

Minutes of a meeting of the **PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL** held in line with The Local Authorities & Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority & Police & Crime Panel Meetings) (England & Wales) Regulations 2020, on Thursday, 18 March 2021 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT

B Alcock (Chairman)
M D Booth (Vice-Chairman)

J R Astill
T A Carter
J D McLean
A M Newton

N H Pepper
P A Redgate
G P Scalese
A C Tennant

J Tyrrell
S C Walsh
D J Wilkinson

In Attendance: The Portfolio Holder for Assets and Planning, the Executive Manger – Governance, the Strategic Housing Manager, the Programme Manager, the Democratic Services Manager and the Democratic Services Trainee.

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors C J T H Brewis, A C Cronin and J L King

56 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Notification had been received that Councillor A M Newton was replacing Councillor C J T H Brewis for this meeting only.

57 MINUTES

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings of the Performance Monitoring Panel held on 27 January 2021 and 9 February 2021 and the meetings of the Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel held on 21 January 2021 and 9 February 2021.

AGREED:

- a) That the minutes of the meeting of Performance Monitoring Panel held on 27 January 2021 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record;
- b) That the minutes of the meeting of Performance Monitoring Panel held on 9 February 2021 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record;
- c) That the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Performance Monitoring Panel and Policy Development Panel held on 21 January 2021 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record; and
- d) That the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Performance Monitoring

Action By

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Panel and Policy Development Panel held on 9 February 2021 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

58 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

There were no declarations of interests.

59 QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER STANDING ORDER 6

There were no questions arising.

60 TRACKING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

There were no responses.

61 ITEMS REFERRED FROM THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL.

There were no items referred.

62 KEY DECISION PLAN

Consideration was given to the Key Decision Plan issued on 4 March 2021.

- Members questioned around the funding made available for energy improvements for homes within South Holland, and asked where the funding would come from, and how much it would be.
 - The Housing Landlord Services Manager reported that there had been success in a grant application to the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Phase 1B (GHG LAD Phase 1B) and that funding had been received for energy efficiency works. There would also be an element of matched funding from the Capital Programme, from the HRA reserves. It would be a maximum of £5,000 of grant funding per individual property. There would be an initial grant of £255,000 with any works being carried out matched to a third, equating to approximately £85,000 from the Capital Programme. This funding would be available for tenants of the Council's own housing stock.

AGREED:

That the Key Decision Plan issued on 4 March 2021 be noted.

63 PROPERTY ACQUISITION TO SUPPORT THE NEXT STEPS ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME (PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION)

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Manager Governance, which provided members with a summary of issues relating to the recent Portfolio Holder Decision 'Property acquisition to support the Next Steps Accommodation Programme'.

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At a special meeting of the Performance Monitoring Panel held on 9 February 2021, pre-decision scrutiny had been undertaken on a decision to be made by the Portfolio Holder for Assets and Planning relating to 'Property acquisition to support the Next Steps Accommodation Programme'. The Panel had raised a number of issues, detailed within the report, and had requested that the Portfolio Holder be notified in writing that the property in question should not be purchased, and that he should consider a more suitable property, with no chain, and that did not require so much work.

On 22 February 2021, the Portfolio Holder for Assets and Planning made his decision, as detailed within the report. Attached at Appendix A was the report that had accompanied the decision, and this included a summary of the comments from the Performance Monitoring Panel, together with the Portfolio Holder's responses to each point, and an assessment of whether there was a justification for proceeding to acquire the property.

The Panel had requested that the Portfolio Holder attend this meeting to provide a fuller response to the objections raised at the meeting on 9 February 2021. The report clarified that, whilst the Panel could question the Portfolio Holder further on the matter, a final decision had been made and was in the process of implementation.

Prior to discussion, the Chairman made it clear that the purpose of the meeting was not to revisit the discussion on this item, as it had been considered at the meeting on 9 February - the Portfolio Holder had been present at that meeting and would have been aware of the strength of feeling expressed, and the overwhelming support for the recommendations. The Chairman continued that, following on from the meeting on 9 February, the Portfolio Holder had received a further report from officers - with the benefit of that report, and taking into account the comments and recommendations of members of the Panel, the Portfolio Holder had proceeded to make his decision in line with the original recommendation.

The following issues were raised:

- Members asked for clarification as to why it had been necessary to take the decision urgently, when it had been stated during the discussion at the meeting in February, and within the report, that an extension period had been requested to provide more time for the decision to be made, and that within 10 days, that extension had been agreed.
 - The Portfolio Holder responded that the matter had been considered by the Council on 25 November 2020 where it had been agreed to pursue the Next Steps Programme. The Housing Team had contacted himself, as the Portfolio Holder for Assets and Planning, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Strategy and Partnerships and the Portfolio Holder for HRA and Private Sector Housing, and the very strict timeframes to be adhered to

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had been made clear. The time frame was from November 2020 to 31 March 2021 and it had therefore been necessary to proceed very quickly within the timeframe, in order that the Government funding could be secured. With regard to the extension, the Portfolio Holder advised that there had been no evidence that the extension would happen. It had been suggested, but not confirmed, and his decision had therefore been based on the evidence at the time. The deadline had been 31 March, and the Housing Team and all involved had had to do all that was necessary in a short period of time.

- Members stated that when criteria were set in order to deal with a matter, that the criteria should be adhered to. In addition, it was felt that there had been a good reason to wait for the extension before a decision was made, and concern was raised regarding the fact that the property added to the stock was old and that improvements could potentially be costly.
- Members stated that following the meeting of the Panel in February, when it had been resolved by 13 votes to 1 in favour of recommending that the Council was not to purchase a particular property, the Portfolio Holder for Assets and Planning had been reported in the 'Spalding Voice' newspaper dated 4 March 2021 as saying that he had had to make a decision as to whether what had been decided at the meeting overruled what housing and homelessness experts at SHDC had said. Members did not feel this was the case. The Panel had not stated that a third property should not be purchased, instead, that a number of considerations should be taken into account, and that a more suitable property be purchased. Concern was expressed that by over-ruling an overwhelming recommendation, the impression given was that the Council was run by Officers, not Members.
 - The Portfolio Holder confirmed that this was not the case. He advised that all comments and evidence arising from the meeting of the Panel in February had been listened to and taken into account, but that he had also attended meetings, prior to the Panel meeting, over a period of three months, with Housing officers, Homelessness officers and officers relevant to his Portfolio. He had had to weigh up all of the information to ensure that the correct decision was made, and he reiterated the fact that he believed that he had made the right decision. When making the decision as to whether to follow the recommendations of the Panel or those of the officers within the report, the Portfolio Holder had compared the property in question with one bought in Park Road, Spalding. He had concluded that both were very similar, built in the same period, with a similar parking situation. As there appeared to be no real difference, and the Panel had not questioned the purchase of the Park Road property, this had assisted

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him in making his decision regarding the property in the Monkshouse ward.

- Members were not satisfied with this response and responded that the report in the newspaper had stated that the officer recommendations had been taken into account over the decision of the thirteen members of the Panel. It was felt that this gave the impression to the public and to members that members' views were discounted.
- Members questioned whether the Portfolio Holder had visited the location of the property.
 - The Portfolio Holder confirmed that he had not visited the property, due to the lockdown situation, but he knew the location.
- The Chairman reported that he had visited the location prior to the meeting and expressed concern over the dismissal of the potential parking issue. He also questioned whether the Portfolio Holder had familiarised himself with the policies within the local plan, relating to houses of this nature, and houses in multiple location.
 - The Portfolio Holder confirmed that he had not, and also that he was not aware of rough sleepers that drove cars.
- The Chairman responded that the property might also be used for people that had been made homeless through no fault of their own, who could own a vehicle.
- Members questioned the suitability of the property for the purpose with regard to issues around party wall considerations, the level of insulation, potential replacement of electrical systems, the windows and the adequacy of the heating, and questioned how the Portfolio Holder had satisfied himself that those concerns had been adequately covered.
 - The Portfolio Holder stated that the Housing Team were aware of the work that had to be undertaken at the property. Costings took into account all of the potential work having to be done, although all may not be ultimately required. It was suggested that the cost could be divided by three as three homeless people would be placed in the property. The fact that the property had to be retained for thirty years meant that homeless people being placed in a property was the main value to the Council. The Portfolio Holder advised that he had been assisted by officers, and had considered the information in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Strategy and Partnerships and the Portfolio Holder for HRA and Private Sector Housing, in arriving at his decision.
- Members suggested that this type of housing could be controversial within wards and that it would be prudent to have the backing of all ward members. Members also questioned whether the views of the ward members had been taken into account following the

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- recommendations from the Panel's meeting in February
- The Portfolio Holder confirmed that he was in agreement that ward members should be consulted with regard to issues happening in their wards. He and the other two Portfolio Holders had been advised by the Housing Team that the ward members had been spoken to and liaised with.
 - Members responded that it had been clear that the ward members were not happy at the Panel meeting in February, that it was clear that they were opposed to the property in question, and suggested that the Portfolio Holder should have spoken to them following the meeting, to ensure that their views had been taken into consideration.
 - The Portfolio Holder replied that the ward members had been notified, and whilst he appreciated that there was some concern at the meeting, he had been assured by the Housing Manager that all concerns and issues had been discussed.
 - Members suggested that this issue may not have been helped by the fact that pre-decision scrutiny had been undertaken.
 - The Chairman clarified that he had been asked to hold the meeting at the appointed time because of the urgency of the decision. He had been assured that, had the Portfolio Holder first made his decision, and the decision had then been called in, it would have been very difficult to achieve the time frame which ended on 31 March 2021.
 - Some members reported, that having looked at the report and recalling questions asked at the last meeting, there seemed to be a robust justification for proceeding.
 - Members commented that the policy within the Local Plan relating to properties of this nature dealt with a number of issues other than parking. Bearing in mind the issues raised regarding parking, it would have been considered useful had the Portfolio Holder familiarised himself through the Planning Department with any other parking issues that were in the locality, especially the risk of setting a precedent.
 - Members questioned why a more modern property had not been considered, particularly as the property was to be retained for thirty years. Although the report stated that many of the costs relating to the property chosen were not specifically in relation to its age, it was suggested that problems and issues were generally common in older properties, and that it would therefore have been better to purchase a newer property.
 - The Portfolio Holder advised that when potential properties were being identified, consideration had to be given to the location of the property and the proximity of facilities and amenities such as doctors' surgeries and shops. He and the other two Portfolio Holders had been presented with 29

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properties to consider. If a new property had been purchased, the same costs would have been incurred in converting the property for three people to have their own separate bedroom and bathroom. Money had been saved by purchasing an older property at a lower price.

- Members responded by asking that, as members had felt that better value could have been gained from purchasing a newer property, was the Portfolio Holder satisfied that all aspects of purchasing a newer property been considered?
 - The Portfolio Holder replied that he was satisfied that this was the case.
- Members still expressed concern that converting an old property would be more difficult, and fraught with problems.
- Members stated that a substantial extension was being added to the property next door to the one in question – would this have any adverse effect on the value of the house being purchased?
 - The Portfolio Holder advised that he could not recall an extension on the next door property being mentioned.
- It was confirmed that the property could house men or women, and no specific decisions had yet been made on who the accommodation would be allocated to.
- Members questioned if it could be confirmed that help had been offered to search for a property and that suggestions of properties had been made with three double bedrooms (one en-suite), separate upstairs bathroom and downstairs shower room, which could have been converted, and was within five years old?
 - The Portfolio Holder responded that he was aware that other properties had been suggested, but that these had not been put forward to the Portfolio Holders to make a decision on.
- Members questioned what role the Portfolio Holder saw the Performance Monitoring Panel taking in any future decisions that he had to make.
 - The Portfolio Holder responded that all reports and comments would be taken into consideration, and that scrutiny was an important part of the process.
- Members questioned what the Portfolio Holder had learned from this process.
 - The Portfolio Holder advised that, in his role, humane considerations had to be taken into account, alongside value for money.
- Members questioned whether the disregard of the Panel's recommendations would have any effect on the reputation of the Authority.
 - The Portfolio Holder responded that he hoped that this was not the case, and he confirmed that the scrutiny process remained important.

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The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for Assets and Planning for his attendance at the meeting, and for answering the Panel's questions.

The appendix relating to this item was attached to the agenda as an exempt item however, no discussion of the exempt information was required, and the item was therefore considered in open session.

AGREED:

That the responses of the Portfolio Holder for Assets and Planning be noted.

64 DIGITAL WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel was advised that it would receive two updates, the first on the Northgate system, and the second an update on the current situation with regard to the Digital Work Programme.

Northgate System

The Housing and Landlord Services Manager provided the Panel with a presentation on the Northgate System, used by the Housing Team.

- Prior to the introduction of the Northgate system, the Housing Department had used at least 7 different systems that each stood alone and were not interlinked. The solution was therefore to have one system that served all areas that the Housing Department dealt with, which both officers and customers could use, and which did everything required in a more user-friendly, easy-to-access way.
- One of the first improvements was a task summary facility for the officers and managers which prioritised the tasks that needed to be dealt with, enabling them to be actioned effectively.
- With regard to Private Sector Housing, improvements had been made to the customer facing side of the system, relating to applications for HMO licences. This had previously been a paper-based task, which had been dealt with by officers. With the new system, all necessary information could be uploaded by the customer in real time, along with supporting documents and payment. The application would then move into a processing queue for officers to deal with.
- With regard to the Repairs service, improvements had been made by combining the two systems previously used into the one area, which could be updated in real time, and which could also be used by customers. A new pictorial guide to repairs had been created which asked the necessary questions to ascertain the type and severity of the problem. If the job was automatically diagnosed to be an emergency, notification would immediately be sent to the PDA device of the officer on call, to be dealt with as an emergency repair. Ultimately, the customer would be able to book their repair appointment via an online appointment system – work on this stage of the process was still underway.

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- Members were advised that officers were currently halfway through the project timeline.

Members considered the information and the following issues were raised:

- Members commented that the pictorial side of the system for reporting repairs was very useful, particularly for people with learning difficulties. However, would residents who did not wish to use the on-line system still be able to access the previous method of reporting via direct contact with an officer?
 - The Housing and Landlord Services Manager confirmed that the system was an enhancement, not a replacement, and that the direct contact system would still remain in place.
- In terms of the customer experience, how would it be confirmed that any repair work had been undertaken, and that the customer experience had been completed?
 - With regard to customer satisfaction, the system would generate housing dashboards that would break down jobs by trade, showing the satisfaction achieved for the customer.
- Could members assist their own residents in completing the information on the Northgate system?
 - Officers responded that family, friends or members could assist tenants in completing the information online, or they could make direct contact with the Council, as before.
- An amount of £220,000 had been invested in the housing system – how could it be shown that this investment demonstrated value, in terms of increased efficiencies?
 - The Housing and Landlord Services Manager advised that the main advantage of the system was the increased capacity that it could create. Officers would be able to spend more time on more complicated issues within their areas, and dealing with vulnerable customers. Savings would also be achieved through the closure of older systems, information from which would be incorporated within the new system.
- Members requested that an analysis of the savings generated by the system, showing whether it had been value for money, could be provided to members in the future.
 - The Housing and Landlord Services Manager confirmed that this could be provided.
- Members questioned whether the system could be open to misuse as a result of customers entering information themselves – how could all requests being stated as an emergency be avoided?

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- The Housing and Landlord Services Manager responded that a recharge would be applied where it was found that a job that had been booked as an emergency was not of that status.
- Members questioned how jobs would be allocated to the operatives, taking into account the time left on the job they were currently dealing with and their distance from the new job.
 - The Housing and Landlord Services Manager confirmed that there was a dynamic scheduling tool that worked out the availability of the operatives, and which took into account the distance they would need to travel. The current scheduling software relied on a manual upload once a week by the Logistics Manager who would then allocate jobs in order to accommodate emergencies. The advantages of the new system were that the level of customer service would be improved, as well as the customer experience, as customers would be able to book and track the repairs themselves.
- Members commented that where a similar system had been used elsewhere, the operatives' mileage had in fact doubled. Concern was expressed and there was a suggestion that the mileage should be monitored.
 - The Housing and Landlord Services Manager advised that as usage of the new system progressed, a presentation on the scheduling software could be provided to reassure members of its effectiveness.
- Members responded that it was important to monitor the system to ensure that there were no unintended consequences and unforeseen problems.
- Members questioned whether all necessary questions were asked of the customer during completion of their repair request on the system. Was further information required to ascertain if the customer could have prevented the issue? It was also suggested that as part of the online reporting process, customers should be informed of their responsibility to adhere to the appointment, and if it was found that incorrect information had been provided, a recharge would be issued.
 - The Housing and Landlord Services Manager responded that questions were already asked, which ascertained if the problem was the responsibility of the customer, and if so, that no further action would be taken. If the repairs were to be dealt with by the operatives, the system would ensure that they were dealt with quickly and efficiently, but if the repair was due to tenant damage or wilful damage, the system would make it clear that a recharge would be applied.
- Members questioned if the analytics produced by the system could highlight whether particular issues were being regularly reported

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which could potentially indicate a District-wide problem.

- The Housing and Landlord Services Manager advised that in terms of repairs, two property systems were being brought together under the new system, and that in relation to analytics, if a particular component was not reaching the end of its suggested life or was requiring a greater number of routine repairs than expected, it would be highlighted to assist with future decisions around purchases and investments. He also stated that parameters could be set for the analytics dashboards, around areas for consideration relating to customer satisfaction, expected component life cycles and when components were due for replacement. It would also be possible to share information with the customer via the Tenants Portal.
- Members asked whether it would be possible for them to use the system under a test environment in order that they could answer residents' questions regarding it more effectively. JK
 - Officers confirmed that a demonstration of the system could be provided to members.
- Members asked if a report could be provided giving further information on progress of the system, and detailing performance as a result of having the system installed. JK
 - The Housing and Landlord Services Manger advised that this would be possible. He explained that there were some improvements to the system that would be going live during the summer, and that September would therefore be an appropriate time for an update.

Members thanked the Housing and Landlord Services Manager for his update, and his clarity around answering the questions.

Digital Work Programme

The Programme Delivery Manager provided the Panel with a presentation concerning challenges and opportunities, next steps, and a financial update on the Digital Work Programme.

- The impact of Covid 19 had created different financial pressures for the Council, changing attitudes and behaviours, changing relationships and numerous other challenges. The opportunity had been taken to redefine the short-term digital strategy, to re-focus resources, to adapt to meet residents' needs, to develop existing channels, and to seek new partnership working.
- The Digital Team were holding daily meetings with the Communications and Digital teams. There had also been regular meetings with the Digital teams at SHDC and PSPS, creating a more collaborative relationship.
- There would be one single plan of action, that would be deliverable and would demonstrate efficiency savings.

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- Between April 2020 and March 2021, economic development had been supported with the production of a multiple business grants online application service. Support had been given to ensure the Local Restriction Support grant scheme web content had been kept up to date. Web content for the different business grants had been made available to the public.
- Work had been undertaken with the Communications team to provide web activity analytics to support SHDC's social media platforms. An online contact function had been created and introduced for the Economic Development Team. In collaboration with PSPS and SHDC's Economic Development team the new Grants4Growth website had been crafted and delivered.
- An online application for e-permit for Castle Parking had been created and introduced.
- The "Tenants Self-Service" area of the website had been reviewed and delivered, including a full re-write of the content.
- Following a website accessibility score of 60% in July 2020, work had been undertaken to improve the website and the score in March 2021 had improved to 86%.
- In summary the work undertaken had concentrated on the crossover between web and social engagement, and trends in user needs, scoping a "book and pay" solution for SHDC, managing and maintaining the web content around Covid-19, and the project management of the introduction of Microsoft Teams.
- The introduction and development of an online booking service for market traders during the free-rent pitch period (phase one) had also been implemented and this was continued to phase two, which offered a full "book and pay" service for market pitch booking.
- An online form had been created and launched for Custom and Self-Build registration.
- Moving forward the work schedule allowed for the continuation of the project management of Northgate Housing and the Tascomi system, used by the Licensing team.

- Members were also provided with a financial update. The original funding for the Digital Team had been £331,613. The current projection was that there would be an under spend of approximately £19,000. However, further funds could be forthcoming from Central Government due to the Covid pandemic, and officers suggested that a further report be given at a later date, taking this into account.

SK, ES

Members considered the information, and the following issues were raised:

- Members asked who was undertaking all the work that had been outlined.
 - The Programme Delivery Manager advised that she was undertaking this work, along with the Digital Project Manager, and an SHDC Web Content Manager. In addition, there was also a PSPS/SHDC resource of 37 hours per week allocated to the programme.

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- Members commented that the Panel had, for some time, been requesting a clear report on the financial situation, and questioned if the expenditure of £220,000 mentioned by the Housing and Landlord Services Manager was included within the £331,000 funding figure.
 - The Programme Delivery Manager advised that the figure of £220,000 was in addition to the £331,000, as the Northgate system was a separate business case.
- A number of points were raised with regard to the continued relevance of the existing programme:
 - Members stated that a report was needed as soon as possible, clarifying the position relating to the overall programme, and whether that programme was still relevant in light of the changing landscape.
 - Members questioned the fact that the original proposal had included references to Breckland Council, and that as that partnership was now ending, this needed to be reviewed.
 - The Council's Budget stated that an amount of £627,000 from years 2020 to 2023/24 had been budgeted to be spent on IT and Digital-related projects (including the Northgate system) and that a further £84k had been budgeted for items such as Office 365 – these figures were significant and a report was required to see if that money was being spent effectively.
 - Members stated that the Authority needed to revisit the original programme, and questioned how the Performance Monitoring Panel could assist with this – how could the Authority deliver what was required, in a cost-effective way?
 - The involvement of PSPS had previously been questioned, but their experience was considered a resource that could be used – was it time for the Authority to reconsider how it delivered the project?
 - The Place Manager advised that a new IT Board had been created, which included officers from SHDC and PSPS. The Board would be considering all the items that had been added into the shared plans, to ensure that they were still fit for purpose. The experts in PSPS were fundamental to the IT Board and ongoing discussions.
- Members responded by requesting a report be produced, dealing with all the aspects discussed at this meeting, and that could demonstrate that a robust plan was in place moving forward.
 - The Place Manager asked for time to liaise with Democratic Services and the officers involved to produce a report.
- The Chairman suggested that a special meeting be arranged to provide sufficient time to consider the content of the report.

SK, ES

AGREED:

- a) That the presentations be noted;

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- b) That the following be provided, with regard to the Northgate system:
- i. An analysis of the savings generated by the system, showing whether it had been value for money;
 - ii. A presentation on the scheduling software, as usage of the system progressed;
 - iii. A demonstration to members of the Northgate software, in order that they could familiarise themselves with the system and thus assist the public, if required; and
 - iv. An update report, giving further information on progress of the system, and detailing performance as a result of having the system installed, for consideration at the meeting on 8 September 2021.
- c) That, with regard to the Digital Work Programme, a special meeting of the Performance Monitoring Panel be arranged, and a report produced to consider the following issues raised by the Panel:
- i. Clarification of the position relating to the overall programme, and whether it was still relevant in light of the changing landscape;
 - ii. A review of the programme in light of the ending of the partnership with Breckland Council;
 - iii. Whether the money allocated to the programme was being spent effectively;
 - iv. A review of the original programme, and how it was delivered; and how the Authority could deliver what was required in a cost-effective way.

65 PERFORMANCE MONITORING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Manager – Governance which set out the Work Programme of the Performance Monitoring Panel. The Work Programme consisted of two separate sections, the first setting out the dates of the future panel meetings along with propose items for consideration, and the second setting out the Task Groups that had been identified by the Panel.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

66 ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

There were none.

(The meeting ended at 8.20 pm)

(End of minutes)