

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Minutes of the Meeting Held on Monday 13th January 2014
14:00pm Edwards Room, County Hall, Norwich**

Present:

Mr C Jordan (Chairman)

Ms E Corlett

Mr A Dearnley

Mr J Dobson

Mr T Garrod

Mr P Hacon

Mr S Hebborn

Miss A Kemp

Mr I Mackie

Mr J Mooney

Mr D Ramsbotham

Mr W Richmond

Mr B Spratt

Mrs A Thomas

Mr B Watkins

Mr T White

Non-Voting Cabinet Members:

Mr S Morpew Finance, Corporate and Personnel

Other Members in Attendance:

Mr T Jermy

Dr M Strong

1 Apologies and Substitutes

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr C Clancy (Mr J Dobson substituting), Mr R Parkinson-Hare, Mr A Proctor (Mr T Garrod substituting) and Mr D Roper.

2 Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2013 were approved 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 There were no Local Member Issues/Member Questions.

7 Cabinet Member Feedback

7.1 The Cabinet Member noted that there had been two stories in the media regarding County Farms. He confirmed that there had been no change in policy, and that there were no plans to sell County Farms.

8 Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

8.1 The Panel received the annexed report (8) by the Head of Democratic Services. The report asked Members to review and develop the programme for scrutiny.

8.2 During the discussion the following points were raised:

- The six monthly County Hall maintenance programme updates, and a progress report from the County Farms Working Group, would be brought to the March Panel meeting.
- The Chairman of the County Farms Working Group reported that the group was working through the financial information and would be looking at management information relating to the estate. The Group would then explore other income streams to supplement the £1.7M revenue, and had set up a meeting with tenants to explore ideas.

8.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and agree the scrutiny topics and reporting dates.

9 Putting People First: Service and Budget Planning 2014/17

9.1 The annexed report (9) by the Heads of Shared Services was received. The report set out the latest information on the government's Local Government Finance Settlement and specific information on the financial and planning context for Shared Services Resources for the next three years. It also set out any changes to the budget planning proposals and the proposed cash limit revenue budget for the service based on all current proposals and identified pressures and the proposed capital programme.

The Head of Budgeting noted that there were now no proposals to removed the New Homes Bonus from Norfolk County Council control. The settlement was in line with forecasts, with additional funding from business rates pooling. Pooling would encompass five of the seven districts:- Norwich and Great Yarmouth were not included for financial reasons, but have been included within discussions.

Three changes were noted to page 31:

- Committed element of 2nd year 13/14 CT Freeze Grant – propose to remove completely (-£1.168M in 14/15 and +£1.168M in 15/16).
- Local Government Information Unit Affiliation – remove completely (+£0.021M in 14/15).

- Cross cutting savings to be allocated - change 14/15 to -£0.468M, and 15/16 to +£0.194M.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Personnel presented an overview of responses from the Putting People First consultation (Appendix 1). He reported that the delay of the final decision for the incinerator would place pressure on the budget, and that it was unclear when the Secretary of State would be announcing a decision. The criteria for funding for Health and Social Care had not been announced by central government. Cabinet was looking at practicalities around raising council tax, including the referendum threshold set by government. Although efficiencies were being identified, it was acknowledged that these would take time to implement.

9.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- The 2013/14 council tax freeze grant cost of £3.478M reflected a change in accounting presentation. In the previous financial year this had been a grant, however in the forthcoming financial year it was included within the base funding and sat behind the £25.121M government funding reduction figure.
- The £1.8M saving within ICT services related to restructuring of the service and associated staff savings. The Digital Norfolk Ambition programme meant that some ICT services would in future be provided externally rather than in-house.
- The threshold for referendum on council tax increase was set by national government and could be lowered to 1.5%.
- The £2M Highways Maintenance reduction related to the additional one-off funding in 2013/14 which was reversed out in 2014/15. The £1M within the ETD budget proposals was a one-off funding reduction for 2014/15.
- It was recognised that budgets would need to be adjusted, and income and efficiencies maximised. Although 55% of respondents had indicated that they supported an increase in council tax, it was felt that the overall consultation response rate had been low.
- It was suggested that the response rate for libraries was high because many libraries had been proactively encouraging people to respond to the consultation. MPs had campaigned against library closures, even though this had not been proposed.
- A report from the Efficiency Working Group to Cabinet in the next few weeks would identify further savings.
- There was concern that cuts in support to the voluntary sector could have an impact on vulnerable people who used those services. It was acknowledged that a new approach of sustainable and targeted funding would be of benefit in the future.
- The Council required a more commercial focus with increased income generation. It was suggested that further income generation avenues could be explored, and that other local authorities could provide a source of new ideas.

- It was anticipated that £795,000 would be retained in the county from business rates pooling, and agreements were in place for how this money would be used.
- It was not yet clear whether the funding associated with integration of Health and Social Care could be used on existing services, or whether it was ring fenced for new projects. The Council continued to lobby government on this matter. It was clarified that this was not new funding on top of the County Council/Clinical Commissioning Group funding, and that some of the money would be found from NHS efficiencies. The additional element around the money related to how it could be spent.
- A 1.5% rise in council tax equated to around £4.5M. The government had set the council tax freeze grant at approx £3.5M which was calculated on the tax base figures before the changes to the council tax support scheme which had reduced the tax base. A 2% rise in council tax would equate to approximately £6M, however in reality this would result in an extra £2.5M budget as the council tax freeze grant of £3.5M would not be received. If the council tax was increased, this would result in a higher base figure for the following year.
- It was suggested that alternative ideas such as contracting services out, and community budget setting could be explored. The effect of accepting the council tax freeze grant on future budgets was noted. It was suggested that freezing council tax could result in less money being spent in the local economy and would not address the budget deficit. However concern was expressed that some residents would not be able to afford this increase.
- Work had been undertaken during the previous three years of budget cuts to reinvest money in income-generating schemes, efficiencies, and initiatives such as apprenticeships.
- It was confirmed that proposed cuts to ICT services did not include the Better Broadband for Norfolk project.

The Cabinet Member closed the discussion by noting that the Council was in a difficult position to produce a budget within the financial constraints that it was experiencing. He acknowledged that there were further opportunities for closer working within the public sector. Norfolk County Council could be a key partner within this and could proactively promote a culture shift. The council was seeking to review its involvement with the voluntary sector infrastructure organisations, offering support to those that offered best value for the council. Efficiency within the council remained a key priority.

9.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to recommend the above comments to Cabinet.

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.

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

11 Property Performance Report 2013

11.1 The annexed report (11) by the Managing Director, NPS Property Consultants Ltd was received. The report provided a position statement on the size and performance of the accommodation owned and occupied by Norfolk County Council.

11.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- Norfolk County Council had a programme of asset review for all operational assets, and was challenged with ensuring appropriate utilisation of assets. A disposal programme was in place.
- The expected reductions in water usage as a result of the recommendations and action plan endorsed by the panel in March 2013 would appear within the next reporting period.
- The policy for sale of property was under review to ensure that the right property was sold at the right price for the right reasons. The disposal process had been scrutinised and the Asset Management Strategy was under review, together with the client relationship between Norse and Norfolk County Council.
- It was acknowledged that at present Cabinet Members had delegated authority to make decisions around property and to represent the Council on relevant groups. It was not clear yet how this role would be transferred to the new committee governance structure.
- The Carbon and Energy Reduction Programme (CERP) was a spend to save initiative, with savings being realised over a period of time. An update was last presented to Panel in October 2013. The property performance report showed a five year progressive reduction in spend on energy. It was **agreed** that a written response outlining whether the CERP was helping with overall energy usage reductions would be supplied (see Appendix 2).
- Surveys of buildings were undertaken which included energy infrastructure and options for photovoltaic cells for generation of electricity. Schemes were prioritised by the best return on investment. It was **agreed** that the next report would include an overview of energy certifications for all NCC operational non-school buildings where statutorily required. It was suggested that a future report could include practical examples to set the context.
- It was confirmed that schools were not included within the CERP figures.
- It was suggested that a report could be presented detailing the surplus furniture being stored by the council, in particular the use of the King Street store, with a view to determining how best to dispose of items.

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

12 Compliments and Complaints Service April – September 2013 Performance Review

- 12.1 The annexed report (12) by the Head of Customer Services and Communications was received. The report presented compliments and complaints data and information for the first six months of the 2013/14 financial year, and proposed that the service moved to annual reporting in line with the rest of Customer Services.
- 12.2 During the discussion the following points were raised:
- The report showed that there was a consistency in the number of upheld complaints across the last three years.
 - Compliments about schools were now dealt with by the school itself. The Compliments and Complaints team signposted complainants to the appropriate area.
 - There had been an increase in the number of complaints being received by the Service as staff and public gained more of an understanding of the process of the Service.
 - Freedom of Information requests were dealt with by the information management team. The Customer and Complaints team became involved in appeals, however these were a small proportion of the workload.
 - 20% more cases had been resolved through monitoring and measurement and increased statistical recording. A business process re-engineering exercise had been undertaken which had resulted in some efficiencies. As a result of introducing more performance management measures following the business process re-engineering exercise, the team had resolved 200 more complaints using the same number of people within the same budget.
 - Service departments were sent monthly lists of complaints received. Where a complaint was received regarding staff attitude, the cause would be investigated to establish whether there were any training needs. An audit of feedback to service departments had been undertaken and enhancements had been identified. Most staff attitude complaints related to one to one contacts, and some were outcome-driven. Not all of these complaints were upheld.
 - Some complaints were driven by statutory timescales, and these were always prioritised for early engagement. The Service would suggest improvements to departments where appropriate.
 - The report had requested a move to annual reporting. It was suggested that if any significant issues arose, these should be reported mid-year.
 - The majority of complaints received by ETD related to service and these included potholes and gritting. The volume of complaints was not considered high when compared with the size of the service area. It was clarified that the reporting of a pothole was not classified as a complaint, but was treated as a service request. If an incident arose following a report, it would be treated as a complaint.
- 12.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and **agreed** that future reports would be presented annually.

13 Employee Health, Safety and Well-being Mid-Year Report 2013/14

13.1 The annexed report (13) by the Health, Safety and Well-being Manager was received. The report provided updated information on the health and safety performance data for 2012/13 as well as an update on progress with the Health, Safety and Well-being Plan for 2013/14.

13.2 During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Policy reviews were driven by key factors such as legislative change or guidance by enforcing bodies such as the Health and Safety Executive. Any incidents or trends that show that a policy needed amending would also trigger a review. The asbestos policy had been reviewed recently and did not require further review.
- Road closures for highways works were strictly governed by legislation which could not be influenced.
- Information sheets including lessons learned from incidents were circulated to schools. Whenever a serious incident occurred, policies were reviewed and where necessary the matter was reported to the Health and Safety Executive.
- There had been a drop in the number of non-employees taken to hospital which related to a change in reporting requirements for schools. Previously, all incidents were reported to the HSE, however a decision could now be made whether a report was required, for example when the incident was minor and related to acceptable play risk it would no longer be reported. Norfolk County Council Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team were responsible for the decision whether to report a matter.

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

14 Norfolk County Council Personal Development for Members

14.1 The annexed report (14) by the Organisational Development Manager was received. The report provided information about the benefits and importance of personal development planning and the options available for Members in Norfolk County Council.

14.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- The Chairman of Member Support and Development Advisory Group recommended the Personal Development Planning (PDP) process to all Members. This had been offered to members of MSDAG and Cabinet Members, and was now offered to all Members.
- It was confirmed that Members were asked to provide feedback on the meeting that they attended, and that there would be a further opportunity to offer feedback on the whole process at the six month review stage.
- The 360 appraisal element of the PDP could be facilitated by the learning and development team to help manage the time taken on the process.

- Members who had undertaken a PDP endorsed the process.

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

15 **Filming and Recording at Meetings**

15.1 The annexed report (15) by the Head of Democratic Services was received. The report outlined guidance from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) concerning the filming and recording of meetings.

15.2 During the discussion the following points were noted:

- A precedent had been set in allowing Radio Norfolk to broadcast a recent Council meeting. It was acknowledged that rules and guidelines were required, which would be drawn up by the Constitution Advisory Group for Panel consideration and Council approval.
- It was suggested that in addition to allowing the public to record meetings, an official recording of council meetings should be maintained.
- It was suggested that filming of meetings could enhance transparency and that different options for the Council undertaking its own recording of meetings, including filming, could be explored by members in the future.

15.3 The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the report and asked the Constitution Advisory Group to prepare a protocol for insertion in the Constitution concerning the Council's use of media tools by members of the public or representatives of the media. This would include filming, audio recording, taking photographs, blogging, tweeting and using other social media websites at meetings of Council, committees and sub-committees.

The meeting concluded at 4pm.

CHAIRMAN



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Feedback
 'Norfolk Putting People First'
 Budget Consultation 2014/17

Stephen Morpew

Financial background

- £189 million gap to make up by 2016/17
- Proposals amounting to over £134 million savings identified so far – with more to be identified in years 2 & 3
- Around 56% of these are from “cutting our own costs” including efficiency measures, better procurement, improved technology and income generation

The consultation – a quick overview

- Responses received by email, letter, online, telephone and social media
- Over 4,400 respondents submitted over 15,000 comments
- These figures don't include petitions with over 2,100 signatures

The consultation – a quick overview

- Panel feedback will form part of the consultation and will inform Cabinet's recommendations to be presented at their meeting on the 27th January

The council's priorities (Excellence in Education, Real Jobs, and Good Infrastructure)

- General support for priorities but council challenged to deliver them
- Many respondents felt that supporting vulnerable people should be a priority, public safety or the environment should be a priority

The council's approach and strategy for bridging the funding gap

- Some support for the approach – “sound”, “pragmatic”, “common sense” – but should the council be more radical?
- Divided opinions on outsourcing services, technology and selling assets
- The council should reduce bureaucracy and “red tape” through more collaboration, better processes and improved procurement

Most commented-on proposals

- P27 Reduce the transport subsidy for students aged 16-19 generated the most responses
- Responses about libraries generated a lot of responses – making up 6 of the top 10 responded-to proposals
- Many respondents felt that overall the council's package of proposals affected vulnerable people the most

Freezing Council Tax

- Around 26% of respondents supported the freeze – usually on principle or on the basis of affordability
- Around 55% of people favour of an increase in Council Tax. The vast majority of these suggest a small increase (1-2% or in line with inflation)
- Many respondents wanted clarity about what any increase would be spent on

Feedback on proposals to cut our own costs and become more efficient

- Some consistent feedback
- Support for open, less complex and transparent procurement
- Staff and departments should work together and avoid 'silo' working
- Significant number of respondents frustrated with broad 'public sector' issues like senior management pay, staff sickness and a feeling that we should have made efficiency changes before now

Feedback on proposals to cut our own costs and become more efficient

- Some areas with divided views
- Some people support the use of technology – but others are concerned about the cost of large scale ICT improvements
- Some respondents want fewer staff or less pay, others would rather pay was cut than lose staff, others worry about the effect of redundancies on service levels
- Some people happy with income generation and charges, others worried about the impact of this on 'core' services and on some customers who might not be able to afford charges

Feedback on proposals to cut our own costs and become more efficient

- EQIA process highlights the need for the council to make sure that systems and 'central' services remain accessible to staff and customers as we make savings

Mixed views about reducing funding to organisations that support and represent the local voluntary sector

- Those supporting proposal felt that other funding streams are available
- Those disagreeing with it feel that it would be a false economy given the support the council receives from the sector
- Broad acknowledgement of the value of the voluntary sector – but also some repeated views about better coordinated action

Mixed views about reducing funding to organisations that support and represent the local voluntary sector

- Support for a sustainable long term approach for mutual support between councils and the sector
- Improved commissioning and better collaboration suggested by respondents
- Some misunderstanding of proposal – many respondents understood it to mean reduced funding to frontline voluntary groups rather than infrastructure organisations

Support for moving historical records to the Norfolk Record Office

- Respondents favour centralised access of records
- Small number of respondents concerned about travelling to Norwich to access records

Finally...

- Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the consultation
- Lots of time spent preparing and submitting written views and attending events
- Every response has been read and considered
- Responses have, and will continue to, inform how we shape services and mitigate risks as we make savings

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Monday 13th January 2014

Agenda Item Number/ Minute Number	Report Title	Action	Response
11	Property Performance Report 2013	Outline whether the Carbon and Energy Reduction Partnership is helping with overall energy usage reductions.	The 2012-13 energy and carbon reduction performance of the Authority is set out in the Cabinet papers of 4 th November 2013, item 15 pages 161 to 174 and reference to the detail therein should be made. To 31 st March 2013, overall carbon emissions for NCC have fallen by ~11% from the 2008-09 baseline, despite the prolonged cold period in early 2013. In addition energy costs have fallen from £17,749,887 in 2008-09 to £14,413,211 in 2013-13.