Minutes of a Joint Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Audit & Governance Committee held at Riverside, Lowestoft on Thursday, 1 December 2016 at 6.00 pm

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members present

Councillors A Cackett (Chairman), S Barker, G Elliott, T Gandy, L Gooch, P Light, J Murray, C Rivett, L Smith and C Topping

Audit & Governance Committee Members present

Councillors S Woods (Chairman), E Back, J Ford, I Graham, J Groom, C Punt and T Reynolds

Cabinet Member in attendance

Councillor M Barnard – Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms

Officers present

K Blair (Head of Operations), Claire Henwood (Director of Community Sport & Leisure, Sentinel Leisure Trust), B Mew (Accounts Contractor (Compliance)), L Rogers (Finance Manager (Planning)) and A Stapleton (Democratic Services Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Provan and N Webb from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and Councillors T Gandy (as she was sitting as a Member of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee) and A Green from the Audit & Governance Committee.

Councillor J Ford attended as a substitute for Councillor T Gandy on the Audit & Governance Committee and Councillor T Reynolds attended as a substitute for Councillor A Green on the Audit & Governance Committee.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Barker declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 5 on the Agenda – “Built Facilities – Waveney Strategy Document” – as she was a member of the Waterlane Leisure Centre.

Councillor T Gandy declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 5 on the Agenda – “Built Facilities – Waveney Strategy Document” – as she was a member of Sentinel Leisure Trust.


3 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 1 November 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
4 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN, RESPONSES OF THE CABINET TO ANY REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OR REPORTS OF ANY DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET

There were no announcements.

5 BUILT FACILITIES – WAVERLEY STRATEGY DOCUMENT

The Head of Operations introduced the report which sought recommendations to Cabinet for the adoption of the Waveney Built Facilities Strategy Document as a key driver for investment and strategic support for facility development, and for approval to deliver against the action plan set out in the Strategy Document. Three Members had worked with officers on the review, as part of a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, which was aimed to allow more in-depth scrutiny of a subject away from the main Committee.

The Sentinel Leisure Trust (SLT) Director of Community Sport & Leisure gave a presentation to Members outlining the key findings from the review, the overall objective of which had been to assess the need for indoor sports and recreational facilities in the District, and to set out the strategic direction for provision up to 2026 and beyond.

Data had been collected, and combined with consultation to obtain views on what was important to organisations in the District. The Strategy would form part of future business cases for any investment needed in leisure services, and would provide direction for future new developments by Sentinel Leisure Trust. The Strategy would also provide support to future funding applications to national and regional funding bodies.

Key issues outlined in the Strategy were presented to Members, and these included that:

- 85% of sports halls were located in schools;
- 87% of swimming demand was met by local pools inside and outside the District, and pools in Waveney operated on average at 63% of total capacity used. If a new pool was provided it would see a migration of participation from existing Waveney based sites;
- There were 12 health and fitness venues across the District with 486 stations. There was an estimated demand for an additional 250-400 stations, mainly in the market towns;
- There were 3 purpose built bowls facilities across the District;
- There were 5 squash courts on 3 sites; and
- There were 2 dedicated gymnastics centres in the District.

Overall, the assessment indicated that the facilities mix in Waveney was fit for purpose and met the needs of local residents, and the recommendations of the Strategy aimed to protect, enhance and provide facilities as appropriate.

The following questions and issues were raised during the discussion of this report:

- A Member referred to the Park Run along Lowestoft seafront, and to the summer use of the beach, and another Member referred to the pitches at Rookery Park and elsewhere in the District. Members were advised that the focus of this review was built facilities, however pitch and non-pitch facilities had already been reviewed and would form a part of the overall Leisure Strategy. It was also recognised that it was important to work with local businesses on the provision of resources.
- Any requirements for access to facilities for people with disabilities had been built into the assessment, for example the lift into the gym area at Water Lane.
- Concern was raised over the significant over-dependence on educational facilities not under local authority control, for example the squash courts at the Sir John Leman High
School which had been reduced to one, and the Council would have no say over whether this facility was removed completely. A Member added that the Council had previously helped fund these facilities, but no longer did so. Schools were in competition with each other, and sports facilities could be replaced by classroom facilities, and the provision of sports facilities was therefore not secure and did not give an accurate picture of provision. The SLT Director of Community Sport & Leisure advised that such facilities were a significant part of the facilities mix identified in the Strategy, and that she would flag up the fact that so many of these facilities were not under local authority control, and therefore not guaranteed for future use, with Sport England.

- Members asked that the first recommendation to Cabinet be amended to add the words: “subject to the sites within the Strategy being available for public use”, and that Cabinet be advised of the Committee’s concern with regard to over dependence on educational facilities.

- A Member queried the timescales to be added to the Action Plan and was advised that discussions would take place with educational sites and other commercial facility providers on timescales. The same Member asked whether the Committee could receive an update on progress, and the Chairman suggested that rather than bring officers back to the Committee, an information bulletin could be provided on a future agenda, which would enable Members to decide whether they wished to scrutinise the Action Plan further.

- Unmet swimming demand was assessed through a methodology which considered the number of people in a population, the number of people likely to swim in any given population, and metres of swimming lanes available. Whilst the study showed there was generally capacity available, there could still be pockets of need across the District. Beccles Lido was not considered as part of the review, as it was an outdoor facility. Pools also needed to be of a certain size to be included in the review. A Member asked whether there were any statistics from Waveney swimming clubs as to the use by them of the world class swimming facilities at the UEA in Norwich, and officers would look into this.

- On the subject of swimming, a Member commented that one reason for the success of the Australian swimming team was the availability of 50m pools. Such facilities were unlikely to be provided in Waveney, as the demand was not there.

- A Member felt that there was a need in Beccles for more indoor sports facilities, and that this should be provided in the Town Centre area. As the Local Plan was under review, he suggested that this would be an ideal time to include such allocation for sports provision in the Town Centre, and the SLT Director of Community Sport & Leisure would have a conversation with Planning Officers in this regard. Another Member added that a site had been identified in Beccles Town Centre for additional gym provision.

- The way people accessed sport had changed, and people were more likely to be involved in activities such as dance, park runs and activities in village halls etc, than to join a gym.

- The £43k budget for Lowestoft Ogogo was for the delivery of a Lowestoft based project which aimed to get people to access leisure activities.

- Waveney Disability Forum had looked at the public transport options for people to access leisure facilities as part of this project, as it was a significant relevant issue.

- A Member advised that the Beccles Town Council had had discussions with Beccles Free School with regard to a piece of land they owned in a densely populated area which could be used for sports facilities, and some funding was available for this.
A Member asked whether any facilities would be transferred to Lowestoft Town Council when it came into being in 2017, and was advised that whilst no built facilities were likely to transfer, some open spaces may be transferred.

**RESOLVED**

1. That Cabinet be advised that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee is concerned at the significant over-reliance in the District on educational facilities not under local authority control.

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET**

2. That Waveney District Council adopt the Waveney Built Facilities Strategy Document, subject to the sites within the Strategy being available for public use.


**6 DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND EFFICIENCY PLAN**

Note: The Audit & Governance Committee was invited to attend the meeting for the consideration, debate and vote on this item as it was considered that the Committees had complementary functions.

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2017/18, which provided a baseline forecast of income and expenditure, and looked at the overall financial climate. It provided a framework within which the Council’s overall spending plans would be developed.

Overall, this period and the long term Local Government financial picture was characterised by an increased shift towards locally generated resources, with an accompanying transfer of both risk and opportunity. The report set out the assumptions made in identifying resources for the MTFS period, and had been developed in advance of the conclusion of Devolution negotiations, and the emergence of detail regarding the Government’s proposals on business rates.

In the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016/17 the opportunity for local authorities to sign up to 4-year settlements covering the period 2016/17 – 2019/20 had been announced. Indicative figures had been used in the 2016/17 Budget and revised MTFS approved by Full Council in February 2016. In order to take advantage of this offer each authority needed to submit an Efficiency Plan by 14 October 2016. The Cabinet had approved an Efficiency Plan for this purpose at its meeting on 20 September 2016. Additionally, a response was awaited from the Government in respect of its consultation on New Homes Bonus (NHB), which potentially had significant adverse medium term financial implications for the Council, which faced a very challenging and uncertain financial position.

Two major projects which would fundamentally change Waveney and its financial position were the Lowestoft Community Governance Review and the potential merger of Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils.

The draft MTFS would be revised for future updates including those resulting from the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement, further developments in the Business Rates Retention proposals, the outcome of the NHB consultation, budget monitoring forecasts, and the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

At the end of the 2017/18 budget process, in February 2017, the Council would be required to approve a balanced budget for the following financial year and to set the Band D rate of Council Tax. The report set out the context and initial parameters in order to achieve that objective and contribute towards a sustainable position going into the major changes now planned for the medium term.
The following questions and issues were raised during the discussion of this report:

- A Member asked what the effect would be if the implementation of the planned change to councils being allowed to retain 100% of business rates income was delayed, and was advised that the Government settlement would cover any delay. Additionally, the Council was working towards self-sufficiency and income generation over the next two years. When asked why the income for business rates had decreased, the Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms advised that this was due in the main to large appeals against rateable value which had been awarded to premises and backdated. This showed that alongside the income from business rates, the risk had also been transferred to district councils.

- The £43k shown in earmarked reserves for Lowestoft Ogogo referred to funding received for a specific Lowestoft project.

- A Member asked where the projected savings from each of the key internal projects, plans and strategies set out in Section 4.2 of the Efficiency Plan could be found. The Accounts Contractor (Compliance) advised that whilst some of the projects shown were more targeted and should ultimately produce figures, others were an ongoing part of the more efficient management of the authority, so it was difficult to quantify specific savings and allocate these to each project. This was also a high level document, so such detail would not be expected to be seen here. Members, however, asked that forecasted savings for each project be provided to them.

- Referring to the Risk Assessment shown in the MTFS, a Member asked why the Lowestoft Community Governance Review (CGR) and potential merger with Suffolk Coastal District Council were not included, particularly as at Full Council it had been stated that Waveney’s Council Tax would not reduce as a result of the CGR, so it was a potential saving. The Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms advised that the document was based on the best information available at the time, and at the time of writing those issues had not sufficiently progressed to be included.

- Later in the debate another Member asked why a potential judicial review of the Lowestoft CGR was not included in the Risk Assessment, and the Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms advised that should such a situation occur, it would be taken into account at the appropriate time.

- The Chairman commented that it was possible for councils to become self-sufficient, as Sevenoaks Council had already achieved this, in part via a number of commercial ventures.

- A Member asked why the District Council Elections reserve was building up, when the next elections were not until 2019, and was advised that the whole of the earmarked revenue reserves were to be reviewed and an updated version provided in the final version of the MTFS.

- MMI stood for Municipal Mutual Insurance, the Council’s previous insurers who had been taken over by Zurich, the Council’s current insurers.

- A Member asked whether the Marina Theatre was to be transferred to any new Lowestoft Town Council. The Accounts Contractor (Compliance) advised that the Efficiency Plan pre-dated the Lowestoft CGR and would be updated annually and revised to reflect any project progressions as changes occurred.

- A Member commented that the rollout of Universal Credit was difficult to quantify and still under review, and the Cabinet Member for Resources & Welfare Reforms advised that this would mainly affect the Housing Revenue Account.

- The results of the Government’s consultation on the future of the New Homes Bonus would probably be received alongside the Local Government Finance Settlement in around 2 weeks’ time. The key reason for the proposed reduction in the scheme was to increase funding for social care.
Following the debate, each Committee considered and voted separately on the following recommendations and it was:

RESOLVED

1. That the principal assumptions and actions surrounding the baseline Medium Term Financial Strategy forecast be noted.

2. That the Efficiency Plan and draft Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.

Additionally, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee made the following resolution:

3. That the forecasted savings for the projects set out at Section 4.2 of the Efficiency Plan be provided to Members of the Overview & Scrutiny and Audit & Governance Committees.

THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7.40PM AND RECONVENED AT 7.45PM TO ALLOW THE MEMBERS OF THE AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE TO LEAVE THE MEETING

NB: Councillor Barnard also left the meeting at this point in the proceedings, at 7.40pm.

7 CURRENT POSITION OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman presented a report which reminded Members that the current position of the Committee’s work programme was provided at each meeting, in order for it to be continually reviewed by the Committee.

At the June 2016 meeting, the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2016/17 and beyond had been approved, and changed to a “rolling” work programme with agendas planned 2-3 meetings in advance and leaving space to be reactive to changing needs. The work programme showed proposed timings for individual reports planned, but was a live document and subject to change.

The current position of the work programme was set out at Appendix A of the report for Members’ review.

The Chairman asked that a question setting meeting for the Committee’s annual scrutiny of the Marina Theatre Trust be set for late January 2017. This should give officers sufficient notice to provide any information requested by the Committee to its March 2017 meeting. On this topic, a Member asked whether, should the Marina Theatre be transferred to any new Lowestoft Town Council, the Committee could still scrutinise it. It was also queried whether membership of the Marina Theatre Trust would become a conflict of interests in such case. Members were advised that the Committee had the right to scrutinise any services relevant to the District, including those not in the Council’s ownership, so should the Theatre transfer, the Committee could choose to continue its annual scrutiny. Any questions of interests would be dealt with at the time they arose.

The Chairman also advised that the minutes from the Suffolk Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting which had discussed the flooding of Kirkley Stream were now public, and asked that the report and minutes of the meeting of that Sub-Committee held on 10 June 2016 be included as an information bulletin on the next agenda. If possible this should be accompanied by an update on any actions taken since that meeting.

Turning to the items planned for the 9 February 2017 meeting, Members were concerned that, with the departure of the Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer at the end of the year, he would not be available to take part in the session on “Lessons to be learnt from the withdrawal from the Sanyo Contract”. The Democratic Services Officer was asked to
investigate whether it would be appropriate for the Strategic Director and Monitoring Officer to return to the Council to take part in that meeting.

Other reports which the Democratic Services Officer was asked to chase progress on were the Public Conveniences Review and the Progress Report on the Asset Management Service. Other reports to be brought to the Committee included: post implementation review of the introduction of charges for the collection of garden waste, post implementation review of the closure of Tourist Information Centres and replacement with Visitor Information Points, and review of the reintroduction of car parking charges in Bungay and statistics from the period of reintroduction in Halesworth.

RESOLVED

That the current position of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee’s work programme, as set out in Appendix A to Report REP1513, be noted.

The meeting was concluded at 8.00pm

Chairman