

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE PANEL

Minutes from the Meeting of the Corporate Performance Panel held on Monday, 13th November, 2023 at 4.30 pm in the Remote Meeting on Zoom and available for the public to view on WestNorfolkBC on You Tube - Zoom and You Tube

PRESENT: Councillor S Dark (Chair)
Councillors R Blunt (*left the meeting at 6.51 pm*), R Colwell (substitute for Councillor D Sayers), P Devulapalli (*left the meeting at 6.52 pm*), B Jones, S Lintern (*left the meeting at 6.50 pm*), B Long, S Nash, J Osborne (Vice Chair) and C Rose

Portfolio Holders:

Councillor M de Whalley, Climate Change and Biodiversity
Councillor T Parish, Leader
Councillor S Squire, Environment and Coastal

Under Standing Order 34:

Councillor A Dickinson (Zoom)
Councillor C Joyce (Zoom)
Councillor J Moriarty

Officers:

Alexa Baker, Monitoring Officer
Becky Box, Assistant Director, Central Services/Management Team Representative
Martin Chisholm, Assistant Director, Commercial and Operations
Lorraine Gore, Chief Executive
Jo Stanton, Revenues and Benefits Manager
Wendy Vincent, Democratic Services Officer

By Invitation:

Adam Worley, Coastal Catchment Manager, Anglian Water Authority
Andrew Raine, Environment Manager, Environment Agency

CP71 **APOLOGIES**

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Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Morley, D Sayers and Mrs V Spikings.

CP72 **MINUTES**

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The minute of the meeting of the Corporate Performance Panel held on 16 October 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CP73 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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Councillors B Long and S Dark declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Norfolk County Councillor appointee to the Police and Crime Panel which was scrutinising the budget and the crime plan.

Councillor Rose declared an interest as a member of the Police and Crime Sub Panel.

CP74 **URGENT BUSINESS UNDER STANDING ORDER 7**

There was no urgent business.

CP75 **MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillors A Dickinson (Zoom), C Joyce (Zoom) and J Moriarty (in person) were present under Standing Order 34.

CP76 **CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE (IF ANY)**

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The Chair advised that he had received correspondence from the Portfolio Holder for Finance regarding Item 9: Cabinet Report – Council Tax Support Scheme: Final Scheme and would refer to the content under the Agenda item.

The correspondence had been copied to all Members of the Corporate Performance Panel.

CP77 **CALL-IN (IF ANY)**

There were no call-ins.

CP78 **WATER QUALITY AT HEACHAM AND HUNSTANTON: NEXT STEPS**

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The Assistant Director, Commercial and Operations introduced the item and provided background information as to why the presentation had been requested by the Panel.

The Panel received a presentation from Adam Worley, Coastal Catchment Manager, Anglian Water Authority and Andrew Raine, Environment Manager, Environment Agency (copy attached to Agenda).

The Chair, Councillor Dark thanked officers for a detailed presentation and invited the Portfolio Holder, Environment and Coastal, Councillor Squire and Portfolio Holder, Biodiversity and Climate Change to address the Panel.

The Portfolio Holder, Environment and Coastal advised that she was the Local Government Association Member Champion for Coastal Water Quality and had regular meetings with Councils around the country who were also experiencing similar issues regarding water quality and added that it was a complicated picture of what affected the water quality. The Portfolio Holder explained that at a recent conference it had been noted that 7% of water pollution came from storm overflows and added that if anyone would like further information to contact her. The Portfolio Holder added that arrangements were in place where to write to Ministers regarding coastal issues.

The Portfolio Holder for Biodiversity and Climate Change advised that he had nothing further to add.

Adam Worley, Andrew Raine and the Assistant Director, Commercial and Operations responded to questions and comments in relation to:

- Birds being the biggest cause of pollution.
- Practical measures to control the gull population.
- Human pollution and steps that could be taken to reduce levels.
- Measures that could be taken to discourage people leaving food in bins for gulls to feed from.
- Impact on pollution from the bird population (had always been present).
- Number of samples taken at each site.
- West Lynn – sewage discharging into the Wash and impact on coastal areas.
- Steps taken to reduce pollution at West Lynn and outlined the reasons why this work had been stalled.
- How West Norfolk compared with the rest of Norfolk and coastal areas including Lincolnshire and the UK.
- Why there was a higher level of bird pollution in West Norfolk that anywhere else in the UK.
- Blue Flag 2015/2016 and why the Borough Council did not apply for the status due to the rules changing. An annual assessment was made which could affect the score.

- Data for concentric ring points.
- Storm overflow – frequency and duration of sampling
- Volume of discharge needed to be identified.
- Spill data to be published at the end of the bathing water season and end of each year.
- Results of sampling used to determine what had gone wrong and gave examples of 28 failed samples in 2022/2023 and advised that of the 28, 2 had occurred during a 72 hour storm period.
- Heacham overload did not affect the network and was dealt with on site by using a balancing tank and then transported to King's Lynn works to be processed.
- Action Plan for design quality at Heacham.
- Heacham – capacity to service the current population both residential and commercial. There were no AWA plans to undertake any growth work and the current population of 54,000 did not trigger any additional work.
- At the peak of tourist season, levels exceeded at certain times. Response given that regular sampling was undertaken and that AWA was committed to using the tanker process to eliminate any human elements.
- What had caused the presence of E-coli.

The Assistant Director, Commercial and Operations explained that with regard to discouraging people to leaving food in bins for birds to feed from, Great Yarmouth had undertaken some work on this and that the Borough Council would look to do something similar as part of the signage for Hunstanton.

Andrew Raine from the Environment Agency undertook to circulate the information regarding the data rings to the Panel.

Following comments on the bathing water at Heacham, Andrew Raine advised that the Environment Agency was committed to tackling the quality of the bathing water at Heacham to make a difference.

Following a question relating to Ecoli (page 44) and why two samples were taken on the same day, A Raine explained that it was normal practice to undertake one per day but would provide a response as to why two samples were taken on the same day.

Councillor Nash referred to the safer rivers and seas service app and undertook to email the link to the Panel.

The Chair, Councillor Dark thanked officers on the work undertaken to date to identify the cause. The Chair commented that outside the bird issue were marginal gains to be had and asked if signage could help regarding location of dog poo bins, drain covers and any low cost measures that could be considered.

The Chair, Councillor Dark also outlined the issues experienced with the bird population in his garden and asked if there was any work being done to address the bird population. In response, Andrew Raine explained that there was no remit to undertake work in relation to birds but was happy to be part of any discussions.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Parish made a number of observations that there was a large population of birds and ducks the village of Heacham. Councillor Parish commented on the water quality in Heacham. Councillor Parish advised that he had received two complaints regarding sewage discharge from a caravan site and sewage in a garden in Mariners Way, Heacham. Councillor Parish added that there was also pollution in the sea as events happened from time to time. In conclusion, Councillor Parish commented that with regard to the capacity at Heacham Treatment Works there was still disbelief when various planning applications were considered.

Councillor Parish commented that in Heacham attempts had been made to try and establish dog poo bins in visible places near and on the beach and was pleased to learn that there was work ongoing to address the issue.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Dickinson addressed the Panel and stated that as one of the Ward Councillors for Hunstanton had noticed comments on social media expressing concern on the quality of bathing water in Hunstanton. With regard to dog waste data, Councillor Dickinson asked how significant was the information and added that up until 5 years ago at Old Hunstanton waste bins had been placed on the beach by the Le Strange but had disappeared pre-Covid and had not been put back.

In response, the Assistant Director, Commercial Services explained that dog bins would be installed at both Heacham and Hunstanton next season. The Panel was informed that 184 waste bins were available in the resort and undertook to discuss the provision of waste bins at Old Hunstanton with the Le Strange Estate.

Andrew Raine, Environment Agency responded to questions from the Portfolio Holder Climate Change and Biodiversity in relation to algae.

The Chair, Councillor Dark drew the Panel's attention to the recommendation to note the update report. The Chair invited the Panel to consider if they wished to receive a further report in April/May 2024.

Councillor Long commented that a further report to the Panel would be beneficial if there was something different to report.

Councillor Blunt asked if it would be more relevant to be referred to the Environment and Community Panel.

RESOLVED: That the update report be noted and a discussion be held with the Chair of the Environment and Community Panel to place on forward work programme.

CP79

CABINET REPORT: COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME - FINAL SCHEME

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In presenting the report, the Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that the Council operated a scheme to help working age people on low incomes with the cost of their council tax by reducing their council tax bill. This was known as the Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme. There were national regulations for a CTS Scheme for customers who had reached pension age, but the Council were free to decide the rules for its own CTS schemes for working age people in our area, taking into account certain government requirements. It was highlighted that the report only referred to the Council's own CTS Scheme for working age group.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager advised that the report followed on from the Corporate Performance Panel (CPP) report of 24 July 2023 outlining the options for a draft CTS Scheme to go to public consultation and recommending Option 1. It was noted that at its meeting on 1 August 2023 Cabinet agreed that Option 1 was their preferred scheme to consult on and a public consultation ran from 21 August 2023 to 1 October 2023. Members were advised that the results were summarised at section 3 and Appendix C.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that the final CTS scheme for 2024/2025 must now be agreed by January 2024 ready for implementation on 1 April 2024.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager drew attention to the four options set out in the report.

The Panel's attention was drawn to section 3 – Consultation and the Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that in response to feedback from the 2023/2024 scheme consultation, the survey questions had been refreshed and reworded to make them clearer and to attempt to promote more engagement and responses. The updated questions are shown in Appendix C. The consultation was widely publicised with press and radio coverage and promotions on social media. Members were also advised that the consultation also included an online calculator so people could check if they would be eligible to claim CTS, or if their CTS would increase under the Council's proposals. The Panel was reminded that the consultation went live on 11 September 2023 and six people had used the service. The public consultation ran for six weeks from 21 August 2023 to 1 October 2023 and the consultation webpage received 2,345 hits and 41 surveys were

completed, a 64% increase compared to the 25 responses received in 2023/2024.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that the consultation response from Norfolk County Council was included in the CPP and Cabinet reports for the draft CTS scheme. Norfolk Police's and Crime Commissioner had not responded.

It was noted that the CTS caseload had reduced over the past year and was having less of a financial impact than was estimated in the Financial Plan. This means there is sufficient scope to cover the additional cost of a more generous scheme without having to specifically raise council tax or spend less on other services.

The financial implications were outlined as set out in the report.

The Chair, Councillor Dark thanked the Revenues and Benefits Manager for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, a summary of which is set out below.

Councillor Long drew the Panel's attention to section 3.5 results of the consultation and added that 37% agreed with the proposal and 51% disagreed and asked why the recommendation was to go ahead with Option 1 and outlined the reasons why he could not support the proposal.

Councillor Blunt asked why did the Council undertake the consultation exercise when the Council's proposal was to ignore the results of the consultation. In response, the Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that the consultation was part of the Regulations which required the Council to undertake the consultation exercise. The Panel was advised that as part of the consultation views were sought from Norfolk County Council (NCC) and the Police and that to date a response had been received from NCC but no response had been received from the Police.

The Chair, Councillor Dark asked for details of the NCC response. The Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that NCC supported a scheme across Norfolk for 75% support model.

The Vice Chair, Councillor Osborne outlined the reasons and referred to national policy as to why he supported option 1 to assist households as set out in the recommendation and urged the Panel to support option 1.

Councillor Rose gave an overview of the current consultation being undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner in Downham Market on a proposed increase on Band D properties in 2024/2025 which ended on 24 November and undertook to forward the information to the Revenues and Benefits Manager.

Councillor Devulapalli commented that she supported the Council Tax Scheme but also agreed with the points made regarding the democratic deficit from the consultation and asked if the Council had considered how this may be changed going forward to look at the actual benefits. Councillor Devulapalli added that there was nothing worse than undertaking consultation and not taking notice of the results.

The Chair, Councillor Dark stated that he was conflicted about the report and highlighted that the previous Administration had looked at other Council's schemes and had increased the support from 75% to 84% which was a move forward to support those people who needed it. The Chair added that he was conscious that not all the schemes were the same and explained that his personal view was around the impact on others such as NCC and the Police.

The Chair commented on the consultation which had been undertaken and asked if the reasons were available as to why people disagreed with the proposal. The Chair added that a lot of work had been undertaken this year prior to the consultation and articles had been published in the press.

The Chair referred to the email received from Councillor Morley, Portfolio Holder for Finance which had been copied to all Members of the Panel.

The content of the email received from Councillor Morley is set out below.

"However, I would like to add an aspect, not included in this factual report, regarding the consultation process. We changed the format of the questions this year to make it easier to follow and widely promoted the scheme.

This resulted in 41 surveys being completed, which, in itself, is a small number but represents a 64% increase over the previous year. Nevertheless, the web site had 2,345 hits and I hypothesise, that with only 41 completed surveys, nearly all people who looked at the scheme were content for it to go ahead as recommended.

I would also wish to draw the Panel's attention to Para. 3.7 explaining that, as for Universal Credit beneficiaries, a large number of working age people are eligible for CTSS. This surely says something about health, jobs and wages in West Norfolk and the need for support in these difficult times.

Paragraph 4.7 explains that, as we have more Band D equivalent properties in the tax base, the scheme can be accommodated within the current Financial Plan.

All in all, I trust your Panel will recognise that this move to offer 100% support to working age people is needed, perhaps more than any period since, in my view, 1945, and support a positive recommendation.”

The Chair stated that he could not support Councillor Morley’s hypothesis that anyone who looked at a consultation but does not respond to it should automatically be considered in favour of the recommendation as the Council do not do it elsewhere.

The Chair outlined the other issues to consider, for example, the proposal to look at a King’s Lynn Town Council and if that was established that would there be a precept. The Chair added that personally he looked at option 1 and commented that he would go against or abstain as the proposal went against the responses received from the consultation. The proposal would be debated at Cabinet and Full Council. In conclusion, the Chair, Councillor Dark stated that he would abstain as he was not comfortable with the proposal.

Councillor Nash outlined the reasons why he could not support the proposal for option 1. Councillor Nash commented that his personal view was that there was a lot of working people struggling and paying the full amount. The Council was already generous giving an 84% allowance as opposed to the 75% proposed by the County Council. Councillor Nash added that there was a 100% scheme available to those where there was a need so there was an opportunity to seek assistance.

In response to a question from Councillor Long if 100% discount was given were bills issued, the Revenues and Benefits Manager explained that a bill was still sent out for people to check and confirm if the information held by the Council was correct or required amendment.

Under Standing Order 34, Councillor Joyce addressed the Panel and outlined the reasons why in his opinion that help should be given to those who required assistance.

The Leader, Councillor Parish referred to the questions set out in the consultation exercise and the replies received. The Leader added that consultation had been undertaken with other interested parties including NCC and the Police listen to recording and the Council made efforts to provide provision in dire circumstances which would impact on the Borough Council.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Performance Panel noted the consultation responses and decided to recommend to Cabinet and Council that the changes detailed Option 1 are adopted as the final CTS Scheme for 2024/2025 (**Votes: 3 For, 1 Against, 4 Abstentions**).

The Panel adjourned at 6.51 pm and reconvened at 6.59 pm.

CP80 **CONSTITUTION INFORMAL WORKING GROUP**

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The Chair, Councillor Dark stated that he assume the Panel had read the report and that discussions would be held with Group Leaders to determine the membership.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Performance Panel recommended to establish an informal working group to be known as the Constitution Informal Working Group with the terms of reference as attached to this paper at Appendix A.

CP81 **FOR INFORMATION ONLY: ANNUAL EMPLOYMENT MONITORING REPORT**

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The Chair, Councillor Dark advised that the report was for information only and that the Assistant Director, Central Services was present if there were any questions.

The Assistant Director, Central Services responded to questions in relation to:

- Retention and recruitment.
- Employees with disabilities.
- Applications for promotion.
- Vacancies on an internal basis only.
- Advertisement for internal and external vacancies.
- Employees leaving the Council's employment and recording reasons for leaving.

The Assistant Director, Central Services explained that in future years the number of internal and external vacancies could be collated separately.

CP82 **PORTFOLIO HOLDER QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

There were no Portfolio Holder Questions.

CP83 **CABINET FORWARD DECISIONS**

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The Cabinet Forward Decisions List was noted.

The following item was identified:

- Council Tax Second Homes – 14 January 2024.
- Procurement Strategy – item to be scheduled.

The Chair, Councillor Dark invited the Panel to email him with any items for consideration.

CP84 **SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN**

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The Chair, Councillor Dark invited the Panel to email him with any items for consideration.

The Panel commented that the responses from West Norfolk Housing and West Norfolk Property regarding Section 21 notices and the impact on businesses. It was suggested that a discussion be held with the Chair of the Environment and Community Panel to ascertain which Panel should consider the item.

CP85 **PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2023/2024**

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The Panel noted the work programme.

Councillor Rose advised that the Police and Crime Commissioner would be available to give a presentation to the Panel in 2024. The Chair invited Councillor Rose to ask the Police and Crime Commissioner to contact Democratic Services with details.

The Chair, Councillor Dark invited the Panel to email him with any items for consideration.

CP86 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Corporate Performance Panel will take place on 4 January 2024 at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, King's

The meeting closed at 7.22 pm