



Corporate Select Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 12 July 2021 at
2pm in Council Chamber, County Hall, Martineau Lane Norwich NR1 2DL

Present:

Cllr E Colman (Chair)
Cllr A Birmingham
Cllr S Blundell
Cllr N Daubney
Cllr B Duffin

Cllr L Hemsall
Cllr J James
Cllr T Jermy
Cllr B Price
Cllr V Thomson
Cllr K Vincent

Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Philip Duigan for Cllr Stuart Clancy

Also Present:

Cllr Andrew Jamieson
Cllr Margaret Dewsbury

Cabinet Member for Finance
Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Stuart Clancy (substituted by Cllr Philip Duigan) and Cllr Kay Mason Billig (Vice-Chair)

2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Declarations of Interest

- 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/Questions**

6.1 There were no local Member questions.

7 **2021 Staff Survey 'Our Voice Our Council': Summary Report and Next Steps**

7.1 The annexed report (7) by the Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation was received. The Director for People gave a [presentation which is available on the committee website pages.](#)

7.2 The staff survey 'Our Voice Our Council' had ran from 12 April 2021 until 4 May 2021, giving Norfolk County Council (NCC) the third consecutive year of insight into NCC employees' perceptions of working as part of the NCC organisation. The survey data provided the senior leadership team with a statistically robust insight into areas of strength as an employer and areas for further work and development. The NCC survey data is compared anonymously with a bank of responses from 30,000 public sector employees and this provided a helpful context within which to view the NCC picture.

7.3. More needed to be done to encourage the remaining 45% of employees to undertake the survey. A higher percentage of responses had come from those working within corporate back office roles as opposed to front line service positions.

7.4 Although a four day week model had not been fully investigated, during the pandemic employees were given greater flexibility and many had chosen to work in the evening and at weekends.

7.5 Whilst allowing employees to work flexible was important, service standards across the departments still needed to be maintained. The Smarter Working initiative will look at providing flexibility in a more formal way by examining 'the deal' and considering the need for change.

7.6 It was agreed that the scores from employees who had protected characteristics needed further investigation and that the committee would like to have more involvement to help shape future surveys. It was also thought the staff absences data and the remit to consider Health and Safety requirements particularly, with regard to mental health, could be brought together under one piece of work.

7.7 Employees had been offered additional support for home working during the pandemic, particularly for those who had to declare personal circumstances that had not always been known prior to home working. Although conversation with immediate line managers had been difficult in the virtual environment the survey had reflected that the Council was doing well in that area.

7.8 **The Committee agreed:**

- The item would return to the committee later in the year to include more

comprehensive data particularly on individuals with protected characteristics and also to include feasibility work around the life/work balance.

- To work alongside with the Corporate board to help scope out future surveys.

8. **Business Transformation (Smarter Working) Programme**

- 8.1 The annexed report (8) by Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation was received. Cllr FitzPatrick, Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance had given his apologies and a PowerPoint presentation was undertaken by the Director of Transformation and the Director of People. [\(The presentation was made available on the committee pages website\)](#)
- 8.2 The committee were reminded that the Smarter Working Programme was established following the adoption of the 2020-2024 Medium-Term Financial Strategy. A savings target was set to achieve through implementing more business-like Smarter Working; utilising physical space and technology to maximise flexibility for customers and staff whilst effectively delivering good outcomes. The current report had been delayed by both the local elections in May 2021 and the pandemic which had seen an increase in cases in January 2021 shortly after when the previous report had been received.
- 8.3 The report was well received by members and good progress was noted. In response to member's questions reassurance was given that any employee needing to work from an office for personal reasons or inappropriate working conditions at home, has been able to do so. In addition, the availability of Microsoft Teams has given both employees and members greater flexibility for communication. Productivity was being assessed on an evidence base basis and was conducted using a test and learn process. The apprenticeship levy had been used to help recruitment to the roles which have proved historically to be difficult to fill such as social workers and planning officers.
- 8.4 The Committee **RESOLVED** to
- 1.Recommend ways in which the Smarter Working Programme can maintain its focus despite the ongoing uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - 2.Acknowledge the savings achieved in the 2020/21 financial year and suggest any further non-financial benefits of the Smarter Working Programme.
 - 3.Review the proposed approach to be taken by the Smarter Working Programme over the next 4 months and propose suggestions for improvement or additional focus.
 - 4.Agree that a further report be made to Select Committee, with an updated plan that takes our transformation forward during normalisation and recovery, in November 2021 (assuming we do not have to re-enter the response phase).

9. Digital Norfolk Strategy and Digital Inclusion

In her introductory comments Margaret Dewsbury Cabinet Member for Communities & Partnerships advised that Digital exclusion affected all aspects of an individual's life, from poor health outcomes to social isolation, education, employment and financial disadvantage.

- 9.1 The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation (by Ceri Sumner Director of Communication Information & Learning and Geoff Connell, Director of IMT and Chief Digital Officer) and a joint report by the Executive Directors of Finance and Commercial Services and Community & Environmental Services. [The presentation, was made available on the committee pages website](#)
- 9.2 The report requested that the committee should help shape the direction of travel for the next iteration of the Digital Inclusion Strategy; the revised strategy will be brought to the Select Committee in September to consider.
- 9.3 Members raise concerns that in a child's development, starting IT skills as early as possible was essential and that once behind, it was almost impossible for a child to catch up to their peers. This was considered to be an ongoing requirement for every child for now and in the future. Reassurance was given that NCC was using its bulk buying power to help with connectivity and schemes like the Every Child Online campaign were identifying and addressing need.
- 9.4 It was acknowledged that those in 65+ age group may have little motivation to use digital services and that more needed to be done to encourage them. Making residents aware of what was available was also key. However, those that choose not to engage digitally should be protected.
- 9.5 Safeguarding issues were taken seriously and NCC were working with schools to provide the best IT and software and working with agencies such as National Cyber Security to protect children and vulnerable adults with the increasing threat from scams and cyber crime.
- 9.6 To persuade the digitally reluctant to engage, it was thought that other channels such as libraries and the voluntary sector may have a better response rate, than the Council would directly.
- 9.7 Whilst good progress had been made, some cohorts may need more urgency such as those requiring treatment for cancer and that priority should be given to those individuals within the refresh of the strategy. Pilot schemes from libraries had been encouraging and more data from these pilots should be brought back to the next committee meeting.
- 9.8 The strategy showed that the County Council was committed to bringing world class digital connectivity to Norfolk to support business growth, social mobility, tourism, efficient public services and quality of life for our residents. The strategy also showed that the County Council was committed to digitally enabled new ways

of delivering services and achieving outcomes that provided new opportunities to transform services to cope with funding cuts and growing demand. Good progress continued to be made in the delivery of the strategy, and the input of the Committee was welcomed as Norfolk moved forward.

- 9.9 The committee **agreed** to the recommendations to refresh the strategy to include :
1. Research into clearly identifying who is digitally excluded in Norfolk, where they live and the reasons why they are excluded. This work is being jointly led by NCC & our NHS ICS partners who have commissioned a specialist Digital Inclusion company called mHabitat to help collate the data and provide us with expert advice
 2. Mapping of existing support capacity across Norfolk to promote digital inclusion
 3. Identification of gaps of support to inform the strategic focus of the refreshed strategy
 4. Creation of a delivery plan against the strategy.

10 Strategic and financial planning 2022-23

- 10.1 The annexed report (10) report by the Executive Director for Finance & Commercial services was received.
- 10.2 The report provided proposals and considerations for the budget position for 2022-23 and the challenges around the savings required. Cllr Jamieson, Cabinet Member for Finance gave [a presentation, which was made available on the committee's website pages.](#)
- 10.3 In response to member's questions it was advised that 85% of savings are taking place through transformation to services rather than direct cuts to budgets. Additions to reserves represent just 5% of annual revenue and were essential to help offset future budget challenges to reduce risk to provision of essential services. Whilst it was acknowledged that borrowing rates are currently low, £280m was still being borrowed within the proposals taking overall borrowing for the council to £1bn.
- 10.4 It was suggested that the council could be more creative with its own assets and to increase the possibilities of more LED street lighting, solar farms and the use of solar panels on council buildings. Cllr Jamieson promised to return to individual members with questions concerning LED lighting and solar opportunities as he did not have the data immediately available.

11 Corporate Select Committee Forward Work Plan

- 11.1 The annexed note (11) by the Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation was received.
- 11.2 **The Committee RESOLVED**

- 1. To agree that meetings are structured as set out in the note.**
- 2. To include marketing and communication within the digital inclusion work and to have early engagement in the scooping out process for future staff surveys working alongside the corporate board.**

Meeting Ended 4.49pm