Life pilot carried out in West Norfolk. In addition, members received a project update video of the pilot in West Norfolk (the link to this was included on page 39 of the agenda).

Cllr Bills arrived at 10:10

7.3 Members of the Corporate Select Committee were asked to review and comment on the progress of delivering the overall Digital Inclusion Strategy. Providing views on any additional work which needed to be included within the wider programme's scope and views from the findings from the proof-of-concept pilot Tech Skills for Life in West Norfolk. Members were also asked to advise on the proposed next steps for Tech Skills for Life following the successful bid for funding from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

7.4 The following points were noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- Members of the committee expressed their wishes for the pilot to be introduced within their divisions given the success and impact that it was having in West

Norfolk. Geoff Connell highlighted that the implementation of the project in other areas of the county was dependent on funding and capacity. The data that was being collected from the pilot provided a direction of travel and which areas of the county were most in need of digital inclusion support. There was hope, however, that the project would become a continuous service. The devolution funding had the potential to help facilitate this ambition. The committee was reminded of the county-wide provisions that were currently offered by libraries to help with technology support.

- The bid to extend Tech Skills for Life to select areas of the county had been successful. The data collected from these projects would provide a deeper understanding of the impact of this work and thus, help to strengthen a business case. The committee heard that external income would always be sought after to try and maximize the number of localities and people that could be supported.
- Following a member's question, it was confirmed that Myoracle was currently performing effectively as a service.
- A member raised concerns regarding Landline Telephone Digital Switchover as well as 3G switch off and the risk to vulnerable and less digitally literate residents. In response, the committee heard that whilst mobile providers have decided to switch off 3G, it was anticipated that 4G would be available in its place. Provider schemes were in place to replace handsets that don't use 4G or 5G. It was a similar position for the changes to the landline, providers would be offering alternative provisions. NCC had been working with providers and Ofcom; this had been a largely positive experience. Members were also offered assurance that the data on everyone who was using assisted technology or was regarded as vulnerable was being shared with providers. Migration would not occur until the safety needs of these people had been met. Additional information was available on Norfolk.gov.uk/digital.
- NCC recycled all of its own devices. Some criteria need to be met, for example, devices were to be no older than four years old. Plans were being developed to increase the stock of recycled devices, this could include looking at the way that the private sector and NCC staff could support this work. The positive environmental impacts of using second devices were highlighted to the committee. In addition, part of the Digital Inclusion work was to support people in recycling their old devices, transferring data between devices, and remaining cyber secure.
- Although there had been a focus on supporting older age range groups, there was still work being carried out to support younger people to be confident with technology and to take advantage of emerging technologies. A member felt that this was an important area to ensure that the next generation had the necessary technology skills.
- Following a member's question about the cost of providing technology, it was confirmed that the cost of providing equipment was minimised and was often the end-of-life equipment from NCC. Additionally, collaboration with partners to provide mobile phones and data reduced the cost further. Equipment was

provided on a case-by-case basis and there was no expectation that the provision of technology would be indefinite.

- A member shared anecdotal evidence to illustrate the difficulties of finding a smart phone device that incorporated the safety device element. They asked if during conversations with providers, this could be highlighted. In response, Geoff Conell noted that work was occurring with telephony providers and that it would be worth exploring what packages they are offering. The NCC website would be updated to include information about which provider packages would be suitable for specific needs.
- It was shared with the committee that when a device is given, information on scams and online exploitation was shared. Loaned equipment and devices have the appropriate safety settings implanted already. In addition, short courses, and seminars about keeping yourself, and your family safe, were also available.
- Where there are multiple providers in an area, residents may struggle to understand which provider was the most suitable for their needs. This was a new challenge and additional information on providers and what packages they offer would be provided.

7.5 Following the discussion, the following action point was raised:

- The NCC website would be updated to give information about providers and the packages available, this would include information on the most suitable option based on specific needs.

7.6 Having considered and commented on Norfolk's Digital Inclusion Strategy and "Tech Skills for Life" Pilot in West Norfolk next steps, the Select Committee **resolved** to **NOTE** the information.

8. Continuous Improvement Update

8.1 The committee received and was introduced to, the Continuous Improvement Update report by Cllr Jane James, Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation & Performance. The report provided an update to committee on 3 deliverables: the implementation of our Continuous Improvement Function, a review of our Hybrid Working Policy, and "Offices for Good" Programme.

8.2 The Corporate Select Committee was asked to note the change from Smarter Working to Continuous Improvement, in line with recommendations from the 2023 consultation process, and provide steer on important areas of focus over the next 6 months.

8.3 The following points were noted during discussion and in response to questions from the committee:

- Some members of the committee expressed their preference for the style of committee meetings that were facilitated during the COVID-19 Pandemic. It was felt that hybrid meetings provided Cllr's with more flexibility and had financial

savings too concerning reduction in travel expenses. Members were keen that the government continued to be lobbied to amend the legislation around this.

- The opportunities that AI could provide for the efficiency of work at NCC were raised by a member, they were keen to hear what was being done to make the most of this technology. The member highlighted that the use of AI should not be at the expense of staff. In response to this, the committee heard that NCC was a leading authority in AI and that it was already being trialed within the authority. It was generally understood by officers that the use of AI would be implemented to allow staff to carry out the tasks that they are good at and that require human involvement. The committee would be receiving an item on the customer experience at a future meeting, which incorporates the use of AI technology.
- About the physical space, a member suggested exploring the rentable rooms at District Councils.
- Following a member's question on the cost difference between hybrid working and in-person working, the committee heard that data on the cost difference was not available. The nature of the workforce and the varying needs between departments allow for different evaluations of what value for money looked like. Services worked at the best and most cost-effective model for them to ensure that their deliverables were achieved. Data was drawn on from other areas, for example, it was shared that following the lockdowns, on average organisations got around half of the commuting time back. Additionally, feedback from staff was important to this conversation and was largely positive about hybrid working.
- A member felt that the move to flexible and hybrid working needed to be accepted as the new standard of working and that NCC should continue to facilitate this mode of working to ensure that it was not at a disadvantage to other industries.
- Following a question about the metrics that underpin the value and cost benefits of this way of working, Paul Cracknell, Executive Director for Strategy and Transformation, provided the committee with the following examples of cost-saving metrics and understandings around productivity. Pre-COVID-19, there was no capacity at County Hall, or in the car park, for all staff to work in the building, thus, flexible working has reduced these issues and would be regarded as a benefit of hybrid working. Additionally, there had been sustainable benefits with the reduction in travel, and estate rationalisation was able to take place that generated capital receipts. There was also county-wide evidence that hybrid working has benefits concerning recruitment and retention, which included cost savings. Concerning productivity, it was consistent across the county that people working hybrid, worked longer hours with higher intensity. Members were reminded that hybrid working was one part of productivity. Cabinet received reports noting Key Performance Indicators that provide context of the current performance, and trends and identify performance risks.

8.4 Having reviewed and commented on Continuous Improvement Update report, the Select Committee **resolved** to **NOTE** the information.

9. Forward Work Plan 2024

9.1 The committee resolved to **agree** the forward work programme.

Meeting concluded at 11:12

Cllr Nunn, Vice Chair

Corporate Select Committee



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