

BROADLAND OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Broadland Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Broadland District Council, held on Tuesday, 9 July 2024 at 6.30 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: N Starling (Chairman), P Berry, L Douglass, J Emsell, M Goodman, C Karimi-Ghovanlou, E Laming, M Murrell, E Tovell, F Whymark and T Yousefian

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: P Bulman (Vice-Chair), P Newstead, A Tipple and S Ward

Substitute: Councillors: N Brennan (In place of P Bulman), S Catchpole (In place of S Ward) and L Hemsall (In place of P Newstead)

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: S Beadle, N Harpley and D Roper

Officers in Attendance: J Sutterby (Director of People and Communities), R Dunsire (Head of Housing and Benefits), R Fincham (Assistant Director of Finance), M Pursehouse (Assistant Director of Individuals and Families), D Slowther (Senior Finance Business Partner), N Howard (Assistant Director for Regulatory), Burgess (Assistant Director for Planning), S Phelan (Assistant Director of Community Services), S Carey (Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer), H Hall (Performance Lead) and J Overy (Democratic Services Officer)

126. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs P Bulman, P Newstead and A Tipple.

127. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

128. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members were reminded that Scrutiny Training was scheduled for Tuesday 30 July 2024 at 6.00pm in the Starston Room.

129. STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT FOR QUARTER 4 2023/24

Members considered the report, which provide an overview of the performance of the Council against the key outcomes set out in the Delivery Plan for 2022/24, for Quarter 4.

The Committee was advised that in Quarter 4 performance was good with 70 percent of measures on target and rated as green, 8 measures were amber indicating the target had not been met but was within the set tolerance and two were red, indicating that performance was below an acceptable level and remedial action was required.

In respect of the customer satisfaction measure, which had not met its target, the Strategy and Data Officer explained that the decline in customer satisfaction performance had been due to a delay with the supplier, which had prevented the launch of the customer satisfaction survey on the Council's telephone lines. However, this issue had now been resolved and surveys would be rolled out for the next Quarter. The data in the report was purely for the website and as it was an incomplete picture it had resulted in the measure being rated red.

The demand on housing measure, which was also rated red, had seen a far higher demand than anticipated due to adverse economic conditions, the implementation of new government legislation and a decline in the private rental sector.

The Council's temporary accommodation purchase programme was bringing properties into use to address this issue, which should improve the rating of this measure from next year.

The collection rate of Council Tax and Business Rates were both amber due to the implementation of a new Revenues Benefits system in December, which resulted in four weeks of downtime during the conversion and court recovery work being suspended. Since the new system had gone live, there had also been several implementation system issues. These issues had now been resolved and collection rates were now returning to expected levels. Members were informed that the Council collected about £100m in Council Tax and £30m in Business Rates.

The measures for the number of new jobs created in the district and overall employment rate showed a decline and was rated amber. Members were advised that the employment rate fluctuated significantly throughout the year and was continuously monitored to understand if it was an indicator of an economic decline, demographic change and/or changing behaviours. The Council was continuing to promote the Business Builder and Building Futures programmes to encourage additional investment and employment opportunities.

The measure for those in employment claiming Universal Credit was also rated amber. The numbers had increased but it was difficult to assess if this had an impact on jobs, as more residents were now moving over to Universal Credit from other benefits, which was likely to be the cause of the increase, rather than lower

paid jobs. This measure was to be revised to more clearly reflect the impact of Universal Credit on employment in the district.

The measures for staff retention, food hygiene ratings and the percentage of fly tips removed within one working day only missed their targets by a minimal amount and would be the subject of light monitoring.

Twenty-two measures were on target and rated green these included the number of residents accessing support via the Help Hub, which was exceeding the target and was driven by the cost of living and increased awareness, as well as individual projects that targeted support. A review would be undertaken to fully understand the demand profile so that proactive interventions could be put into place to help support people earlier and before issues escalated.

Participation levels in the Garden Waste Service had also increased, despite pressures with the cost of living.

In response to a query about cyber security, members were advised that a range of mitigation measures were in place. These included a third-party review, raising awareness of staff and members of the risk of a cyber-attack and the importance of adhering to the security policy and ensuring that staff and members are trained in cyber security. It was emphasised that it was entirely appropriate that that cyber security was a high priority given the risk that it posed to the Council.

In answer to a question about the original transitional costs of bringing together the One Team, the Committee were informed that this figure was in the region of £69,000.

A written response would be provided regarding the number of staff who had confirmed that they had not experienced bullying, harassment, or discrimination within the last 12 months, in the staff survey.

In answer to the query about the Garden Waste Service the Assistant Director for Finance confirmed that an error had occurred, which meant that banks had not been notified of Direct Debit reference details and had rejected the requests. The Council had communicated to the affected customers and resubmitted the requests for payment a month later. No resident's garden waste collection had been affected by this error. It was confirmed that in future a smaller batch of Direct Debit requests could be sent out to check for any discrepancies before the rest of them were processed. This issue had incurred some additional postage costs, as well as one month's loss of interest. The Assistant Director for Finance confirmed that he would forward the exact figure to members following the meeting.

In answer to a query about mental health it was confirmed that the Council had a range of measures to support staff. This included, Mental Health First Aiders and referring staff to occupational health support and counselling. Members were reminded that this was a national issue, and that it was becoming more common for people to feel confident about reporting that they were struggling with their mental health. The Council was conscious of this issue and, as a responsible employer, sought to help its staff have good and productive lives.

The economic indicators in respect of new jobs, employment and Universal Credit were national issues outside of the control of the Council, but Broadland was continuing to promote the Business Builder and Building Futures programmes to encourage additional investment and employment opportunities. The Chairman advised members that the Portfolio Holder for Finance was bringing an update to

the 23 July 2024 meeting on extending some temporary posts in Economic Development. It was also noted that any additional activities on top of those already being delivered by the Council to boost economic activity and support business was a political decision for members.

A member noted that vacant retail space was a concern that affected suburbs and small villages, as well as market towns.

The Chairman also noted that employment rates could fall if retirees moved into an area.

Members were also informed that the Universal Credit measure was due for revising, so that it could better demonstrate the impact the benefit was having on employment in the district.

It was also confirmed that 43 temporary accommodation units were being brought into use and it was hoped that more could be acquired through the Local Authority Housing Fund.

In response to a question about staff absences it was confirmed that this was usually close to the target figure and that staff absences were monitored very closely to identify if there were any trends or issues that needed addressing.

Members were advised that the Chief of Staff would provide a written response to a query about any linkage between staff absence, mental health, customer satisfaction and the Garden Waste Direct Debit issue, as well as some feedback on the PILOT management development programme.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. To endorse the Quarter 4 2023/24 performance (detailed in Appendix 1).
2. To endorse the current position with respect to risks and agree the actions to support risk mitigation (detailed in Appendix 2).

130. FINANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 4 2023/24

The Committee considered the report from the Senior Finance Business Partner, which summarised the Council's financial position for Quarter 4 and the final year end position.

Members were advised that over the year inflation and increased demand on services had led to cost pressures. However, the impact of the cost pressures had been offset by savings in other areas, and by buoyant investment income.

The revenue outturn figures showed an improved position with the final year end position showing an adverse variance of £63,000 on the cost of core services. This had been offset by the performance of investment income which was £831,000 above budget. The overall positive variance of £451,000 would be transferred to the General Reserve.

As at the end of March the Council had spent £14.571m on capital schemes in 2023/24, compared with the £13.693m that had been forecast in the Quarter 3 report.

Members were requested to approve a capital slippage request totalling £6,618,271.

In answer to a query, it was confirmed that public conveniences in Ranworth would be subject to significant refurbishment and there would be further works at other sites. Changing Places had also been positively received and some further facilities might be provided, if the funding became available.

It was confirmed that Broadland Growth Ltd had a budget of £3m for 2023/24 and a further £2m in the following years and that the company was actively looking at sites for development. When the schemes were worked up, they would be brought to Council for final determination.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. To endorse the revenue and capital position for year-end.
2. To approve the revenue and capital slippage requests for use in 2024/25.

131. ANNUAL TREASURY REVIEW REPORT

The Assistant Director for Finance introduced the report, which reviewed the Treasury Management activity during the financial year 2023/24 and reported on the prudential indicators on Treasury Management.

The Council's investments totalled £42.662m as of 31 March 2024, including £8.3m in externally managed funds.

Members were advised that the Council's Capital Programme had increased over the last 4 years, from £2.4m to £15m as of 31 March 2024.

The Council's budgeted investment income for the year had been set at £1,107,700. The cash balances invested, representing the Council's reserves, and working balances were £34.3 million as of 31 March 2024 and interest earned was £1,939,000, which was £831,300 over budget.

Security of capital remained the Council's main investment objective and there had been no breaches of the prudential indicators during the year.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. Note the treasury activity for the second half of the year and that it complies with the agreed strategy.
2. Note the 2023/24 prudential indicators for the latter six months of the year.

132. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW

Members considered the report of the Head of Housing and Benefits, which proposed the adoption of an updated Housing Allocations Policy following extensive member engagement, a consultation and legislative changes.

Members were reminded that the housing sector was undergoing significant and continuous change and to ensure that the Council's Allocations Scheme remained effective and relevant, it was best practise to regularly review the scheme and amend it to meet local need, new legislation and ongoing pressures.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Housing added that an additional recommendation was being made to the report to take account of the concern expressed about the removal of the family connection in the consultation. It was therefore proposed to retain the family connection for people aged 55 and over in need of support.

It was emphasised that there were other statutory routes for accessing social housing, which included accommodation for children and that the Policy being considered was for the discretionary allocation of housing for a very limited number of properties.

In answer to a query about the proposed amendment to the core policy, it was confirmed that carers allowance and attendance allowance would not prevent an applicant qualifying for a property. The Head of Housing and Benefits confirmed that he would amend the text to make this clear.

It was also confirmed that band D applicants on the Housing Register were important, as it was evidence of local demand for social housing delivered via S106 agreements. It was also confirmed that a report would be brought to Cabinet on restricting the allocation of S106 properties going forward to those with a local connection in perpetuity. A member suggested that this should be done sooner, rather than later.

It was also clarified that the proposed amendment reduced the family connection to applicants aged 55 years or older, to enable them to live independently with the support of relatives. Housing with care was another matter and the Council took a very generous approach to the provision of this type of tenure.

The Chairman welcomed the greater focus on accommodation for local residents and that there would be a Policy on this coming forward in the future.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Housing added that not all disabled people needed specialist accommodation and there were other means to support for them such as the aids and adaptations, which allowed them to remain in their own home and live independently.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. To recommend to Council the proposed Housing Allocations Policy; and
2. Endorse the proposed amendment to the removal of the family connection detailed in table 4.1 (page 96) as outlined below:

An applicant aged 55 or over with a family connection to Broadland District Council who has an ongoing need for care, and it is necessary to move to Broadland to enable the family member to meet this care need.

Further clarity to be added within core policy following 6.4.3 as outlined below:

An applicant will have a family connection where they have a close family member who has resided in the district continuously for at least five years. The family member must be responsible for the unpaid care of the applicant who needs help because of frailty, illness or a disability and they cannot cope without this support. Consideration will be given to the extent and frequency of the care required, the distance the applicant lives from the family member and what other provision of care is available to the applicant in their current locality. Evidence

may be requested to verify the relationship between the applicant and the family member, the care needs of the applicant and the length of time the family member has been resident in the district.

133. PRODUCTIVITY PLAN

Members considered the report from the Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer, which presented the Council's Productivity Plan in response to the Productivity in Local Government request, from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

The submission deadline for the Plans was 19 July 2024, but following the General Election the Council was awaiting a steer from Government on what the next steps should be. However, until then submission of the Plan would go ahead as requested.

Members were advised that the DLUHC required that Plans consider the following themes:

- 1. How have you transformed the way you design and deliver services to make better use of resources.*
- 2. How you plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.*
- 3. Your plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems.*
- 4. The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help reduce or remove.*

The Plan reflected the Council's current Policy Framework and had been drafted based on the Council Plan for 2024-2028 and Delivery Plan.

The Plan must be published on the Council's website and would be used to consider emerging issues, implications for future national policy design and the role of government in supporting further change in local government.

A member suggested that the Plan should be retained as a useful internal measure, even if it was not required by Government.

The Chairman agreed and added that demonstrating that the Council was making savings and cutting out waste was beneficial.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

- To approve the draft Productivity Plan for Broadland District Council.
- To delegate authority to the Chief of Staff (Monitoring Officer), in consultation with the Leader, to finalise and submit the Productivity Plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

134. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY ANNUAL UPDATE AND EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

The Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer introduced the report which summarised the progress made by the Council during 2023-2024 in complying with the duty under the Public Sector Equality Duty, as required by the Equality

Act 2010 and to update the Equality Objectives for the Council.

The report highlighted just some of the activities and work which had been undertaken by the Council over the last year to improving equality, serve the people of Broadland and behaved as a responsible employer.

The Equality Objectives had been updated to reflect the Council Plan 2024–28 and Delivery Plan for 2024–26 and showed the activities the Council was undertaking to achieve both the Public Sector Equality Duty and its Equality and Diversity Policy. The revised Objectives now included target delivery dates and lead officers to ensure greater oversight and accountability for delivery.

In answer to a query, it was confirmed that the INTRAN translation service remained available to aid in understanding the Council's communications.

A member noted the increase in over 65s and a decrease in working age people in the district, which could help explain the fall in employment already noted in the district.

In response to a query about the lack of representation of men in the graphic in the report, the Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that this represented a snapshot of equalities events throughout the past year, but she would discuss revising it with the Communications Team ahead of the publication of the report. The Assistant Director for Individuals and Families added that the Council's Health and Wellbeing Partnership was doing a piece of work on men's mental health, particularly those aged between 25 and 45, which was a group with some of the highest suicide risks in Broadland. The Council was also looking at mental health support for young people, which could be a particularly difficult target group to engage with.

It was confirmed that equalities and diversity training was available to members via the SkillGate eLearning Platform.

A member advised the meeting that she was concerned that the Horizon Building did not have a changing place facility.

Another member noted that much of the information in the report was out of date, as it used 2021 Census data, and it did not include under 16 year olds.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. To note the Public Sector Equality Duty Annual Report, as attached at Appendix A.
2. To approve the Equality Objectives for 2024 – 2028, as attached at Appendix B.

(The meeting concluded at 7.58 pm)

Chairman