



SOUTH NORFOLK SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the South Norfolk Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk Council, held on Thursday, 25 July 2024 at 10.00 am.

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: J Overton and D Thompson

Officers in Attendance: S Carey (Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer), C Lawrie (Assistant Director of ICT/Digital and Transformation), R Fincham (Assistant Director of Finance), S Phelan (Assistant Director of Community Services), M Allen (Leisure Senior Operations Manager), D Goodwin (Communities Manager) and L Palmer (Democratic Services Officer)

1387. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr J Overton and Cllr D Thompson.

1388. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

1389. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 9 May 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

1390. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Assistant Director for Transformation and ICT and Digital presented the report, which provided an update on the progress of the Customer Experience Programme and sought the views of the Committee on the proposed member engagement and the draft key reporting milestones.

Members were reminded that in December 2023, the Council agreed to initiate a

Customer Experience Programme as a mechanism to achieve the aspiration set out in the Council Plan to *'deliver services that residents, businesses and communities say are innovative, efficient, and easy to use.'* The business case for this had included the following core deliverables and objectives:

- Improving the customer experience
- Generating efficiencies
- Improving the use of digital technology
- Improving the staff experience and access to data

The report was the first of a number of updates that would be brought to the Committee as the Programme progressed and included known milestones, The next stage of reporting would be for the formulation of the roadmap, and it was suggested that this be added to the Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme. This would be followed by an informal update advising members of the outcome of the procurement process for the platform. It was anticipated that a report on the closure of the project would be received in early 2027 and would outline the positive benefits of the Customer Experience Programme.

The report proposed convening a member User Group to help develop the Programme, by testing user journeys against specifications and providing feedback.

A member referred to the financial information in the report and asked whether the initial investment of £1.4m was over an eight-year period, or just the first three years of the project. In response the Assistant Director for Transformation and ICT and Digital confirmed that most of the investment was upfront in years two and three. Year one, funding for procurement and establishing the project would be provided from existing resources. The programme would run for eight years with anticipated savings of approximately £3.5m. The savings were profiled in year two (the first year of delivery) and would increase over the lifetime of the project.

In answer to a query about any changes to the initial business case, as approved in December 2023, the Assistant Director for Transformation and ICT and Digital said that the budget had been tested and was found to be sufficient and it was, therefore, unlikely that the project would be over budget. She added that the reduction in full time posts did not necessarily mean redundancies would be made, but instead could result in resources being redeployed.

It was confirmed that the savings generated by the Programme would be split between South Norfolk and Broadland, with one website being developed for both Councils.

In answer to a query about support for those who were less confident with technology, the Assistant Director of Transformation and ICT and Digital confirmed that the more traditional routes of telephone and face to face contact would still be available for those who could not engage digitally. It was emphasised that there would be a record of contact no matter which route the customer had taken.

Members discussed the proposal of forming a User Group and it was

recommended that the Group be made up of approximately six members with a range of digital skills.

It was,

RESOLVED:

1. To convene a member user group to test user journeys and provide feedback on development of the Customer Experience Platform.
2. That the Scrutiny Committee adds a review of key milestone one – Roadmap for Customer Journey mapping – to its work programme to allow for input into the proposed draft document. This would be added to the meeting on the 24 October 2024.
3. To note that an informal update on the result of the procurement process will be circulated via email to members.

1391. SCRUTINY REVIEW - OVERVIEW OF PROCUREMENT

The Assistant Director of Finance presented the report. The item had been added to the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme in response to a TOPIC form being received from a member of the Committee.

Members were informed that the Council's Contract Procedures worked alongside the Public Contract Regulations, to ensure transparency and that no suppliers were discriminated against in the procurement process.

The Committee was also advised that legislation surrounding procurement was due to be changed and would simplify processes and give the Council more flexibility, whilst increasing transparency.

The Council purchased a wide variety of goods and services so having some flexibility around the procurement processes was helpful. For values below £20,000, a light touch approach was taken with one quote being obtained and officers considering whether it represented value for money before proceeding. For values of £20,000 to £75,000, officers sought to obtain three quotes. It was noted that the cost should reflect the lifetime of the contract.

The Assistant Director of Finance highlighted table 4.5 within the report, which set out the Council's general procedure approach for low value procurement and explained the various frameworks available to the Council, which officers could use to assess bids for specific pieces of work. If more bespoke services or goods were sought, they would need to go out to tender with their own specification and criteria instead of using the frameworks.

The Chair thanked officers for the very clear and interesting report.

In answer to a query about the weighting given to local suppliers when procuring services the Assistant Director for Finance confirmed that the Council had to be

transparent at the start of the procurement process and be clear if it was looking for the supplier with the lowest cost. There was also a balance to be struck between cost and quality depending upon the service or item being procured. The levels of weighting were fairly standard across Norfolk Councils, although processes could differ slightly for lower value contracts.

In response to a member's question, the Assistant Director for Finance explained that larger value items were brought to members for decision. For lower value contracts, individual contract managers would make the final decision on the procurement, whilst working to their departmental budgets and conscious that public money was being spent and decisions were published for transparency. It was emphasised that members had influence over the Contract Procedure Rules to ensure that Council priorities were built into the procurement processes, such as procuring from companies that had a carbon reduction strategy or took on local apprentices.

A member asked if prices could be negotiated with businesses once all bids for a contract had been received. The Assistant Director for Finance replied that to ensure equal treatment, all suppliers could be contacted to ensure they had understood the contract specification and had submitted their bid correctly. If no bids were acceptable, it would be considered a failed procurement.

In answer to a query about the procurement thresholds, as set out in the table at paragraph 2.3 in the report, the Assistant Director for Finance confirmed that these figures continued to be derived from EU regulations and therefore, were subject to an exchange rate.

Members discussed the importance of a well-written specification to start the procurement process and the Assistant Director for Finance agreed that the specification was the most important document in the process and confirmed that experts could be drafted in to advise, if needed.

In answer to a question about a direct award with no quotes, the Assistant Director for Finance replied that direct awards were not common, and a filtering process would be undertaken using the information on the framework to ensure the best supplier was appointed. Usually, a direct award would only be made if only one company could provide a particular product or service.

(Members took a short break between 11:10 and 11:15am)

Officers gave a presentation on the procurement processes surrounding the refurbishment of Diss swimming pool and the procurement of the Help Hub van.

The Diss swimming pool refurbishment work was procured using a framework as it was bespoke work which needed to be completed quickly, to open the pool as soon as possible. It was confirmed that the suppliers had been subject to a competitive procurement process.

The Help Hub van was a bespoke vehicle for which external funding had been secured to procure and run it at no additional cost to the Council. There were only four companies which were able to supply the specified vehicle and two of the companies submitted a quote for the work. As the procurement process

required a minimum of three quotes, an exemption was sought from the Assistant Director of Community Services. The Assistant Director of Finance highlighted that this was a good example of the flexibility built into the procurement processes to ensure that bespoke work could be awarded.

It was,

RESOLVED

To receive the report on an overview of procurement.

1392. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND CABINET FORWARD PLAN

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

(The meeting concluded at 11.41 am)

Chairman