

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the Deben Conference Room, East Suffolk House, on **Thursday, 15 December 2022 at 6.30pm**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Tony Goldson, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Caroline Topping

Other Members present:

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Mark Jepson, Councillor Mary Rudd, Councillor Kay Yule

Officers present: Ben Bix (Democratic Services Officer), Julia Catterwell (East Suffolk Communities Officer), Andy Jarvis (Strategic Director), Sandra Lewis (Head of Digital and Programme Management), Nicole Rickard (Head of Communities), Alli Stone (Democratic Services Officer)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Deacon, Beavan, Gandy and Robinson. Councillor Byatt was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Deacon; and Councillor Yule attended as substitute for Councillor Beavan.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3 Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Matters Arising Update Sheet

The Committee noted the matters arising update sheet in relation to queries raised at the last meeting.

5 East Suffolk Crime & Disorder Committee: Review of the East Suffolk Community Safety Partnership

In its capacity as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee under the provisions of the Police and Criminal Justice Act, the Scrutiny Committee received report and supplement **ES/1383** from the Cabinet Member for Community Health. The report was presented by the Assistant Cabinet Member, Councillor Jepson, the Council's Member lead on Community Safety and Chair of the East Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and the Suffolk Police and Crime Panel.

The Chairman expressed his disappointment that representatives of the Responsible Authorities had not attended the meeting, despite having been invited. Councillor Jepson acknowledged that engagement from some of partners had gradually decreased over time, due in part, to increased workloads as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the diversion of resources to help households tackle the the rising cost of living. However, the process of engaging partners in order to refresh the Action Plan, led by the Safeguarding and Community Projects Manager, had improved matters significantly.

The Action Plan had been refreshed between March and November 2022, utilising a workshop for partners followed by task and finish groups focused on local issues whilst still delivering activity on strategic priorities. Councillor Jepson emphasised that the CSP was a strategic body, with some operational strands, and that its local priorities should be visible to residents. The new Action Plan was a significant opportunity to improve community safety. Its overarching themes were an important addition that would positively influence both collaborative work and the work that all partners delivered outside of the scope of the CSP. It would be more deliverable and measurable because it was focussed on practical, visible activity with clear Key Performance Indicators.

The Committee had chosen two priority topics for the meeting and Councillor Jepson gave a brief introduction by explaining that the first priority topic, tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) was lead by Suffolk County Council with support from East Suffolk Council, the emphasis of which was around local interventions and cross-cutting awareness with other Council services such as Licensing. The second priority topic chosen by the Committee was Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), and Councillor Jepson described how the East Suffolk Communities, Environmental Protection and Housing teams were all working together to investigate reports of ASB and would work with complainants and perpetrators to reach a satisfactory conclusion where possible. The Safer Neighbourhood Team were also working in partnership to identify and reduce anti-social behaviour. The Chairman thanked Councillor Jepson for his introduction and invited questions from Members.

The Chairman asked two questions about funding. Firstly he sought clarification of the CSP was funded currently, and secondly how it would be funded in the future. Councillor Jepson described how funding arrangements had changed in recent years and that funding for CSPs was now allocated by the Police and Crime Commissioner. Future funding was uncertain, a Serious Violence Duty was forthcoming which was likely to impact on how CSPs were resourced and it was indicated that clarity would be forthcoming early in the new year. As an illustrative example, Norfolk now had a single countywide CSP rather than CSPs based on District Council administrative areas.

Councillor Topping similarly noted that funding was uncertain after March 2023 and asked whether the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) received by East Suffolk Council could be utilised. The Head of Communities responded that whilst there would be indirect benefit from the UKSPF funding, it was allocated to Economic Development and Community related projects (specifically around cost of living); moreover, it was anticipated that future funding may be made available through Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group.

The Chairman and Councillor Yule sought clarification of how infrastructure improvements such as lighting, fencing and CCTV were funded. Officers cautioned that County Highways would fund the maintenance of existing street scene infrastructure, but not new schemes. A project on CCTV was being led by East Suffolk Council working with partners and illustratively, CCTV had been funded for the Whitton Estate in Lowestoft. However, it was cautioned that the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner had been clear that it would not fund local CCTV schemes, but would fund local youth engagement and diversionary projects.

Violence Against Women and Girls

In response to a query from Councillor Lynch, Councillor Jepson clarified that whilst the title of VAWG indicated that it was gender specific, the title reflected the statistical prevalence of violence against women and girls, but was not limited to women and girls. Men and boys could also be victims of violence and abuse.

The Chairman noted the *Ask for Angela* activity shown on the Action Plan and in the Supplement and sought an indication from Committee Members as to whether they knew about the activity. Illustratively, the male Committee Members were not aware of the activity and Officers explained that was the intention, as the activity was targeted to females. Councillor Topping queried whether there was any data since 2016 to demonstrate the effectiveness of the scheme, Officers explained that employees at licensed premises were being upskilled to capture data. Councillor Jepson cautioned that licensed premises were under great strain due to economic pressures, and that prevention was difficult to quantify. Councillor Coulam asked whether awareness raising could be undertaken at other premises, such as supermarkets. Councillor Jepson countered that emphasis had been placed on premises where women may feel unsafe, but welcomed Councillors enthusiasm for spreading the word.

Councillor Cloke questioned how domestic abuse sufferers would know where to get support. Officers advised that Domestic Abuse Champions were provided with training and skills to spread awareness to other colleagues and friends and family and would

act as the 'go to person' for information. Illustratively, both the Felixstowe Town Pastors and the Leiston Town Pastors had completed the training. Overall, there was a national white ribbon campaign, and the Council's website provided local information. Further to a question from Councillor Topping it was confirmed that victims were offered support and fifteen Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors were employed in Suffolk.

The Chairman noted the importance of the emphasis on changing the behaviour of Men and asked whether the normalisation of exposure to online sexual material could be a cause of abusive behaviour. The Head of Communities referred to the *Crucial Crew* project aimed at young people, challenging their behaviours, and older children were benefitting from advice on relationships. The scheme had good feedback and was a proactive measure for young people. In response to Councillor Byatt, the Communities Officer confirmed that around 2000 young people in the district had been engaged in the project.

Anti-Social Behaviour

In response to a question from Councillor Yule, the Communities Officer explained that whilst Anti-Social Behaviour was statistically seasonally prevalent in three locations in Woodbridge, it was not increasing. Members were urged to report all incidents of ASB, and to escalate matters if necessary to the Suffolk Constabulary Area Superintendent.

Echoing the significance of reporting of ASB, Councillor Green was of the view that more co-ordination and publicity of how to report matters would be welcome and asked whether there was a co-ordinated approach to publicity, similar to the *Ease the Squeeze* project. Councillor Jepson concurred and had recently met with the Chief Constable to consider the approach to visibility and communication. Officers explained that a new CSP leaflet was in production and the views of Members about co-ordination would inform that work.

Councillor Byatt had observed that when the press reported incidents of ASB, typically no counter statement was provided by the CSP and asked whether responses could be more proactive. The Head of Communities stated that proactive projects around ASB had been delivered at events during 2022, but cautioned that a balanced approach was necessary. Councillor Jepson concurred and advised that media responses were under consideration at PCC level.

In response to Councillor Goldson, the Communities Officer set out how the impact of the work of the CSP was monitored using social media tools to understand the effectiveness of campaigns, and by logging the outcomes from training and awareness sessions. Furthermore, the Head of Communities emphasised how the new Action Plan included KPIs which would enable monitoring of the effectiveness of interventions.

In response to Member's further questions and observations, Officers clarified that:

- The proposed Criminal Exploitation Hub would be located in Lowestoft
- ASB could be reported online via the East Suffolk Council website

- The Criminal Exploitation (formerly known as County Lines) priority included addressing with partners the impact of illegal drug use and distribution
- The PCC could provide updates by Ward as part of its reporting to outside bodies

The Chairman invited the Assistant Cabinet Member to sum-up. Councillor Jepson thanked the Committee for its engagement and re-iterated that the work of the CSP would continue to be more locally focussed. Feedback from Members around visibility, communication and monitoring had been heard and would be actioned. The participation of partners was a challenge, but recent engagement around the development of the Action Plan had improved and it was hoped that would continue.

RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Committee note the current position of the CSP, including the CSP Action Plan and the priority areas Violence Against Women and Girls and Anti-Social Behaviour.

The Meeting was adjourned from 7.43pm to 7.51pm

6 Cabinet Member Scrutiny Session

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Burroughes - Cabinet Member with responsibility for Customer Experience, ICT and Commercial Partnerships. The Committee had previously advised that the session would focus on two areas of the portfolio, namely, the Leisure Commercial Partnership and Customer Services.

Councillor Burroughes introduced the Leisure Commercial Partnership in summary, as follows:

- East Suffolk Council delivered leisure services at five leisure centres provided in partnership with Places Leisure and Everyone Active
- Everyone Active was responsible for providing leisure services in the north of the District since 2020 at Waterlane in Lowestoft and the newly refurbished and renamed Waveney Valley Leisure Centre in Bungay
- Since 2015, Places Leisure operated the centres in Leiston, the Deben Pool in Woodbridge and the Brackenbury Centre in Felixstowe in the south of the district
- A major capital investment programme had been undertaken to update, refurbish and refresh most of the centres at a cost of over £15m.

The contracts varied between the 2 operators due to the number and type of facilities they operated and as a result of improvement and redevelopment of the assets which had been reflected in variances in the management fees. The redevelopment of the leisure centres and maintaining their condition and quality was key to the performance of the contracts. The contracts were monitored and overseen at quarterly partnership board meetings.

The impact on services during the pandemic when all leisure facilities were closed by the government was considerable. There was a significant financial impact upon operators and their staff which had been mitigated by support from government funds

and the furlough scheme which had enabled employees to be retained. The Council was also successful in applying for a government grant of £570,000.

Over 600,000 visitors had used the facilities in the year to date, with swimming returning to almost 100% of pre-pandemic levels, whilst gym usage was at 85%. Data indicated that obesity rates were increasing and consequentially, it was important that the Council continued to offer affordable leisure options to everyone within the District.

The challenges were around future financial pressures including the rising cost of utilities. Some operators had to close their swimming pools due to the high cost of heating. The Council had taken mitigating measures by adding pool covers throughout the centres to keep them open and reduce the cost pressure. The Council was also taking action to reduce its carbon footprint at all centres working with its development partners, Pulse and Build, and a decarbonisation report was due to come before Cabinet in March to explore the possibility of the installation of PV solar panels and air source heat pumps across some assets.

The contractual element of the leisure service in particular was a significant strand within the Council's Strategic Plan focused on the key themes of delivering Financial Sustainability, maintaining vibrant communities and embedding relevant data as part of its digital theme. All current contracts would run until 31 March 2029 when the leisure service for the District would be put out to tender.

Councillor Goldson declared an Other Registerable Interest as Chairman of Halesworth Campus Ltd.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his introduction and asked why usage of the leisure centres had not yet returned to pre-Covid levels. Councillor Burroughes explained that users had choices about how they would spend their money, and economic pressures were impacting on those choices. Whilst leisure centre usage had not yet returned to capacity, swimming pool usage had. In response to Councillor Yule, the Strategic Director confirmed that school usage of the pools had recovered to pre-Covid levels. Councillor Topping probed further to enquire as to where the previous gym users had gone, and whether any incentives were offered to encourage their return. Councillor Burroughes advised that during the pandemic, people had started to exercise more at home, purchasing the necessary equipment. In terms of incentives, those were targeted by the provider to those most in need of health improvement interventions and promoted on the Council's website.

In responding to Councillor Lynch, Councillor Burroughes confirmed that the Council was keen to reduce the carbon footprint of its leisure provision. An options report would be presented to Cabinet in the spring and the Strategic Director detailed that alternatives to gas energy would be explored. A credible range of options would be presented to Cabinet, to include air source heat pumps and photovoltaics. The report would illustrate a cost comparison with gas energy provision, including maintenance, and any replacement infrastructure. Councillor Burroughes cautioned that not all buildings would be suitable for alternative power sources.

There being no further questions, the Chairman invited the Cabinet Member to introduce the Customer Services area of his portfolio.

Councillor Burroughes explained that during the Covid pandemic the service had to change to reduce demand and free up capacity. Interactive Voice Response tools were used to inform customers of relevant service changes, and enable greater demand and resource management. Resources had to be diverted and be flexible enough to ensure resilience, take on new services, and maintain support for customers and colleagues. Face to face contact points were closed in order to keep staff and customers safe. During the pandemic over 2,000 vulnerable residents were assisted including 1,800 community referrals, in addition to over 175,000 phone calls and over 22,000 emails mostly relating to Council Tax, Garden Waste, and ESC tenants.

During the pandemic, 65 staff had to quickly adapt to the implementation of a virtual call centre. Measures had to be put in place to move from a traditional call centre management approach to fully remote working. New services were integrated at short notice, to help support the NHS, and to support the Home but Not Alone call service. Outbound call work was new for Customer Service Agents but with additional support and training it had proven successful.

Work was continuing across all departments to gain buy-in and support for an 'experience' approach particularly the need for end-to-end service delivery, to utilise and learn from customer feedback and to improve public confidence, increase satisfaction, minimise failure demand, and reduce resource pressures.

Councillor Burroughes explained that a brand-new Customer Service Delivery Model known as our One Front Door had been implemented and was designed to be both proactive and responsive to the needs of customers. Digital Champions had been established to encourage and inform residents about online services.

A redesigned customer access and digital coaching approach had proven to be successful. Historically, the public facing offer was only delivered at the Marina Customer Service Centre, and Felixstowe, Beccles and Woodbridge libraries 5 days a week. Since the pandemic, the analysis of the operational data had shown a significant shift in the way the public contacted and used council services. Consequentially, the Council now had a presence in more locations across the District than previously. Together with a digital coaching approach, the Council now operated 2 days a week at the Marina Customer Service Centre in Lowestoft, and also now in Aldeburgh, Felixstowe, Halesworth, Leiston, Saxmundham & Woodbridge libraries. This was based on demographic need but also allowed the service to be available for those who had specific needs and who needed support in a face-to-face setting.

Due to the cost of living crisis, a comprehensive support service was available to customers through the Council's Financial Inclusion Officers, particularly for those who had limited online experience and ability or who were nervous about going online. Residents within areas of East Suffolk who were vulnerable were offered specific customer access points to offer bespoke assistance where required. This provided greater flexibility to react and adapt where demand was apparent less cost. The service would continue to evolve over time according to data analysis and research.

The One Front Door approach would ensure a customer centric approach to service delivery, across a variety of channels to maximise resources, improve first contact rates and accessibility for customers, reduce failure demand and touch points of dissatisfaction. The model would flex to meet the changing needs of customers and other pressures as well as being able to support local partners. This work had also released capacity in other departments and had created efficiency savings.

A Call Performance Framework had been implemented to provide call monitoring and to identify staff training needs alongside areas of performance improvement. A new data capture system called Every Contact Counts had been introduced to better understand demand and customer insight to inform and influence decision making.

The coming year would see the evolution of the service offer to continue to deliver a flexible approach to service delivery, to meet the changing needs and expectations of customers and residents through channel choice. The Marina Customer Service Centre was being refreshed and would offer a remodelled setting for customers.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Burroughes for his introduction and invited questions from Members.

Councillor Green was pleased to hear that the number of Customer Service desks had increased but was concerned that there was only 5 hours of staffed service in Felixstowe and queried whether the floorspace in the library could be better used. Councillor Burroughes advised that support was targeted to those that needed help, through channels that were best aligned to their needs, some interactions were best completed online, and other interactions face-to-face or over the telephone. The floorspace in the library was not a long term arrangement and was under review. The strategy for the service going forward was the 'One Front Door' approach.

In response to further questions and observations from Members, Councillor Burroughes and Officers clarified that there had been 182 requests for assisted bin collections during the financial year to date; and confirmed that the One Front Door approach would enable signposting to other authorities and service providers as necessary, as it was intended to be a triage style service, for example taking on tenant repair calls from January 2023.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Burroughes and Officers for their attendance and participation.

RESOLVED

That the information presented by the Cabinet Member be noted and the Cabinet Member and Officers report back to Members on the following Matters Arising:

- What is the target timescale for Customer Services answering telephone calls? And what is the current performance against that target?
- Which services are within the scope of the 'One Front Door' Customer Services initiative?

7 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Annual Report for 2021/22 agreed at the September 2022 meeting, was received by Full Council on 23 November 2022. The next meeting of the Committee would be on 19 January 2023 where the Committee would undertake its annual review of the Council's Budget. A process to enable advance questions would be circulated to Committee Members. An Extraordinary Committee meeting would then be held on Thursday, 26 January 2023 at 6.30pm to review the governance arrangements for the Council's Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCOs), and Members had been consulted on the scope for that topic by email.

The meeting concluded at 8.37pm

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Chairman