



Corporate Select Committee

Minutes of the Meeting Held on 15 November 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 S Clancy
Cllr B Duffin
Cllr L Hemsall

Cllr J James
Cllr T Jermy
Cllr K Mason Billig
Cllr B Price
Cllr V Thomson
Cllr K Vincent

Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Tony White for Cllr Nick Daubney

Also Present:

Cllr Andrew Jamieson
Cllr Margaret Dewsbury
Cllr Tom Fitzpatrick

Cabinet Member for Finance
Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships
Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and
Performance

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Nick Daubney (Substituted by Cllr Tony White).

2 Minutes

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 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 **Digital Inclusion Strategy**

7.1 The annexed report (7) by the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services and Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services was received, and introduced by the Cabinet Member for Commercial Services and Asset Management and the Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships.

7.2 The report followed on from the committee's discussion held earlier in July 2021 with a commitment to return the item to the committee in the Autumn. The dynamic landscape of the digital world means that the strategy will need to be refreshed and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that connectivity for all Norfolk residents is achieved. Nationally, 11% of adults still are without basic internet skills. The report provided details of how over the last 18 months the Council had ramped up efforts significantly to ensure more residents were digitally connected. The strategy aimed to support the outcomes of "Together for Norfolk" by enabling Norfolk's residents to have digital skills for work, life, engaging with their communities and accessing information and resources to thrive in today's digital world.

7.3 The Director for Information Management Technology and the Director for Community Information & Learning gave a presentation which is [available on the committee website pages](#).

7.4 The following was discussed and responses noted to questions:

- The business cases and economic benefits for further investment was in the process of being worked up in consultation with partners and stakeholders such as library services, NHS and LGA.
- The data collected to identify those digitally excluded will be refreshed and updated regularly to ensure goals to reach target groups are achieved.
- Accessibility options to support those with hearing problems was discussed and it was acknowledged that whilst not perfect speech to text technologies are continually improving.
- The vulnerability hub set up during the pandemic is still in existence and is important to help identify and support the cohorts who fall into the digitally excluded category.
- Laptops provided to schools were being maintained and refreshed by the schools to ensure pupils in the future can still benefit. Some laptops were also issued directly to families and were enabled with software protection to ensure correct usage.
- Project Gigabit will see £115m invested in fast broadband connectivity to all properties within Norfolk that can not receive a commercially viable service from providers.

- The lack of a reliable mobile phone signal was also acknowledged as an issue for many rural residents in Norfolk.
- Work with local Parish and Town Councils was happening to help identify those within the digitally excluded group that required help and support.
- Connecting with those groups who are digitally reluctant and disconnected is a challenge, and will need to be contacted by more traditional methods once identified. A wider communications strategy was being developed by the Communications team for consideration in 2022.
- Voluntary groups, the charity sector, town and parish councils as well as connections with adult social care services and primary care providers were all being engaged to help identify and connect with the digitally excluded cohort.

7.5 The committee **RESOLVED** to:

- Endorse the Digital Inclusion Strategy including the strategic plan and performance indicators.

8. ***MyOracle* Programme Update**

8.1 The annexed report (8) by the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services was received. The report was introduced by Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance.

8.2 The Programme Director for HR & Finance gave a verbal presentation on the update. The committee noted:

- During validation testing it became apparent that the go live date would require pushing back from November 2021. The date of April 2022 was agreed to avoid critical Christmas and New Year periods. This new live date was fully supported by the Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance.
- Business and system readiness was a key component in achieving the go live date and a comprehensive training programme is in place to build user confidence ahead of launch.
- Covid had necessitated that colleagues needed to work remotely and this contributed to the delays which had resulted in moving back the go live date.

8.3 In response to member's questions the committee noted:

- Surveys were being used to monitor user confidence and training needs ahead of launch.
- Whilst confidence was very high that the launch date of April 2022 would proceed, contingencies were in place to cover any issues that might arise.
- The *MyOracle* software would be available to staff on any platform including mobile phones. Arrangements were in place to provide access to staff who did not own a digital device.
- The delay in implementation would have some financial impact, although final costs at this stage were not known. The over run costs known to date were much lower than other local authorities are experiencing in introducing similar software.

- The Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance committed to returning to the committee with all over run costs once finalised.
- One advantage of the April 2022 live date would be that data for a complete tax year would not be spread over 2 different systems.
- Parallel payroll testing has been successful although it was decided to reduce the risk of issues arising by not undertaking the go live date during the critical pay months of December and January.

8.4 The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance, the Programme Director for HR & Finance and the team for all their hard work in producing the new system software to the Council.

8.5 The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- Endorse the work completed to date and the next steps.

9.0 **Smarter Working Programme Update**

9.1 The annexed report (9) by the Executive Director of Strategy & Transformation was received, and introduced by the Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance.

9.2 The report outlined the workstreams in progress to deliver the identified benefits and prepare property and workforce for the move to Hybrid working as part of the Recovery phase. The report described the status of the Smarter Working Programme following the reopening of the Council's office spaces on 4th October 2021, as well as the key activities undertaken to embed Hybrid working arrangements and activity now, and into the next phase.

9.3 The Director for Transformation gave a presentation which is [available on the committee website pages](#).

9.4 The following was discussed, and responses noted to questions:

- It was felt that there should be more of a focus on outcomes for end users rather than on staff activities and processes.
- More feedback from staff was required to ensure that all aspects including wellbeing and mental health was being considered.
- Anyone that needed to work from an office base, for example because of poor working conditions at home, was being accommodated.
- Since 4th October 2021 approximately 200 staff per day were using County Hall. Only a handful of staff had taken up the option of the subsidised Park and Ride facility.
- It was felt that new employees might be at a disadvantage as they could not work with and learn from colleagues, if working from home. However, new processes and inductions were being developed to help and support new employees. Each individual department and team would need to assess their requirements and act accordingly.
- The programme had accelerated the asset management rationalisation initiative and concerns were expressed that it would be difficult to reverse the loss of office space if more was required in the future. A slower more cautious approach to asset sale was suggested.
- The Council had carried out assessments for all those working from home and had funded the purchase of new equipment for employees home based.

- It was noted that home working, benefits carbon reduction and helps the Council towards its net zero carbon target by 2030. However, baseline data and carbon reduction figures was requested for future reports.
- The Council is challenging itself to be more effective and creative with how space and assets are used, as well as how services are delivered to Norfolk residents. New technologies were making this process easier but there is more work to be done to achieve the savings required.
- A report in March 2022 would set out the recommendations for consideration by the committee.

9.5 The committee **RESOLVED** to agree:

- Deliver ways in which the Smarter Working Programme can help directorates maintain the benefits realised as a result of the pandemic, including the commencement of the implementation of Hybrid working.
- Acknowledge the ongoing savings programme in the 2021/22 financial year and steps that have been taken to maintain the financial benefits and positive service outcomes of the Smarter Working Programme.
- Endorse the proposed approach to be taken over the next 4 months in shaping phase 2 of the Smarter Working Programme, given the uncertainty due to the pandemic that continues to impact our ability to plan with confidence and certainty.
- That a further report be made to the Corporate Select Committee, with an updated plan that takes our transformation forward into Phase 2, in March 2022.

10.0 **Strategic & Financial Planning 2022-23**

10.1 The annexed report (10) by the Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services was received. The report was introduced by Cabinet Member for Finance.

10.2 This report provided an opportunity for the Committee to provide its views on the detailed budget proposals for the services within its remit which are being taken forward to public consultation, following Cabinet decisions undertaken on 8 November 2021. As such the report forms an important part of the budget setting process for 2022-23 and enabled the Select Committee's views on proposals to form part of the Cabinet's considerations when it makes recommendations about the Budget to Full Council in February 2022.

10.3 The committee discussed and noted the following in response to member's questions:

- Although central government had announced an additional £4.8bn of spending for local government, the details of how much would be received by the County Council was presently unclear. This was a settlement over a three year period (£1.6bn a year, non indexed) and this packaged timeline was welcomed to provide stability for the Council's finances and strategy.
- The budget proposals for 2022/23 included £24.5m of new savings, with a need for an additional £5m of new savings yet undecided, and a Council Tax increase of 3%

- The level of new savings required were wholly intertwined with initiatives such as Independence at Home and the Smarter Working Programme which had been detailed earlier in the meeting.
- The Government had not yet undertaken the long awaited Fair Funding Review which is felt would benefit Norfolk due its demographics of an aging population. In addition, business rates review and extensions to Covid grants were also outstanding pieces of central government work.
- The Government is expected to make an announcement on 16th December 2021 to provide more clarity on spending and funding reviews.
- The three year settlement does provide the Council with an opportunity to look more closely at a transformative review of operations and how services are delivered to develop a medium to longer term strategy.
- A strategic approach for Norfolk should be formed to ensure the bids for funding from the Share Prosperity Fund are successful, so that Norfolk benefits from the central government levelling up agenda.
- The recent announced increase in National Insurance contributions of 1.25% did not solve the adult social care funding worries as the NHS would take the lion's share of the additional cash generated for the first 2 years.
- The County Council would receive a 2% Adult Social Care precept raise as 1% had been deferred from the previous year.
- The proposed longer term goals of £108m savings by 2025/26 would only be achievable if a wholesale review and transformation of the delivery of services and functions was carried out. The initial stages of these reviews have shown promise but there is much work to do.
- The £330m spent on adult social care service contractors was a large sum that needed to be reduced. The £4m spent on contract management was an area that the County Council had been slow to examine and reduce and would be an item to focus on in the short term.
- The burden of taxation was being switched by central government to local authorities. However, there was not always the extra support in funding to manage this transition. Local authorities were being left to deal with the demographic challenges themselves.
- NP Law did have the capability to increase their services to other local authorities to produce an increase in their income.
- The recent Cabinet paper on environmental policy had underlined the Council's commitment to carbon neutrality and progress has been made, but there is much work to do. Carbon reduction can be sought through a proper procurement policy.
- Although 50% of the Council's streetlighting stock had been converted to more energy efficient LEDs, there was a programme being undertaken to ensure all lighting is switched. The remainder of the programme would be more challenging to switch than the first 50% of the stock.
- Renewable energy generation is not an area that has been maximised by the Council but could be considered in line with other local authorities.
- It was thought that consideration could be given to commercial investment ideas in Norfolk to produce income and help smooth out the potential increases in Council Tax to Norfolk residents and reduce the need to find a further £5m in savings. This was a proposition that had not been explored by the Council before in much detail. A proposal for such a joint report from

the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Deputy Leader was seconded and was agreed that it would be placed as an item on the forward work programme.

10.4 The Committee **RESOLVED** to agree to:

1. To note the key issues for the budget proposals for the services within its remit which are being taken forward to public consultation, to inform Cabinet's recommendations to County Council on the 2022-23 Budget in February 2022.
2. To note the requirement for a further £5m savings, and identify any further areas which the Select Committee consider should be explored to deliver 2022-23 saving proposals.

11. **Constitutional Amendments – Policy Framework and Local Choice Functions**

11.1 The annexed report (11) was received and introduced by the Director of Governance.

11.2 The report appeared in two parts. The first part of the paper set out the local choice functions applicable to County Council decision making and suggested who the decision maker should be. The second part of the paper is concerned with the policy framework. The content of the major policy framework had recently been reviewed by Executive Directors, as a result of which, changes had been recommended.

11.3 The committee **RESOLVED** to agree:

1. The local choice functions and decision maker and **recommend** these to Full Council
2. The policy framework list and **recommend** this to Full Council

12. **Financial Regulations 2021 Update**

The annexed report (12) from Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services was received and introduced by the Cabinet Member for Finance.

12.1 The Financial Regulations are reviewed and updated on an annual basis to ensure that they remain up to date, aligned with current systems and processes, and compliant with statutory requirements. The paper appended the Financial Regulations with amendments proposed following the annual review exercise.

12.2 The committee noted that changes to the regulations were required due to the environmental report received by Cabinet on 8th November. The cost benefit analysis matrix formula was being developed. This was seen as a starting point to take into account current projects, which if recalculated, might place a greater emphasis on the carbon neutrality benefits.

12.3 The committee **RESOLVED** to agree:

1. The proposed amendments to Financial Regulations and **recommend** these to Full Council.

2. The further amendments which would be required subject to Cabinet decisions in respect of the Natural Norfolk: Progress on delivering the Environmental Policy report and **recommend** these to Full Council.

13. **Corporate Select Committee Forward Work Plan**

13.1 The annexed note (13) by the Executive Director of Strategy and Governance was received.

13.2 The committee **RESOLVED** to agree the forward work programme and add the following items:

1. Update on Digital Connectivity for March 2022

2. Report on Economic Development Opportunities in Norfolk to reduce the saving requirement for 2022/23 of an additional £5m and budgets gaps in the future. The time line of the report to be agreed in due course by the Chair, Cabinet Members involved and Officers.

Meeting concluded at 4.41pm