

SOUTH NORFOLK SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the South Norfolk Scrutiny Committee of South Norfolk Council, held on Thursday, 1 February 2024 at 9.31 am.

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: J Cork and D Thompson

Substitute: Councillors: K Murphy (In place of D Thompson)

Officers in Attendance: P Courtier (Director of Place), G Denton (Assistant Director of Economic Growth), N Howard (Assistant Director for Regulatory), S Carey (Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer), L Chant (Food, Safety and Licensing Team Manager), A Sommazzi (Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager) and J Hammond (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in Attendance: Councillors: D Sacks and J Webber

1356. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

1357. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr K Cross advised the Committee that she was a Director of Big Sky Ventures Ltd and would not vote on Minute Item 1359.

1358. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 23 November 2023 and 12 December 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

1359. ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY AND DELIVERY PLAN UPDATE

Members considered the report, which sought to provide an update on the Environmental Strategy and Delivery Plan.

The Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager reminded members that the Environmental Strategy and Delivery Plan were adopted by Cabinet in March

2023. The Strategy and Delivery Plan outlined the ambitions and activities for delivery between 2023 and 2025 as well as the near-term actions the Council would focus on to drive forward the environmental agenda.

The adoption of the Strategy and Delivery Plan in 2023 corresponded with the declaration of a net-zero 2030 target across the Council's scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions. In response to a request to clarify the three scopes, the Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager explained that:

- **Scope 1** related to Direct Emissions which arose from the activities of an organisation and included fuel combustion on site, such as gas boilers and fleet vehicles.
- **Scope 2** related to Indirect Emissions from electricity purchased and used by the organisation.
- **Scope 3** related to all other Indirect Emissions from activities of the organisation, occurring from sources that the organisation did not own or control. Such as emissions associated with business travel by employees.

Discussion turned to the key activities which had occurred following the adoption of the Strategic and Delivery Plan. The Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager advised the Committee that:

- The decarbonisation and retrofit of three Council owned buildings.

A grant had been secured from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero for the delivery of a Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) work programme. The PSDS work programme was estimated to reduce the Council's carbon footprint by 288 tons per annum.

- Net-Zero Innovation Programme funding for the development of a biodiversity toolkit.

A pilot toolkit for assessing the biodiversity value and carbon sequestration potential of Council owned land had been developed and was being piloted by the Ground Maintenance Team and Community Asset Officers,

- The development of a Clean Hydrogen Strategy

Funding had been secured for the creation of a Clean Hydrogen Strategy. South Norfolk Council would act as the lead partner in the creation of the Strategy.

In response to a concern that members had not previously been made aware of the development of a Clean Hydrogen Strategy. The Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager informed the Committee that officers were in the process of developing a Prior Notification Document, which would be presented to members once completed.

- Carbon emission reporting and reduction

Emission reports were updated annually and published on the Councils Website. Since 2018 the Council's emissions had reduced by over 30%. By 2025 it was expected that emissions would reduce by a further 7% as a result of the activities currently underway within the Environmental Strategy.

Some members queried why the carbon emissions of Big Sky were not included within the Council's carbon emissions report. Members felt that as Big Sky was wholly owned by the Council, the figures should be included. The Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager explained that the Council followed the Governments Greenhouse Gas Protocol for reporting emissions. Big Sky and its activities did not fall into any of the three scopes of emissions. The Committee considered inviting Directors of Big Sky to a future meeting to discuss reporting their carbon emissions in the future.

Other members highlighted that Big Sky was a commercial enterprise and the Council needed to ensure it did not encroach on the duties of the Directors in running the business. After further discussion the Committee proposed to recommend that officers explored including information on Big Sky within the Council Carbon Footprint report in the future.

It was noted that Diss Leisure Centre was the second largest contributor to emissions, Members queried what action was being taken to reduce carbon emissions. The Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager advised the Committee that the heating of the swimming pool and the showering provision were the main contributors to the emissions. The temporary closure of Diss Leisure Centre would lower emission levels in the short-term whilst the installations of air source heat pumps, which formed part of the refurbishment, would lower carbon emissions once the leisure centre reopened.

With regard to the Ketteringham Depot, the largest contributor of emissions, members queried whether the Council would look to replacing the diesel fleet with electric refuse vehicles. The Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager explained that there were a number of interim measures that the Council was considering. One opportunity was for the Council to use Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil fuel (HVO) instead of diesel. HVO fuel could be used without the need to adapt the currently owned vehicles, the fuel was however more expensive than diesel. She added that longer-term the Council would look to have a mixed fleet consisting of electric and non-electric vehicles. The Director of Place advised members that were the Council to purchase new vehicles, it would need to ensure that the depot itself could accommodate the new fleet.

The Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager assured members that the Strategy and Delivery Plan would continue as a 'living' document and would be updated to ensure that it continued to address local priorities and opportunities.

It was then,

RESOLVED

1. To receive the report on the effectiveness of the Council's Environmental Strategy and Delivery Plan.

2. To recommend that officers explored including information on Big Sky within the Council Carbon Footprint report in the future.

1360. REVIEW OF EARLY INTERVENTION ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR OFFICER PILOT SERVICE - REVIEW OF PROGRESS

The Assistant Director for Regulatory presented the report which outlined the progress of the Early Intervention Anti-Social Behaviour Officer pilot service following its introduction in April 2022 and the future options for this service.

The Early Intervention Anti-Social Behaviour Officer pilot was designed to offer an inexpensive and beneficial extension to the existing Community Protection Service which dealt with neighbour nuisance, anti-social behaviour and environmental offending.

In order to monitor and evaluate the success of the pilot, five success measures had been pursued:

1. Volume of case work that can be resolved quickly and efficiently through early intervention methods

Approximately 50% of service requests had been pursued taking an early intervention service approach.

Despite the pressures caused by only having one early intervention officer in 2023/24, compared to two in 2022/23, the Council achieved a 57% resolution rate on the first visit.

2. Average time to first meaningful action

During the first seven months of the pilot, 76% of responses were made within three working days, with the most common response time being two working days. 95% of first responses were achieved within ten working days.

3. Average time to conclude each case

This year to date, 75% of early intervention cases had been concluded within five working days and 92% within twenty working days.

4. Customer satisfaction ratings and feedback

The early intervention approach had achieved strong satisfaction ratings. A short survey of customer satisfaction produced an average satisfaction rating of 9.4 out of 10.

Strong support had also been expressed from working partner agencies.

5. Service Impact

The early intervention approach had achieved remarkably positive impact ratings. The average customer reported service impact rating measured in

2022/23 was 2.1 out of 3.

Members praised the positive statistics which arose from the success measures and queried whether the statistics met initial targets. The Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that the decision was taken not to set targets prior to the pilot commencing, but to aspire to achieve the shortest timescales possible.

It was anticipated that over a longer-term period, the outcomes of the Early Intervention Anti-Social Behaviour Officers pilot service would be:

- Reduction in the prevalence and visibility of anti-social behaviour.
- Improvement in levels of safety and protection perceived and enjoyed by residents.
- Reduced service demand for serious anti-social behaviour concerns across Council services and partner agency services.
- Increase in community wellbeing and confidence.

Discussion turned to the routes available to raise anti-social behaviour complaints. In response to a question the Assistant Director for Regulatory advised the Committee that over 80% of cases were reported to the Council via its online form, which was designed to obtain detailed information regarding the complaint. This allowed officers to triage cases before contact was made. Members highlighted that not all residents were IT literate and suggested that a dedicated phonenumber be set up to allow residents to raise complaints by telephone. The Assistant Director for Regulatory was unsure whether the phonenumber was on the telephone switchboard already but advised that there had been no complaints regarding a difficulty in contacting the team. He agreed to explore whether improvements were needed in the contact routes provided.

With regard to future funding of the service, the Assistant Director for Regulatory explained that the Pilot had been funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, until the end of March 2024. Officers were investigating the scope to further the Early Intervention Anti-Social Behaviour Officer service beyond the current pilot. If alternative funding could not be found, officers would look to reabsorb the lessons learnt from the pilot within existing teams. The Assistant Director for Regulatory further explained that approximately 30% of anti-social behaviour complaints related to individuals/premises under the responsibility of Housing Associations, it was therefore expected that those cases would be referred to Housing Association Officers to mediate and resolve.

After further discussion it was unanimously,

RESOLVED

To receive the report of Early Intervention Anti-Social Behaviour Officer Pilot Service progress to date.

The Committee adjourned at 10.50am and reconvened at 11.00am, when all the Committee members listed above were present.

1361. REVIEW OF BUSINESS REGULATORY SUPPORT HUB PILOT SERVICE - REVIEW OF PROGRESS

Members considered the report of the Food, Safety and Licensing Manager, which presented members with a review of the progress of the Business Regulatory Support Hub pilot service following its introduction in January 2022.

The Business Regulatory Support Hub pilot service was introduced with the purpose of promoting accessibility, delivery and uptake by local businesses of good, well-received and influential regulatory information and advice. It was expected that the service would be a 'one-stop-shop' for specialist information relating to functions within Regulatory and Economic Growth, such as:

- Licensing
- Planning
- Commercial Waste
- Training (Carrowbreck)
- Economic Development
- Business Rates
- Food and Safety

One member queried how advice was circulated to businesses before the Hub pilot. The Food, Safety and Licensing Manager explained that each service area held its own expertise and would provide advice independently. The Hub allowed for a coordinated, single point of access for businesses to obtain support.

The Business Regulatory Support Hub pilot had a temporary break in operation between October 2022 and June 2023, as the initial Business Regulatory Support Hub Coordinator secured an alternative role within the Council. The new Coordinator was employed in June 2023 and additional funding was obtained from Economic Growth's UK Shared Prosperity Fund which extended the pilot by 12 months up to the end of May 2024. In response to a member's query, officers advised that a condition of the funding was that the Hub had a 2-day presence at Carrowbreck House each week. Members were further advised that, were additional longer-term funding to be secured, the presence at Carrowbreck would be reconsidered.

The Food, Safety and Licensing Manager explained that the pilot service corresponded with the Council's strategic aim of 'Protecting our natural and built environment'. As the Hub aimed to support the creation of new businesses it also linked with a second strategic aim 'Growing our Economy'.

In order to monitor and evaluate the success of the pilot, nine success measures had been pursued:

1) Carrying out service remodelling to offer a high-quality pilot service

The single point of contact hub with a dedicated coordinator was set up to offer a single, highly responsive contact point. Which freed up the Council's teams from the provision of standardised information and advice, to enable

them to provide more specialist advice and support where it was needed.

2) Gathering repackaged regulatory compliance information and advice in one place and efficiently offering it to businesses, both reactively and proactively

The first task of the Coordinator was to gather, organise and, where necessary, repackage the Regulatory services written information and advice designed for delivery to businesses.

3) Connecting up the various points of contact that business have with the Council and reaching out to offer the full range of support available

The Coordinator worked at length to explore, fully understand and develop connections between the different Council services involved with businesses.

1,000 letters were sent to businesses to cultivate awareness of their responsibilities regarding commercial waste. The letters led to 12 inbound calls to discuss current waste arrangements, as well as 2 offers of assistance to provide intelligence of suspected non-compliant businesses. The proactive approach helped to lessen the adverse impact of fly-tipping.

4) Maximising local business awareness and uptake of enquiry service

Marketing was delivered using Facebook advertisements, LinkedIn and other social media accounts as well as 'Nextdoor'. The engagement rate in South Norfolk ranged from 0.5% to 7%.

The Hub was also promoted at a number of local business groups and events, including:

- Business Breakfasts
- Local Flavours event
- The Royal Norfolk Show
- The Council's Business Awards
- The Federation of Small Business
- Norfolk and Waveney Wellbeing Service

5) Number of businesses in South Norfolk / Broadland reached during the pilot

It was not possible to count the number of businesses actively reached during the pilot. However, support and advice provided over social media and direct messaging had benefited well over 1,000 businesses.

The number of engagements per month had grown since June 2023, with a further 133 engagements receiving bespoke advice.

6) Numbers of businesses making use of the pilot service and information and advice

By the end of November 2023, the Hub had offered information, support and

advice to 320 businesses across South Norfolk and Broadland.

80 businesses in South Norfolk made contact and received tailored support and advice between June and November 2023.

7) Business customer satisfaction ratings and feedback

A telephone survey method was used to measure satisfaction ratings with the service provided by the Hub. The Hub achieved a 10 out of 10 rating across all surveyed businesses.

8) Businesses reporting positive benefit derived from using the pilot service

The telephone survey was also used to measure how much difference using the service had made. Responses were most commonly that the Hub had made 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of positive difference.

9) Promoting uptake of Council services, including enhanced compliance services such as business start-up support and pre-inspection support

The Hub service had connected Council services together in ways which helped to ensure a seamless experience for businesses using the service. The pilot had also been used to carry out limited promotion and testing of enhanced services.

Discussion turned to the estimated yearly cost of providing the Business Regulatory Support Hub service. The Food, Safety and Licensing Manager explained that the combined cost of the Coordinator's salary alongside service costs was approximately £45,000 per year.

Members recognised the important work of the Business Regulatory Support Hub Coordinator in supporting both new and established businesses within the district and expressed their support for the continuation of the service. The Committee suggested that officers reviewed the funding opportunities available for the Business Regulatory Support Hub post, in consultation with Broadland District Council.

It was,

RESOLVED

1. To receive the report on the business regulatory support hub pilot service progress review.
2. To recommend that officers review the funding opportunities for the Business Regulatory Support Hub post in consultation with Broadland District Council and to then take a report through to Cabinet should funding be secured.

1362. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME, TRACKER AND CABINET FORWARD PLAN

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

The Chairman confirmed that more TOPIC forms had been submitted by members. The forms would be reviewed, and where relevant added to the Work Programme.

Members were advised that the Task and Finish Panel had been set up. The Task and Finish Panel would review the strategic Key Performance Indicators detailed in the draft Strategic Plan for 2024-2028.

(The meeting concluded at 11.35 am)

Chairman