

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Minutes of the Meeting Held on Monday 10th March 2014
10:00am Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich

Present:

Mr C Jordan (Chairman)

Ms E Corlett

Mr S Clancy

Mr A Dearnley

Mr J Dobson

Mr P Hacon

Mr S Hebborn

Mr I Mackie

Mr R Parkinson-Hare

Mr D Ramsbotham

Mr W Richmond

Mrs M Somerville

Mr B Spratt

Mrs A Thomas

Mr B Watkins

Mr T White

Non-Voting Cabinet Members:

Mr S Morphew Finance, Corporate and Personnel

1 Apologies and Substitutes

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr J Mooney (Mrs M Somerville substituted) and Mr A Proctor (Mr J Dobson substituted).

2 Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2014 were approved by the Panel and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) and Other Interests

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/Member Questions

- 6.1 Following a comment from some Members about the lack of information available to them regarding the new Committee Governance arrangements, it was noted that the Chairman of the Committee Governance Steering Group had recently sent out an email informing Members of the progress of the group. Information was also available on Members Insight.

7 Cabinet Member Feedback

- 7.1 The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources advised that the County Council budget had been agreed at the last Full Council meeting and was now going through the implementation process.

8 County Hall Maintenance Programme

- 8.1 The Panel received the annexed report (8) which provided an update of the progress, costs, and timeline for the County Hall maintenance programme. Members were asked to consider the progress made on the programme and to decide if they would like to arrange a visit to the 7th or 8th floor to view the work that had been done so far.
- 8.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:
- On completion of the maintenance works, all redundant aerials would be removed from the building.
 - The current demand for car parking spaces exceeded availability. The situation was being carefully managed and once a plan allocating the car parking spaces had been drawn up, it was hoped the car parking situation could be managed more effectively.
 - The maintenance programme was expected to be delivered on budget and on time.
 - Some Members suggested the County Council flag should be flown from the top of county hall once the maintenance works had been completed and that some thought should also be given to flying the District flags as well as the County Council flag.
 - There was a contingency fund within the allocated budget of the maintenance programme to deal with any unexpected problems that had occurred. Throughout the programme, adjustments had been made to the budget where needed and those adjustments had been closely monitored. Costs had been kept within the original budget, without the quality of the work being compromised.
 - Half of the proposed budget had now been committed to the project. As the programme continued, the costs would be confirmed to reduce the risk of overspending the budget.
 - Mick Sabec was confirmed as the Norfolk County Council (NCC) lead business officer on the project and he was regularly liaising with Carters Builders and Norfolk Property Services (NPS). He confirmed he was satisfied with the progress of the

project, and of the work that was being carried out.

- 8.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and **AGREED** that they would like to see the work carried out on the first completed floor as soon as it could be arranged.

9 **The Potential Financial Contribution of the County Farms Estate – Progress Report**

- 9.1 The Panel received the annexed report (8) by the Chairman of the Working Group. The report provided the Panel with an outline of the progress to date by the Working Group which had been set up to scrutinise the topic.

- 9.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- The working group had recently held a workshop which had been well attended by tenant farmers and had received some positive feedback. The objective of the workshop was to ascertain if the tenants felt they were well supported to develop their own ideas, and to consider any ideas they had to promote growth.
- It was hoped that in the future there could be greater scope to encourage young people to take on County Farm tenancies by working with organisations such as Easton College. It was also hoped that it would be possible to identify those who could not get onto the farming property ladder without assistance, and to develop and implement initiatives to assist them achieve this.
- The ex-RAF Coltishall site had been identified as being a suitable site for agricultural purposes and Norfolk County Council could consider ways it could support agricultural working at this site. This would be an appropriate time to support agricultural working in view that the ex- RAF Coltishall site could be suitable for some agricultural land.
- Income generation opportunities for farmers were unlimited, with ideas ranging from bio fuels to using land for recreational activities and younger people often came up with innovative ideas for improving county farm tenancies.
- Some discussions had taken place with relevant energy companies with regards to renewable energy innovation although contact had yet to be made with the University of East Anglia who may also be able to provide some useful information.
- Work was being undertaken by the lawyers to consider the older county farm tenancy agreements. At present tenant farmers with older tenancy agreements had a life-long tenancy agreement with family members taking over the farm if the tenant had no longer been able to continue. Other authorities had also indicated that the age profile of tenants was an issue, therefore a re-organisation of the county farms estate to ensure it remained viable was crucial.
- In order for the ethos of County Farms to remain, Members expressed a desire for County Farm tenancies to be offered to those wishing to pursue farming as a full time career. The size of the holdings could be taken into account, as the smaller holding provided an excellent introduction to farming.

- There were opportunities within the County Farm structure to provide job opportunities for apprentices as the bigger holdings needed extra labour and this could be an opportunity for people to try farming before committing to a tenancy.
- The work of the County Farms Working Group had proved much more complex than originally thought but it was agreed that the work carried out had been very valuable work. It was suggested that the working group should be allowed to continue its investigations and that one report to Council would not be sufficient to finalise all the work the working group wished to carry out.

9.3

- The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.
- The Panel **RECOMMENDED** that the working group continues under the new Committee system arrangements.

10 2013/14 Resources Finance Monitoring Report

10.1 The annexed report (10) by the Interim Head of Finance was received. The report provided an update on finance monitoring for services in Corporate Resources. Members were asked to note progress and to consider whether any aspects contained in the report should be identified for further scrutiny.

10.2 During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- Norfolk County Council (NCC) had successfully sold the remainder of the claim against Landsbanki through a competitive auction and had recently received their sale proceeds. By selling the claim the risk to NCC of not recovering some of the remaining Icelandic banks investments had reduced considerably. The Head of Budgeting and Financial Management confirmed that NCC was content with the decision to sell at the price realised, and that they had benefited from the sale. Although there had been some element of risk with the judgement call to sell the claim rather than wait for further dividend payments, most other local authorities in the same position as NCC had also decided to sell their claims. As part of the sales process, NCC was required to sign a confidentiality agreement and not all of the details could be made public.
- It was confirmed that the NDR was not being funded from the money raised from second homes Council tax. Some of the second homes Council tax monies are transferred to the Norfolk Infrastructure Fund which is used to fund infrastructure projects across the County.
- The car leasing scheme was continuing although the size of the pool of cars had reduced.
- Projects which had been invested in from the Norfolk Infrastructure Fund (NIF), with in some cases help from other grants available, were College of West Anglia and housing on the former beach coach station in Great Yarmouth which had recently opened or been completed. Due to the reducing financial resources available to local authorities and in order to invest in similar projects in the future, there may be

a need to review the criteria of the NIF and this would be a matter for the new committee to consider.

10.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

11 2013/14 Resources Performance Monitoring Report

11.1 The annexed report (11) by the Head of Planning, Performance and Partnerships was received. The report provided a summary of performance for services covered by the remit of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The report covered the period April to December 2013 and presented information on four main themes; managing change, service performance, managing resources and improved outcomes for Norfolk people.

11.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- The reduction in carbon footprint target was on track to achieve a 25% reduction, although the full results would not be available until July or August 2014. The mild winter and expected reduction in energy bills had assisted in achieving this target. It was also clarified that the data included in the report included schools.
- Robust processes were in place to monitor levels of sickness absence and report on this as part of effective workforce management. It was noted that due to the timing of the meeting, some further updates to the figures in the report were anticipated. Members observed that it was helpful to compare levels of sickness absence across sectors – however, the data had to be treated with some caution due to differences in data collection methodology.
- During the budget consultation, staff had been involved in a range of engagement activities to ensure information was widely available. Members would be provided with some further information on this.
- The role of procurement in obtaining additional savings for the authority was discussed. This could be achieved through reviewing existing contracts and renegotiating the terms, or through re-starting the process. Members would be provided with some further information on this.
- Some Members highlighted the issue of the employment of agency workers. This particularly related to the number of permanent social workers recruited. It was noted that all managers work to an establishment structure that contains a set number of posts, identified as necessary to the delivery of high quality services. Inevitably, there might always be a need to use some temporary agency staff in some situations, for example to cover maternity leave or long-term sickness in essential areas of activity like social work. Members would be provided with some further information on this.

11.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

12 Member Learning and Development Programme 2014/15

12.1 The annexed report (12) by the Head of Democratic Services was received. The report highlighted the training that members had received and the way the forward programme of training would be developed.

12.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- Most Members had found the Member Induction training programme very useful, although it was noted that they had been given a large amount of information to disseminate in a short space of time.
- The Member Development and Advisory Group received regular updates on the learning and development programme and the feedback received from the group had been positive.
- Members who had attended the Personal Development Plan sessions (PDPs) had found the process valuable. They had commented that the facilitator had been helpful in producing their personalised development plans.

12.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

13 Update Report on the Transfer of Public Health Functions to Norfolk County Council

13.1 The annexed report (13) by the Interim Director of Public Health was received. The report provided updated information on the current financial position of public health, the management of risks identified and the performance in 2013/14.

13.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- Members expressed some concern that they were accountable for a budget which had previously been the responsibility of the National Health Service and the responsibility required in ensuring that the resources were allocated correctly. Members also expressed the view that the public health services should have remained within the NHS and that Members of Parliament should be lobbied to ensure this point of view was shared. The newly established Health and Well-Being Board worked with partners in the NHS and District Councils and were in a good position to influence.
- Since Public Health had become a County Council function, it allowed closer working on preventative issues with partners such as schools and occupational health, which accounted for a large proportion of the budget.
- There was no longer a mandatory target for 'Stop Smoking', but there continued to be a mandatory target for health checks. Workplace health checks would be implemented in the near future.
- The current financial report would be useful in providing benchmarking for future budget planning, although Members requested more detail to be included.

- The responsibility for alcohol and drugs health related issues sits with the Norwich Drug and Alcohol Partnership Board and until Public Health joined the County Council Community Services was the lead agency. Alcohol related health issues have been identified as an issue and have continued to rise recently.
- The separation of the sexual health services with the HIV specialism being provided by NHS England and HIV services up to point of diagnosis being commissioned by Public Health had the potential to fragment and destabilise services. Discussions with NHS England regarding co-commissioning were ongoing. User engagement with this client group was difficult, to some extent the experience of frontline staff was used as a proxy.
- It was clarified that the costs of the sexual health clinics provided by NHS were included in the sexual health figures in the budget, and the costs of prevention of obesity in young people had been included in the Children's Services figures.
- It was **AGREED** that the Interim Director of Public Health would send more information about the details of the criteria under the £49k marked 'other' in the budget figures to Members.

13.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

14 Corporate Banking Services

14.1 The annexed report (14) by the Head of Finance (Interim) was received. The report informed Members that the Co-operative bank would be withdrawing from providing banking services to local authorities. This would mean that the corporate banking contract would need to be re-tendered and a new banking provider procured.

14.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- It was reported that the Joint working of the County Council and District Council had caused sponsorship to be offered by LGA Eastern.
- Current banking processes were continually being assessed and monitored to ensure they were efficient. The transition to a new banking provider would provide opportunities for further innovation.

14.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report.

It was noted that this would be the last Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel due to the imminent implementation of the new committee system. Therefore, at the end of the meeting, the Chairman thanked all Members and Officers who had contributed to the Panel and also Mr Parkinson-Hare in his role as Vice-Chairman.

The meeting concluded at 12 noon.

CHAIRMAN



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