

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission

Held at 6.00 pm on Tuesday 1st November 2022 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury (Chair)	Councillor Kevin Watt
Councillor Valerie Anslow	Councillor Philip Irwin
Councillor Robin Carter	Councillor Zoe McGhee
Councillor John Currall	Councillor Andy Mercer
Councillor Mark Dearing	Councillor Gill Mercer
Councillor Jim Hakewill	Councillor Lee Wilkes

Officers

Cornelia Andrecut	Northamptonshire Children's Trust
Mark Dickenson	Assistant Director – Finance & Strategy
Ann Marie Dodds	Executive Director - Education
Claire Edwards	Assistant Director – Finance
Colin Foster	Accountancy
Janice Gotts	Chief Executive – Northampton's
Raj Sohal	Children Trust
Andrew Tagg	Executive Director – Finance
Louise Tyers	Democratic Services Officer
Adele Wylie	Northamptonshire Children's Trust
	Senior Democratic Services Officer
	Leader of Legal and Democratic

Also in attendance –

Councillor Graham Lawman
Councillor Lloyd Bunday
Councillor Anne Lee

44 Apologies for non-attendance

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Geoff Shacklock.

45 Members' Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

46 Notifications of requests to address the meeting

Notifications to the address the meeting had been received from:

- Green Waste: Future Service Provision

Councillor Martin Griffiths

David Keller
Councillor Lyn Buckingham
Chris Stanbra
Richard Bowles
Councillor William Colquhoun
Councillor Jean Addison
Matthew Reay

47 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2022

RESOLVED that:

The minutes from the meeting held on the 4th October 2022 were approved as a correct record.

48 Call-In of Key Decision Relating to Green Waste: Future Service Provision

The Scrutiny Commission considered a report concerning the call-in of a key decision, relating to garden waste future service arrangements. The Call-in had been submitted by Councillor Anne Lee and supported by eight other councillors.

The Commission considered statements from several members of the public, regarding the call-in relating to garden waste collection and the following points were made

- Money generated by green waste collection should be utilised to combat fly tipping.
- Council Tax payment existed as the largest financial outgoing for many North Northamptonshire residents therefore, waste collection should be included within this cost.
- The Council's proposal appeared to be a disaggregation rather than harmonisation of services. Garden waste and food waste services should be harmonised, since 70% of food waste was compostable.
- The Council's predicted subscription rate for the garden waste collection service was not realistic, since the rate in East Northamptonshire at the time of meeting was only 31%.
- 9,500 local residents had responded to the consultation however, it appeared that these responses had not been considered by the Executive when making a decision.
- Implementing a cost service would not be environmentally-friendly, since it would most likely lead to increased fly-tipping and home burning of garden waste, as well as collection vehicles remaining on roads to collect the waste of subscribers.
- The proposal appeared to be a 'stealth tax' on gardening, during a cost of living crisis, and could create disparity in local areas.

- An issue of democratic accountability could also arise, since the majority of residents consulted clearly opposed the proposal.

Councillor Anne Lee addressed the Commission and explained why she had proposed the call-in of this key decision. She posited that the decision was made based upon incorrect information and had disregarded the outcome of the public consultation, which had received 9,500 responses. Councillor Lee stated that the proposal had been made during a hard national economic period and went against the Council's aims for environmental sustainability. She suggested that the proposal should be referred to a task and finish group, to closely assess the figures, and then be returned to Full Council.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- Members queried how Councillor Lee's constituents felt about how the decision had been made
- One member stated that some residents in East Northamptonshire paid almost three times more, for garden waste collection, than other North Northamptonshire residents.
- Members queried how future waste collection was to be funded, if for the first year it was supported by Council reserves.
- One member posited that the issue of fly-tipping would continue to occur even without a charge for the service. This was since in 2018, the rate of fly-tipping in Kettering was 20%, compared with that of 11% in East Northamptonshire, despite the former having a free collection service.

In response, Councillor Lee clarified that:

- Her constituents did not approve of the decision as they maintained the belief that the outcome of the public consultation had not been properly considered. She suggested that her constituents would be discouraged from gardening with the implementation of a paid collection service.
- The cost of garden waste collection in East Northamptonshire was a decision that had been made by the legacy authority in the area, prior to unitary Council reorganisation.
- She believed the cost of garden waste collection should be covered by existing Council Tax rates.
- It could be suggested that the fly-tipping figures in 2018 were an anomaly.

The Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets assured the Commission that the Executive had not ignored the consultation responses and had discussed them at great length. He clarified that residents without garden waste would not have to pay for the collection service. He also posited that no evidence existed to suggest that green fly-tipping would increase, nor that residents would opt to pave over green areas with concrete.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- Members expressed concern that the public consultation was ignored, despite its high response rate, and suggested that upholding the Executive's decision could harm public trust in the Council.
- One member queried whether the fire risk of green waste had been considered by the Executive, when making its decision.
- Members queried how many East Northamptonshire residents had subscribed to the paid collection service.

In response, the Executive Member clarified that:

- The fire risk of green waste had not been considered.
- 30% of households in East Northamptonshire had taken up the paid service.

It was moved by Councillor Andy Mercer and seconded by Councillor Lee Wilkes that no further action be taken in relation to the decision.

In accordance with Meeting Procedure Rule 29.2, a recorded vote was requested and taken:

For the motion: Councillors Wendy Brackenbury, Philip Irwin, Andy Mercer, Gill Mercer, Kevin Watts and Lee Wilkes (6)

Against the motion: Councillors Valerie Anslow, Robin Carter, John Currall, Mark Dearing, Jim Hakewill and Zoe McGhee (6)

As there was a tie in the vote, the Chair used her casting vote and voted for the motion.

RESOLVED that:

The Commission approves that no further action be taken regarding this matter.

49 Children's Trust Annual Report 2021/22

The Commission considered a report by The Executive Director of Children's Services, which outlined the Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) Annual Budget Report for 2021/22.

The Commission considered a statement from a member of the public where the following points were made:

- How were in-year overspends paid for? In exceptional circumstances the Trust can come to the councils and request more funding.
- The same issues now being raised are the same as when children's services was part of the former county council.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- One member suggested that cuts to the SureStart programme would have had a significant impact on this generation of children.
- Members queried what impact on integrated care systems the NCT expected there to be.
- Members queried how the current trends compared with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Regarding asylum-seeking children, members queried whether the NCT was being funded to a suitable level to support these children.
- One member acknowledged that family liaison workers were sometimes reluctant to pass cases on to social workers due to social workers' high workload. They queried whether this situation had since improved.
- Members queried whether it would be possible to provide more local homes to keep children in their supported environment and allow for better services.
- It was noted that demand led pressures were increasing and putting pressure on the Children's Trust budget.
- There was some concern that it was proposed to not keep the percentage of children placed out of county as a KPI.

In response, the Chief Executive of the NCT clarified that:

- It was too early to predict the full impact on integrated care systems. Officers of the NCT hoped that there would be better support for children with mental health needs, communities and schools. One success of the integrated health system would be that community members would be aware of available support and from where they could access this.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing and had been significant on children and families, since an increased number of children were entering the system. Abuse and neglect had been the primary reason for these children being referred to NCT services.
- The NCT had received its basic entitlement for the funding of asylum-seeking children.
- The situation regarding family liaison workers passing cases on to social workers had significantly improved in the previous two years.
- The NCT already operated several local children's homes. Increasing this provision remained a long-term aspiration. A successful bid for the provision of two children's homes in the county had been made.

- With regards to children placed out of county, children would be placed where their needs were best met. Out of county places were more expensive and the situation was challenging as out of county placements was not a competitive market.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

Suspension of Meeting Procedure Rule 10 – Guillotine

During consideration of the previous item, it was moved and seconded that the meeting be extended to complete that item or to finish at 10pm at the latest.

RESOLVED:

That meeting procedure Rule 10 be suspended to complete the previous item or to finish at 10pm at the latest.

50 Close of meeting

The Chair thanked members, officers and members of the public for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm