

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 21 July 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 Paul Plummer
Cllr Timothy Birt	Cllr Lynda Turner
Cllr Vera Dale	Cllr David Wickerson
Cllr Fabian Eagle	Cllr Peter Wilkinson
Cllr Robert Kybird	

Also Present

Cllr Philip Morton	Cllr Gordon Bambridge
Cllr Jane James	Cllr Mike Brindle
Cllr Gordon Bambridge	Giles Orpen-Smellie, PCC
	Amanda Murr, Head of Community Safety, PCC

In Attendance

Adele Newsome	- Customer Experience Manager
Sarah Barsby	- Assistant Director People and Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Ryan Pack	- Innovation and Change Business Partner
Ruth Tudge	- Democratic Services Officer

44/22 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

45/22 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jermy and Clarke. There were no substitutes in attendance.

46/22 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

None.

47/22 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

48/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

Action By

Action By

49/22 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

The Chairman gave permitted Councillor Eagle to address members present on a non-agenda item of significance in relation to recent events.

The lack of rain and soaring temperatures over the past few weeks had cumulated in raging fires across the county destroying farmland, fields, trees and in the most tragic of circumstances, homes. The Norfolk Fire service had declared a major incident due to the huge surge in demand caused by the heat. There had been a particularly critical incident in and around the village of Ashill which lasted for many hours and caused a great deal of devastation.

Councillor Eagle conveyed his thanks to everyone involved including the Fire Service, Police, St Johns Ambulance, Lowland Rescue and in particular to Breckland Council's Chief Executive, Maxine O'Mahoney, Executive Director, Jason Cole and the Housing Manager Gill Duffy who were at the scene until after 1am the following morning.

Around ten houses had been completely destroyed and others suffered smoke and water damage. An appeal had been launched and Ashill Community Centre had been inundated with items to assist those in need and a 'JustGiving' page had been started to raise donations for further assistance. Cllr Eagle stated that it had been tremendously heart-warming to see everyone pull together at a time of need. Further thanks were also conveyed to the Fire Services of Merseyside and Tyne and Wear who had also attended the scene to assist.

Councillor Nairn endorsed all that had been said and also conveyed his thanks to the Fire Service from Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk, who had assisted with a recent fire in Weeting, and had worked together to bring the blaze under control. Additionally, he also thanked Breckland Council's Environmental Health Team who had been on site to ensure the clean-up was done correctly.

Councillor Wilkinson expressed his appreciation and gratitude to Councillor Eagle for being on scene during the fire in Ashill. This had been an unprecedented situation for a Ward Member to be in and a disaster for all concerned and he felt that it had been extremely commendable for Councillor Eagle to step up and do what a Ward Member should and be involved to help residents wherever possible.

Cllr Turner agreed and conveyed her thanks to all concerned.

The Chairman and all Members of the Commission wanted their

formal thanks and appreciation to be conveyed to all those involved in helping communities in need both across Norfolk and nationally.

Action By

50/22 VISIT OF POLICE, CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Giles Orpen-Smellie explained the role and responsibilities of the PCC stating that it needed to deliver an efficient and effective Police Force for the County. In terms of policing, he had the authority to hire, and if necessary, fire the Chief Constable and also to set the strategic priorities for the policing in Norfolk. There was a distinct separation of responsibilities, the Chief Constable and the police's operational independence was protected in law, so the PCC had no operational control in that area. The PCC's operational priorities dealt with overarching strategic matters.

The PCC held the budget for the Police, which, in this current year, had been £197m, and was the key lever for the PCC, as the public's elected representative, to steer the Police in tackling the priorities that the residents of Norfolk felt were important. The PCC held the Chief Constable to account on behalf of the public to achieve this against the Strategic Police and Crime Plan and through the budget.

The crime part of the role was extremely diverse and unlimited as it was about crime prevention, supporting victims of crime, rehabilitating offenders, and community safety. Amanda Murr, Head of the Community Safety Team was also in attendance. The PCC explained that Norfolk was a unique county in that it was the only county nationally who had a single community safety partnership across all seven of the local authorities which had an advantage in that it was chaired by the PCC's Chief Executive, who worked closely together to streamline services to accomplish results.

The PCC was also responsible for criminal justice within the county and was also the Chairman on the Norfolk and Suffolk Criminal Justice Board. He was also the national lead for the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners for Police ethics and transparency, and the Eastern Region's representative on the Strategic Board of the National Police Air Service.

Norfolk was a very safe county based on statistics published and currently sat within the bottom third in most categories. However, this was not taken for granted as it had only been achieved through the incredible hard work of the constabulary and its partners. Across the county there were 1800 Police Officers and at any one time about 200 officers on duty. Routinely they would deal with about 250 x emergency 999 calls and 750 x non-emergency 101 calls per day. With the recent issues in respect of the unusual dry hot weather, the 999 calls had increased to over

Action By

five hundred per day and the 101 calls well over a thousand per day and with the priority being focussed on 999 calls the Police were currently working flat out. Norfolk's population was increasing, and crime becoming more complex with many issues not reported and remaining behind closed doors such as domestic abuse and drugs.

The first duty of the Police was to protect life and currently the greatest risk to life in the county was mental health which had been a major problem. Although not strictly a Police issue, the Police would normally be the first on the scene. Secondly, drugs caused problems across Norfolk and there had been a major effort to tackle the drugs issue in the county. The third main issue had been road safety with over 30 people per year losing life and over 400 culminating in serious and life changing injuries.

The PCC urged Members to support the Police, as the role of elected officials was to challenge, however, the Police faced a constant barrage of negativity, and it was time to rally and support the Police in their role.

Councillor Birt asked for clarification on the increase in the number of officers available. The PCC explained that the current figure for Police uplift for Norfolk over the 3-year period of the programme was 224. This year, because other areas were not set to achieve their target, the Government had agreed that areas that were able to recruit could recruit more. Norfolk had put a case forward and Government had agreed that Norfolk could recruit an additional 20 officers this year; however, he did state that it was the quality of the recruitments that mattered rather than the number.

Councillor Brame asked if there was a policy of retention of more experienced officers and if there was anything that Members could do to help the situation with central Government. The PCC stated that this was really a question for the Chief Constable; however, in his conversations with him he had been aware that he was actively looking into the retention of experienced officers and detectives.

Councillor Kybird stated that Breckland Council had provided approximately £50,000 in support in respect of the County Lines surveillance operation and asked if this money had been effective. The PCC advised that he could not provide a full breakdown of monies spent but with regard to County Lines, Norfolk had accomplished a great deal with the monies provided and was presently on top of operations in this area with a 100% conviction rate so far. It had however, been a constant battle to keep up to date and well informed on what was happening, and they were constantly working with the National Crime Agency and partner organisations to achieve this and ultimately, it would be an ongoing operation.

Action By

Councillor Wickerson said that he had previously been Chairman of Swaffham Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel (SNAP) meetings and as local councillors were tied up with community safety, he asked if there was any documentation or information available that local councillors could access to find the main points of issues in the Community Safety Plan. The Head of Community Safety, Amanda Murr explained that there was a Norfolk Community Safety Partnership Strategy – Making Norfolk Safer which was available on their website that looked at all key areas including, modern slavery, domestic abuse, county lines, drugs, serious violence and fraud plus others. It also provided other useful information and links and the information would be emailed to all Members after the meeting.

Councillor Turner pointed out that the SNAP meetings had been an extremely useful tool in creating partnership working and gaining investment from residents to work with the Police to achieve priorities in Wards and Parishes. She asked if this could be taken into account in future as it created a culture of investment in the role of the Police officers to support them to do their duty and achieve the right outcome for all concerned.

Councillor Bambridge explained that he met often with the PCC and his team in County Hall and could take any questions that Members had along to that forum on their behalf.

Councillor Morton asked how the PCC would resolve issues on supporting mental health, if mental health was not supported sufficiently with Police officers being first responders on scene. The PCC explained that when the officer arrived at a scene it could be concerns of a resident with mental health issues and with more demand on ambulances and NHS staff there could be delays in sending the right support. If this was the case the Police officer, as first responder, would need to remain with the resident until the trained mental health professionals arrived to avoid putting any public at risk; unfortunately, this could sometimes take many hours. Approximately, 20% of calls involved mental health issues, and this meant that there was a reduction of officers available to attend 999 calls; however, further work had been planned with the NHS to work out a solution.

Councillor Birt asked about the figures used and if they included information on fraud. The PCC stated that it possibly over 50% of crimes reported involved fraud of some nature but some issues were never reported. The main issue was that it was mostly a very sophisticated type of fraud, and the perpetrators were difficult to find if they were not resident in the UK as they could be based anywhere globally. This made it very difficult to police and needed a national and international solution to solve it which was why the Government had been looking at improving cyber security. From the constabulary perspective they had to place the onus on

Action By

preventing issues, to get people to think about passwords and follow the guidance, locking devices and to be much more aware about the ability of mobile devices and the information held within them. There was also a Norfolk Against Scams Partnership which worked together to raise awareness and asked Members to pass this information on to their residents.

Councillor Brame felt that Members were in a position to promote this information and guide residents and suggested this information could be included, with links, on the Breckland Council website. This was seconded by Councillors Kybird and Turner and was agreed by Members.

Members of the Commission thanked the PCC for attending and sharing the information with Members.

51/22 Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Executive Member for Customer and Corporate Service, Councillor Jane James introduced the Performance Overview Report – Quarter 1 2022/23 for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 June 2022.

Councillor Birt stated that at the previous meeting it had been confirmed that further information would be sent to Members after the meeting, yet he had not received anything. The Innovation and Change Business Partner, Ryan Pack confirmed that this information had been sent out to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission outlook address group and other Members had confirmed receipt of the information. This would be investigated outside of the meeting.

The Innovation and Change Business Partner pointed out that at the time of publication of the report the electricity usage figures had not been received from the supplier and it was therefore verbally confirmed that the usage had been 215,006kWh which was down about 19,000kWh compared to Q1 on the previous year and down approximately 76,000 compared to Q4 of 21/22. The percentage of planned works update for Members was not available at this time. Some details needed to be checked but it was hoped that the commercial property debt would be available in the report for the October meeting.

Councillor Birt asked about the timely receipt of data to the Commission specifically related to commercial debt and asked if it could be presented to the Commission in its early stages.

After much discussion the Chairman asked Members if they would like an item on commercial debt included within the quarterly report.

Councillor Kybird suggested that if such matters were going to be

Action By

monitored by the Commission, parameters should be set so that it would be a by exception report rather than a regular quarterly report.

It was agreed that a 'by exception' report would suffice.

The Innovation and Change Business Partner confirmed that he would email the Commission with the information and would take this request to Cabinet to add to the Performance Report.

With regard to bin collections on page 23 of the report, Councillor Birt felt that this figure should be red, as 94.14% was more than slightly below the target of 98% and asked if Serco were being fined for the unsuccessful collection rate. The Innovation and Change Business Partner said he would find out from the Environmental Services Team and report back to the Commission.

Councillor Turner explained that at a Serco Task and Finish Group meeting the officers had explained that it was not in Serco's best interest to attract fines for breach of KPIs. Where bins had been missed or collected late through circumstances beyond Serco's control Breckland Council would have discussions with Serco to confirm the situation as a fine in some situations may not be the best way forward.

Councillor Birt had concerns over the continued poor performance of the Contact Centre and asked for more detailed information and statistics on the abandoned rate and call-back requests.

The Customer Experience Manager, Adele Newsome confirmed that she would provide a written response to the Commission.

The Chairman said that it would be useful to see the statistics and information provided in one more quarterly report and then at the October meeting the Commission would decide if further scrutiny of the performance of the Contact Centre would be required.

Councillor Birt voiced his concerns over the percentage of complaints not responded to within the time limit and asked if this would be an ongoing issue. The Innovation and Change Business Partner said that this had been a disappointing indicator, but he did not see it as an ongoing issue as it had improved from past years, and this was felt to be an isolated incident, but it would be monitored and checked against Q2.

The report was otherwise noted.

52/22 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

Councillor Turner explained that the Serco Task and finish Group last met on 14 July where it had been hoped to finalise a report for this

Action By

Overview and Scrutiny meeting. However, a number of mitigating circumstances had prevailed, and Members had felt that there had not been enough information to finalise the report. It had therefore been agreed that the T&F Group should meet again on 26 July 2022 to finalise the report so that it would be fit for purpose and presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting in October.

53/22 OUTSIDE BODY FEEDBACK (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Kybird stated that the Norfolk Records Office meeting scheduled for 22 July 2022 had been cancelled.

The Norfolk Joint Museums meeting, scheduled for 22 July 2022 contained two items affecting Breckland Council. The first was to support an expression of interest to the Heritage Lottery Fund for Thetford Town Council for a Heritage Master Plan with Norfolk Museums listed as a partner. The second item was for the Joint Museum Committee to support the Museums Service in respect of starting a project enquiry form to the National Heritage Lottery Fund to explore funding opportunities to increase the Duleep Singh interpretation at the Ancient House Museum in Thetford to align with the 100th anniversary of the opening of the museum.

With regard to the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny meeting, once the outcomes from the recent meeting had been issued, these would be circulated to the Members of the Commission.

As a Trustee of the Hammond Educational Trust, Councillor Wickerson reminded Members of the special Platinum Jubilee £10,000 bursary and stated that one applicant had been awarded £3,000 but there was still £7,000 available and encouraged Members to publicise and circulate the information within their Wards.

Councillor Wilkinson, as Breckland Council's representative and Governor on the Board at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn stated that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Steve Barclay had visited the hospital and opened the new eye centre. There had been other clinics opened on site and it was hoped that these could offer the day care to alleviate pressure on GPs.

He then explained that the Breckland Youth Mental Health Project - Cup-O-T: Wellness and Therapy Services had been commissioned by Breckland Council and Breckland Youth Advisory Board to deliver support for young people and their families who were on mental health waiting lists. The project had been running from October 2021 to September 2022 and had so far worked with 54 families during that time.

54/22 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM)

None.

55/22 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Nairn had concerns over the lack of NHS dental care within Breckland and across Norfolk. The dental practice in Watton was not

Action By

now accepting any new NHS patients and another dentist had recently left the practice. The existing NHS patients had not been transferred to another dentist within the practice. As far as he was aware, there were no other dentists accepting NHS patients within the Breckland area and private dentistry work remained extremely expensive. Similarly, there had been a lack of GP appointments available, and he felt that such matters were now approaching a crisis point and felt that the situation should be investigated on behalf of residents to establish what action could be taken.

Councillor Kybird pointed out that this had been discussed at the recent NCC Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and said that there had been an opportunity to tender bids for a dental practice in Thetford, but none had been received. One of the key issues with regard to rural practices was that they had been that based on a national model and required practices to be open from 8am until 8pm which would not be practicable in rural areas; however, he felt that if this was done through a Councillor Call for Action it should be through the Eastern Region Commissioners.

Councillor Wilkinson said that he had experienced the same issues with complaints from residents and felt that this was a national issue and had been discussed in Parliament recently and the Commission could possibly add weight to this debate.

Councillor Kybird said that he would check the responses and outcomes from the NCC Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and follow up with writing to the Minister to see if a response had been received and reconsider a call for action at that point.

Councillor Nairn confirmed that this was acceptable and would await the outcome before deciding a course of action.

There had been no update as this point with regard to the previous call for action from Councillor Nairn on the issues with grass cutting by NCC. The Democratic Services was asked to chase this action.

56/22 WORK PROGRAMME

It was agreed to move the report of the OSC Task and Finish Group-Serco Contract to the October meeting.

The Chairman suggested the review of the IT infrastructure be scheduled for the December meeting.

57/22 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on Thursday, 8 September 2022 at 10am in the Anglia Room were noted.

The meeting closed at 12.40 pm

CHAIRMAN