



Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 20 July 2022
at 10 am at County Hall Norwich

Present:

Cllr Steve Morpew (Chair)

Cllr Lana Hemsall (Vice Chair)

Cllr Carl Annison

Cllr Lesley Bambridge

Cllr Phillip Duigan

Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris

Cllr Keith Kiddie

Cllr Ed Maxfield

Cllr Jamie Osborn

Cllr Brian Watkins

Cllr Tony White (substitute for Cllr Graham Carpenter)

Parent Governor representative

Mr Giles Hankinson

Also present (who took a part in the meeting):

Cllr Daniel Elmer

Cllr Andrew Jamieson

James Bullion

Titus Adam

Peter Randall

Kat Hulatt

Tim Shaw

Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Chair of the Children's Services Performance Review Panel

Cabinet Member for Finance

Executive Director of Adult Social Services

Head of Strategic Finance, Service Budgeting & Accounting (attending in place of Simon George)

Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager

Head of Legal Services

Committee Officer

1A. Apologies for Absence

- 1A.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Graham Carpenter, Cllr Barry Duffin, Cllr Richard Price, Mrs Julie O'Connor (Church Representative) and Mr Paul Dunning (Church Representative).
- 1A.2 An apology was also received from Simon George the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services.
- 1A.3 The Committee noted that Cllr Shelagh Gurney, the Chair of the Adult Social Care Performance Review Panel, was engaged on other Council business and had given her apologies for the meeting.

1B Comments from the Chair: The Work of the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service

- 1B.1 The Committee paid tribute to the work of the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service and to the other emergency services in tackling the devastating scenes across Norfolk yesterday after fires ravaged land and homes during what was the hottest day ever recorded in the county.

2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meetings held on 23 June 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest,

4 Urgent Business

- 4.1 No urgent business was discussed.

5. Public Question Time

- 5.1 There were no public questions.

6. Local Member Issues/Questions

- 6.1 There were no local member issues/questions.

7 Call In

- 7.1 The Committee noted that there were no call-in items.

8 Strategic and Financial planning 2023-24

- 8.1 The annexed report (8) was received.

- 8.2 The Scrutiny Committee received a report from the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services that supported the Committee's scrutiny of the Council's process for developing the 2023-24 budget and was an opportunity for the Committee to consider savings proposals identified to date, the approach to public consultation, and the overall timeline and activity required to deliver a balanced budget.

During discussion of the report with Cllr Andrew Jamieson, Cabinet Member for Finance, the following key points were noted:

- Service departments were asked to produce an initial list of savings that amounted to £15m.
- The Table 1 on page 20 of the agenda set out the overall savings targets.
- The bulk of the proposed savings in Adult Social Services came from the use of reserves, the continuing programme of prevention work aimed at helping people to live independent lives for longer and from the connecting

communities programme where savings were expected to be at the higher end of expectations.

- The proposed sale of the Professional Development Centre at Woodside Road in Norwich was expected to bring in £1.2 m. The withdrawal from the use of this building formed part of a programme of redeployment aimed at Council services being centred on the use of core buildings.
- The budgetary proposals included the introduction of parking charges for non-residents in tourist hot spots as a means of tackling traffic congestion.
- The closure of recycling centres on Wednesdays (and only for those recycling centres that were currently open on Wednesdays) would mean that Norfolk aligned itself with neighbouring counties and closed centres on the day of least demand.
- The Council was consulting during the summer on the use of mobile libraires. It was too early for the Cabinet Member to answer detailed questions from Members about the future use of these vehicles until this process was complete.
- The Chair said that the budget setting process appeared to be running behind schedule because the first round of challenge had only identified £13m of £60m of savings. The Chair questioned whether the budget setting process was robust enough to be able to identify how all the other £47m of savings would be achieved.
- In reply, the Cabinet Member said that he was reasonably content with what had been achieved at this stage in the budget setting process. By this time last year, the Council had identified 60 % of its end of year savings target but on a much smaller overall savings figure. The Cabinet Member was confident that a combination of departmental savings, savings from the ongoing strategic review and from transformation programmes would close the budget setting gap for 2023/24.
- In reply to questions about the impact of the current high level of inflation and the upward pressures on Council spending, the Cabinet Member said that a 1% increase in employee pay would add £3m of cost pressures to the Council's budget. The County Council had budgeted for a pay increase of 3%.
- The Committee discussed the Council's debt in the context of debt servicing costs.
- In reply to questions about operational and authorised borrowing limits, the Cabinet Member explained the wide range of treasury management tools and performance indicators that the Council was able to use to ensure that it did not borrow more money than it could afford to repay.
- It was pointed out that the possibility of the Council exceeding its operational boundary was very low and that Full Council would have to agree to an increase in its authorised borrowing limit before that limit could be exceeded.
- The cost to the County Council of borrowing money available to it over 50 years was 1.8% in 2021/22 compared to 3% at today's borrowing rate. The

Cabinet Member said that the Council would be unlikely to be able to borrow money at a rate as low below 2% ever again.

- The percentage of the net revenue budget represented by interest costs had fallen to 7% and was likely to go down to 6.9% at the end of the current financial year.
- The Chair said that while interest payments might be small the sums of money borrowed were very large. It was important for Councillors to be able to understand how much control the Council had over the level of the overall net revenue budget and the size of the sums of money that were being borrowed to meet current and anticipated future commitments.
- In reply, the Cabinet Member said that the most important consideration for the Council was to be able to deliver its statutory obligations and essential services in the most efficient way, and at a cost that was as painless as possible for the residents of the county.
- The net revenue budget for the Council was expected to increase from £339m to £439m (with a great deal of this increase taken up by statutory obligations).
- The Chair said that despite the increase in the revenue budget the figures in the report appeared to suggest that the Council might have to cut more than a quarter of its net revenue budget by 2027.
- Titus Adam, commenting on behalf of the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services, said that it was not possible to provide the Committee with a definitive figure for the level of controllable revenue expenditure since such a figure always remained subjective. The gross spend of the Council was £12 billion and it was this figure on which the net revenue savings of the Council needed to be based.
- The Cabinet Member said that the Council remained confident that the DfT would fund £85m of the cost of the Norwich Western Link. In reply to questions about what would happen if this proved not to be the case, the Cabinet Member referred to the costs and financial risks that were set out in section 6 of the report.
- The Chair said that when the Committee next considered the proposed budget it would be useful to have more detail about where and why there was a significant increase in demand for statutory Council services.
- It was noted that the connecting communities programme was overseen within the project itself and through the work of a project oversight group.
- In reply to questions the Cabinet Member said that Norse Property Services might be able to help provide a retrofitting service that was requested by Cllr Osborn.
- The Chair said that the Select Committees should ideally have been given an opportunity to consider budgetary setting proposals as part of the summer cycle of Committee meetings. It was important for Select Committees to be given every possible opportunity to help formulate and scrutinise service department budgetary proposals before the next report

came back to the Scrutiny Committee in October 2022. The Scrutiny Committee would then be able to centre its deliberations on the Council's overall budget rather than on scrutinising issues of fine detail which had not gone through the select committee route.

8.3 **RESOLVED**

That the Committee:

Note the current position in relation to the setting of the Council's budget for 2023/24 and that this matter was due to next come before the Committee in October 2022.

9 **Quarterly update on Children's and Adult Social Care Performance Review Panels.**

The annexed report (9) was received.

9.1 The Scrutiny Committee received a report that outlined progress to date with regards to the ongoing activity of the two Performance Review Panels (PRPs), one for Adult Social Care and one for Children's Services.

9.2 Cllr Daniel Elmer and James Bullion, the Chair of the Children's Panel, and the Executive Director of Adult Social Services respectively, were present to answer questions about the performance review panels meetings and the actions that were being taken as a result of the issues raised. The Committee noted that Cllr Shelagh Gurney, the Chair of the Adult Social Care Performance Review Panel, was engaged on other Council business and had given her apologies for the meeting.

9.3 The Committee discussed, received answers to questions and considered the following:

9.4 **Children's Services**

- There was a backlog of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) outstanding, and the position was recognised as a countrywide issue brought about by a lack of child psychologists.
- The percentage of those EHCP that were overdue had reduced, but the demand had been unprecedented.
- The Council had a target of producing EHCPs in 20 weeks. Two years ago, only 7% of EHCPs were produced within that timeframe. Today, 55% of EHCPs were produced in 20 weeks and at a time of increased demand. Two years ago, about 1,000 EHCPs were produced in a year which compared with 1,400 at the present time.
- There had also been an improvement in the quality of the EHCPs that were produced. Previously 445 of the EHCPs were rated as part of the audit process as being inadequate in some way which compared with a figure today of just 3%. The Council was now only 4% below the national average.

- In reply to questions Cllr Elmer said that Children's Services were looking to come up with a new stretched target for EHCPs that was achievable and above where Norfolk sat in relation to the national average.
- Cllr Daniel Elmer said that the Panel had received an overview of the key interventions at the edge of care, their impact and been given some indication of where there were opportunities for improvement in the future.
- Cllr Elmer said that he would let Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris have details after the meeting on the progress that was being made with reviews that fell outside of the EHCP process.
- The Committee was informed that the Panel wanted the vision for the next phase of the Children's Services transformation to emphasise the importance of professionals getting involved earlier through the early hub, working with parents / carers and in schools. This would allow Children's Services to impact on the numbers requesting an EHCP and help reduce the demand for them.
- Members of the Committee questioned whether the Review Panel had considered all the issues asked of it by the Scrutiny Committee.
- The Parent Governor representative on the Committee said that it was essential for Scrutiny Committee to receive written reports that logged the progress that was being made by the Panel.
- In reply, Cllr Elmer said that the Panel was looking to have a more robust action log and feedback mechanism and to invite comments from interested parties where possible. The possibility of expanding the size of the Panel from 5 to 7 members to allow for more robust scrutiny was also being explored.
- The Chair agreed with the comments made by the Parent Governor that clearer and simpler information was required in future written reports to help Members identify issues examined, actions taken and resulting outcomes. The Scrutiny Committee wanted to see in the written reports that came from the Panel the conclusions of their deliberations as well as the issues that they had discussed. The Chair added that the important contribution which the Parent Governor representative could make to the work of the Panel was something that required further consideration.
- In reply to questions, Cllr Elmer explained how the assessment of Young Carers was an important issue that was being looked at by the Panel.

9.5 **Adult Social Care**

- The Committee noted that Cllr Shelagh Gurney, the Chair of the Adult Social Care Performance Review Panel, was engaged on other Council business and had given her apologies for today's meeting.
- In adding to the report, the Executive Director of Adult Social Services said that the Cabinet Member had asked for the department to take part in a 'mock' independent inspection by the LGA and that this would take place

over three days starting on 27 July 2022 (the date had been brought forward from that mentioned in the report) in the run up to the published framework.

- Outcomes of the dry run inspection / key risks and challenges would be considered by the Panel, but it was not known at this stage how they would be reported through to elsewhere within the Council.
- The formal assessment framework would not be released before October 2022; however, the 'mock' independent inspection should give a good indication of where Norfolk stood in relation to the position elsewhere and provide a good tool to strengthen the scrutiny process.
- Adult Social Services already had a good general knowledge of the questions that might be asked as part of the inspection process.
- Once the 5 areas of inspection were published, they would be accompanied by a breakdown of what each included, and what 'good' looked like.
- The cost implications of the mock peer review would be met by the LGA who were piloting the mock reviews as part of their proposals for future Government funding.

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

Note progress with the ongoing work to monitor service performance and that a further report will be brought before the Committee in three months.

Thank both Cllr Elmer and James Bullion for their attendance and for their work to date on their respective panels.

10 Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

- 10.1 The annexed report (10) was received.
- 10.2 The Committee noted that the Chair and Vice-Chair were currently exploring how the cost-of-living crisis could be added into the work programme, perhaps as part of an existing item.
- 10.2 The Committee asked for the Chair and Vice-Chair to consider how the County Council's response to extreme weather events could be added into the forward work programme as an additional item.
- 10.3 It was noted that the forward work programme also needed to be amended to include in September 2022 the minerals and waste plan which formed part of the Policy Framework.
- 10.4 It was suggested that following the introduction of the new integrated health care system the Corporate Select Committee might want to consider the effectiveness of scrutiny in this area of work.

10.5 RESOLVED

That the Committee:

Note the current forward work programme as set out in the appendix to the report subject to further consideration being given by the Chair and Vice Chair to the response in the county to extreme weather events and the addition of the minerals and waste plan to the agenda for September 2022.

The meeting concluded at 12.40 pm

Chair