



SOUTH NORFOLK SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the South Norfolk Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk Council, held on Thursday, 9 May 2024 at 10.00 am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: J Rowe (Chairman), T Laidlaw (Vice-Chair), B Bernard, K Cross, T Graham and J Overton

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: J Cork and D Thompson

Substitute: Councillors: K Murphy (In place of D Thompson) and D Sacks (In place of J Cork)

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: G Minshull

Officers in Attendance: C Lawrie (Assistant Director of ICT/Digital and Transformation), E Hodds (Chief of Staff), M Pursehouse (Assistant Director of Individuals and Families), R Dunsire (Head of Housing and Benefits), K Gallagher (Help Hub and Communities Senior Manager) and L Palmer (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in Attendance: T Breame (Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) M Rosen, J McCloskey and J Webber

1380. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr J Cork, with Cllr D Sacks as substitute and Cllr D Thompson with Cllr K Murphy as substitute.

1381. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

1382. MINUTES

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 1 February 2024, 15 February 2024 and 4 April 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

1383. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

The Chair expressed his gratitude to those members on the Task and Finish Group for the work they had undertaken on behalf of the scrutiny committee.

Cllr D Sacks, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, presented the report. She thanked officers for their time and detailed insight into the services of the Council and highlighted some key findings.

She referred to the Medium Term Financial Plan and said that the Council was well managed financially, with the right information being presented to Cabinet, although interim reports would be helpful to further aid financial monitoring.

The Task and Finish Group had noted that there was a lack of environmental data being collected by national agencies and suggested that the Chair should write to the Environment Agency to highlight this.

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) surrounding sports and leisure focused on membership of leisure centres in the area and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group said that this measure should be widened to monitor the health of the population in South Norfolk.

The Assistant Director for Transformation and ICT and Digital added that the work of the Task and Finish Group was also to look at historic performance and targets, to understand if those strategic targets were being met, and whether the baseline measures needed to be changed. Officers felt that the recommendations were accurate and would improve the strategic measure set.

A member referred to the capital budget and the separation of ongoing council business and projects that were awaiting approval. He suggested that the capital budget should be split into those projects both necessary for the ongoing work of the council and core to the performance of the revenue budget, and those that were aspirational.

The Assistant Director for Transformation and ICT and Digital replied that the capital programme would always see movement due to some projects being reliant on partners and all projects needed to have a degree of flexibility.

A member commented that a document outlining each of the KPIs in detail could be made available, to allow members to develop a deeper understanding of the indicators.

In response to a question, the Assistant Director for Transformation and ICT and Digital clarified that there was no change recommended to the measure 'Reduction of residual waste collected per household' but a change of description was recommended to better explain what the indicator was measuring.

A member asked for clarity on what Scope 1, 2 and 3 meant in the context of the report. It was noted that broadly, Scope 1 emissions were direct emissions from council activity, Scope 2 emissions were emissions created indirectly by the council and Scope 3 emissions were emissions created indirectly by the council by factors out of its control. The Assistant Director of Transformation and ICT and

Digital said that she would ask for a definitive definition to be circulated to members of the committee.

A member referred to the outcome of an audit of the Help Hub service, which recommended that the council developed its own software to collate data and asked for an update on this. The Assistant Director for Individuals and Families replied that work was underway on a system but appropriate data was already being collected.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the Scrutiny Committee recommend that Council agree the recommendations, as set out in section 6 of this report.
2. To recommend that officers produce report outlining how the KPIs are produced which is circulated to all councillors.
3. To recommend that the Chair of Scrutiny writes to Natural England and the Environment Agency regarding access to data.

1384. FUTURE DIRECTION OF POLICY COMMITTEES

Cllr G Minshull, Portfolio Holder for Supporting People introduced the report. Assistant Directors and Portfolio Holders had liaised with the Chairs of the policy committees, as well as group leaders, to discuss the best approach to the future direction of those committees. The key focus was on widening knowledge and experience for all Councillors.

He highlighted the main changes to the Terms of Reference of the committees, set out at appendices A to D of the report, and noted that there were also changes proposed to the Scrutiny Committee terms of reference, set out at section 4 of the report, which would ensure that the work of the committees complimented each other.

Formal meetings would be scheduled four times a year with meetings being rescheduled to fit in with the work. A rolling work programme would be developed with an Assistant Director allocated as the senior officer for each of the committees. Informal meetings would be convened as needed.

The Chief of Staff said that the initial purpose of the policy committees was to review policies as the council moved into the One Team. There had been frustrations around meetings being cancelled and the purpose of the committees, which had led to the review of the terms of reference. The work programme would be a standing item on the agenda, and this would help to give direction to the committees, whilst improving openness, transparency and the specialist knowledge of councillors.

A member commented that she agreed with the analysis of the issues with the policy committees and felt that the report addressed those. She said that it was frustrating when the policy committees agreed recommendations to Cabinet, and these were not acknowledged. It was still unclear how Cabinet would deal with input from the policy committees. Members also felt that the titles of the policy committees were opaque.

The Chief of Staff replied that the Monitoring Officer report to be taken to the council's AGM would clarify the titles of the committees and align these with portfolio holder responsibilities.

Cllr G Minshull, Portfolio Holder for Supporting People, said that the Cabinet received information from various committees, which was always taken into consideration. If there was additional information that a member wanted to highlight, he invited Councillors to contact the relevant cabinet member.

A member commented that the policy committees put a lot of work into the recommendations to Cabinet and she would be very disappointed if they were not acknowledged. She suggested that if cabinet wished to see any further changes to a policy, these should be brought back to the policy committees. Cllr G Minshull, Portfolio Holder for Supporting People, reassured the committee that cabinet had trust that the committees were highlighting well thought out and detailed recommendations.

In response to a question from a member on the cancellation of policy committee meetings, the Chief of Staff said that meetings were only cancelled with the agreement of the Chair of the policy committee when the lead Assistant Director had identified that there was no business to be discussed. The implementation of a work programme, which would be driven by the delivery plan, should give an early idea of the workload of the committee and the best timings for the four formal meetings.

A member questioned how the committees would input into the work programme. The Chief of Staff explained that the outline work programme would be developed by the lead Assistant Director and the Chair but would also be a standing item on each agenda, to allow the committee to consider the ongoing work programme.

A member suggested that he would like to see a statement in the cabinet report, which recognised that the policy committee had considered the item and set out any further recommendations to cabinet. This would reinforce the relationship between the policy committees and cabinet.

A member referred to point 4.3 of the report, which highlighted that no changes were suggested to the Finance, Resources, Audit and Governance (FRAG) committee and said that he would like to see reviews of the council's budget and performance monitoring added. The Chief of Staff replied that although she was not suggesting any changes to the FRAG terms of reference, the Head of Internal Audit was considering these in conjunction with best practice guidance from CIPFA. A proposal would be brought forward in due course.

It was noted that within the body of the report, there was a suggestion that the

committees should routinely monitor Key Performance Indicators and it was agreed that this should be included within the terms of reference to formalise this item.

It was

RESOLVED

That Scrutiny Committee recommends to officers to take forward proposals for the Cabinet Policy Committees, as detailed in appendices A to D of the report, subject to adding to the terms of reference to routinely monitor Key Performance Indicators in the thematic areas.

1385. CALL IN - POLICY FOR RESIDENTS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

The Chair welcomed officers and Tabatha Breame from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to the meeting.

He invited Cllr M Rosen and Cllr D Sacks to address the committee and outline the reasons for their call in of the item.

Cllr M Rosen said that he appreciated the work that officers had put into the policy and the call in was not to criticise but to strengthen the final document. He highlighted the second point of the call in, which referred to the support for children and families and said that he felt that the resource was directed toward high need cases and not enough towards prevention. Families were falling below the high threshold for support. Cllr Sacks added that she felt that the report could also benefit from some clarity on the figures quoted and background information around service delivery.

The Chair invited the officers and Tabatha Breame to take each of the five call in reasons in turn and comment on them before taking questions from members.

To consider the response to perpetrators and how the policy contributes to reducing offending

The Head of Housing and Benefits said that section four of the policy, perpetrator management, outlined the Councils response to domestic abuse perpetrators and how those behaviours would be addressed. This was a Norfolk wide issue, and a strategic response was needed, whilst the council continued to be a strong influence and lead.

Tabatha Breame added that there were perpetrator intervention programmes available which were shown to reduce offending. These programmes also ensured the safety of victims whilst the perpetrator was attending the programme. The higher-level programme was 26 weeks long and although it was resource intensive, it led to better outcomes.

Training from the Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS) was

available, and it was noted that the council was working on a business case for specialist training.

To consider further the support for children, families and how it enables continuity for their social networks and community integration as well as the educational needs referred to in the policy.

The Health and Wellbeing Manager explained that this was a very complex issue and the council worked alongside a variety of partners, including the Police, NIDAS and Children's Services.

The emotional impact of domestic abuse was significant and where families were moved, officers would work to support children within their new school. Work was also carried out in the community, as positive role models for children could mitigate some of the effects of domestic abuse. The council's Community Connectors were based in GP surgeries and could provide support for children.

The council also gave a grant to NIDAS which funded a Domestic Abuse Adviser to build connections with families and help children to process their experiences.

To consider further a broad view of the policies that have been brought together in this new policy to ensure that nothing significant has been diluted or missed and that every opportunity has been taken to strengthen the council's approach. Did the council use experts with experience in developing policies?

The Head of Housing and Benefits explained that the policy had been written by a very experienced Policy Officer and was completed in conjunction with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA). The officer had also attended training courses and worked closely with NIDAS. The policy included a two-year review period.

Whilst it has been suggested little to no impact on current service, is this a missed opportunity to review the council's practice in light of the new policy? Is this an opportunity to strengthen support and extend the services provided?

The Head of Housing and Benefits commented that this showed the amazing work of the Help Hub and the policy was about alignment of work, rather than structures. The appropriate structures were already in place to ensure that the policy could be implemented within existing resources.

What has been considered in relation to those from minority communities included refugees and asylum seekers, where domestic abuse is recognised to be a concern.

The Head of Housing and Benefits said that housing data on minority communities was collected, along with a Domestic Abuse Champion working within the People from Abroad Team. Within Norfolk, DAHA led a working group around this issue and the council had signed up to UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter.

The Chair thanked officers for their comments and took questions from members.

A member said that data showed that children affected by trauma before the age of 5, could have permanent damage to their brains, therefore this was a lifelong issue. The burden of experience would stay with the child and she asked for reassurance that support would be provided for children, no matter where the initial trauma took place. She also felt that mandatory mental health counselling should be given to victims of domestic abuse.

The Health and Wellbeing Senior Manager replied that the council worked closely with partners and the Help Hub was available for anyone within the district. It was not within the gift of the council to offer support in perpetuity, but immediate circumstances could be dealt with. The Head of Housing and Benefits added that the policy needed to ensure that residents felt comfortable approaching the council for help, without placing mandatory restrictions on that help.

(The Head of Housing and Benefits left the meeting at this point)

Tabatha Breame explained that domestic abuse went hand in hand with wellbeing and mental health support was not as prevalent as it should be. Part of the work of all of the Domestic Abuse Advisers was to help to contain wellbeing, until mental health services were available.

Cllr M Rosen commented that the policy referred children for appropriate support and asked whether the committee would consider adding into the policy that the council would advocate for all children and young adults to receive mental health support.

He added that he felt that the report should be returned to the executive as it needed to reflect the excellent work already happening in this sector. The council was a leader in domestic abuse support and the inclusion of more evidence around this would make it clear to residents what support was available. The Portfolio Holder endorsed the approach and said that the work of the Help Hub should be publicised to give victims the confidence to approach the council for help.

A member suggested that the appropriate policy committee could review the Domestic Abuse Policy and develop a further report to cabinet. The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families replied that the policy was a snapshot in time and officers were always looking ahead for improvements. He would be pleased to take the report to the appropriate policy committee for further work.

It was,

RESOLVED

To refer the matter back for reconsideration by the executive, with the following recommended changes:

- Add additional information into the policy around the offer of the Council and what work is already underway within this area.
- Recommend that the relevant policy committee conduct a review on what

- more the Council can do this in area in collaboration with our partners.
- Amend the section of the policy regarding children to ensure we advocate for additional support to children

1386. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted the Work Programme, Tracker and Cabinet Forward Plan.

(The meeting concluded at 12.19 pm)

Chairman