

RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 JULY 2019

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND ELECTIONS

A.2 Scrutiny of the North Essex Garden Communities Business Plan 2018-19 and beyond

(Report prepared by Keith Simmons and Charlotte Cooper)

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To invite the Committee to consider the appropriate arrangements to be adopted for scrutiny of the North Essex Garden Communities Interim Business Plan 2018-19 and the future Business Plans. The content of the current and future Business Plans does and is likely to continue to impact on matters which are the responsibility of both this Committee and the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

This Committee's approved Work Programme envisaged scrutiny of the NEGC Business Plan at this meeting and this report seeks to respect the wish to undertake this scrutiny, to establish a revised timeframe for this scrutiny and address the appropriate arrangements for that scrutiny.

It is intended to submit a similarly worded report to the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 August 2019.

BACKGROUND

The Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held 3 December 2018 resolved that the North Essex Garden Communities (NEGC) Business Plan become a regular item on its agenda. That Committee's work programme schedules a review of the NEGC Business Plan for 2 December 2019. In addition, the NEGC Business Plan, is also on the work programme for this Committee (to be considered at this meeting).

The nature and content of the NEGC Business Plan is such that it is open to scrutiny by both Overview and Scrutiny Committees. However, it is incumbent upon us all to consider whether, in cases like this, there is a need to establish arrangements that support efficient and effective scrutiny and avoid issues not being scrutinised because they fall in the boundary area between the terms of reference for both Committees.

The NEGC Business Plan 2019-2022 is not as yet available. This though does not prevent scrutiny of the delivery of the NEGC Business Plan 2018-19 at this point in time. However, on the basis that future Business Plans will be approved with the intention of then directing activity to deliver the Plans, there will be an ongoing element of scrutiny.

As outlined above, there is a legitimate rationale for both this Committee and the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the NEGC Business Plan. However, this may not be either efficient or effective and it could unduly lead to a drain on capacity of Members of the two Overview and Scrutiny Committees and officers in supporting those Committees if both operate separately on this matter. Indeed, it could also lead to poor scrutiny of areas close to the interface of the terms of reference of those two Committees.

In view of the above, this report is submitted to invite the Committee to consider whether there is value in establishing specific scrutiny arrangements for the NEGC Business Plan that span both Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Corporate Director (Planning and Regeneration) has indicated that it would be entirely reasonable to accommodate a meeting within August/September on the basis that the arrangements have been settled upon.

DETAILED INFORMATION

The following text has been provided by the Corporate Director (Planning and Regeneration) in respect of the NEGC Business Plan to assist the Committee to consider this matter:

The development of North Essex Garden Communities will deliver Community Leadership in a multitude of ways. It will deliver against all of the key elements of the Corporate Plan in significant ways over a sustained period of time. The vision set out in the Corporate Plan is “To put community leadership at the heart of everything we do through delivery of high quality, affordable services and working positively with others”.

In particular the proposals will deliver the following specific elements in the Plan at significant scale:

- *Health and Housing*
- *A quality living environment*
- *Local Regeneration*
- *Improved Community Health*
- *The opportunity for Council House building*
- *Healthier lifestyles and wellbeing*
- *Employment and Enjoyment*
- *Support business growth*
- *Enable better job prospects*
- *Facilitate improved qualification and skills*
- *First rate Leisure facilities*

North Essex Garden Communities Ltd (NEGC Ltd) was established in January 2017 by Braintree, Colchester, Tendring and Essex County Councils (the company shareholders) and is the strategic delivery vehicle for the North Essex Garden Communities project. The basis for this is the Councils shared ambition to promote, plan and deliver sustainable strategic growth at scale and over the long-term; providing the housing, employment and necessary supporting infrastructure required to ensure the best outcomes for current and future communities of North Essex.

In the period to date NEGC Ltd has developed its strategic rationale and operational capacity with the support of both its' shareholder Councils, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and key national agencies such as Homes England. The North Essex Garden Communities project is part of the national Garden Towns Villages & Cities programme run by MHCLG which provides direct access to other Garden Towns with associated learning and knowledge/information sharing opportunities, and resources. NEGC Ltd is the largest and most ambitious project in the programme.

The role of NEGC Ltd has been successfully developed to the point where it is a fully operational company recognised by the public, private sectors, and local communities, as the focal point for the North Essex Garden Communities project. This includes developing a strategic proposition for the North Essex Garden Communities which has gained significant traction with key government departments and the development industry.

The Board of NEGC Ltd developed an Interim Business Plan for 2018-19 for approval by its shareholders setting out the vision, objectives, workstreams and funding requirements for the company in order to continue to support delivery of North Essex Garden Communities. Key tasks during the year were to support the Local Plan, evolve the approach to master-planning, innovation, economic development, programme funding, governance and delivery including consideration of transition towards a locally led development corporation style of approach to delivery of the NEGC project.

The Council, as one of the 4 shareholders, was requested to continue to support North Essex Garden Communities Ltd as the strategic delivery vehicle for the North Essex Garden Communities projects through approval of an Interim Business. Cabinet, at its meeting of 14 December 2018, approved the Interim Business Plan for NEGC Ltd for 2018/19 including the associated Budget.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee consider the appropriate arrangements to be adopted for scrutiny of the North Essex Garden Communities Interim Business Plan 2018-19 and the future Business Plans.