



## Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 20 April 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 Graham Carpenter

Cllr Barry Duffin

Cllr Phillip Duigan

Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris

Cllr Paul Neale (substitute for Cllr Jamie Osborn)

Cllr Richard Price

Cllr Brian Watkins

Cllr Tony White (substitute for Cllr Keith Kiddie)

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

Cllr Greg Peck

Cabinet Member for Commercial Services and Asset Management

Cllr Andrew Jamieson

Cabinet Member for Finance

Tom McCabe

Head of Paid Service and Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services

Paul Cracknell

Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation

Simon George

Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services

Al Collier

Director of Procurement

Jonathan Franklin

Policy Officer in the Procurement Team and for the Secretariat of the Net Zero Board

Peter Randall

Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager

Kat Hulatt

Head of Legal Services

Tim Shaw

Committee Officer

### 1. Apologies for Absence and related issues

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Keith Kiddie, Cllr Ed Maxfield, Cllr Jamie Osborn, Mr Giles Hankinson (Parent Governor), Mrs Julie O' Connor (Church Representative) and Mr Paul Dunning (Church Representative).
- 1.2 Apologies were also received from Cllr Andrew Proctor, the Leader of the Council, who would have attended the meeting but for other Council business that involved him being elsewhere.

## **2 Minutes**

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meetings held on 23 March 2022 and 30 March 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 Better Together for Norfolk: Delivering our Strategy**

- 8.1 The annexed report (8) was received.

- 8.2 The report set out the role expected of the Scrutiny Committee with regards to providing challenge and oversight of items that formed part of the Council's Policy Framework for the delivery of the Better Together for Norfolk strategy, to ensure good progress was made against strategic priorities and targets. Included as an appendix to the report was a report presented to Cabinet on 4 April 2022 that included the Corporate Delivery Plan, updated to reflect a change in priorities for Norfolk as the county emerged from the pandemic.

- 8.3 During discussion of the report with the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation, the following key points were noted:

- Cllrs spoke about the alignment of the strategy to wider system changes, specifically the launch of the Integrated Care System and the potential development of a County Deal.
- In reply to questions it was pointed out that Norfolk was one of nine areas in the country attempting to negotiate a deal whereby central Government devolved powers and functions to the County Council. Negotiations on a "county deal" were at a very early stage and if successful could enable the Council to set up a long-term investment fund and allow for significant infrastructural improvements across the county.
- Strategy and policy development (through responding to changes in national policy and lobbying of Government Ministers and local MPs) were already key components of the Better Together for Norfolk Strategy.
- Essential day-to-day service delivery would continue to be captured in the

Council's departmental plans.

- The Chair broadly welcomed the Better Together for Norfolk strategy which he said should enable the Council to have a stronger grip and focus on Council priorities. The Chair did, however, question whether the overall strategy contained too many corporate priorities and asked if the headline priorities within the strategy should be cross referenced to increase their impact. He also said that he would have liked to have seen the strategy contain more consistent and in-depth descriptions of what success in meeting the Council's headline ambitions would look like, and the timescales for when targets were expected to be achieved.
- In reply, the Cabinet Member for Finance said that the ending of the pandemic provided an opportunity to do things differently; the Corporate Select Committee was involved in the formulation of the overall strategy and had supported the inclusion of a wide range of ambitious targets.
- The Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation said that the strategy was a broad delivery plan partly because of the wide breadth of the County Council as an organisation and partly because officers should be able to see their own work reflected in the strategy.
- A rolling annual Corporate Delivery Plan would be maintained behind the scenes to take account of critical activity updates and any changes in priorities and obligations that contributed to the delivery of the strategy and key areas of focus for the next performance year.
- Officers were putting together a suite of measures that joined together operational performance, transformational change and strategic outcome measures that would be reported to Cabinet and Select Committees over the life of the strategy. Cabinet would receive reports on a quarterly basis that set out the corporate vital signs. This matter would be reviewed to take account of comments made by the Chair about the cross referencing of important headline projects.
- The Scrutiny Committee was informed that Select Committees would as part of their work plans have an opportunity to examine the projects that were relevant to them. Where there was some inconsistency in reporting mechanisms this was essentially due to some of the individual projects being in the early stages of their development and attempts by some Select Committees to have their own separate reporting mechanisms.
- In terms of process for taking projects through the Select Committees, a new forum was in place to coordinate, develop and review progress on work plans which would shape the regular reporting of the overall strategy to Cabinet.
- It was agreed to take up a suggestion that the strategy should have a glossary that made it easier for the non-expert to read.
- Cllrs welcomed the launch of the "green skill road map" but spoke about how the inclusion of nuclear energy in this section of the strategy required policy challenge rather than scrutiny challenge.
- Cllrs spoke about how the refreshed communications strategy would help to ensure effective and targeted communications with Norfolk residents and stakeholders across local, regional and national systems. Cllrs and officers alike would be advocates for coordinating story telling around key communication themes and strategies.

- That Scrutiny Committee note the report (including that presented to Cabinet and the 2022-23 Corporate delivery Plan) and the feedback to officers that can be found in paragraph 8.3 of these minutes.
- That, at its work programming meeting scheduled for 16 May 2022, Scrutiny Committee consider its role in supporting the delivery of the Better Together for Norfolk 2021-25 strategy, discussing arrangements for further challenge and oversight.

## 9 Strategic and Financial Planning 2023-24

9.1 The annexed report (9) was received.

9.2 The report provided Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the Council's process for developing the 2023-24 Budget, to consider the overall timeline and activity required to prepare for that budget and to help identify savings.

9.3 During discussion of the report with the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services the following key points were noted:

- The Cabinet report that formed an appendix to the Scrutiny Committee's report marked the start of the Council's budget setting process for 2022/23 which was two months earlier than in previous years. To ensure that the Council set a legal and balanced budget in February 2023 there was a year one savings target of some £60m.
- The savings mentioned in table 4 of the report were savings that had already been agreed and needed to be delivered before the Council set about meeting the £60m gap in the budget for 2022/23.
- The Cabinet would be asked to consider making savings in July 2022 and further savings in October 2022.
- Some of the pressures within the Council's budget were driven by Central Government decisions, including elements of pay and price market pressures which were linked to the National Living Wage, social care reform, and pressures relating to assumed reductions in funding.
- There was a lot of uncertainty linked to Government's plans to reform local government funding during 2022 (for 2023-24) linked to the delivery of the levelling up agenda.
- The medium-term financial strategy that underpinned the budget would focus on supporting the Council's ambitions and delivering on transformational change set out in the Better Together for Norfolk Strategy.
- There would be three rounds of Budget Challenge (initial proposals in May and June and a detailed session for each directorate in September).
- Select Committees would have a role to play as part of the budget-setting process, considering areas for savings in May 2022 and commenting on detailed proposals in November 2022.
- The report assumed Council Tax base growth of 1% per annum but this was likely to work out for the current year at between 1.3% and 1.4% (around another £2m).
- The organisational review approved by Cabinet was the first comprehensive review of its kind undertaken in ten years. Optimising spans of control and reducing management layers suggested that cost savings in the order of £15m could be achieved.

- The Cabinet Member said that while the report mentioned a figure of £15m to £20m for dealing with organisational change this was not a cap on potential savings; it would be for the Cabinet to challenge the Executive Directors as to if this ballpark figure was appropriate when the findings of the external consultants were known.
- The Chair said that if there was a duplication in layers of senior management and administration within the organisation then he would have expected this to have been identified during the challenge mechanism used during previous budget rounds.
- In reply, the Cabinet Member said that the way in which the Council's budget had historically been knitted together had not teased out of the system the savings that could be achieved from an organisational review; the need for such a review had become more apparent following the introduction of a Cabinet system of local government in Norfolk in 2019 and the steps taken since then to provide a coordinated approach to tackling the pandemic.
- The Executive Director said that there was between £2.5m and £3m in the base revenue budget to cover the cost of redundancies that arose from organisational change, together with £3m in reserves. This was considered sufficient to meet all redundancy costs.
- The Chair said that it was important for the organisation to be comprehensive enough in its approach to show whether the Council was fit for purpose following the ending of the pandemic.
- In reply to further questions about the success or otherwise of the Council's lobbying of government for additional funding, the Cabinet Member explained how the Council continued to press for an uplift in its funding and for a long-term financial settlement for local government generally which would be essential in balancing the budget in the long term.
- It was pointed out that the end of year government settlement for 2022/23 was expected to be somewhat short of the real rate of inflation.
- The Head of Paid Service said that while table 1 in the report showed that the Council was spending more money on services each year the budget gap for 2022/23 would be twice the size of that which the Council had previously had to find.
- The Vice Chair said that it would be wrong to assume that all savings were cuts in services, since some savings made services more efficient. While there was a large budgetary gap that had to be met it was important not to lose sight of the fact that there were various good news stories from smarter ways of working, from technology and from transformation that had made for year-on-year improvements in the way Council services were run.

#### 9.4 **RESOLVED**

- **That Scrutiny Committee note the proposed strategic and financial planning timeline set out in the report and the feedback to officers that is set out above.**
- **That Scrutiny Committee place on record thanks to the Cabinet Member and Executive Director for their help in answering Councillors detailed questions.**

## 10 **Monitoring of NCC Environmental Policy – Development of a Digital Dashboard**

10.1 The annexed report (10) was received.

10.2 The report provided an update on progress towards the development of a digital emissions dashboard to monitor progress against key environmental targets. The report reviewed the benefits and drawbacks in terms of form, functionality and deliverability of a dashboard developed through different reporting platform options.

10.3 The Committee also received on the screens in the Council Chamber a (work in progress) demonstration from Jonathan Franklin, Policy Officer in the Procurement Team, of the high-level digital dashboard currently in development.

10.4 During discussion of the report and the digital dashboard demonstration with the Director of Procurement, and the Policy Officer in the Procurement Team the following key points were noted:

- The Policy Officer explained how the dashboard was developed through different reporting platform options and utilised the Azure (cloud-based) platform to extract, transform and load data from multiple sources.
- The Chair said that the dashboard would provide the Scrutiny Committee with a means to assess progress with the Council's net zero and Natural Norfolk work programmes.
- In reply to questions it was noted that it was too early to include in the dashboard baseline figures for carbon emissions in future years. The Council had a carbon emissions target for 2030 but was still working on the trajectory for how it would get to that point in time.
- The prototype dashboard would lead into a go-live version that was based on data collected annually. Phase 2 of the project could include data collected on a quarterly basis but there were numerous technical reasons why this data could not be shown in real time.
- The dashboard would go live in the next few weeks.
- The parameters in the dashboard were set in accordance with international standards and currently included scope 1 and scope 2 standards.

## 10.5 **RESOLVED**

- **That Scrutiny Committee acknowledge the progress being made in the development of a digital emissions dashboard.**
- **That Scrutiny Committee place on record thanks to the Director of Procurement and Jonathan Franklin, Policy Officer in the Procurement Team and for the Secretariat of the Net Zero Board, for their help in answering Councillors detailed questions.**

## 11 **County Farms – Updates on Actions Following Scrutiny**

11.1 The annexed report (11) that was circulated with the supplementary agenda was received.

- 11.2 The report provided an update on actions taken on the County Farms Estate since the Scrutiny Committee had previously considered this matter in September 2021.
- 11.3 The Cabinet Member for Commercial Services and Asset Management explained the work that the County Farms Team was doing with tenants to increase tree and hedge planting.

11.4 **RESOLVED**

**That the Committee note the report and the actions that are being taken.**

12 **Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme**

- 12.1 The annexed report (12) was received.
- 12.2 The Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager drew Cllrs attention to changes in the work programme previously reported to the Committee which were highlighted in the appendices to the report. This was subject to further change. Following comments made earlier in this meeting, a further scene setting item for the annual budget setting process would be added to the forward work programme for July 2022.

12.3 **RESOLVED**

**That the Committee:**

**Note the current forward work programme as set out in the appendix to the report which was subject to a revised work programme being distributed to Members in the next week.**

The meeting concluded at 12.40 pm

**Chair**