

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, Lowestoft on **Thursday 15 July 2021 at 6:30 pm**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Caroline Topping

Other Members present:

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Councillor Steve Gallant, Councillor Tess Gandy

Officers present: Katherine Abbott (Democratic Services Officer), Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Deacon; Councillor Gandy acted as Substitute.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

3 Minutes

It was, by majority vote,

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meetings held on 25 March 2021 and 20 May 2021 be confirmed as correct records

4 Cabinet Members' updates

(i) The Chairman invited Councillor Burroughes to provide an update on the strategic priorities for his portfolio which included customer services, customer access, channel shift, complaints, commercial partnerships, IT and digital transformation. This was the last of the first round of updates by Cabinet Members.

Councillor Burroughes provided the Committee with a brief presentation which outlined the challenges and priorities of his portfolio. In summary,

Customer Services

- Channel shift and demand reduction: One front desk, virtual call centres, 'My East Suffolk' online accounts, increased digital customer experience and interactive services
- Customer satisfaction: Data led service improvement, customer service dashboard, comments module, every contact counts, Customer Charter, and robotics
- Streamlined services: New software, customer service booking system, housing triage service, and, integrated service model
- Customer access: Virtual call centre model, managed 'walk-ins', digital coaching, proposed 'digital hubs', and avoiding digital exclusion

IT and Digital Services

- Digital by default: Upgrading and replacing systems (Citrix, Uniform), improving connectivity and doubling band width, agile working approach, constant and continual skills and training
- Lean and efficient services: Interaction across service areas, greater use of laptops and tablets, asset management, greater network management and capacity
- Effective use of data: Detailed intelligent performance management, Orchard Technology Housing Repairs, Food Safety team's data transfer, dashboard infographics, 'LIFT' project, and corporate dashboard
- District-wide digital infrastructure: Digital service integration, increased internet capacity, and digital communities

Commercial partnerships

- Providing value for money: Greater management and oversight of performance and cost management through improved service efficiencies, improved key performance indicators and service level agreements
- Increasing performance and improving efficiency: Greater use of digital technology, smarter working and data gathering. Intelligent routing of vehicles and detailed quality assurance. A 'challenge and change' mentality
- Creating growth and business development: Increase third-party business through the Joint Venture. Improve access and communication with Towns and Parishes, create greater social and community interaction.

The Chairman invited questions.

Councillor Gooch, with reference to the ambition to be digital by default, suggested this signified barriers to access for some residents in terms of literacy, skills, finances, technophobia etc., and asked how the Council could assist them. Councillor Burroughes replied that digital coaching would be available to help people go online. He added that a digital audit would create opportunities and, where areas of digital exclusion were identified, the Council would offer what help it could. Councillor Gooch asked if there were further plans to widen digital inclusion and, if so, what these might be - for example, she referred to residents for whom English was not their first language. Councillor Burroughes replied that translation services were available via the Council's customer services team.

Councillor Green said the channel shift had worked well at the customer services team at the Marina Centre in Lowestoft, but that the customer services team in Felixstowe

did not currently have the technology to enable channel shift; she asked what plans there were to address this. Councillor Burroughes replied that a review of customer access was proposed in order to make it the best it could be. The review would include real customer experiences and interactive screens which would connect customers to staff at other locations. Councillor Burroughes said technology would be used to advance how the Council interacted with its customers and to transform peoples lives for the better.

Councillor Topping referred to the number of complaints quoted in the presentation, 41: Councillor Burroughes clarified that this was for one month and most related to green waste collection and benefits. In response to a further question about remote meetings, Councillor Burroughes said these had contributed to a 60% reduction in the Council's carbon footprint and said that it was hoped a change to the legislation would mean these could continue.

Councillor Lynch stated that technology sometimes brought problems such as cyber attacks and asked how much more effort had been necessary to protect the Council's system, and if more and more would be required. Councillor Burroughes said the Council's firewall and security was the best possible and it regularly checked for any potential attacks. He added that the need to ensure the system was completely secure was always a priority and he referred to the phishing hook now available in Outlook.

The Chairman asked if Councillor Burroughes was satisfied that the system was sufficiently robust to cope efficiently with the additional demands of remote meetings. Councillor Burroughes replied that the system was very robust.

Councillor Gooch asked about the security of residents systems and referred to media coverage of large corporations who had had their details copied to formulate a scam; she asked if the Council could protect its residents' details. Councillor Burroughes said that the Council issued very clear advice to residents about being careful what they accessed on line. He said the Council's systems were secure but that, generally, there was a need to raise awareness of the dangers. However, he also felt that individuals also had to take responsibility for their actions too. Councillor Gooch said the Council would be liable if residents' details were stolen and then utilised in a scam. Councillor Burroughes said that Trading Standards issued alerts of scams and the Council then alerted its residents.

Councillor Back stated that the live-streaming of Council meetings had opened up its democratic business to the public and that the vast majority of virtual meetings had been 'attended' virtually by around 100 people, on average. He stated that this was good for open democracy and asked if remote meetings would continue so that public engagement could continue to be enhanced. Councillor Burroughes said he hoped so and that the Leader of the Council was working to press the Government to update legislation to enable this to continue. He added that, personally, he would be concerned if there were a return to physical meetings.

Councillor Green referred to the Council's staff who now largely worked from home and asked if the Council was ensuring they were able to do so safely and in accordance with health and safety legislation and requirements. Councillor Burroughes said this had been raised at a meeting with line managers.

Councillor Hedgley asked if the introduction of the phishing facility to report suspicious emails was being used by the Council's members and Officers. Councillor Burroughes said this was a very valuable additional piece of security which was being used, but not by everyone. He did not have the exact figures with him but undertook to provide these after the meeting.

Councillor Gooch if the Council's systems and hardware were fit for purpose in terms of what it had now, or planned upgrades. Councillor Burroughes referred to the successful upgrade to Windows 10 software. He added that the Council was well-placed to make sure it had the systems that did what was needed and wanted. He said the market and what was available was monitored but, equally, items would not be upgraded if they continued to be fit for purpose. Councillor Gooch welcomed this as it minimised impact on the environment when it could be avoided. Councillor Gooch also asked about the apps which the Council might require its customers to use and referred to the potential impact on the capacity of people's mobile telephones; she asked if the Council was able to safeguard against 'forcing' residents to upgrade. Councillor Burroughes said that a minimal number of apps would be used and that the Council would endeavour not to 'force' anyone to upgrade their technology in order to be able to use them. He undertook to get further details on the apps and to provide this after the meeting.

The Chairman referred to a recent social media campaign, by the Council, on how to recycle correctly and said that this and a significant majority of the Council's publicity was only online. He suggested there might be a risk of indirect digital exclusion as not everyone used social media and, therefore, some residents were not receiving important messages. Councillor Burroughes said corporate communications was not within his portfolio, but agreed that the Council needed to be mindful of this. *(Clerk's note: The Leader of the Council spoke further on this under his update later in the meeting).*

Councillor Green referred to the compliments, complaints and comments page on the Council's website. She suggested that it would benefit from examples of good practice and also examples of where a complaint had resulted in a service improvement. Councillor Burroughes said he would take the suggested improvements away and consider them further.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Councillor Burroughes for his portfolio update.

(ii) The Chairman invited Councillor Gallant, Leader of the Council, to provide an update on his key deliverables for the next six months. This update was the commencement of a second round of Cabinet Member updates and so the focus had altered from that at (i) above.

Before providing his update, Councillor Gallant referred to the earlier question to Councillor Burroughes on the Council's communications, which was within his portfolio. He referred to the use of social media to get urgent messages or updates to as many residents as quickly as possible; he agreed that not everyone used social media but the immediacy of it had many advantages. Councillor Gallant emphasised that those residents who chose not to use social media were not forgotten and articles

were placed in parish magazines, local newspapers and the Council's quarterly publication to residents.

In summary, Councillor Gallant provided updates on the following:

Delivery of the Strategic Plan: Review performance/risks of all five themes. Possible revision during 2022.

Maintaining an effective communications strategy: With Members - monthly bulletins, verbal updates, sharing of key Government/Suffolk Public Sector Leaders' correspondence, regular meetings with Group Leaders. With the Council's communities including town and parish councils – residents' magazine, tenants' magazine, social media, press releases, radio/tv interviews, consultations. With Officers – working as 'One Council', staff briefings. Supporting all Members to better represent their constituents

Progressing the Member development programme: Reaccreditation of Charter Status – interim review in March 2022. Review the induction programme. Councillor satisfaction survey. Review Member Development Strategy and how to attract a diverse range of new Councillors in the 2023 elections.

Community Partnership Board: To ensure it provides effective strategic support and oversight of the eight Community Partnerships and ensure that the Community Partnerships were an effective mechanism for maintaining/enhancing existing local connections and addresses local issues identified through data and insight

Supporting the Council's peer reviews: Virtual peer review of Community Partnerships in October 2021 focussing on membership, funding and outcomes. Corporate peer review (face to face) in early 2022 focussing on five core components - Understanding of the local place and priority setting, Leadership of place, Financial planning and viability, Organisational leadership and governance, and, Capacity to deliver

Raising the profile and influence of East Suffolk: Maintaining liaison with the district's three MPs. Interaction with other Suffolk authorities and key stakeholders. Liaison with/feeding back to central Government

Ensuring the Council remains committed to working towards its goal to be net carbon by 2030

Ensuring the Council's major projects are delivered on time and budget: Roll out of various LATCOs. Development of the former Deben High School site in Felixstowe. Towns Deal for Lowestoft. Flood barrier. Freeport East. Seeking to achieve the best for our communities in relation to major, national infrastructure projects.

The Chairman invited questions.

The Chairman asked Councillor Gallant, in a few words, to say how he saw East Suffolk Council being different in 2023 than it was in 2019. Councillor Gallant said East Suffolk was a fantastic place and that the change he was most proud of was the One Council approach which saw members and Officers working together. Councillor Gallant said

he hoped that would continue and become embedded as second nature for the Council of 2023 to take forward.

Councillor Back asked what benefits the joint bid for City of Culture would bring to the district, if successful. Councillor Gallant said the bid would bring benefits whether it was ultimately successful, or not. The benefits he referred to were an opportunity to showcase the district, to attract economic development and investment, to increase cohesion, and to raise the tourism profile. The criteria for the bid had been opened up and so was no longer a focus mainly on arts and culture, but also on communities and civic pride.

Councillor Bird asked for Councillor Gallant's thoughts on how the Council might be able to increase residents participation in the election process and so increase democratic legitimacy. Councillor Gallant said that, in his opinion, to get people to vote you needed to make them care - and to make them care, he suggested, you needed to either deliver great things or very poor things. Therefore, he said the Council needed to work hard to continue to deliver great things that would give the electorate reason to go and vote in order to have that continue.

Councillor Lynch said the Council's focus on the environment was important and he referred to several green projects already underway; he asked where Councillor Gallant saw further impetus to the environmental agenda. Councillor Gallant said the Council was committed to the environmental agenda and the environment was the golden thread running through everything it did. He referred to the cross-party Environment Task Group (ETG) which, he said, had been very successful in investigating issues and, he suggested, was a more effective approach than Motions to Full Council. He suggested that the ETG was the more appropriate forum to deal with the matters raised as Motions. However, it was for central Government to make the Council's efforts easier by relevant regulation and legislation.

Councillor Topping asked what Councillor Gallant hoped would be his greatest achievement when he ended his term as Leader. Councillor Gallant said that this would be ensuring the new Council was cohesive and effective in its delivery of many and significant projects. This, he said, had been achieved by team work by members and Officers and had not been slowed or halted by the pandemic.

Councillor Gooch said the full effects of Brexit might be hidden by the impact of the pandemic and asked what Councillor Gallant saw as Brexit's benefits and drawbacks. Councillor Gallant said the impact of Brexit was significant and across all areas - it had, he said, required a huge effort on the Council's behalf to set up a 24/7 port health facility, but the challenge had not only been met but done in an exceptional way. The impact on the local economy was not, he said, as great as might have been imagined in that the Port of Felixstowe's main traffic was not from Europe and so had not been significantly impacted upon. Councillor Gallant said the wider impact was around employment particularly in various sectors such as haulage, hospitality and agriculture where it was proving difficult to recruit staff. Councillor Gallant said that, obviously, it was not possible for the Council to solve this issue but it could petition those who were in a position to do so and also offer support to local businesses. Councillor Gooch referred to the City of Culture bid and noted the date for expressions of interest of 19 July, and to the need to then prepare the full application - she asked if it was possible

for Councillors to contribute to the fact-finding and evidence gathering aspects of this process. Councillor Gallant said the full application would include a lot of existing strategies and policies, that there would be a period of pulling the application together and a 'call-out' to members to make sure everything was covered - however, he said, clearly it was not possible to have 55 Councillors preparing the bid.

Councillor Hedgley asked what had been Councillor Gallant's worse moment as Leader. Councillor Gallant said the pandemic had brought many challenges but the Council had emerged and evolved. He said he was sad when a Councillor stepped aside before the end of their term of office. He added that he was sad when the Council drifted into political point scoring.

Councillor Beavan noted Councillor Gallant's earlier comments about how best to encourage more people to vote and asked if he agreed that identification checks at polling booths would not help as the problem did not exist, and, if the Government should be urged to re-think their proposals. Councillor Gallant replied that he did not agree - he asked Councillor Beavan what evidence he had for saying that a problem did not exist and added that being asked to provide identification before voting was not unreasonable if it helped to avoid voter fraud. Councillor Gallant added that he did not wish to rehearse the debate at Full Council on 28 July 2021 in response to the Question on the agenda. He stated that he had faith that the Government had examined the matter and proposed a realistic response.

Councillor Bird asked if Councillor Gallant felt politicians should continue as long as they were elected or if there was a point at which they should perhaps step aside. Councillor Gallant said that the key was that politicians remained passionate about their role, if a level of enthusiasm could be maintained then experienced politicians should continue to serve whilst elected, but they also needed to be self-aware enough to know when it was time to step aside.

There being no further questions, the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee thanked both Councillor Burroughes and Councillor Gallant for their full and informative updates.

Before leaving the meeting, Councillor Gallant said he wished to issue a challenge to the Scrutiny Committee. He said that he was a fan of the Committee because it could add value to the work of the Council and of Cabinet, if its reviews were efficient and effective. It was, he said, his observation that, at times, the Committee's remit was too wide and this resulted in what he described as 'scatter-gun' recommendations. He challenged the Committee to think about how it could hone in on the key issues of work and provide well-evidenced recommendations to Cabinet. He asked the Committee to look at one key aspect and provide detailed recommendations. In response, Councillor Gooch said she accepted the principle but that the recommendations from the recent review of waste management were detailed and focussed.

5 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee received and reviewed its current forward work programme.

The Committee received a draft scoping form, prepared by Councillor Gooch, which proposed a review of the NHS dental health provision in the district. Councillor Gooch stated that the Council had a duty of care to its residents and so it should do what it could to bring pressure to bear to seek improvements from the bodies with responsibility. It was clarified that, if approved, the review's findings would be presented to Health Scrutiny by Councillor Hedgley, as the Council's appointed representative. The Chairman reminded the Committee that, as a constructive friend, it was its role to suggest solutions and not to apportion blame. Councillor Hedgley agreed the need to discuss the matter and bring its thought to the attention of Health Scrutiny; the Health Scrutiny had, he said, also agreed to review the topic after the implementation of the new Integrated Care System. There was discussion of the suggested witnesses and agreement that they should be invited to attend either physically or remotely. The item was agreed and added to the work programme.

The Meeting concluded at 8.50pm

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Chairman