

Environment, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 26 November 2013 at 2.00pm
in the Edwards Room, County Hall.**

Present:

Mr B Spratt (Chairman)

Mr T Adams

Mr M Baker

Dr A Boswell (Vice-Chairman)

Mr B Bremner

Mr R Coke

Mrs M Dewsbury

Mr T East

Mr P Hacon

Mr J Law

Mr B Long

Mr J Perkins

Mr N Shaw

Mr J Ward

Mr A White

Mr M Wilby

Also present:

Mrs C Walker

Cabinet Member for Economic Development

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr D Harrison, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Development & Waste.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2013

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2013 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following:

- Paragraph 2.2 to read "The Panel noted the comments made by Mr White regarding the condition of the Fen Roads and the request for providing special funding for maintenance, junctions and haunching of these roads".
- Paragraph 8.2, second bullet point. To insert the word "junctions" within the brackets to read (including Fen Roads, junctions and haunching programme).

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

5 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

6 Local Member Issues/Member Questions

No local member questions/issues were received.

7 Forward Work Programme: Scrutiny

7.1 The annexed report (7) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received by the Panel. The report set out the forward work programme for scrutiny.

7.2 Snettisham Beach/Common

The Panel received an update on the Snettisham Beach/Common from the Scrutiny Support Manager, who said that a meeting of the working group had been held on 21 November with stakeholders from Snettisham. Unfortunately not all the parties had been able to attend and a further meeting of the working group would be held in December to consider all the options available and also to receive advice from Defra on the powers available to the County Council regarding signage. The Working Group would bring a report, outlining their recommendations relating to signage at Snettisham, to the Panel meeting in January 2014.

7.3 Mobile Phones.

The revised terms of reference for this long-standing working group were **agreed** by the panel. The terms of reference had been redrafted to reflect developments including the Mobile Infrastructure Project, a national Government funded initiative, which would address the issues of "not spots". Although the project would not ensure perfect coverage across all of Norfolk, it was felt this was a good start.

Members raised a concern about how elderly people, who had mobile alarms fitted, could call for help if their landline telephone had failed and asked if this could also be considered by the working group.

The next meeting of the working group had been scheduled for early December and the Panel were reminded that all Members were able to attend working group meetings, with notice, if they wished. The Scrutiny Support Manager would let Members have the date of the next meeting.

7.4 Business Rates

The Panel's Scrutiny Group Leads had received a copy of the draft report asking for their comments. Once these comments had been received, the report would be circulated to District Councils and business organisations for

their comments.

The Panel **agreed** that the ETD O&S Panel meeting on 14 January would commence at 10am with a stakeholder meeting for the Business Rates scrutiny item, adjourn for lunch at approximately 12.30pm and reconvene for the other items on the agenda at 2pm.

Fracking

The terms of reference, attached at Appendix B of the report, were **agreed** by the Panel. The first meeting of the working group had been held and a schedule of meetings had been planned for 2014.

Broadband

The Panel would receive an update report at its meeting in March 2014.

7.5 **RESOLVED** to note the report.

8 Provision of Temporary Traffic Signs for Special Events.

8.1 The annexed report (8) by the Interim Director of Environment, Transport and Development was received by the Panel. The report set out the current criteria used by the Council to vet applications for temporary traffic signs, the national guidance issued by the Department of Transport and a summary of the concerns that had been expressed about the inflexibility of the Councils current approach.

8.2 During the presentation of the report, the Highways Network Manager informed the Panel that Norfolk County Council dealt with approximately 140-150 temporary traffic sign applications annually and the report set out the criteria currently used to consider those applications.

8.3 The Chairman welcomed Mr Martin Lake, mid-Norfolk Branch Chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, who had asked to address the Panel. The following points were noted during his presentation:

- Whilst there was general agreement that having a proliferation of signs should be avoided, a widening of the policy was needed in order that businesses trying to advertise local events were not disadvantaged.
- Mr Lake asked if consideration could be given to widening the policy to place signs further than the five mile limit. This would make allowances for the rural nature of Norfolk and the distances some villages were away from main roads.
- Mr Lake also said he would like to see information such as the name of the event, what the event was and the date of the event included in the signage.

8.4 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Panel:

- The advertising on the highway protocol empowered Norfolk County Council to remove unauthorised advertising signs on the highway. This empowerment was regularly utilised, despite the resource intensive nature involved in the removal of signs.
- Signs for events on the highway, such as cycle races, were approved by the Police through involvement with the Safety Advisory Group and the Highways Network Manager confirmed he had not seen any cases where this approach had been inappropriate.
- The Panel requested that the words “under no circumstances” at paragraph 3.2 of the report, be removed and the word “exceptionally” or “normally” be inserted in order that the flexible requirements needed in north Norfolk could be maintained.
- The Highways Network Manager said that, to his knowledge, no-one had been prosecuted for erecting unapproved advertising signs, although the advertisers were contacted to advise them that the signs had not been approved and that these would be removed. Advice was given on how to apply for approval for erecting advertising signage. Following a suggestion that the Council may be able to issue on the spot fines for illegal fly-posting the Highways Network Manager agreed to follow up this suggestion with the Cabinet Member.
- Members asked if a policy was in place regarding advertising signs on roundabouts and the content of such signs if they were approved. The Highways Network Manager referred the Panel to section 2 of the report, which outlined the requirements of the policy.
- “Seasonality” in this instance referred to the summer months of June, July and August with the policy having been put in place to support out of season events and allow for more signage to be erected during the rest of the year.
- It was proposed to amend the criteria of the signs to include the date of the event, as Members considered this would make it easier to remove signs once the event had taken place. It could also mean more timely enforcement action could be taken if the signs were not removed in a timely manner once the event had taken place.

8.5 **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report, including the guidance issued by the Department of Transport.

9 Environment, Transport and Development Department Integrated Performance and Finance Monitoring Report 2013/14.

9.1 The Panel received the annexed report (9) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development, updating the Panel on the progress made against the 2013/14 service plan actions.

- 9.2 The Interim Director of ETD updated the Panel about the progress of the NDR submission. The Director said that the department was in the process of collating all the information required for the submission to the National Planning Service. Once this information had been collated and checked by the legal team and the QC, it would be delivered to the Planning Inspectorate who would then consider and validate the information. Once the Planning Inspectorate had validated the information, a date would be set for the Public Inquiry, which was likely to be spring/summer 2014. Once the application had been submitted, the feasibility study would be completed and a report submitted to Norfolk County Council Cabinet.

The Public Inquiry report relating to the Postwick hub was currently with the Secretary of State. It was expected that a decision would be known early January 2014.

- 9.3 The following points were noted during the general discussion:

- The risk register included all the information on how the risk relating to the Willows had been managed and had moved as the project had progressed. The risk had fluctuated between amber and red throughout the various stages of the project.
- The balance of reserves of £9.321m relating to the Street Lighting PFI, reflected the balance of payments to the contractor from the commencement of the project as well as the PFI credits held to pay for contracts which would be completed later in the scheme.
- The Panel requested that the Parish Council contributions to schemes under the Parish Partnership Fund remain at 25%.
- The Panel felt that consideration should be given to lobbying Government for help with funding the County Council's budget gap of £189m to try to avoid the inevitable cuts in services.
- A debate had been held at the full Council meeting on 28 October 2013 and a report had been received showing the options available to the County Council if planning permission for the Willows was refused. These possible options were:
 - Re-procurement of a new contract.
 - Continue to use landfill for the disposal of waste.
 - The County Council could procure the use of a neighbouring waste disposal facility.
- The Parish and District Councils had been involved in the development of the Rural Development Strategy for Norfolk. Action planning was now taking place, which included everyone who had taken part in the development of the strategy to ascertain the best ways to take advantage of any funding whilst remaining aware of the constant tension between sustainability and the need for development, with a balance needing to be

struck and maintained.

- The long-term trend showed a decline in people being killed or seriously injured on Norfolk's roads, although the short term trend showed an increase since the start of the current monitoring period in January 2011. Work was ongoing to try to identify the most vulnerable groups in an attempt to address this short-term increase and the Panel noted that the figures were still relatively small. It was confirmed that road casualty data was supplied on a regular basis to the officers supporting the A47 Alliance to try to help support the case for the A47 upgrade.
- A range of data was reported to the Joint Casualty Reduction Partnership, including data from different services including the police and ambulance service. This data could be used to map casualty statistics which could then be used to lobby the appropriate authorities for road improvements.
- The Finance Business Partner ETD agreed to ascertain the detail and the reasons for the overspend of £2,485,325 relating to the Northern Distributor Road and inform the Panel of the reason.

Mr Baker left the meeting at 3.30pm

- Members requested that acronyms were fully explained within the risk register.

9.4 **RESOLVED to note:**

- the progress against ETD's service plan actions, risks and budget.
- The contents of the Economic Intelligence Report.

10 Service & Financial Planning 2014/17

10.1 The Panel received the annexed report (10) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development setting out the financial and planning context for the authority and gives an early indication of what this meant for Environment, Transport and Development service (ETD).

10.2 The points below were noted following questions from the Panel:

- Any increase in recycling rates was a net gain to the Norfolk County Council budget, although this would only show a saving if recycling rates continued to rise year on year.
- The 4.75% interest on borrowing 2013-14 was the assumed PWLB borrowing rate for a 25 year loan.
- Norfolk County Council was still waiting notification on what their share of the £2bn single growth fund would be, although Members were informed that the majority of this money would already have commitments assigned to it. Work was being undertaken with the Local Enterprise Partnership to

ensure Norfolk received its fair share of the funding in order that it could invest in the right schemes for Norfolk.

- The Panel stated they were not in favour of a reduction in the refilling of grit bins as they felt this could lead to dangerous road conditions, particularly if the same severe weather conditions were experienced as had taken place last winter.
- The Panel considered that removing funding for rural roads should not take place as they felt to wait an additional two years before maintenance was carried out on these rural roads could leave the roads in a dangerous condition.
- The subsidy paid for the coasthopper bus service was not based on the level of patronage. Members were reassured that the coasthopper service generated sufficient profit to run throughout the year, continuing to offer a good winter service to serve the people living in coastal villages. The incumbent operator had also confirmed that the service would continue.
- Members were concerned that charging £2 to dispose of waste at recycling centres may lead to increased fly-tipping and suggested that penalties for fly-tipping should be increased. The Panel noted there had been similar concerns about fly-tipping expressed three years ago when opening hours at recycling centres had been reduced although these fears had not materialised. Although some fly-tipping had occurred for a short period after the opening hours had reduced, these had not lasted long. If this charge was not agreed, the savings identified of £218,000 under this proposal would not materialise and would need to be found from other areas.
- Members also asked about the cost implications for staff handling cash at recycling centres as they felt the administration costs may be higher than continuing to offer free disposal of items. In response, the Panel noted that staff at recycling centres were already handling cash so there would not be any additional costs involved should a charge be levied.
- An annual amnesty at recycling centres would take place to offer people the opportunity to dispose of waste such as paint or tyres. The main aim of the County Council in suggesting a £2 charge was to try to encourage individuals to recycle items such as tyres at tyre manufacturing and fitting centres.
- If, under proposal 48, it was agreed to charge businesses for the advice provided by Trading Standards, the Panel were reassured that Trading Standards would continue to perform all their statutory obligations.
- In the event that applicants did not comply with the conditions of planning applications, inspections would still take place, although these inspections would be less frequent and may even only take place upon receipt of notification of an alleged breach of the conditions imposed under the

planning approval. This would be monitored on a risk basis.

- Free advice on planning applications would no longer be offered to businesses. This would also apply to applicants submitting applications for larger developments, such as supermarkets, who would no longer be able to receive free transport advice, although advice could still be given if a fee was levied.
- Under proposal 59 – Cut the cost of providing school transport. The Panel were pleased to note that this did not mean that the taxi service taking pupils to schools would be cut. Discussions were taking place to determine alternative options for pupils getting to and from schools, such as cycle training and encouraging farmers to provide ‘trods’ across fields to help people walk or cycle independently along roads without proper footpaths.
- The Panel were reassured that the tender process and award of contracts to Norse followed the same stringent procedure as for all other transport contracts.
- The Panel noted that any charity offering a community transport service would be required to prove they had enough reserves in a contingency fund to operate for a minimum period of three months in the event of vehicle failure. Charitable organisations would be expected to have a vehicle replacement policy in place. The accounts of these charitable organisations were inspected by Norfolk County Council to ensure they remained viable and had adequate reserves to fulfill their obligations.
- Although Norfolk County Council had been offering an enhanced recycling credit payment for food waste collections for some time, North Norfolk and South Norfolk District Council’s had decided not to roll out the food waste collection scheme in their areas.

10.3 The Chairman invited Cllr Pennells to address the Committee to talk to them about air to air heating systems in an attempt to encourage a reduction in carbon output. Mr Pennells advised that renewable heating subsidies could be obtained to install air to air heating systems, which in turn could help reduce electricity usage. Transferring to an air to air heating system may attract government subsidies and could be installed in small classrooms for approximately £1500. Mr Boswell also suggested that the County Council may wish to consider installing solar panels onto buildings and that replacing oil boilers with biomass facilities may also offer greater energy payback than air source heating.

10.4 Members of the Panel were reminded that the Norfolk Putting People First consultation was open until Thursday 12 December 2013. Once the consultation had been completed, all the responses would be consolidated into a report showing the impacts on all the departments. The Panel would receive a copy of the full report at its January 2014 meeting summarising the feedback from the consultation on the budget proposals.

10.5 The Panel asked that the following points be forwarded to the Cabinet Member for Transport, Development, Environment and Waste for him to request Cabinet reconsider some of the options proposed in the Norfolk Putting People First consultation:

- The Panel were against a reduction in the refilling of grit bins, as they felt this could be a danger, especially if prolonged wintery conditions were experienced this winter.
- Revisit the £2 recycling charge as the Panel felt this could result in more instances of fly-tipping which could cost the Council additional money to clean up.
- Parish Council contributions to schemes under the Parish Partnership Fund to remain at 25%.
- Delete the £1m saving from the maintenance budget as this was only for one year and maintenance on some roads was urgently required.

10.6 **RESOLVED** to note

- The revised service and financial planning context.
- The revised spending pressures and savings for the Environment, Transport & Development department.
- Updated capital schemes and announcements relevant to ETD.

11 Apprenticeships Norfolk – one year on

11.1 The Panel received the annexed joint report (11) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development and Director of Children's Services providing Members with an update on the progress of Apprenticeships Norfolk, an initiative set up to tackle youth unemployment and encourage more businesses to employ apprentices, thereby increasing the skills base in the Norfolk economy. This was a joint initiative between Environment, Transport and Development and Children's Services departments.

11.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Panel:

- Members agreed that this was an excellent initiative which had been well received throughout Norfolk.
- If a young person appointed as an apprentice lived in Norfolk but was offered an appointment in Suffolk, the apprenticeship would be classed as an "appointment out of Norfolk".
- The College of West Anglia was a large provider of apprenticeships in Norfolk and this accounted for the high number of apprenticeships taken up in the King's Lynn and West Norfolk area.
- In an attempt to recruit apprentices, work was being undertaken to try to ensure that young people could afford to take on an apprenticeship, as

taking up employment as an apprentice may have an impact on any benefit payments they received. Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) had been contacted in an attempt to negotiate an agreement that the bursary apprentices received would not have an impact on their benefits.

- Members were reassured that work was being undertaken to publicise the apprenticeship scheme to ensure individuals were not financially disadvantaged if they took up an apprenticeship.
- The Employment and Skills Manager, Children's Services, agreed to circulate a list of the business sectors that had offered apprenticeships. The scheme had been targeted at, and had attracted, small companies in Norfolk.
- The Panel noted that if additional money was made available, the scheme would continue as it had been very well received in Norfolk.

11.3 **RESOLVED** to:

- Note the progress of the Apprenticeships Norfolk Programme.
- Approve a review of the final 12 months of the programme, to take into account the changing local and national landscape, including City Deals, as set out in paragraph 2.5 of the report.

12 **Great Yarmouth Borough Surface Water Management Plan**

12.1 The Panel received the annexed report (12) by the Director of Environment, Transport and Development providing a summary of the process and findings of the Great Yarmouth Borough Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP). This SWMP was jointly funded by Norfolk County Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council and Anglian Water Services. These organisations formed the leadership of the project steering group that was actively supported by the Environment Agency and local Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs).

12.2 The following points were noted in response to questions from the Panel:

- The study had shown that there was a reduction in the number of properties which were liable to flooding and therefore there were fewer properties at risk than first thought.
- In response to a question about the sea defences at Hemsby and what work was being undertaken to prevent the erosion of the coastline, the Panel noted that the Environment Agency and the beach owner were monitoring the situation closely. The Panel also noted that following local fund-raising, some work was planned to be carried out by community groups to install some concrete blocks as defences.

12.3 **RESOLVED** to note the report and recommend its adoption by Cabinet.

(The meeting closed at 5.30pm)

Chairman



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