



Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 18 November 2020
at 10:00 as a virtual teams meeting

Present:

Cllr Steve Morphew (Chair)
Cllr Alison Thomas (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Steffan Aquarone
Cllr Roy Brame
Cllr Emma Corlett
Cllr Phillip Duigan
Cllr Ron Hanton

Cllr Joe Mooney
Cllr Judy Oliver
Cllr Richard Price
Cllr Dan Roper
Cllr Haydn Thirtle

Substitute Members present:

Cllr Terry Jermy for Cllr Chris Jones

Parent Governor Representative

Mr Giles Hankinson

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

Cllr Bill Borrett	Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention
Cllr John Fisher	Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Cllr Andrew Jamieson	Cabinet Member for Finance
Cllr Graham Plant	Deputy Leader
Tom McCabe	Head of Paid Service
Sara Tough	Executive Director, Children's Services
Fiona McDiarmid	Executive Director of Strategy and Governance
Simon George	Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services
James Bullion	Executive Director of Adult Social Services
Vince Muspratt	Director of Growth and Development
Simon Hughes	Director of Property
Chris Snudden	Director of Learning and Inclusion, Children's Services
Chris Starkie	Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership
Louise Smith	Director of Public Health
Niki Park	Head of Passenger Transport
Katrina Hulatt	Head of Legal Services
Dawn Filtness	Finance Business Partner (Children's Services)
Caroline Clarke	Head of Governance and Regulatory Services
Karen Haywood	Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Chris Jones (Cllr Terry Jermy substituting), Mrs Julie O" Connor (Church Representative) and Mr Paul Dunning (Church Representative).

2 Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 21 October 2020 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 Cllr Steffan Aquarone, Cllr Emma Corlett and Cllr Dan Roper declared an "other interest" because they had signed a petition in respect of Holt Hall (mentioned at item 11 on the agenda).
- 3.2 Cllr Haydn Thirtle declared an "other interest" because he sat independently on the development committee of Centre 81 in Great Yarmouth who had received an offer from the LEP of new premises.

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 was local member questions.

7. Call in

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

8 COVID 19 – Norfolk economy and support for businesses

- 8.1 The Committee received a report from Tom McCabe, Executive Director Community and Environmental Services that provided an update on the work that the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) undertook in collaboration with the County Council.
- 8.2 The Committee explored areas of joint response to the current Covid-19 pandemic with Tom McCabe, Executive Director Community and Environmental Services, Chris Starkie, the CEO of the LEP, and Vince Muspratt, the Council's Director of Growth and Development.

The following areas of work were discussed:

- The impact of Covid19 on the Norfolk economy over the last six months
- Support for local jobs and the local economy
- Transport issues
- Lessons learnt
- Plans in place for the Norfolk economy

8.3 During discussion the following key issues were raised:

- The County Council had worked closely with New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and district colleagues from the outset of the pandemic response.
- Councillors asked how close the Covid-19 pandemic was taking Norfolk to a point of no return for the survival of public transport. In reply it was pointed out that the “tipping point” would be if passenger numbers remained at anything less than 80% of pre-Covid-19 levels at which point commercial bus operators might look to withdraw some services. The Council's budget for bus services was fully committed and new sources of funding would be required to maintain essential public transport services.
- In reply to further questions it was pointed out that there had been a significant reduction in the use of public transport, particularly in coastal areas, however, the support available to transport operators meant that services were being maintained at pre-Covid-19 levels.
- The Norfolk and Suffolk Covid-19 Economic Recovery Restart Plan had brought together commitments and actions from local authorities, the private sector and other organisations to outline the key activities in place to help the region's economy restart after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Norfolk commitment was contained in a separate Norfolk Delivery Plan.
- The success of the Norfolk Delivery Plan would only be known when it became possible to make regional comparisons with elsewhere in the country.
- Councillors stressed the importance that the Norfolk Delivery Plan placed on local markets and supply chains which had provided invaluable support to the local economy, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic.
- As part of a collaborative approach to Covid-19, the LEP had worked with Local Authorities, the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, Public Health Norfolk and the Norfolk CCGs to create a business support script (from Government supplied information) that supported local businesses throughout the pandemic and assisted people to return to places of work that had been impacted by the pandemic. The business support script was regularly updated.
- There was no shortage of funding available to local businesses that wanted to adapt their business model as a result of the pandemic.
- It was pointed out that tourism areas of Norfolk had reported increased numbers of visitors at this time of year, as people took delayed holidays and looked to less crowded destinations.
- The County Council was working alongside the LEP, the Department for Work and Pensions and other stakeholders to explore how the new Kickstart Scheme might best operate strategically across the region to provide high quality work placements for those aged 16 to 24.
- In reply to questions, Councillors were informed about progress with the

local industrial strategy that was based on inclusive growth and driving up the average wage and investing in supporting industries and businesses where high value wages were paid. Work continued to help develop the offshore wind industry sector, the Agri-food sector and the digital economy.

- It was pointed out that Norfolk had been successful in bidding for additional funds for mobile phone telephony and continued to support local businesses to digitise.
- In reply to questions Councillors were informed that prior to the pandemic a significant work programme was put in place to support the social care work force across Norfolk and Suffolk and that this work continued. There were estimated to be 27,000 social care jobs in Norfolk, and it was important to raise the status of the social care work force.
- A £8m social care work force project that ran across both counties was being used to upskill those working in the social care sector, led by colleagues in adult social care in Suffolk.
- In response to the pandemic, representatives from the public and private care sectors and from the Norfolk CCGs were invited to meetings with local business leaders to share experiences and discuss how to improve business practices.
- Councillors spoke about how the opportunities and risks from the pandemic were not shared equally across all parts of society, particularly in relation to the impact of the pandemic on local housing provision. This was an area that the Committee might wish to consider further at a future meeting.
- In reply it was said that the availability and affordability of local housing was addressed through local development plans with support from the County Council in terms of local infrastructure developments.

8.4 **RESOLVED**

1. **That Scrutiny Committee note the report and place on record thanks to Chris Starkie, Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership and those County Council officers who attended today's meeting for their help and support in answering Councillors questions.**
2. **That the Scrutiny Committee look to receive a further update on the work that the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) undertakes in collaboration with the County Council at a future meeting.**

9 **NCC response to Covid-19 – initial lessons learned – progress update**

9.1 The annexed report (9) by Tom McCabe (Head of Paid Service) was received .

9.2 During discussion the following key issues were raised:

- In reply to questions about an outbreak in the community at a market town in south Norfolk, Cllr Bill Borrett, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention said that evidence showed that social control measures were essential in reducing the rate at which cases increased.
- The Director of Public Health updated the Committee on the current situation across the county.
- There had been a rapid increase in the number of cases since the lockdown began on 6 November 2020. High numbers of cases were expected

throughout the winter and case numbers were expected to be near to NMS capacity.

- The County and District Councils continued to produce updated communications messages about how people could protect themselves and others from Covid-19.
- Each local authority had its own action plan although they were broadly similar.
- Infection rates were different in different areas of the county and varied between 52 cases per 100,000 people in North Norfolk to 250 people per 100,000 people in Great Yarmouth.
- Areas of Norfolk with lower case numbers were showing the largest rises.
- The cases of over 60s were being carefully monitored because of the implications for hospital admissions.
- Dealing with outbreaks in meat processing factories remained one of the highest priorities for Norfolk. It was hoped to obtain government approval to put in place a pilot scheme that provided for this issue to be addressed locally. The County Council welcomed the continued support of the food processor companies in dealing with the issue.
- The size of outbreaks in the community had increased and there were recorded outbreaks in care homes and in educational establishments.
- Most outbreaks in schools were small.
- It was not possible to say if school outbreaks were driving up the number of outbreaks in the community at large but steps were being taken to increase the use of Covid-19 marshals at the school gate.
- Steps to support the wellbeing of all staff working for the County Council remained a priority.
- The County Council had put in place a mechanism to identify those carers who were most at risk as a result of the pandemic and to provide them with the support they needed.
- The County Council had also put in place steps to provide additional mental health support for those children that needed it.
- The Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services said that he would provide the Committee at its next meeting with information to show how long it was taking to deal with applications for assistance from the Norfolk Hardship Fund.
- The Chair asked to see at a future meeting a report that set out the lessons that were learnt from the pandemic on specific issues such as local food supply and the delivery of PPE.

9.3 **RESOLVED**

That Scrutiny Committee note the report and consider further updates at future meetings on the specific lessons that have been learnt from the approach taken in Norfolk to deal with the pandemic.

10 **Strategic and Financial Planning 2021-22**

- 10.1 The Committee received a report by the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services and the Executive Director of Strategy and Governance about the development of the 2021-22 Budget. The report (which was adjourned from the previous meeting) supported the Committee's scrutiny of the Council's process for

developing the 2021-22 Budget, and in particular represented an opportunity for the Committee to consider the new budget proposals identified to date, the approach to public consultation, and the further actions required to deliver a balanced budget for the year. The report and appendix provided for this meeting included one amendment to section 7.6 of the report to provide additional clarification about information requested by the Chair.

10.2 Cllr Andrew Jamieson (Cabinet Member for Finance) in introducing the report said that the outcome of the Government's comprehensive saving review was expected at the end of November 2020.

10.3 The issues that were discussed included the following:

- The Chair had requested additional information pertaining to the "Budget Challenge Process" that had led to the savings presented in the Cabinet report. The Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services considered that these meetings were policy development meetings (and very clearly not decision-making meetings) and as such was of the view that the said information was not appropriate for a Scrutiny report.
- ASS001 was about supporting more people to move into independent housing, reducing the reliance on residential care. It needed to be considered in the context of the whole programme over several years and was a positive move as well as a cost saving measure.
- ASS003 was about revising the short term out of hospital offer. This involved working with CCG colleagues on a different joint approach to reablement services and was dependent on an agreement with the NHS.
- ASS013 involved a contract renegotiation with Norse Care and was an ambitious plan.
- CES019: was about a reduction in grass cutting which would not compromise driver safety at road junctions and dangerous locations. Parish Councils were expressing different views on this matter which was part of the formal consultation process.
- Councillors discussed the responses which were received to date to the consultation process.
- The Cabinet Member for Finance explained how he was going about explaining the budget setting process to the Parish and Town Councils. The Administration was using savings from technology to transform the way in which the Council met its savings targets. The scale of the budget gap to be closed remained subject to considerable uncertainty and Covid-19 was only one of the significant costs in the next financial year that would have long term implications.
- The Chair said that he would have liked to have seen the Council explain the budget setting process more clearly and to have provided evidence to show the means by which it would meet its budget targets. The Chair questioned whether the Administration was being challenging enough of senior officers in its approach to finding savings.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention said that the outcomes to be delivered as part of the budget setting process would support service users independence at the most efficient cost that such services could be provided.
- Councillors asked for details regarding staffing implications of the savings proposals to be brought to the Committee, The Cabinet Member for Finance

said he would ask officers to provide such details.

10.4 RESOLVED

That the Committee note the report and that the Cabinet Member for Finance would provide details regarding the staffing implications of the budget proposals.

11 **Outdoor Learning: A change of service, based at Holt Hall**

11.1 The Committee received a report by the Executive Director of Children's Services that set out the process for a potential change of service based at Holt Hall following the outcome of a service review.

11.2 The issues that were discussed included the following:

- The Executive Director of Children's Services explained the review process which had begun in November 2019 and recommenced in July 2020 after the lockdown.
- The process had begun in earnest in September and included: talking with staff and volunteers; engaging with schools; engaging with Friends of Holt Hall and engaging with North Norfolk District Council.
- It was noted that a petition had been received from the Friends of Holt Hall and would be taken into consideration.
- The consultation process had involved staff and their feedback together with that of others would be reported to the Cabinet.
- Some Councillors spoke about how Holt Hall was a valuable resource for young people in Norfolk and about how any loss of service would be a huge loss to them, especially more vulnerable and disadvantaged youngsters and those with Special Needs. They were of the opinion that no decision on the provision of outdoor learning from Holt Hall should be taken without the opportunity for Councillors in all areas of the county to be fully involved, and not just briefed in accordance with the Local Member Protocol.
- The Cabinet Member said that it was never his intention to predetermine the outcome of Holt Hall. The final service level decision was originally delegated to the Executive Director for Children's Services but following the staff consultation, and a full review of all the outcomes from the process, a recommendation on whether to cease the delivery of the service would now be taken to Cabinet in December 2020.

11.3 After further discussion, the Chair moved, seconded by Cllr Dan Roper

That without any form of pre-judgement in this matter, the decision making process continues to be kept under review to ensure that it meets the requirements of the constitution, that there is proper consultation and is robust before the Cabinet is asked to make a decision.

11.4 On being put to the vote the motion was agreed unanimously and it was

RESLOVED

Accordingly.

12. Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

12.1 The Committee received a draft of the forward work programme.

12.2 RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Committee agree the forward work programme as set out in a report by the Executive Director of Strategy and Governance subject to the following:

- **Further updates on the NCC response to Covid-19 and the lessons learned when this is considered appropriate.**
- **Strategic and Financial Planning 2021-22.**
- **A long-term review of County Council wholly owned companies (Norse and Repton) that explains their purpose, how they serve the Council's interests and where their future lies.**
- **The work of the Corporate Board.**

The meeting concluded at 14:20

Chair