

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, Lowestoft on **Thursday 20 May 2021 at 6:30 pm**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Caroline Topping

Other Members present:

Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Steve Gallant, Councillor Letitia Smith, Councillor Ed Thompson

Officers present:

Katherine Abbott (Democratic Services Officer) Sarah Carter (Democratic Services Officer), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Sue Meeken (Political Group Support Officer (Labour)), Nicole Rickard (Head of Communities)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gee.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Cloke declared a vested interest in item 3, Review of Community Partnerships, in that she was the Chairman of one of the eight Community Partnerships. It was clarified that this did not prohibit Councillor Cloke from participating in the review.

3 Review of the Community Partnerships

The Scrutiny Committee received the written report submitted by the responsible Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Tourism, Councillor Smith, in response to the Committee's agreed remit.

The Chairman invited questions.

Councillor Deacon referred to one of the responses in appendix B to the report and the which had referred to work underway to boost Town and Parish Council and Voluntary and Community Sector membership respectively, he asked how this would be achieved. The Head of Communities said this was more about ensuring a good range of representatives on the Community Partnerships, including youth and voluntary bodies,

to facilitate different voices. Councillor Deacon welcomed the ambition to widen the range of voices but said he had found the reference to the reduced participation of Councillors to be offensive. The Leader of the Council said the comments had been provided by one of the Chairmen of one of the Community Partnerships as part of the Committee's consultation; he wished to assure the Committee that there was no intention or wish to reduce the involvement of Councillors in any of the Partnerships rather ESC Councillors would be core members of their respective Partnership. Councillor Smith said the aim was to retain Councillor involvement but use it to encourage other participants.

Councillor Beavan referred to question one of appendix A to the report and said that district Councillors bore the responsibility to ensure public monies were well spent and, therefore, he considered that Councillors should be informed on spend in their wards; he asked if such a notification could be considered. Councillor Smith said she would consider this suggestion and make it happen if at all possible.

Councillor Topping said that the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) had indicated that some small parishes did not wish to engage with the Community Partnerships because they had felt dominated by the Town and District Councils and asked if this was being addressed to engage and reassure parishes that their participation was of equal importance. The Head of Communities reiterated that the Council worked closely with SALC which had worked to encourage every parish to participate, in addition, information had been shared on the projects the Partnerships had supported to indicate the possible benefits of participation. Councillor Smith also referred to the recently introduced rural proofing toolkit, developed in conjunction with Community Action Suffolk, and which aimed to increase engagement over the next twelve months or so. Councillor Cloke said that within the Community Partnership she chaired the three market towns had multiple representatives which did mean that some representatives from small parishes felt 'outnumbered'. Councillor Smith added that the continued success of the Partnerships and their positive impacts would encourage participation.

Councillor Hedgley said he had, initially, had reservations about the Community Partnerships but that these had largely dissipated; he added that his constituents did not speak to him about isolation or mental health, but did raise traffic and road safety issues which, he suggested, sometimes mattered greatly to small rural villages. Councillor Coulam added that transport in towns also needed to be considered. Councillor Smith replied that the Community Partnership Board would be looking at this as a priority for 2021/22 and that a Transport Delivery Plan was in development with £80,000 already allocated for projects. It was also possible for Partnerships to change their priorities if they so chose. The Chairman asked if a Partnership could return to one of its original priorities if this had altered as a result of Covid. The Head of Communities said that if emerging needs indicated this would be helpful then a return to a previous priority was acceptable.

Councillor Gooch thanked the Cabinet Member and Head of Communities for the report and for the hard work which had gone into establishing the Community Partnerships so successfully. She asked how much monitoring was done of good practice in other local authorities and for some additional details on the planned peer review. The Head of Communities said the peer review was scheduled to be

undertaken over three days in mid-October; it would focus on Community Partnerships as a new, innovative and successful initiative. The Review would be undertaken by the Leader of another local authority, a CEO of another local authority - both with experience of community-related initiatives - have officer support and include someone from the Local Government Association who would prepare the resulting report. The review would provide an external and independent assessment. The Leader of the Council said that officers and the Council's leadership team looked outside of the organisation for good practice examples.

Councillor Gooch asked if anything in the replies submitted by the Chairs of the Partnerships had been a surprise. Councillor Smith replied that she intended to discuss the replies with the Chairs and to ask them to elaborate further. The Head of Communities wished to reassure the Committee that extensive research had been undertaken before the establishment of the Community Partnerships and, she added, the Chairs replies had been insightful and clearly proud of the achievements to date. However, there were some specifics in the replies which needed to be discussed a little further.

Councillor Bird asked about perceptions of the current funding allocation to all Partnerships of the same amount, no matter their make-up. The Leader of the Council said this had been raised and revisited previously. He stressed the need to make sure the allocation was fair and equitable; he outlined the costs of a project undertaken in an urban areas and the logistical challenges and costs of doing the same in a rural location. The Head of Communities said it was important not to look at the allocation in isolation but within the context of other initiatives underway and funding available, for example, in Lowestoft, Leiston and Felixstowe.

Councillor Green asked if there was a perception that some groups, with older volunteers, might struggle to seek funding and, if so, was there something the Council could do to assist them to identify funding opportunities and to complete applications. The Head of Communities said the Council was working with Community Action Suffolk on a number of projects and that the Community Partnership Board had created the 'bounce back' fund but, sometimes, in the instance Councillor Green referred to, it was more about having additional volunteers than about funding.

Councillor Topping asked how Community Partnerships would meet in the future; she suggested that a more inclusive remote approach would perhaps be more welcoming to smaller parishes but, equally, exclusive if they did not have the correct technology. Councillor Smith said this depended on the Partnership and that whilst she encouraged face to face meetings the difficulties of doing so were recognised.

In response to a question from Councillor Byatt, the Head of Communities said Partnerships were encouraged to review their priorities annually to decide if they needed to continue or if other matters should take greater priority in changing circumstances. The Leader of the Council said the identification, monitoring, review and changing of priorities was in the power of the Partnerships and added that sometimes it was not a question of funding, but joint working, that offered the solution.

Councillor Smith thanked the Committee for its questions and for an enjoyable debate.

She said she had noted the questions and comments which had been very useful.

Councillor Lynch said the Committee had been negative in its review and instead should have been praising the Partnerships and the Communities team for their work and to have pride in their achievements. The Chairman stated that the review had not been negative, but the Committee's remit was to examine constructively and to ask probing questions. He agreed that achievements were praiseworthy but the Committee was required to examine matters thoroughly. Councillor Deacon and Councillor Gooch agreed with the Chairman and also referred to the need for the Committee to fulfil its role and to add value where possible.

RESOLVED

That, having received the written report and questioned its contents, the Committee agreed to formally thank the Cabinet Member, all Officers within the Communities team and the Chairs of the eight Community Partnerships for their excellent work and achievements to date

4 Cabinet Member's update

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Smith, the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Tourism, and invited her to make her update on her strategic aims and priorities for her portfolio.

Councillor Smith referred to her key strategic roles and responsibilities with the portfolio. With regard to Tourism, Councillor Smith said the Council's role was both strategic and delivery focussed. Strategically, the Council promoted the various resorts, market towns and natural attractions via the DMO - this was, she said, a partnership with the tourism industry which the Council jointly funded with tourism businesses. These businesses also promoted east Suffolk as a tourist destination through the Visit Suffolk Coast website and targeted promotional/ marketing campaigns. Councillor Smith added that with the DMO the Council also worked strategically and collaboratively with Visit East of England to promote the region as a destination of choice. The Council had established Visitor Information Points across the District at which tourism related businesses were able to provide print and digital visitor information; this had benefitted visitors and businesses alike and increased footfall. Councillor Smith stated that the Council had invested directly in tourism assets such as the East Point Pavilion, Jubilee Terrace beach chalets, Martello café, Felixstowe Seafront Gardens etc.

Councillor Smith referred to the Council's Covid response and said that a specific grant support fund of £1.9m for the district's hospitality sector had been established. In addition, local campaigns such as the Shop local/Stay safe campaign had been running since the first lockdown. Councillor Smith also referred to the twelve town videos produced with on-going social media campaigns which had been adapted as restrictions had altered. The Welcome back to East Suffolk campaign had commenced to promote the district's towns to residents and visitors. Councillor Smith said the Council had worked collaboratively with partners across the region to survey the needs of the tourism sector and implemented a joint promotional campaign to welcome visitors back safely. The campaign 'Unexplored England' was supported by a coalition of 14 DMOs and Councils. Some £150,000 regional investment funding had been put in

place with a further £425,000 secured from the Government and Visit England. The campaign targeted a younger demographic of pre-school families and 'pre-nesters', which linked to the Council's new Consumer Sentiment survey. Councillor Smith explained that an older demographic would return to places they knew, but younger people were willing to try a new location. The campaign had commenced in April/May and would be underway over the summer; it would feature bookable experiences such as theatres and the arts. Councillor Smith said that whilst the Council did not have a specific remit for this sector, it had recognised its wider and economic value. The Council had established the first Cultural Strategy for Lowestoft in 2019 to support the cultural regeneration element of the wider Lowestoft Town Investment Plan. This had developed into a major capital project - The Cultural Quarter - which had built on the strengths of the Marina Theatre to provide a fully externally funded (Town's Fund) public realm and leisure redevelopment in the heart of the High Street. Councillor Smith added that an East Suffolk Arts and Performance Forum had been established to better understand the common issues affecting the sector and to provide tangible support which had included access to funding, promotional and marketing advice, the use of digital technology, advice and support on the implementation of Covid safety measures and testing, and business support programmes.

With regard to leisure centre redevelopment. Councillor Smith advised that over the last six months the Council's leisure team had overseen the redevelopment of the Waveney Valley Leisure Centre (formerly Bungay) which had re-opened in October 2020, before lockdown three, and was not open again to the public. The Waterlane Leisure Centre had also undergone a refurbishment which had addressed some long standing issues such as the teaching pool moveable floor, mechanical and lighting, and decoration. Following further investigation into a continuing roof leak, a temporary fix had been made but the only option was replace the roof and a report would be coming to Cabinet and Full Council with more detail and to seek approval of the funding later in 2021.

Councillor Smith referred to the production of a new Leisure Strategy. She advised that consultants had been appointed in 2020 to undertake the necessary work including strategies for the Built Facility, Playing Pitch, Open Space and Play Equipment strategies to help inform the production of a new East Suffolk Leisure Strategy. The new Leisure Strategy would set the key tasks to be undertaken over the next five years and it was anticipated would be complete during the summer.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Smith for her comprehensive and interesting update and invited questions.

Councillor Deacon asked Councillor Smith to elaborate on how the views of young people on social isolation and loneliness were being gleaned. Councillor Smith referred to one of the projects which young people had chosen to do as part of the Youth Take Over Day 2020, which had focused on isolation and loneliness being an opportunity to write to elderly people or their lonely friends.

Councillor Bird asked if the Council was confident the district was sufficiently prepared for the numbers of tourists which were likely to visit the area this Summer. Councillor Smith replied that it was anticipated that many would have stay-cations this Summer

and this would be a welcome opportunity for local businesses to recover from the impact of the pandemic.

Councillor Gooch referred to social distancing measures on the promenades and suggested these were not being observed nor monitored; she asked if the Council had a strategy for this. Councillor Smith said clear and visible signs had been put in place and that people needed to use common sense and personal responsibility. Councillor Gooch also referred to the previous 'passport to leisure' membership which had been, she said, both transferable and flexible; she asked if, as this no longer existed, if access to leisure facilities could be standardised. Councillor Smith said that she was happy to raise the possibility of a passport approach with the providers. Councillor Gooch asked if showers in leisure facilities remained out of use. Councillor Smith said that currently facilities were not available and that this would alter as the roadmap out of the pandemic proceeded. Councillor Gooch referred to a recent article in *The Lowestoft Journal* and asked how the Council was addressing the inaccurate perception which might be in place based on the article's ranking of facilities. Councillor Smith said that so many positive achievements were taking place that any perception would soon be altered.

Councillor Smith was asked why she had wished to be responsible for her portfolio and what achievement she felt most proud of. Councillor Smith said the portfolio took her out of her comfort zone and offered an opportunity to be challenged and learn. In terms of achievements, Councillor Smith said she aimed to have all the roles within her portfolio to be provided to the best possible standard, to set an excellent example.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Councillor Smith for her responses to questions.

5 Appointments to Outside Bodies 2021-22 (Scrutiny functions)

The Committee received a report by the Leader of the Council. The report sought the Scrutiny Committee's consideration of its Appointments to Outside Bodies (with scrutiny functions) for the 2021/22 Municipal Year. The current appointments and designated substitutes were outlined at Appendix A to the report.

The Vice Chairman referred to the Annual Meeting of Full Council earlier in May and at which, he said, Councillor Patience had been re-appointed to the Joint Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Panel; he asked why it was necessary to therefore appoint to that Panel at this meeting. The Leader of the Council said that an appointment had not been made at the Annual Meeting and that appointments to outside bodies should be made by the Scrutiny Committee from amongst its membership. Councillor Beavan said this was disappointing.

The Chairman sought nominations for the appointment of the Committee's representative and designated substitute to the Joint Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Panel:

Councillor Deacon nominated Councillor Keith Patience as the representative, this was seconded by Councillor Gooch. Councillor Back nominated Councillor Coulam as the representative, this was seconded by Councillor Lynch. Councillor Patience received

four votes and Councillor Coulam received eight votes. Councillor Coulam was appointed as the Committee's representative on this Panel. Councillor Robinson was nominated and seconded for the position of the designated substitute. There being no other nominees, Councillor Robinson was appointed as designated substitute to Councillor Coulam on the Panel.

The Chairman sought nominations for the appointment of the Committee's representative and designated substitute to the Health Scrutiny Committee:

Councillor Hedgley was nominated and seconded as the representative; there being no other nominations he was appointed as the Committee's representative on the Health Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Back was nominated and seconded as the designated substitute. There being no other nominations, he was so appointed.

It was proposed by Councillor Cloke, seconded by Councillor Robinson and by majority vote

RESOLVED

1. That Councillors had been appointed to those Outside Bodies listed in Appendix A for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.
2. That designated substitutes had also been appointed to attend the Outside Bodies listed at Appendix A for the 2021/22 Municipal Year in the event the primary appointee is unavailable.
3. That the Leader of the Council be authorised to fill any outstanding vacancies left unfilled by the Scrutiny Committee.
4. That the Leader be granted delegated authority to make any necessary changes to the membership of the Outside Bodies for the remainder of the 2021/22 Municipal Year, in consultation with the other Group Leaders.

6 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee received and reviewed its current forward work programme.

The draft scoping form for a proposed review of Long Term Empty Properties submitted jointly by Councillors Gooch, Green and Topping was approved and added to the schedule for the September 2021 meeting.

It was agreed that Councillor Gooch would provide a draft scoping form to propose a review of NHS dental provision in the district. It was acknowledged that this was not a matter the Committee nor the Council could directly influence, however, subject to the scoping form being agreed and the outcome of the review, it was suggested that the Committee's findings could perhaps be shared with the pan-Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee through Councillor Hedgley as East Suffolk's appointee.

It was further agreed that the previously submitted draft scoping form on social prescribing not be approved for a review due to the oversight and funding of social prescribing lying with the CCG and Primary Care Network. It was agreed that it would be difficult to make and implement recommendations, particularly given the proposed

changes to health systems through the introduction of Integrated Care Systems and which, it was suggested, were likely to cover different geographical boundaries.

It was agreed that for the crime and disorder item at the November 2021 meeting, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable both be invited to attend to brief the Committee on key areas of enquiry. It was agreed the Clerk would ask the Committee for questions to be submitted in advance and also for an indication of the areas the Committee wished to be briefed on.

The meeting concluded at 9.01pm

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Chairman