



GREAT YARMOUTH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes

Tuesday, 28 November 2023 at 18:30

PRESENT:- Councillor Williamson (in the Chair); Councillors Freeman, Grant, Galer, Hammond, Jeal, Murray-Smith, Robinson-Payne, Thompson, Waters-Bunn & Wainwright.

Councillor Lawn attended as a substitute for Councillor Mogford.

Ms K Sly (Executive Director, Resources); Mrs N Hayes (Executive Director, Place), Ms C Whatling (Monitoring Officer), Ms L Snow (Finance Manager), Mr A Chrusciak (Interim Head of Planning), Mr S Hubbard (Strategic Planning Manager); Mr R Parkinson (Development Control Manager), Mr D Zimmerling (IT Support) & Mrs S Wintle (Corporate Services Manager).

Councillor Wells (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, Licensing and Waste) attended as an observer.

01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cordiner-Acenbach and Mogford.

02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest declared at the meeting.

03 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 24 October were confirmed.

04 MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman asked for clarification with regard to recommendation (ii) on item 6, whether the financial breakdown was ready to be circulated to Members as requested. It was advised that this matter would be looked into and emailed round to Members.

05 2023-24 PERIOD 6 GENERAL FUND & HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

Members received and considered the Executive Director, Finance's report which asked Scrutiny to note the contents of the Cabinet report which was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on the 13 November 2023.

Councillor Galer referred to recommendation three contained within the report which had been agreed to fund the digital upgrade of the sheltered alarm system and he asked if there was anything in place to deal with power cuts. It was advised that any systems with alarms have a set priority on the network should power cuts occur, it was further advised that this matter would be raised with the relevant Officer and be fed back to the Committee via email.

Councillor Wainwright commented that the report seemed to give a conclusion very much based on the general fund with very little detail of the Housing Revenue Account. Councillor Wainwright commented that he had hoped that this would be shown to Members in due course, the Executive Director, Resources advised that work was ongoing with the Housing Revenue Account and would be updated in due course.

RESOLVED :

The Committee note the contents of the Cabinet report.

06 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT 1990 AND BONFIRES

The Committee were informed that the Head of Environment and Sustainability had been unable to attend the Committee this evening.

The Committee **agreed** following a proposal to defer the item from Councillor Jeal and seconded by Councillor Waters-Bunn until a future meeting to allow the Head of Environment and Sustainability to attend the meeting.

07 REVIEW OF PLANNING / DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

The Committee received and considered the Interim Head of Planning's report which presented an update on the on-going review of the Planning Department, specifically the Development Management Team.

The Interim Head of Planning delivered a presentation to the Committee which focussed on the current issues faced by GYBC as follows :-

- Staffing and capacity

- Structure
- Application numbers and backlog
- Performance
- Planning fees
- Planning enforcement

Councillor Williamson sought clarification on whether the £100,000 from Government referred to within the report was a one off payments, it was advised that Officers believe this to be a one off payment.

Councillor Wainwright asked with regard to the pre application stage and whether this was charged at the same rate as a planning application. It was advised that these were pre discrepancy fees and were based on a cost recovery basis. The Head of Planning advised that applicants were encouraged to use the pre application stage.

Councillor Wainwright further asked if Officers were to request an extension of time whether this could only be requested once, it was confirmed that there could be multiple extension of times applied.

Councillor Hammond commented with regard to the "have a free go" procedure and whether it would not be more simple if applications were to be refused that the applicants were then advised of appeal process rather than given a free go. It was advised that the Council receives no money from appeals. Councillor Hammond further asked if the department had any control of the types of application they could accept, it was advised that all application have to be received and dealt with.

Councillor Jeal referred to the pay scales of the Officers and the recent golden hello package that had been offered to try and recruit into posts, he asked whether rather than offering an incentive for 2 years why this could not just be factored into the salary and offered as a whole. it was advised that there was a need to create an attractive package to recruit although there was a also a need to ensure a budget was available.

Councillor Jeal asked if applicants did not submit the correct documents were Officers able to simply turn down these applications. The Development Control Manager reported that Officers had always tried to work with the customer, however he advised that now Officers were looking to remove the ability to have a free go if refused there was a need for Officers to look at negotiation protocols as it was acknowledged that removal of this facility would see some resistance from Developers.

Councillor Grant advised that he was concerned of the reputation of the Council when seeing significant delays in planning applications being considered as there was a need for the Council to continue to encourage a growth in housing stock, he referred to an application he himself had submitted which had taken a considerable amount of time to be considered. The Head of Planning advised that the teams were balancing the limited resource in place but that a future solution was to look at more ways people could self serve therefore updates to the website were being looked at to assist with this.

Councillor Thompson asked with regard to an out of hours service for enforcement and the need for this service as he commented there was currently no way of contacting anyone if any works were completed illegally over the weekend or out of office hours such as the removal of trees. It was advised that this would be possible although this would be at cost, and with the Council currently under financial pressure this was unlikely to be a service that could be offered.

Councillor Thompson further commented that whilst he accepted there was a need to look after Developers, he also felt that the public concerns should be considered at all times and he felt that if a policy was in place that did not permit the development then this should be refused.

Councillor Murray-Smith referred to the single Enforcement Officer in post and asked whether this was by design or was this a similar situation to the struggles of recruitment. It was advised that this was the only post for this area, Councillor Murray-Smith asked if this was not a risk by only having one person within that area of expertise. It was advised that although there was only one Officer in this post, there was expertise within the team who under delegated powers would be able to make decisions if this post holder was to not be available.

Councillor Robinson-Payne commented that there was a need to look at and consider growing individuals within the current team in order to try and retain staff.

In summarising the Chairman advised that the Committee :-

- Welcomed the Interim Head of planning's report and thanked him and his Officers for completing this piece of work.
- Notes the lack of Planners and the pressures of recruitment
- Identified the risk of only having one Enforcement Officer, if that post holder were to leave
- Note that website improvements are to be made to make the service more user friendly
- Commented on the need for consideration be given to an out of hours service
- Identified the need for the speeding up of communications within the department
- The need for upgrading of IT within the department.

The Committee **agreed** that an update report should be brought back to the Committee in April or May of 2024.

08 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

The meeting ended at: 20:10