

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**Held on Thursday, 26 May 2022 at 10.00 am in the  
The Breckland Conference Centre, Anglia Room, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke,  
Dereham, NR19 1EE**

**PRESENT**

Cllr Rhodri Oliver (Chairman)	Cllr Mike Nairn
Cllr Roy Brame (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Lynda Turner
Cllr Fabian Eagle	Cllr Peter Wilkinson
Cllr Timothy Birt	Cllr Roger Atterwill (Substitute Member)
Cllr Vera Dale	Cllr Harry Clarke (Substitute Member)
Cllr Robert Kybird	Cllr Robert Hambidge (Substitute Member)

**Also Present**

Cllr Gordon Bambridge	Cllr Sarah Suggitt
Cllr Paul Claussen	Grant Tufts, Anglian Water, Regional Engagement Manager
Rose Shisler, Anglian Water, Stakeholder Engagement Programme Lead	

**In Attendance**

Claire Burton	- Organisational Development Performance Manager
Adele Newsome	- Customer Experience Manager
Ruth Tudge	- Democratic Services Officer
Rosie Hill	- Digital Project Manager
Ryan Pack	- Innovation and Change Business Partner

**29/22 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

**30/22 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bushell, Jermy and Wickerson. Councillors Atterwill, Clarke and Hambidge were in attendance as substitutes.

**31/22 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)**

None.

**32/22 URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**33/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

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**34/22 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

None.

**35/22 AI PROJECT UPDATE**

Councillor Birt raised a point of order. When asked under which aspect of the council's constitution he wished to raise his point of order Councillor Birt cited Section 100b of the Local Government Act 1972. He stated that at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 9 September 2021 he had raised some queries around the introduction of Chatbot regarding the security of personal data and had concerns over the full AI implementation saying that it would need to access huge amounts of personal data and asked how it could be to be protected. He pointed out that in the minutes of that meeting it stated that 'it was agreed that it would be beneficial for this item to come back to the Scrutiny Commission in February or March 2022 in order that the Commission could look at the security of data to ensure it was managed correctly and assist in anticipating any future problems or issues.' He asserted that section 100b had been breached as no report had been provided on this matter at least 5 working days prior to the committee meeting commencing.

The Chairman rejected the point of order, giving the following reasons. The agenda was a matter for the Chairman to set at the Chairman's discretion. The Chairman had not required such a report be provided by the team as part of this agenda item and as such no requirement under the 5-day rule arose. He suggested that the presentation from the team under the item be heard by the Commission and if the Commission concluded that a report was required it could be requested by way of proposal. Where such a report formed part of a future agenda item it should be provided to the Commission in line with all relevant statutory requirements.

The Customer Experience Manager, Adele Newsome and the Digital Project Manager, Rosemary Hill, gave a presentation on the background of the project and what they hoped could be achieved in the future. The Customer Experience Manager explained that the vision within the Customer Access Strategy was to provide high quality and easy to use services designed with the customer in mind. That vision included access to digital channels providing convenience and choice and a digital customer service agent 24/7, developing on-line services so good that customers would choose to use that channel and therefore free up capacity for agents to support those with more complex needs. The Digital Project Manager explained the timeline so far from April 2021 to March 2022, and the Benefits for customers which included 24/7 access to the digital Customer Service Agent and live chat fallback available between 9am-5pm. Data analysis exceeded expectations with 80% of customers getting the right information and were happy with the support given.

The Digital Project Manager explained the way forward which would include adding personalisation of conversations and supporting the Annual Canvass Process which formed one of the busiest peaks after the Council Tax Billing period. The integration of Alexa was hoped to roll

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out at the end of the summer and a demonstration followed on how this might work, and the work needed to improve the system.

Councillor Birt asked about data security. The Customer Experience Manager said that they had conducted a full data impact assessment and as the project progressed it would be continually reviewed, it did not currently capture, or machine learn any personal information. The DPIA element still needed to be carried out on the Alexa part of the project and the Chatbot did not currently hold any personal information only generic. Customers would be able to sign up to the Alexa privacy policy, when introduced and this would also include a sign up to Breckland Council's privacy policy and a terms of use policy which would all be checked with the Data Protection Officer and Information Governance Officer.

Councillor Birt proposed that a detailed report of the security implications and the Data security of this product and its future development be presented to this Commission. This proposal was duly seconded, and Members voted that a report be brought back to this Committee and added to the work programme for further discussion.

**36/22 ANGLIAN WATER**

Anglian Water representatives, Regional Engagement Manager, Grant Tufts and Stakeholder Engagement Programme Lead, Rose Shisler provided a detailed presentation to Members of the Commission.

It was explained that Anglian Water was the largest water and water recycling company in England by geographic area, serving almost seven million customers. East Anglia was the driest region in the UK which was prone to the impacts of climate change including drought and flash floods and was one of the UK's fastest-growing regions outside of South-eastern London.

The four key goals for 2020-2025, guided by the views and needs of stakeholders were:

- To make life better for customers, every single day
- To deliver 2020-2025 Final Determination
- To deliver identified business priorities
- To create a sustainable future for the region

Over the next five years Anglian Water would be investing over eight hundred million pounds as part of their Water Industry Natural Environment Programme.

It was committed to continue as environmental custodians and make river health a focus with the following points:

- The statutory need to tackle storm overflows ensuring prioritisation through the price review process
- A new, jointly owned national plan for rivers
- An end to the automatic right to connect
- A ban on wet wipes that did not meet fine to Flush standards
- Collaborative action to restore rivers and natural habitats

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Combined Storm Overflows (CSOs) were explained in more detail, how they worked and how monitors were being installed to ensure minimal impact on the environment.

Planned investments across Breckland included:

- £9million – growth schemes in Swaffham, Thetford and Attleborough
- £5million – Watton WRC compliance scheme
- £5million – Water infrastructure National investment Programme (WRCs)
- £1.5million – first time sewerage scheme at Rockland St Peter
- £800,000 – dosing schemes to mitigate Lead
- Event Duration Monitors being installed at 14 sites

It was explained that Anglian Water were pledging to Get River Positive by 2030 and were striving to do no harm to rivers and do everything possible to ensure they thrive with the five Get River Positive commitments:

- Ensure storm overflows and sewage treatment works do not harm rivers
- Create more opportunities for everyone to enjoy the regions' rivers
- Support others to improve and care for rivers
- Enhance rivers and create new habitats so wildlife could thrive
- Be open and transparent about their performance and plans

Nutrient Neutrality in relation to Anglian Water was explained to the Commission. In March 2022, Natural England had written to authorities whose areas contained habitat sites that were in an unfavourable conservation status, where additional nutrient loads, such as from development, may have an adverse effect. The advice stated that planning applications and plans affecting such habitats should be carefully considered and mitigation provided to ensure that there were no adverse effects and to meet the requirements of the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended). Anglian Water had no direct influence over the requirements and would accept flows from new developments once the local planning authority and Natural England were satisfied that the relevant tests had been achieved, planning permission had been granted by the LPA and had been lawfully implemented by the developer.

Councillor Birt asked how many Combined Storm Overflows (CSOs) had been removed in the region and how the amount of discharge had changed over time. He also felt that the £30million pound investment over Breckland did not seem sufficient for the work he felt was needed.

Mr Tuffs confirmed that three hundred CSOs had already been removed out of an amount of one thousand five hundred. Ms Shisler stated that last year there had been an average of twenty-seven instances per CSO and the target for the current year was twenty-five instances per CSO.

Councillor Eagle asked about sewage capacity sufficiency and how it was calculated. Mr Tuffs explained that Anglian Water were not

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statutory consultees in planning applications and that there was an automatic right to connect in England and they were lobbying hard to Central Government to have this changed. He said Anglian Water had highly qualified and skilled technicians and modellers to look at connections to assess impact and likely additional flows to ensure that the current systems could cope.

Councillor Kybird highlighted that microplastics had been identified as a new source of pollution and asked if this was seen as a problem and if this was monitored by Anglian Water. Ms Shisler explained that they had screens and filters in place that were set to industry standard and were working across the whole industry to work together to improve this along with the amount of road run-off.

Councillor Brame said he felt that there was insufficient information provided by Anglian Water to inform residents on the services that were available to customers in all forms of communication to cover all ages and abilities. He also asked the Chairman if Breckland Council could do more to work with Anglian Water to provide more information to residents either on the internet or through the magazine. Ms Shisler explained that Anglian Water did have a Priority Services Register which offered extra support to residents in need of additional assistance. Councillor Dale agreed and felt that it was vitally important to provide residents with the correct information on who to contact before residents were financially out of pocket and paying for services that were provided free of charge by Anglian Water. The Chairman asked for this to be relayed to the Executive to investigate different methods of working with Anglian Water and communicating this information to residents.

Councillor Bambridge asked how realistic Anglian Water were with Nutrient Neutrality and achieving no pollution by 2030 and whether they thought this would be achievable. Furthermore, the twenty rivers within the Anglian Water area that they had said they were committed to ensuring were clean and of the highest possible quality, he asked if any of those rivers would be within the Breckland area. Mr Tuffs explained that reaching the no pollution target would be a challenge, Anglian Water would be working as much as possible, along with other partners to ensure rivers were clean; however, there were other factors involved that were out of their control. He said he would send further details on Nutrient Neutrality out to Members of the Commission. At this point in time, he could not confirm which rivers would be within the twenty chosen or if they would be within the Breckland area, but once this was confirmed he would share the information with the Members.

The Chairman asked for more clarification on the stated 4% of the reasons for adverse river health that were due to Anglian Water's activities. It was explained that each river was given a set target by DEFRA in the river basin management plan, in the UK most rivers were given a target of average and organisations were funded to ensure the target was reached. In the UK storm overflows contributed to 4% of the reasons that rivers were not achieving good status. In the Anglian Water region, it was 1% of the reason that rivers were not achieving the target which was due to storm overflows. It was further explained that there was a report from Water UK explaining this in more detail that she would share with the Commission.

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Councillor Atterwill asked how they arrived at the figure of 4% when not all monitors had been put in place in the CSOs at this point in time. It was explained that the figure came from the Environment Agency and through the monitoring that they conducted in the rivers. A good resource to check would be The Environment Agency Catchment Data Explorer <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/> which provided data on rivers across all areas and the reasons it might not be at target.

Councillor Atterwill also asked how clean the water was that came from modern treatment plants and returned to the rivers. He mentioned the new treatment plant installed at Swanton Morley which, in his opinion, remained inadequate and not fit for purpose and felt that the site had failed and flooded nearby land with sewage. He also wanted to know how this would cope with planned new housing development in the area.

Mr Tuffs stated that the final effluent was monitored, checked, and had to reach the quality and standards set by the Environment Agency so although there may have been more leakage, the standard would have been met. Anglian Water was aware of some spills at the Swanton Morley site, and it was currently under investigation. New developments were factored into operational parameters which was one of the reasons the Swanton Morley treatment plant had been upgraded.

Councillor Turner suggested that Breckland Council could have some influence on working towards water companies being a statutory consultee on planning applications.

Councillor Suggitt asked how Anglian Water kept up with new developments and provide what was needed if they were not a statutory consultee.

It was explained that it was a challenge, the planning development team within Anglian Water worked with local authorities and the planning portal to look at any developments of 10 properties or more and worked together to assess any impacts or issues and if it was found that there might be an impact, they worked with the local planning authority to impose conditions during the build to avoid issues. This would be voluntary, and they could only advise as there was currently no statutory requirement to check with the water company. They were hoping that this could be changed and be incorporated into the new revision of the Planning Act that water companies be a statutory consultee.

The Chairman suggested that the relevant Cabinet Member should work with Anglian Water to write a letter to Central Government regarding this point. This was seconded and agreed by Members and the Executive Member for Strategic and Operational Planning, Councillor Sarah Suggitt would take this forward.

Councillor Eagle said that North Pickenham had experienced an issue with the river Wissey and that he had been informed that the issue had been water ingress within the sewage system that had caused an overflow. There had been inspections that had confirmed the pipe

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should be changed, additionally, there had been six main water leaks causing disruption and damage to verges, which meant that bin collections had not been carried out and post not delivered. He had found out that the reason the river Wissey had been classed as a failure by the Environment Agency on a chemical status was because of the high concentration of PBDEs and PFOSs and asked if Anglian Water could do something to solve this. Mr Tuffs said he would find out what was happening and report back to Councillor Eagle.

Councillor Atterwill wanted to know if there were any plans to upgrade the Bylaugh sewage treatment works which had recently had a serious breakdown. Mr Tuffs said he was aware there had been issues at Bylaugh and would investigate the progress and report back to Councillor Atterwill.

Councillor Birt said that the CSO incidents averaged at twenty-seven and the target for the current year was twenty-five but felt that this was a crude measure and asked how Nutrient Neutrality would affect existing discharges and where the budget was spent. Ms Shisler agreed that measuring CSO incidents was a crude measure. In terms of finding a more appropriate measure they were working in partnership with Severn Trent Water on reaching a more suitable solution with the Get River Positive project looking more at the harm each CSO was causing and reducing the impact based on priority. Mr Tuffs stated that they were not funded on their current business plan for Nutrient Neutrality as it had only been a recent introduction so the impact on the budget was yet to be realised, they had received a letter from Natural England which explained their position in more detail which he would share with the Commission.

The Chairman asked for a brief overview of Anglian Water's ownership and what they felt was the future of Anglian Water and how it aligned with customers' needs. Mr Tuffs explained that Anglian Water was mainly owned by pension funds some in Canada, Australia and the UK which had been the model for several years and stated that investors had not taken any dividends since 2017 but had reinvested any profit back into the business.

The Deputy Chief Executive, Rob Walker asked about the challenges and opportunities faced with Nutrient Neutrality and how Anglian Water infrastructure might be a contributing factor in the adverse nutrient load into the Wensum catchment which was predominantly rural. Mr Tuffs explained that they were currently operating within the current remits, permits and licences set by the regulator and as it stood there were no adverse effects; however, they continually looked at new targets and constantly invested in infrastructure to adapt. He also explained that they were working with other bodies to ensure that they were doing everything possible to mitigate any avoidable issues with Nutrient Neutrality.

**37/22 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORT- QUARTER 4 2021/22**

The Innovation and Change Business Partner, Ryan Pack said there had been some strong performances over quarter 4 but stated that there had also been some challenges, particularly around the Customer Contact Calls. It was highlighted that Under Thriving Places, there were

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some annual indicators included in this report.

Councillor Atterwill felt that the Customer Contact Centre was cause for concern and stated that he had residents who had told him that they had difficulties in contacting the Council on the telephone, and although he felt that the advancements and improvements made on the technical side were good, there needed to be options to meet all types and ages and ensure all residents needs were being met. He also felt that the front page of the website should clearly show the telephone contact number and asked what was being done to ensure the telephone number was being made readily available. He also felt that the website was not easily used and needed refreshing and making more accessible.

Councillor Birt stated that this matter had been raised at the Town and Parish Forum recently about residents having difficulties in finding a contact number to call to speak to someone in person.

Councillors Turner and Brame agreed with the above comments stating that the website was difficult to use and did not suit everyone. There was a diverse range of residents across the district and many reasons why advances in technology were not suitable and some residents preferred to speak to a person for guidance and get answers to questions.

The Deputy Chief Executive, Rob Walker agreed with the comments made on the visibility of the telephone contact on the website and explained that a historic decision had been taken to prioritise digital traffic where possible and the phone number was taken from a prominent position to try and direct enquires and promote digital where possible. However, given the recent feedback he would take the comments on board and investigate options to improve this. He said that the introduction of more digital channels was the way forward for those comfortable using the digital platforms and the view and desire of Breckland Council was that this would free up the time for staff to spend more time with the residents who preferred a conversation in person. Breckland Council was committed to offering options to suit all.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that there had been recruitment issues in staffing the Contact Centre recently which had caused performance issues, however they were committed to filling the vacancies as soon as possible and staggering training to solve the issues.

Councillor Birt pointed out that it was previously agreed for the performance report to have a breakdown of businesses under each star rating, but this had not been shown and asked about the calculation on the average yield on commercial property, and crucially, what the capital value of the asset was. He felt that the Freedom of Information requests calculation was still insufficient in that it should show either red or green, and more information on the percentage of complaint requests responded to within the time limit and if this included multiple failures.

The Innovation and Change Business Partner said that in terms of the star rating, it should have been changed as previously agreed and would be changed and would send the information out to the Members



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of the Commission. He would clarify the calculation on the average yield with the service department and respond to Members with the information. In terms of complaints, he believed it would just be once as it was dealing with one complaint as opposed to dates that were missed. He said that based on the fact that Freedom of Information requests was a statutory request he could change the reporting to red and green if required. Members voted for this to be changed to show just red and green.

**38/22 SERCO TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Councillor Turner stated that the seven members of the Serco Task & Finish Group had met 3 times in February, March and April and four members had visited the Serco Depot in Watton on 12 May 2022 together with the Cabinet Member which had proved very useful.

The focus had been on three main areas:

- To scrutinise the current performance of the Serco contract
- To examine the impact of Covid and the National supply chain issues on the mobilisation of the contract
- Examine Governance arrangements in place to manage and monitor the contract

Officers were now preparing a report, on behalf of the Task and Finish Group, which would form the basis of the final meeting on 14 July 2022 and would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 21 July 2022.

Councillor Turner thanked the officers and the Serco Management for their support and cooperation in this task.

**39/22 OUTSIDE BODY FEEDBACK (STANDING ITEM)**

Councillor Wilkinson informed Members that the Breckland Youth Advisory Board and Breckland Council supported Cup-O-T programme of mental health support to young people and families to fill the gap of the waiting time between referral and specialists. At the last quarter 24 families were referred over the five market towns and after discussion would now accept self-referrals and was also working on a scheme to look at an on-line plan for families who could not attend in person. He also reported that the QEH was now out of special measures which was a great achievement for all staff concerned after two years of disruption by Covid. More information could be found at: <https://www.map.uk.net/breckland-youth-advisory-board-yab/>

Councillor Eagle, a Trustee on The Hammond Educational Charity updated Members sharing information that The Hammonds Educational Trust were now doing a bursary for up to £10,000 to support a student for the Platinum Jubilee and welcomed applicants across the whole of the Breckland area and would appreciate Members sharing the information across their areas. More information could be found at: [www.hamoneducationalcharity.org.uk](http://www.hamoneducationalcharity.org.uk)

Councillor Kybird reported that Maureen Orr, a Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager for the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny

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Committee, had now retired and the arrangement was now to be changed so that the officer who supported the main Scrutiny Panel at Norfolk would also be the officer presenting at the Health Scrutiny meetings. There would be a separate research assistant appointed to gather data.

Councillor Atterwill informed Members that he had recently attended the AGM for the Norfolk Playing Fields Association, but unfortunately the AGM could not proceed due to lack of numbers. They had been struggling for a number of years, particularly since funding had been withdrawn from Norfolk County Council, and therefore there was no funding from County or District to assist. They would be forming a small working party to look at the constitution and the model going forward to see what work could be done to help communities with this valuable resource. Playing fields were a vital part of communities for Norfolk residents and it was important that this continued and any assistance from any Breckland Council Members would be appreciated.

**40/22 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM) (IF ANY)**

None.

**41/22 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM) (IF ANY)**

Councillor Nairn said he had received many complaints from residents regarding the new grass cutting scheme that Norfolk County Council had now adopted, and verges were approximately 18 inches deep in some areas. Some months ago, NCC had deepened all the grips to assist with road drainage, however, these had now been hidden by the length of the grass and residents were reporting damage to vehicles because of this. He also felt that the length of grass may be affecting the increase in roadkill.

Councillor Nairn asked for this to be considered as a Councillor Call for Action and suggested that NCC be invited to a meeting to explain the rationalisation in respect of their grass cutting policy.

The Chairman suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission invite Councillor Wilby, the Cabinet Member for Highways at Norfolk County Council, along with the relevant officers, to attend a meeting to explain their change in policy. He suggested that Councillor Nairn and the Democratic Officer work together to formulate the request.

**42/22 WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor Atterwill requested that the Commission invite the Breckland Council Communications Team, and relevant Cabinet Member, to a future meeting to explain their modus operandi, how they operate and what their parameters were which he thought would be extremely useful for Ward Members.

Councillor Birt asked about the review of the IT equipment and the invitation to UKPN as they were on the work programme, but no date as yet had been set. The Chairman suggested that related items such as the IT infrastructure, Website accessibility along with Chatbot data protection be put together and discussed at the September meeting and

move Empty Homes to a later meeting.

Councillor Kybird suggested that Nutrient Neutrality, although currently in its initial stages, should be added to the work programme as a future item.

Councillor Atterwill pointed out that the Capita Contract was up for renewal and suggested that this should be added to the work programme to look at their performance against the contract, their future work programme, and the Local Plan.

**43/22 NEXT MEETING**

The arrangements for the next meeting on Thursday, 21 July 2022 at 10am in the Anglia Room were noted.

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The meeting closed at 12.45 pm

CHAIRMAN