

Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
held at Riverside, Lowestoft on **Thursday, 14 March 2019 at 6.00pm**

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Members Present:

Councillors A Cackett (Chairman), J Ceresa, M Cherry, L Coulam, J Ford, L Gooch, P Light, J Murray and K Robinson.

Other Members Present:

Councillor Y Cherry (observer)

Cabinet Members Present:

Councillor M Ladd - Cabinet Member for Tourism and Economic Development.

Officers Present:

J Berry (Economic Development Manager) and S Davis (Democratic Services Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Beavan, T Gandy, K Springall, C Topping, M Vigo Di Gallidoro and N Webb.

Councillors M Cherry and P Light attended the meeting as Substitutes for Councillors T Gandy and C Topping respectively.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ceresa declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in item 5 on the grounds that she was the Deputy Cabinet Member for Tourism and Economic Development. During the course of the discussions on the same item, Councillor Ceresa also declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest as the County Councillor for Lowestoft South and also because she was a relative of someone who owned tourist accommodation and took part in tourism promotion events such as the Leaflet Exchange.

3 MINUTES

A Councillor referred to first paragraph at the top of page 12 of the minutes and stated that she believed that it referred to something she had said, however, she wished to clarify that she had meant she had been surprised people did not understand that arrangements for depreciation were in place given the situation had been going on for a decade or so. She added that the presence of so many members of the public from Southwold at the meeting indicated a lack of faith and trust in the Council.

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 February 2019 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

The Chairman reported that, whilst she had no announcements to make on this occasion, as it was the last ever Waveney District Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee she wanted to state that it had been very nice to work with Members past and present over the years.

5 POST IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE ON VISITOR INFORMATION POINTS

The Cabinet Member for Tourism and Economic Development presented the report which detailed the background and existing provision of Visitor Information Points (VIPs) following the decision to close Tourist Information Centres in January 2016. He reminded the Committee that they had looked at the impact of that decision last year and had then requested a further update this year.

It was noted that there were currently 20 VIPs signed up for the 2019 season and they provided local and specific knowledge of their immediate area as well as information regarding the wider District. The Committee was reminded that the District Council had previously been paying considerable amounts of money for TIC buildings and staff but instead there was now more money to put into towns eg Southwold TIC was in the town but most people went to the Pier so now there were 5 VIPs spread around the town which generated greater footfall. The Cabinet Member stated that this was not just about cost but also about getting a better and more informed service. He also pointed out that the service had Officer support.

Reference was made to the Lowestoft Wayfinder Scheme which included new boards erected from Sparrows Nest to South Beach to help people find their way around town more easily. The Cabinet Member pointed out that this was a new digital age with most people using their mobile phones and apps to access information which had resulted in most visitors to TICs generally only wanting to pick up a rail or bus timetable. He added that he had agreed to a full review after the first year and again after each season to ensure that the VIPs were still fit for purpose.

The Cabinet Member also reported that he was the Chairman of the Suffolk Coast DMO which was one of the most successful DMOs in the country and continued to be the main source of information for visitors. He added that Waveney still made a financial contribution towards the DMO. In addition, an East Suffolk Tourism Group had been set up, which he was a member of, with the aim of highlighting tourism given it was an economic driver and generated growth. He concluded that the Local Authority could not “do nothing” but had to work with partners to support them.

The Economic Development Manager reported that one of his staff had taken ownership of the service and met with VIP organisers three times per year, before, during and after the season. They also undertook a survey in the Autumn and £5K was available to support the VIPs in addition to fixtures and fittings to enable displays of literature. Resources were also made available to have a leaflet exchange to enable VIPs to promote local attractions. The Committee was informed that, as part of the survey, businesses were asked how having the VIP in their premises had affected them and the majority had answered that it increased their footfall even if people did not always make purchases and they generally wanted to continue as VIPs. The point was made that Waveney had previously had two TICs but now had 20 mini TICs and good feedback had been received about them. The Volume and Value

Survey showed an uptake in tourism and, although it was not possible to say this was completely down to the VIPs, there had been a definite increase. The Economic Development Officer referred to the fact that regular leaflet exchange events were organised and one was being held on 19 March at 4pm at Africa Alive if any Member wished to attend.

Clarification was sought on the number of VIPs given the report stated that 2 had closed. The Economic Development Manager explained that there had previously been 22 but two businesses had completely closed which left 20 operating as VIPs. He added that most of the VIPs had been participating in the project from the start and the model had already been adopted by Mid Suffolk DC and Diss, with The Waveney Valley area considering it as an option going forwards.

The Cabinet Member stated that the Council was keen to promote The Waveney Valley as separate to the town area as tourism was a growth area and rural places needed prioritising as much as the coast.

Clarification was sought on whether the VIPs were able to provide the same level of service as the previous TICs such as information on specialist accommodation. It was noted that in some cases the VIP providers had a greater local knowledge and they also had factsheets which included information about car hire places etc. The point was made that the VIPs supported the wider economy but kept everything at a local level. Whilst this was acknowledged, it was stressed that the VIPs were only a cost effective solution if customers were getting the same level of service

A query was raised as to whether the Wayfinder signage was a Waveney or Lowestoft Town Council project. The Cabinet Member reported that it was a Waveney project as part of the Lowestoft Vision Project and the boards had been created to direct people from one area to another within walking distances. Whilst the aim of the boards was welcomed, the point was made that some were not as readable as others eg the one at the top of the High Street and a query was raised as to whether a specialist in dyslexia for example had been consulted about the colours and the font size used. The Cabinet Member stated that, whilst he did not know if a specialist had been consulted, he pointed out that there had been a huge amount of consultation about the boards at the time. He added that he was happy to look into this further if felt necessary as the only comment he had received to date was that some people did not like the pink colour. The point was made that, colour was a matter for personal taste but the wording had to be readable.

Reference was made to the fact that the report stated that VIPs had reasonable disabled access wherever possible and clarification was sought as to what this meant and how many were compliant. It was reported that, at the time all the premises were visited, they had some levels of access especially those in public buildings, however, for those VIPs in smaller private premises it was possible that they were not fully compliant for every disability.

Clarification was sought as to the distance the Information Leaflets covered and if, when Waveney joined with Suffolk Coastal, they would cover the whole East Suffolk area. The Economic Development Officer reported that the leaflets on offer were the choice of each VIP and that was partly what the Information Exchange events were for as it enabled them to choose how local they wished to be. He added that it would be up to the East Suffolk Cabinet to decide on service provision in the future. The Cabinet Member reiterated that Officer support was still available and that the Council currently provided the leaflet racks. He added that rebranding had also been provided when the VIPs were introduced eg an A-

Board so that visitors knew where the VIP was but because of the boards' size it was a bit limiting as to what could be included on it.

A query was raised as to whether Lowestoft Town Council had been involved and the Cabinet Member stated that the Town Council had not existed when the VIPs had been introduced. The Economic Development Manager pointed out that all the rural areas were involved too not just Lowestoft. The Cabinet Member commented that tourism was very important to the wider community and it was important, therefore, that the Council helped businesses to help themselves working together in partnership.

The Chairman queried whether Officers were getting any general input from other local tourism groups and she reported that there was a workshop on 22 March at 1.30 for the Blyth Valley which she would ask if the Economic Development Officer could be invited to. The Officer reported that the Economic Development Team supported various groups which fed into the Waveney Business Forums. The Chairman also referred to bus services and she suggested that VIPs should be encouraged to carry them because timetables were now only available in libraries. The point was made that Suffolk County Council had PDF versions on their website which VIPs could print out or Officers could make them available upon request.

Reference was made to the signage around Asda roundabout and it was suggested that it should be made clearer on how to get to the seafront. The Cabinet Member pointed out that this was Suffolk County Council's responsibility but it would be possible to ask them to provide better signage from the tourism angle. The Ward Member indicated that she had been working with the County Councillor to get better signage in the area but problems were being experienced in relation to Highways. It was reported that similar issues were being experienced in relation to signage for the new Crematorium at Ellough. The Chairman reported that the Halesworth Tourism Group had paid for signs themselves because the County Council would not provide funding.

NB Councillor Ceresa declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest at this point as the County Councillor for Lowestoft South and also because she was related to someone who owned tourist accommodation and took part in tourism promotion events such as the Leaflet Exchange.

The point was made that Great Yarmouth had a cruise liner docking at their port and it was queried if this was ever likely to happen at Lowestoft. Members were reminded that the main issue for Lowestoft was the depth of the harbour, however, two cruise ships had docked at Southwold.

Moving forwards, the Economic Development Officer reported that a Visitor Survey would be undertaken to assess the Service at the end of the season and Officers would visit each VIP which helped build relationships. The Cabinet Member referred to each area being considered separately as to what was needed for example a VIP for Sizewell would be suitable, however, for Southwold which had far more visitors it might be more suitable to have something that was purpose built with additional facilities such as toilets.

In relation to signage to attractions, reference was made to the third crossing in Lowestoft and the Cabinet Member explained that a County Group was currently looking at signage so it would be appropriate to submit any comments to them.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the proposal to continue the Waveney VIP service for the 2019 season be supported, subject to it being reviewed in order to ensure that there was a wider East Suffolk service going forwards.

6 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

The Chairman asked Members to consider the draft Annual Report which had been drawn up earlier than normal because this was the last ever Waveney District Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. She added that she had really enjoyed being the Chairman of the Committee and felt honoured to present the last ever Annual Report before Waveney merged with Suffolk Coastal to form East Suffolk District Council on 1 April 2019.

The Chairman stated that she wanted to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank everyone who had participated in the Scrutiny process during the year including Officers, Members, the community and partners. She encouraged anyone who became an East Suffolk Scrutiny Committee Member to take part in courses to ensure that the Committee was effective and referred to the fact that the Committee would also have its own budget as Waveney had.

Reference was made to a Scoping Form that had been submitted in relation to homeless people following the Beast from the East and the Chairman stated that she could not comment on any submitted before she was Chairman but the process was that they were sent to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman but the whole Committee would decide whether to accept them on to the Work Programme. She added that Officers were looking at processes to ensure that if anything was going on in a Ward that Councillors would be made aware of it.

The Committee was reminded that as today's meeting had reviewed the VIPs this had obviously not been included in the Annual Report and, therefore, it was suggested that the Report be updated and delegated authority be given to the Chairman to approve it before it was published.

NB Councillor Rivett arrived at 7.05pm but took no part in the discussions or voting thereon.

Reference was made to the review of Anglian Water held on 14 June 2018 and clarification was sought on whether the resolutions made by the Committee had been followed up. The Chairman stated that she knew the Youth Council had received a presentation from Anglian Water on what they could and couldn't do. She added that, if Members wanted, they could make a recommendation to the new East Suffolk Scrutiny Committee that they invite Anglian Water to give an update presentation.

In relation to garden waste, Members were reminded that information had been presented to Full Council on this and regular updates were received from Norse as well as Sentinel Leisure Trust.

Reference was made to Members receiving a follow up on any motions to Council or Committee resolutions and it was suggested that one way this could be dealt with would be by having an update section at the end of agendas.

A suggestion was made that the East Suffolk Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider reviewing Enabling Grants to see where the money was being spread geographically and to determine if it was adding value to communities.

It was moved and seconded and upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED

1 That the draft report be approved and published, subject to the Chairman being given delegated power to approve an additional section covering the items considered at this meeting to enable the document to reflect the Committee's deliberations for the entire Municipal Year.

2 That the East Suffolk Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider reviewing Enabling Grants.

A vote of thanks was expressed for the Chairman, particularly in relation to the smooth running of the Committee whilst under her chairmanship.

The meeting concluded at 7.15pm.

Chairman