

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 17 September 2025 in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am

Committee	Cllr P Bailey	Cllr J Boyle (Vice-Chair)
Members Present:	Cllr K Bayes	Cllr C Cushing
	Cllr A Fletcher	Cllr M Gray
	Cllr M Hankins	Cllr P Heinrich
	Cllr V Holliday (Chair)	Cllr N Housden
		Cllr C Rouse

Members also attending:

Cllr W Fredericks (PH for Housing and People's Services)
Cllr A Brown (PH for Planning and Enforcement)
Cllr L Shires (PH for Finance, Estates and Property Services)

Officers in Attendance:

Democratic Services & Governance Manager (DSGM), Assistant Director Finance & Assets (ADFA), Chief Executive (CE), Director for Resources (DFR), Deputy Monitoring Officer (DMO), Democratic Services Governance Officer (DSGO), Director of Service Delivery (DSD), Assistant Director Environment and Leisure Service (ADELS), Leisure and Locality Services Manager (LLSM), Countryside Services Team Leader (CSTL).

Also in attendance:

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr S Penfold.

43 SUBSTITUTES

None.

44 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & STATEMENTS

None received.

45 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16th July were approved as a correct record, subject the following amendment:

The additional recommendation (n) be reworded to align with the minutes from Full Council and to take out the reference to Pg.41.5.6(a)

46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

47 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None received

48 PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Committee heard from, Amanda Swann, speaker for the petition group looking to restore access to the path known locally as 'God's Path' in Pretty Corner Woods, Sheringham.

Cllr Rouse asked the Countryside team how much it would cost to re-open the path. The LLSM said he would not be able to put a cost on that at that time. The ADELS wished to point out that the path, a 'desire line', was not a waymarked trail and nor would the Countryside Team recognise it as a path within Pretty Corner. They explained the path cut the corner off one of the waymarked trails. If they were to open that path it would mean a change to how they managed that block of woodland trees and there was an existing path already around it.

Cllr Heinrich felt aerial photos, from the Ordnance Survey, clearly showed the official paths but the path known locally as God's Path was less visible and whilst acknowledging that the path was clearly well used the Committee would need more detail as to why it could not be re-opened. LLSM explained that the standard approach to managing sites was to use the waymarked trails as they were known to be safe and accessible. Woodland blocks were reserved for nature and regeneration. The Pretty Corner site was a County Wildlife Site, meaning it had been identified as rich in wildlife and sought to support locally threatened wildlife species and habitats. The Council was obligated to protect that and develop the wildlife habitats that existed there. As part of the County Council Nature Recovery Strategy, Pretty Corner had been identified as being of particular importance for Biodiversity. The block was due to be thinned, under a Felling License issued by Forestry England, to allow for natural regeneration which wouldn't occur if people or dogs were walking through it. This approach was supported by partners, and the site had been awarded Green Flag status receiving the highest possible score. Local ecologists and the Wildlife Trust also supported the management of the site, highlighting that when desire lines go through blocks of trees it caused detrimental damage, including soil compaction and damage to tree root systems. The Countryside team firmly believed what they were doing was the right thing. There were approximately 8km of waymarked trails at Pretty Corner where people could walk and enjoy nature.

Cllr Boyle asked how much further someone would have to walk if they were to take the waymarked path. The LLSM did not have an exact distance to hand but said not much. He admitted as you went around the corner of the waymarked trail it went downhill and could be a little more challenging and as with all woodland sites it was undulating and could be difficult to access by its very nature. Cllr Boyle wished to confirm her understanding that some of those trees where the 'God's Path' cut through were very mature and that is why they were being felled. CSTL explained some were reaching maturity so thinning would be the next step. In answer to an additional question by Cllr Boyle, the CSTL, explained Health and Safety (H&S) was of paramount concern as there were trees within that block that were deteriorating and to make an area safe for people the Countryside team would have had to have felled more trees than otherwise necessary. Surveying would need to be increased around the site if any new path were to be created, further reducing the area of natural habitat. That is not what the Countryside team were trying to achieve in

managing a County Wildlife Site or with their felling licence.

Cllr Housden asked how many trees would need to be felled, if the path stayed, in comparison to what needed to be thinned within that block for the management of natural regeneration. The CSTL explained a felling licence was for volume rather than the number of trees. The management of thinning trees was different to having to fell trees for H&S. Cllr Housden argued therefore that H&S took precedence over habitat. The CSTL explained it was a balance across those areas. The ADELS explained that the felling licence allowed you to thin trees based on percentage of trees within that block but if a new path was created, they would have had to fell trees based on the H&S risk so may have ended up felling trees that could have provided deadwood and food for insects. The ADELS said they managed all their sites on 3 principles, one of which was H&S, which had to be paramount, they had to manage that risk as a Council with regular tree surveys. They also managed those woodland sites with habitat and public access in mind. Cllr Housden wished to confirm therefore the path could not be reopened due to H&S grounds and existing programme of tree felling, with wildlife also a given concern. The ADELS confirmed it was.

Cllr Hankins asked if the path had been in use for a considerable amount of time. The LLSM did not believe so. He felt that it was only really used since the Covid lockdown and only as recently as the start of 2025 did the Countryside team notice that people were creating this desire line and using it more often. In response to Cllr Hankins asking what, and who, initiated the change in closing the path, the LLSM explained the Countryside Rangers noticed the path was being used so installed some low-level dead hedging to encourage people not to use that area. Unfortunately, it continued to get walked through so the Countryside team increased the level of dead hedging to make it more obvious there was no access to the woodland block.

Cllr Boyle wished to confirm that thinning the trees would still have had to be carried out within that block regardless of whether the 'God's path' was to be opened. The CSTL explained it would, but you would have to consider that if the path was opened you would need to fell more trees than were otherwise necessary than if just thinning. They found people were exploring that whole block when gaining access through the self-titled God's Path, many trees where habitat and wildlife were known to live would be affected, such as bats which are protected by law and known to live in some of the dead wood. With high winds becoming a more frequent extreme weather occurrence, any trees surveyed that were vulnerable to falling over any new path would have to be felled as well. Wild birds were also protected by law so there would be an increased harm to them.

Cllr Rouse did not feel it would be worthwhile to open the path given the obvious disruption to the ecological system and wildlife and with the H&S implications involved for what was a very minimal shortcut.

The Chair asked about accessibility and was the feature of gradient a factor for people using God's Path instead of the waymarked trails. The ADELS said they believed God's Path was still on a significant gradient, with uneven terrain equal to the waymarked trail, so did not believe the path in question made the site more accessible in any way.

Cllr Shires thanked the Countryside team for the work they do and compared the issue to one they had in the woods in North Walsham and the fine balance required between people enjoying the woods peacefully and ensuring nature prevailed there.

It took some time then for residents to realise the Council was trying to protect the wildlife and not trying to stop people from enjoying the beauty of the woodland. Cllr Shires affirmed it was her belief the designated paths were there for a reason, to allow us to enjoy the woodland but not to stray and if the Council was to create new trails where would that end and where would that leave the natural habitat that the Countryside team were trying to protect. The ADELS confirmed those existing trails had been there for a long time and were historic trails and formed part of the Green Flag application. Each year they considered opening new trails, and it was part of that application to consider whether the site was accessible. The Countryside team agreed that their concern would be where would that stop and what would stop someone else from opening their own path. Having a woodland where people could roam free was a completely different type of woodland management and not one the Countryside team subscribed to at that time.

In response to the Chair's question, the CSTL explained you had two types of felling, felling for H&S risk and felling for thinning but within the Forestry Commission you can additionally fell for regeneration. All tree work, governed by Forestry England, that was carried out in the woods was analysed and checked.

The ADELS explained to the Committee, in response to the Chair's query, they had attended two meetings, one being the Sheringham Town Council Environment Committee in March to discuss with the group their concerns and they had also met individually to discuss. The Countryside team had a corporate complaint in from an individual on the matter and would now respond to that accordingly. The Chair believed the complaint was around separate issues associated with the path and not specifically about its re-opening.

The Chair felt that there was enough divergence within the Committee that it would be a good idea to be kept updated. The ADELS explained the Countryside team would not be changing their decision. She reiterated they had openly discussed the matter and the reasons behind it and their opinion, after consulting with stakeholders, would not be changing on the matter.

Cllr Bailey suggested that once the Corporate Complaint had been responded to the Committee could be kept informed so they could review at that point.

ACTION Countryside Team to provide an update to the O&S Committee once the existing formal complaint has been responded to.

49 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY A MEMBER

There were no matters for consideration referred to the Committee by a member.

50 POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER – REVIEW OF POLICE AND CRIME PLAN

The Chair invited the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Sarah Taylor, to speak about the Police and Crime Plan for Norfolk and answer any questions.

The PCC responded to questions the Committee had sent in advance (attached as Minutes Appendix A). In response to a query from Cllr Boyle, the PCC outlined the priorities as set out in the Police and Crime Plan and said District priorities were set in the District priority meeting, held every quarter. The last meeting focussed on

ways to target Anti-Social Behaviour across market towns in North Norfolk. The PCC explained that many of the questions posed to her were operational which was not her area of expertise.

In a follow up question by Cllr Boyle in relation to funding and redundancies the PCC said the Police had been experiencing cuts year on year for the past 14 years, so to some extent it was business as usual. The Police, the PCC believed, had responded extremely well to those cuts, maintaining that public safety would not be compromised which the PCC took as being very reassuring. That meant in terms of high risk, high harm crimes the Police were actively keeping us safe. However the Police simply didn't have the capacity or resource to deal with the low harm, low risk crime that people see on a day-to-day basis. Norfolk and Suffolk had a shared space for funding that had been set up over 10 years ago to achieve cash savings and efficiencies. Norfolk had already realised a lot of efficiencies that other areas were only looking to achieve now, so going forward, the targets set by Government were not possible as they had already been reached. A new Policing Minister was now in post and the PCC would look to take that point forward with them.

Cllr Boyle asked how Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would affect the role of the Police. The PCC believed it wouldn't significantly impact the Police. The Police would still be there and operate independently, and their role would not change. The effectiveness of partnership working with such things as victim support and community safety had the potential to be significantly disrupted by Devolution and LGR. The PCC warned the Committee that they needed to be aware of the scope of that disruption. The PCC function would be incorporated into the Mayoral function from April 2027. No additional funding or resourcing to facilitate that transition had been provided by the Home Office or central Government. The PCC office had to absorb an extra £200k of work additional to the business-as-usual function. As a result, the PCC office did not have any intentions they could consider beyond the short-term. The PCC asked local Members to engage with the problem as those partners with whom the Police worked, would disappear (the District Council, the County Council, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) etc), and to work with community groups to bridge that gap and increase community resilience.

In response to a question by Cllr Boyle about new recruits, the PCC was very confident that the numbers of people eager in joining the Police force was extremely good. Those new recruits were from an enormous, diverse, range of backgrounds. In follow-up Cllr Boyle queried the challenges in policing a rural area such as North Norfolk. The PCC explained they were the same as with any rural area, the travel times it took to get to incidents were a challenge, as were the costs involved, with such work as firearms licence administration meaning the costs to visit each licence holder were substantially more in a rural area like Norfolk due to the travel times involved. North Norfolk had a long stretch of coastline where needs changed seasonally, and this could present a challenge. PCC assured the Committee the Constabulary were very used to covering those challenges. Blue light response times in Norfolk were good and they were looking to improve still further.

Cllr Fletcher asked what was being done in regards speeding and inappropriate driving in our towns and villages. The PCC said she could see that how road safety was handled in Norfolk was different to other areas. The overwhelming amount of her correspondence and interactions with the public were in relation to road safety. She felt there was a gap between public demands and reasonable expectations and past priorities. She had become really engaged in the problem and into the best practice of policing our roads more safely. The Police should, and do, enforce speeding but in doing so speed limits must be set appropriately. She would have

liked more political engagement and a more preventative, consistent, approach to speed limit setting by Norfolk County Council (NCC). The PCC warned that the size of the task was phenomenal due to the largescale of the road network across Norfolk. The PCC acknowledged the many Speed Watch volunteers across local community groups who often get verbally abused whilst trying to keep their streets safe. Those Speed Watch teams issued thousands of letters to speeding drivers every year and they did make a significant impact. The PCC was frustrated that the devices Parishes used to measure vehicle speed, were not getting the data they needed to implement change. The PCC would like to see a more highly useable data set being generated from that equipment. As that equipment sits on roads they are classed as assets of NCC and therefore NCC would have to approve those changes, and the PCC urged Members who sat as a Member for NCC to advocate that change or to at least advocate for change for their local parishioners.

The Chair asked what strategies were being used to reduce drink and drug driving and how effective were those strategies. The PCC explained the Constabulary had started a new reporting tool, for members of the public to report anonymously when they knew of, or had witnessed, someone driving under the influence of drink or drugs; the tool would be live by Christmas 2025. The PCC was happy to share this new reporting tool with the Committee. Norfolk Police and partners also supported the National campaigns to get better roadside testing for drug driving which was, sadly, on the increase.

The PCC responded to the Chair's query around the number of beat police officers. The Government had a National Policing Guarantee which was in the first round of funding with hopefully funding available every year. That money could only be spent to deploying officers into the local neighbourhood. Norfolk had a small Constabulary, so funding is relatively small, so it had resulted in an additional 31 new officers that year. There would be a gap between seeing the funding allocated to then seeing Officers on the ground and the Chief Constable would decide where those officers would need to be stationed. The PCC and Chief Constable did speak frequently about neighbourhood policing as are fully aware it was an important issue for the public.

The Chair asked what the Police's role was in reducing domestic violence. The PCC said that was a very substantial piece of work for Police and their partners. With LGR and devolution and any potential disruption it was critical people are safeguarded, and a working group were looking into how they could ensure this service provision continued during the period of change. The PCC did not want Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS) to fall away, as it was funded through the PCC office and various District Councils, as this would add a significant burden to the Police. A Task and Finish group had been put in place to see how those contracts could be safeguarded during that period of Government reform. There were peripheral concerns around continuity of funding, and this was not something the PCC could solve on her own and asked Members to engage. Police relied on Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), NIDAS, the NHS and partnership working. The number of people affected by Domestic Abuse (DA) in Norfolk was substantial, the scale of the challenge for the Police and its partners in the area was very significant and PCC did not want LGR to diminish all the hard work that had gone into supporting victims so called on NNDC to provide any support they could going forward.

Cllr Cushing asked what resources and numbers of Norfolk police were deployed to preventing and investigating online crime. The PCC explained that it was difficult to give exact figures on specific resourcing, or how services were deployed in tackling

high level crime. It was smaller in Norfolk than across other forces nationally and this was something the PCC would like to have seen change. She had talked to the Chief Constable (CC) during her term about online, and offline, crime. It was not in the PCCs or CCs power to be able to go out and recruit more officers to specifically deal with such crime as obviously financial resources were depleted. For cyber offending there were 4 members of expert staff solely dedicated to the area with an additional 35 investigating staff, or generalists, which would include multi-skilled people within the Constabulary available to be called upon to investigate when needed. That gave the CC more flexibility on how to deploy their staff which the PCC believed gave the Police more balance which was to our benefit. PCC had some sympathy for those who would prefer the Police had specific teams set up to deal with specific areas of business but believed it was a misconception that if a specific team wasn't set up the work wasn't being done.

The PCC asked the Committee to consider Norfolk Safeguarding Children Online Team (SCOLT) who dealt with the threat of online child exploitation. They were dedicated in keeping children safe. The team did phenomenal work, with the digital requirement being massive with potential of thousands of files needed to be stored securely. The costs and resourcing were significant all amongst budgeting constraints.

The PCC wished to highlight the significant emotional burden of trauma for those answering calls and those first on the scene and the stress put on officers and staff in many number of roles which, understandably, resulted in those people needing to take a period off sick. There was a need for better support and resource of those officers and staff. This was a human cost, not just a financial or a resource issue.

The regional response to crimes, like cyber, was very good with the resource they had but the Police still had more to do.

Cllr Housden asked about the speeding issue, and speed limits in his parishes, and said when he challenged Highways their standard answer was that it had always been like that, and he asked should the PCC and her fellow Commissioners not be lobbying Government on that point. The PCC agreed speeding was a massive issue and there was a significant amount of work being done nationally. That was being done in a politically balanced way, and that there was a common joining up of perspectives. Cllr Cushing asked if there were other methods that could be used to counter speeding. The PCC said there were differences between Highway Authorities, and many referred to speed limits as in accordance with National Guidance but there was no reason therefore, that Norfolk could not do something differently. It was within the powers of Members of those Authorities to change how they considered speed limits as it was only guidance and not standards. The current model in Norfolk did not facilitate road safety.

Cllr Brown asked the PCC if she would support a change of policy, similar to that originally trialled in Wales when they set 20mph limits across their villages. The PCC agreed that everyone had a right to enable their need to travel without fear of dying or sustaining serious injury. Difference in speed did make a difference and was the primary thing that could be done to make accidents more survivable, but it was not everything. Norfolk was an area that had a rising number of fatalities from road traffic accidents and that was not what the PCC wanted to see. Requests for 20mph zones were likely to succeed if submitted at local level via the Highways Agency (HA) rather than by national Government as the HA knew how that road was used. Speed limits should have been appropriately set to reflect local context, and the views of residents should be taken into account. Any new policy should enable that to

happen. The PCC would not support any type of blanket coverage, as in the trial in Wales, but could learn the lessons from that and she would have supported any policy that brought about positive change.

The PCC was happy to respond to any further questions or requests for info via her office.

The Chair thanked the PCC for her insight into her role and state of policing in Norfolk and agreed Council could possibly look to ensure partnership working continued. As far as the Committee remit would allow, in terms of advocacy for changing the speed limit policy on mass, Scrutiny was not necessarily the correct forum, but this session provided food for thought.

51 REPORT PROGRESS IMPLEMENTING CORPORATE PLAN 2023-27 DELIVERY AGAINST ACTION PLAN 2024-25 AND ACTION PLAN 2025-26 – TO END OF QUARTER 1 – 30 JUNE 2025

Cllr Fredericks, Portfolio Holder for Housing and People's Services, introduced the report to the Committee.

Cllr Fletcher asked why household waste collection was rated green and not amber when there appeared to be issues in financing the strategy. The Chief Executive (CE) explained legislation required the Council to introduce green domestic food waste collections from April 2026. The Council had ordered the refuse freighters that would fulfil those collections and were moving forward, notwithstanding the uncertainty of the true and actual cost, for the introduction of domestic collections.

The CE assured the Committee the issue would be reported through Cabinet moving forward. Cllr Ringer, the Portfolio Holder for Waste Services, was working with Officers and explained that Cllr Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, and the DR and S151 Officer would be monitoring for any shortfalls in funding the scheme that the Council needed to make up beyond the 'New Burdens' funding that the Government had awarded to the Council.

Cllr Fletcher asked for assurances the scheme would be introduced on schedule. The CE said that approximately 160 Councils were having to introduce food waste collections at the same time so there was pressure on the supply chain of food caddies and the refuse freighters but orders for those had been made. The scheduling of those domestic collections and when they would start would depend on when the Council had been given notice those orders were to be delivered.

Cllr Housden asked about energy infrastructure as his local parish had been experiencing frequent power cuts and wondered if the Council was addressing the issue. The CE was not aware of the incidents but the Council did work with partners to continue to highlight the deficiencies within the UK Power Networks infrastructure within the District. The Council and partners did have an energy plan for the District, and with Anglian Water with regards to water resilience, moving forward. Cllr Fredericks asked Cllr Housden if he could email her the details as she was meeting with some of the energy companies that week.

The CE responded to a question from Cllr Cushing in relation to an Organisational Development Plan that was due in June 2024, but the Committee was no closer to seeing that and he wondered what success would look like and when would that plan be available to view. The CE explained work was undertaken in terms of recommendations from the Corporate Peer Review, LGR then came into effect so

amended the draft document and he believed this would be presented to the Committee in November as the People Strategy and Learning Development (Workforce) Strategy.

Cllr Cushing also asked about the Rural Position Statement which should have been completed by August 2025 and wondered had this been done and why it was rated amber. The CE said following the English Devolution White Paper being published in December 2024 that outlined LGR the Council had to look at Organisational Capacity, both at an Officer and Member level, therefore the Corporate Plan had reduced its actions down from 46 to 30 for the year 2025/26. Some base line data had been collected in terms of rural community services across the District but that position was changing frequently. The Council was working closely with Banking Hubs. Blakeney had lost its doctor's surgery and the District had lost a number of post offices and village shops. The position was dynamic and, in some respects, gathering pace. The Council had tried to reflect those issues in their proposal for LGR but have not moved that forward to an actual strategy for North Norfolk. The CE explained they would most likely move that base line data into any emerging unitary authority as sanctioned by Government in due course.

Cllr Hankins wondered what the Committee would do with the data that had been collected in regards to mobile connectivity going forward, especially in regard to health and business. The Chair did explain this would be looked at as part of the Work Programme later in the meeting; however the Chair did question that it was listed as an action for 24/25 to develop a deeper insight into mobile and fast internet coverage but could not see that carried forward for 25/26. The CE confirmed that data had been gathered and Members' experiences and beyond had fed into that piece of work in terms of mobile and digital infrastructure but that it had not yet been developed into a Strategy or Action Plan.

Cllr Fredericks responded to a question by Cllr Bayes who felt that Action No.33 had a very vague outcome detailed by the Officer as it did not cover the action or objectives. Cllr Fredericks explained they may need a written response to that question. The Council had engaged with a taskforce with the East of England Energy Group, colleges and training providers and that would all come together and feed into that piece of work. The Economic Growth Manager and Cllr J. Toye, Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Growth would need to answer the query more fully and she would get them to do that report as soon as possible.

Cllr Cushing highlighted the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Plan and wished to know what had slipped and what the outcome of that would be. The CE referred to previous answer in relation to the Workforce Strategy that was outstanding.

The Chair asked the CE if the Actions could have some consistency in how they are numbered to allow the Committee to follow them more easily across both years. The CE said they couldn't do that easily as they reduced from 46 to 30 Actions and they had to be transparent and show the significant organisational capacity pressures that LGR had put onto the Council. The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Cabinet had to make difficult decisions to decide what Actions they would keep for 25/26, whilst still maintaining a business-as-usual model.

Cllr Fredericks asked Cllr Brown for an update on the new Local Plan in response to a query by Cllr Boyle. Cllr Brown said they were concluding the last part of the public consultation, and those responses would be analysed and reported to the inspector. The inspector would then look at the modifications those responses fed into and hopefully be satisfied with the Council's updated expert reports with the hope being

the Council could adopt the local plan by the end of 2025.

Cllr Cushing referred to item 24 regarding the development of pipeline project proposals for serviced employment land but wondered if the Council had a deadline. The CE agreed to take that away and provide a written response to the Committee as there were ongoing discussions with Cabinet on this matter.

In response to a query from Cllr Boyle regarding health, wellbeing and financial inclusivity initiatives. Cllr Fredericks said it was a moving target as the ICB were going through a huge restructure as was the NHS. The Council prided itself on having the Health and Wellbeing Partnership which brought those organisations together and discussed those topics and lobbied for them. The Council was in discussions with the North Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board and its partners.

The Chair highlighted the capacity issues with LGR; in 24/25 there were the 31 actions that had been updated or cancelled due to changed circumstances and queried if they were sufficiently recorded within the Corporate Risk Register where there was an inherent risk of 12 and residual and target risks of 8 for Corporate Risk 41. The CE explained that the Corporate Plan was a statement of the Administration's programme of work which was translated into a plan with the staff and financial resources the Council had at the time. When advising the Administration in 2023, it was agreed the Corporate Plan, and its actions would be shared over the 4 years but with an annual delivery plan to reflect changing positions. A number of the objectives were not in control of the Authority. The Corporate Risk Register (CRR) was reviewed quarterly by CLT and the Governance, Risk and Audit Committee and even though it was important to be mindful of those issues, as with the LGR process, the CRR was there to inform but it was also a living document that could change at any time. Cllr Fredericks added that the Council's main priority was to serve the public and keep the Council financially stable.

Cllr Boyle wished to recognise the Empty Homes Team for being highly commended for best use of media award. She noted also they had been having software issues for managing empty homes. Cllr Fredericks reassured the Committee that it was only for the most complex of cases where there had been a problem, and those were being dealt with by hand but, as a result, they were just taking a little longer.

The Committee AGREED they had seen the report and made comments.

52 BUDGET MONITORING P4 2025/26

Cllr Shires, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates and Property Services introduced the report. She explained this was Period 4 and the first monitoring since the budget was set in February. Last year the Finance Team had made a change in the way they monitored the budget, so it now included a projection to year end. Outturn this time last year forecast a deficit of £1.3m. Because of the subsequent focus in the organisation, as reported in July the Council had £600k to put in general reserves. The Budget in February 2025 created a new reserve of £515K to support with the Council's Homelessness budget. Cllr Shires explained they were projecting a small surplus of £138k at year end.

Cllr Cushing questioned what confidence the Committee could have that the forecast was accurate given past estimates and the variance of 22% last year. Cllr Shires was currently very confident. With food waste collections coming in, it was inevitable

that would bring some changes along the way but if everything remained stable then she was as confident as she could be on the figures provided. Cllr Shires reiterated the Council could only control what was within its powers in house and external pressures and influences could have an impact that was not anticipated. Cllr Cushing agreed some variance was natural but would not expect a variance running into millions as per the previous year. Cllr Shires said when the budget was set in 2024/25, the Finance Team had changed how they monitored that budget process and that had always been openly communicated. There had been a collective push from Officers to save money and as the year progressed they could see that improvement due to having an early warning system in place. This was also about considering where the Council would be in the future financially and not just about setting the budget for the current year. Cllr Shires was already meeting with the ADFa and had been for some time in looking at the budget for 2026/27.

The Chair had a query on the use of £500k in reserves that Environmental Health anticipated using and wondered what that spend was on. Cllr Shires explained that was a cost they had decided would be funded by the budget so not a new change but something they were expecting to spend from reserves. Cllr Shires agreed to provide an exact reason in writing. The Chair also wondered with regards to dog waste and litter bins if that was the total savings listed on Pg.87 and Cllr Shires explained that with the small increase in the charge for emptying those bins that was the income the Council was predicting to make from that.

In relation to general funds and how much council tax came from 2nd homes, Cllr Bayes asked if there was a breakdown of those figures. Cllr Shires referred the Committee to Pg.86 and the Second Home Premium reserve which was where the share NNDC took from the premium charges could be seen. That was then put into reserves for supporting homelessness.

Cllr Fletcher asked to what the Extended Responsibility Producer referred and Cllr Shires replied that she believed it was for food waste collections. Cllr Fletcher also referred to the removal of the Youth Council Budget and the £9k saving, saying that he felt the Council should be encouraging interest in local Government in our younger community and not potentially curbing it. Cllr Shires said the creation of the Youth Council was one of her proposals and the vision of what that would be didn't really work for younger people who were very busy in education and carving out their future lives. Asking them to come to meetings did not appeal despite the incredible efforts of Officer Denny in trying to find a format that excited younger people. Cllr Varley had reached out to schools to see if it was possible to work out a different model for that project going forward. So, the money had been reduced as not all required at this time for such things as travel, but the Council was still pursuing that alternative and being steered by young people in what excited them and had continuity as the turnover of those young people naturally moved on.

RESOLVED to make the following recommendations to Full Council:

- a) **Note the contents of the report and the current forecast year end position.**
- b) **Approval is requested from Full Council to decrease the 2025/26 capital budget for the Mundesley Coastal Defence scheme to £1,139,806 to reflect the apportionment of £250k from external contributions to the Cromer Scheme.**
- c) **Approval is requested from Full Council to increase the 2025/26 capital budget for the Cromer Coastal Defences scheme to £1,096,067 to**

reflect the apportionment of £250k from external contributions from the Mundesley Scheme.

- d) Note the contents of the Q1 Treasury Management update report, appendix F.

53 NHOSC QUARTERLY REPORT

Cllr Boyle summarised the July meeting where the Norfolk Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (NHOSC) had looked at changes that were going on around the abolition of NHS England over the course of the next 2 years and the 50% cut in the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the subsequent reorganisation process. The NHOSC did write to the Secretary of State for Health over the disbanding of HealthWatch; they had been given a year's grace to Cllr Boyle's understanding, but the NHOSC Committee had felt very compelled to write due to all the excellent work of HealthWatch.

The Chair asked how big ICB Norfolk was compared to other partner organisations. Cllr Boyle suspected it could be that if Norfolk and Suffolk were joined together, it would be very big indeed. Despite the uncertainty ICB Norfolk were determined to make as many plans as they could to hand the service on in a good way.

The Chair asked the Committee to consider sending their own letter to the Secretary of State for Health over the abolition of HealthWatch and to say it would be very detrimental to the health care system of Norfolk. The Chair also asked the Committee if they had a view that the proposed joining of the Norfolk and Suffolk ICB would also be detrimental given that the standard of the healthcare system in Norfolk was under strain.

Cllr Fletcher noted a real concern in the reduction of staff by 50% and the effect on staff wellbeing. Cllr Boyle said they were keen to express that cuts were on the admin side of the ICBs and not what the ICB do, so what they would be producing would remain the same but half the number of people organising it. Cllr Fletcher felt there was a question there in regards the organisation's efficiency if they were experiencing cuts that deeply.

Cllr Boyle was happy to compose a letter to the ICB outlining the Committee's concerns. Cllr Bayes was in agreement that as a Committee they should be asking the ICB to reconsider their decision over HealthWatch as it was important as a Council we recognised the good work they did and the impact it would have.

1. The Committee noted the report and **AGREED** to write, as a Committee to the Secretary of State for Health to express the detrimental effect the closure of HealthWatch would be for Norfolk and to ask them to reconsider their decision, liaising with NHOSC in doing so.

54 RESPONSES OF THE COUNCIL OR THE CABINET TO THE COMMITTEE'S REPORTS OR RECOMMENDATIONS

Noted

55 THE CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

No comments

56 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE

The Committee looked at the scoping document in reference to the Mobile Connectivity issue and the Chair asked for suggestions on how they would like to look into this subject further. The DSGM explained the scoping document was a way of staying focused on what the Committee wished to look at in more detail.

Cllr Hankins welcomed the fact mobile connectivity was brought to the fore and felt there was a need to prioritise, when talking to providers, on two principal requirements, in terms of health and business. For example, where defibrillators were unable to connect online or where some business have very poor mobile broadband.

Cllr Cushing questioned how to identify if those so called not-spots existed and how this could be demonstrated. Cllr Housden felt that was tricky, as online you could get maps from the providers of their coverage areas and where there were not-spots. If you talked to those providers, you would find that many joined together to improve the network. Also, some of those 3G masts had been taken down so it was difficult to know where to start. Cllr Housden suggested undertaking a scoping document just for the Committee to look at to really define what it is the committee wanted from the providers.

The Chair said Cllr Toye had done some work in collating data on the issue but questioned whether that would be enough for the Committee to focus on. Therefore, the Chair suggested that the Committee could wait to see what the data showed before scoping out the full review. Cllr Housden agreed as a base was needed as a starting point. He agreed that the Committee should call in some of those providers to respond to questions, as the signal in North Norfolk was appalling.

Cllr Gray felt that without proper data the Committee was in danger of asking providers to attend a meeting with no proper questions to ask, adding that it needed to be the right request to get the providers to commit. Cllr Gray believed Norfolk County Council ran a similar data gathering exercise and suggested that it would be worth checking what they had discovered, to then be considered alongside the report from Cllr Toye before the Committee pushed forward.

Cllr Hankins felt the Committee needed to ask providers the hard question, which was identifying where the signal was bad and asking them what they were going to do about it. Cllr Heinrich said much of this would depend on what network you were on, he felt a range of data was needed to identify which providers were guilty of the biggest not-spots and not just a broad map of where signals were weak. Also, greater clarity was needed on when 5G would be rolled out.

Cllr Shires noted how the Committee's work programme was extremely busy and asked if it would be useful if she and the ADFA sent the Committee some information on what they were doing as a written report rather than taking time up in the meeting itself to help the Committee determine how they would want to feed into the budget setting process. The DSGM thought that would be a very good idea and the data that had been gathered on mobile connectivity was scheduled for the October O&S Committee meeting. The Democratic Services team would feedback to the Officer bringing that report what the Committee wished to focus on and then the Committee could run the scoping exercise again perhaps in a pre-agenda session to decide how the Committee wanted to home in on those specific aspects. They would

also ask, at Cllr Housden's request, to see if the data collated by NCC could be included in that report.

Cllr Fredericks asked the Committee to consider what, as a Council, could be achieved with the Mobile Connectivity item and could maybe suggest that it was something the local town and parishes could raise within their local communities. The best the Council could do was to present the figures that it and NCC had collected. Members could help advocate but could not influence those private companies.

Cllr Bayes wished to feedback that the scoping document was a very good idea at keeping the Committee focused on what was possible to achieve.

57 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The meeting ended at 12.43 pm.

Chairman