

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 20 November 2014 at 2.00 pm in the
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr T. J. Jermy (Vice-Chairman)	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr C G Carter	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mrs D.K.R. Irving	Mr B. Rose
Mr A.P. Joel	

Also Present

Mrs S Armes	Mr K. Martin
Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mrs J A North
Councillor C Bowes	Mr M. S. Robinson
Mrs B Canham	Mr F.J. Sharpe
Mr T R Carter	Mrs L.S. Turner
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen	Mr M. A. Wassell
Mr P R W Darby	Mr N.C. Wilkin
Mr P.J. Duigan	

Stephen Bett	Police & Crime Commissioner
Inspector Wheatley	Norfolk Constabulary

In Attendance

Tracey Baxter	- Anti-Social Behaviour Officer
Helen McAleer	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Maxine O'Mahony	- Executive Director of Commissioning & Governance
Riana Rudland	- Community Development & Health Manager
Robert Walker	- Assistant Director Community

69/14 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

Due to sickness, the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2014 were not available. The Minutes would be presented to the next meeting of the Commission.

70/14 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Byrne. Councillor Kiddle-Morris had also sent his apologies as he was unable to attend the meeting.

71/14 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

72/14 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

No declarations were made although Councillor Rogers noted that he

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was one of the Watton Surgery patients that had had to move to another practice.

73/14 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Councillors Armes, Bambridge, Bowes, Canham, T Carter, Chapman-Allen, Darby, Duigan, Martin, North, Robinson, Sharpe, Turner, Wilkin and Wassell were in attendance.

Mr Stephen Bett and Inspector Wheatley were also in attendance at the invitation of the Commission.

74/14 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Councillor Turner, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Community & Environmental Services said that Norfolk was a safe place to live with relatively low crime and the Council was proud of its response to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). It had a proven track record. The Operational Partnership Team (OPT) had been formed in 2004 and since 2010 Norfolk Constabulary Officers had been co-located at the Council's offices. They were a dedicated team with a high standard of response. She asked the OPT to give their presentation before she provided her update.

At the conclusion of the presentation and the question and answer session that followed it, she advised the Commission that the Community Team and the Council as a whole were focussing on Health & Wellbeing including dementia awareness. The local leisure centres were working with the Council placing an emphasis on dementia sufferers and their carers.

Other things that the Community Team were involved in were the Art Trail which had works from 57 artists at 25 venues; Fit Families – aimed at increasing physical activities; the Master Gardner Scheme, with 378 new supported growers; the Walks Project; the Parks Runs; Active Norfolk and Pride in Breckland which was also aimed at getting people active.

On 20 March 2015 the Pride Awards event would be held. There was also a Participatory Budgeting (PB) Scheme based in the five market towns, which each had £10,000 to award in grants. A new Pride Officer had been appointed. It was noted that the five market towns each had their own local lead organisation which would work to include the rural areas in the PB scheme.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Turner for her update.

75/14 OPERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP TEAM (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Mrs Baxter and Sergeant Crown gave a detailed presentation on the work of the Operational Partnership Team (OPT) which had been the first of its kind in Norfolk and was held up as a beacon of best practice. There were now six other such teams, modelled on the Breckland OPT. Their priority was to address anti-social behaviour (ASB) and to focus on identifying risk and harm.

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Being co-located the Team were able to respond quickly to complaints about ASB. They worked with both victims and perpetrators focussing on early intervention. They used a teamwork approach to deal with a range of complaints and gave practical help. In neighbour disputes, mediatory or restorative justice measures were used.

Members were given details of the numbers and types of cases that the Team dealt with and the way that they worked together to form an action plan and prioritise cases where risk had been identified. Examples of successful interventions were described.

Councillor Armes asked if the schools were involved in educating young people about ASB and was advised that a drama project was run every year in junior schools. It was hoped to roll that out to more schools in future.

Councillor Bambridge asked how confident the Team was that they were impacting rural areas. Mrs Baxter advised that they were a reactive team which responded to issues reported to them by communities.

Councillor Sharpe asked what happened when high risk incidents occurred 'out of hours' and Inspector Wheatley explained that the police responded to such cases. Also, each morning a meeting was held to discuss the calls received in the previous 24 hours and at those meetings high risk cases were also identified for a quick response.

Councillor Richmond said they had had problems in Swanton Morley and he congratulated the team as the system had worked.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Baxter and Sgt Crown for a fascinating presentation.

76/14 NORFOLK POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Stephen Bett, Norfolk Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), thanked the Commission for their invite. He had been in post for two years since being elected in November 2012. He had had no idea what he was letting himself in for as no-one seemed to know what a PCC was expected to do.

He had decided to start by listening to what people wanted and expected. He had talked to public bodies, voluntary groups and charities. It had been very interesting. The main themes had been domestic violence, child sex exploitation, drug and alcohol abuse; mental health, etc.

After the first year of listening, he had asked people to tell him their problems and come up with solutions. There had been a huge list of problems from the prisons, employers, NHS, Social Services, etc and he had decided that the best way he could help was to co-ordinate all the agencies to work together. So the PCC Office had become a hub for everything and people chosen by the agencies worked there.

He now had a really great team that worked as one unit. They were not

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political. He was not an expert himself and he relied on his team to give him the information to make the decisions. He did not get involved in the day to day workings of the team. If necessary he went outside the team to get help in addressing problems. He could also question any organisation and they had to answer him. It was the first time in British political history that one person could cut across all boundaries and get things done.

A recent public consultation had not identified any new issues so he would keep on doing what he was doing as it was meeting the needs of the majority of people. He didn't want to take on any more responsibilities as it would dilute what he was currently able to do.

He gave an example of one area where he had been able to make a difference. There had been a problem in Cromer with domestic abuse. It was obvious that the medical profession knew something was wrong but due to confidentiality issues they said nothing. He had got training for all GP surgeries on the early signs of domestic abuse. Over 500 nurses had been trained so far.

Another area he was working on was rehabilitation for prisoners. Currently if a prisoner served less than 12 months they got no support at all on release. Rehabilitation was important and all the problems like health, housing and mental health needed to be looked at. On release they needed to be given employment or training to get them in the right mind-frame to break the chain, stop re-offending and slow the growth in domestic violence. That was his priority for the medium to long term.

In future there would be less resources, so it was important to work closely with partners to break cycles or the problems would expand. If vulnerable people were looked after they would not become perpetrators of crime.

He was very pleased with his team and with the OPTs. They were working as one for all the people in Norfolk.

The Leader of the Council asked if the PCC could guarantee the funding for the Breckland OPT and Mr Bett advised that he could not because he did not know what the Minister was going to do, but he would do his utmost to safeguard the funding.

Councillor Wilkin asked an operational question about the A47. When there was a bad accident the road was closed and traffic was diverted off, but there didn't seem to be an emergency plan to provide a secondary route. The diverted traffic found itself on narrow lanes without diversion signage. He asked if there was a plan in place.

The Chairman noted that the A1075 suffered from the same problem.

Mr Bett asked Inspector Wheatley to respond as District Commander for Breckland. He explained that it was very difficult because their priority was to safeguard any victims and protect what could be a crime scene. The police notified the Highways Authority and they put up the correct diversion signs.

Councillor Wilkin also asked about the number of police in attendance

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at an incident as he had seen seven vehicles at one single car accident which seemed to be too many resources.

Inspector Wheatley said that for major incidents the tactic was to get a command team in place quickly. They took control and determined the number of officers needed. He acknowledged that the first hour of any incident could be 'chaotic'.

Councillor Canham asked about ASB and street drinking which was a problem for communities. In Thetford they had tried to tackle the problem but it was a big issue. The Vice Chairman agreed. One of his roles was on the Safer Thetford Action Group. They would like a blanket ban, but there were resource issues.

That was also an operational issue so Inspector Wheatley responded. There were designated no drink areas in Thetford but there was still a problem and the police regularly seized alcohol and prosecuted offenders. It was an on-going issue which would be looked at over the next 12 months. Currently research was being carried out to see if partnership working could help to address the issue. Under the new ASB Act the police had spontaneous dispersal area powers. They could take items away and require individuals to leave an area for 48 hours.

Councillor T Carter was a speed watch co-ordinator for several villages which had spent money on speed awareness message systems. However, those systems were only educational and the data could not be used to get a police officer presence.

The Chairman had the same systems in his own Ward and was aware that they could log the time and speed of a vehicle. Some villages suffered from excessive speeding especially by motor bikes. It was frustrating that the data collected which was passed to the Highway Authority, was not used by the police. He felt that there was reluctance by the police to address rural speeding problems even in known hot-spots. Villages were often used as rat-runs but the police seemed to be unwilling to follow up on rural crime. These issues had been raised time and again at Parish Council meetings. It was a serious problem in rural areas where there were many elderly and vulnerable people and he believed that residents felt let down by the police.

Councillor North attended her local SNAP meetings at which such issues were prioritised for a three month period. The police did get out and take action in her area and in the vast majority of cases it was the local inhabitants that were caught speeding.

Councillor Armes was concerned about parking on corners and yellow lines which caused a lot of problems in Thetford, particularly near schools. She also asked if there were still 'safe houses' in the District.

Inspector Wheatley confirmed that there were safe houses but their location was not publicised for obvious reasons.

With reference to a recent article in the news, Councillor Martin asked what measures were taken to ensure that all crimes were recorded.

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Mr Bett advised that there were a number of areas for improvement and the system was not perfect but safeguards had been added to ensure that recording was being done correctly. Unfortunately 'everything' had to be recorded which could give a poor impression in the short term, but once the 'norm' had been established the figures would be more useful.

Councillor C Carter was satisfied with the broad brush approach to rural policing. The farming community often managed its own problems and the police were very good. People had to take responsibility for their possessions, which were often not branded or labelled and left in unlocked premises.

Mr Bett agreed that a lot of people did not help themselves. It was a big county and a small force with limited resources. He confirmed that most traffic offences in villages were committed by local people.

Councillor Armes had heard that the police would be using horses to access farms in future and asked if that was correct.

Mr Bett advised that if a PCSO or Special Constable owned a horse they could wear their uniform whilst riding in an aim to stop crimes like fly-tipping in remote areas.

Councillor Bambridge asked what was being done in Norfolk about the sexual exploitation of minors.

Mr Bett said that a lot was already being done but a special type of police officer was needed to investigate such matters properly. They were working with Trading Standards looking at fraud and paedophilia and trying to improve their cyber-detection methods. He assured Members that a lot of resources were being put into detecting such crimes.

Councillor Sharpe was aware of research which had found that there was a high incidence of dyslexia in offenders. He wondered if screening could be carried out in schools to try to prevent future crime.

Mr Bett regretted that there was not enough money to carry out that sort of screening. He was concentrating on identifying the problems whilst offenders were in prison and trying to deal with them when they came out.

Councillor Darby returned to the issue of parking on yellow lines which caused a lot of problems in small towns with narrow roads. It was a particular hazard to wheelchair and pushchairs.

At this point the Chairman advised that Mr Bett had to leave the meeting shortly to attend another engagement. The Vice-Chairman was invited to ask the last question. He asked Mr Bett what his best achievement had been so far and what his biggest disappointment had been during his term of office.

Mr Bett was really pleased with the money he had spent in the voluntary sector which had many unsung heroes. However, they were not good at communicating and were often scrimping for money. He would be offering more grants in future to sustainable projects. The best thing

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was that he really enjoyed the job and he was working with excellent people. To survive in austere times people had to work together.

The most irritating thing had been the expenses scandal which had caused a lot of bad publicity. But his conscience was clear and it had not detracted from his achievements and he was certain the report would say that he had done nothing wrong.

The Chairman thanked Mr Bett very much for coming and he said that he would be happy to come again. He then left the meeting.

77/14 NORFOLK CONSTABULARY (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Inspector Wheatley gave a brief update on his role particularly concentrating on the rural crime aspect of his work. He said that they concentrated on evidence based policing as there was a significant problem with burglaries from sheds, etc and with the theft of diesel. There were numerous arrests and he assured Members that the police were 'out there'.

They had started a distribution list system where they sent out advisory e-mails. He was happy to include other people on that list. It was working well and proving to be a good tool in raising awareness of potential problems in specific areas.

The police had also started using quad bikes and they had had a positive impact in tackling ASB problems and hare coursing among other things. They were also very useful in searching for missing persons and could be used for patrolling hard to reach areas.

Members were encouraged to let the police know if they had an issue and to notify them if they saw anything about which they were suspicious. The police had alarms which could be put into places when intelligence was received.

Councillor Rogers raised two issues about crimes being notified to the police and no action being taken for a number of days. Inspector Wheatley asked him to provide details of the incidents as he could not understand why there had not been an immediate response.

Councillor R Richmond was concerned about speeding motorbikes and Inspector Wheatley said it was a difficult issue and the good summer had increased the problem. However, they had the technology to capture evidence and they used it to concentrate on known hot-spots.

He noted that there was a lot more migrant criminality with people coming from other Counties. There had been a spate of catalytic converter thefts by people from Essex and another group from Staffordshire had been hitting industrial areas. The key offenders had recently been identified.

Councillor Joel was concerned about the increased number of children at his local high school which meant increased cars and coaches and risk from traffic as NCC would not employ a lollipop person. Inspector Wheatley said that he would speak to the Safer Neighbourhood Team to see what could be done.

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Councillor Bambridge was concerned about the misuse of PCSOs and said that he would rather see one constable than two PCSOs.

Inspector Wheatley advised that PCSOs were there for reassurance. They did not investigate crime but they did a tremendous job. Some went on to be trained as PCs which was very cost effective as the training was shorter.

Councillor Gilbert asked about the rise in organised shop lifting and how restorative justice was working. Inspector Wheatley acknowledged that shop lifting did increase at this time of year and said that Shop Watch was to be encouraged. With regard to restorative justice, he didn't have any figures but he thought it was excellent and its use was encouraged. Mrs Baxter said she was a big advocate of it as it could dispel tension in communities and gave the victim some control.

Sgt Crown noted that seven out of ten first time offenders did not re-offend after going through the restorative justice process.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Wheatley for attending.

78/14 TASK & FINISH GROUP (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Chairman asked Members to contact Councillor Kybird with any comments.

In view of the time and the number of Members that needed to leave the meeting the Chairman said that the remaining items would be moved to the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 4.45 pm

CHAIRMAN