

South West Norfolk

Operational Review 2019

From: Matthew Burrell, County Commissioner 24 June 2019

Background

South West Norfolk Scout District is in the Scout County of Norfolk. It reaches from Norfolk's western border with Cambridgeshire and borders the Scout County of Suffolk to just east of Thetford.

It is bordered to the North by North West Norfolk, Central Norfolk and Southern Norfolk.

The District has had five District Commissioners since creation in November 2002 only two have served a term of greater than two years. In recent years the District has had some difficulty to build an effective District Team with any period of tenure to invoke any kind of organisational change.

The District has grown since formation from 350 young people in 2002 to 560 in 2019, although the number has remained static since 2013, the number of groups during that time has reduced from 17 to 12.

Since my appointment in January 2017, I have tried to support the development and growth of Scouting in the District however a number of serious incidents, prolonged adult disputes and complex governance and legal issues has absorbed all of the effective operational time of the lead volunteers with has led to disillusion and a lot of operational and personal stress.

The District leases land to provide a campsite called Two Mile Bottom, this is a beautiful, well loved and wonderful facility to absorb young people into Scouting. The District has developed the site, however its operation is a further distraction and challenge to volunteers and trustees.

Investment has been made into two District Conferences and the creation of two strategic plans that appear to have failed to gain buy in from the District Members.

The District situation is not attractive for people to step up, existing hard-working volunteers hold multiple roles and worked tirelessly to support provision, a supportive environment needs to exist to develop them further.

The District Explorer Scout provision is weak and we are generally not providing for 14 – 18 age group.

The Challenge

The current District Commissioner, David Human has given me his notice that he intends to step down at the end of 2019 following 21 months in role.

I have full respect for Dave's decision and support him in his next steps.

This finds me again in the position to find a new strategic leader and start another round of team building development and planning.

The Positives

While my background does not portray a positive image there is of course elements that are very positive.

The adult volunteer community is generally very committed and caring towards young people. Many work long hours to support their community.

Scouting within Groups is pretty good and young people have access to programmes including residential experiences. Many have turned away from the District environment and focused their time on their Group and young people.

South West Norfolk has still managed to produce Queen's Scout Award holders including one in 2019.

Two Mile Bottom is a cherished resource throughout Norfolk and the United Kingdom.

While we may not have gained ground, progress has been made. A number of volunteer positions have changed and poor behaviours have been challenged, regrettably some volunteers have moved to other interests while some have taken new challenges and transformed situations.

My conclusion

The District is tired, scarred by past battles, sceptical of the intentions of others and past the point of a third attempt for resurrection.

The Way Forward

I have decided that the opportunity presented allows me to make some fundamental changes to the way that Scouting in this area of Norfolk is supported and developed.

In accordance with POR 4.17b, I shall not be starting a search for a new District Commissioner, but have instead asked County Trustee, Paul Weeks to form a small working group to review the operation of Scouting in South West Norfolk and make a number of recommendations to me for consultation with the County Board of Trustees .

The recommendations I shall be seeking are:

- How the current Groups can be reallocated to the three neighbouring Districts to provide access to existing and developing support models with sensible considering to travel and external factors.
- How the District assets, cash or other will be fairly distributed.
- How a modern and achievable operating model can be developed for Two Mile Bottom to ensure that it remains a viable asset for Young People in Scouting, Guiding and any youth organisation.
- What the legacy of South West Norfolk could be, with a focus on providing a positive outcome for Explorer Scout aged young people.

Brandon Scout Group

Brandon Scout Group is part of Norfolk Scouts despite the town being in Suffolk.

The working party will make a recommendation based on the wishes of the Group Scout Council about their future District. If the Scout Council wishes strongly to remain in Norfolk Scouts then we will accommodate that, likewise if the Scout Council wishes we will approach Suffolk for consideration.

External Considerations

Along with the background information the following factors should be considered as to why it is now time to reconsider the District support framework:

- The number of Groups within the four Districts has reduced from 64 in 2002 to 51 in 2019 with Central Norfolk now only supporting 9 Groups.
- The way we work has changed, when South West Norfolk was created it was commonplace to have monthly District meetings to share information, communication has gone online and technology has reduced the need to meet.
- Infrastructure projects have made improvements to connections between places, for example the A11.

Next steps - Timeline

June 2019

- Members made aware of changes

Now – September

- The working party will consult and define recommendations to me.

September

- A delayed District Annual General Meeting will be held and outcomes of the review will be published

October – December

- District Team members will be encouraged to discuss opportunities with District Commissioners of North West, Central and Southern Norfolk.

December

- In line with POR with POR 4.21a an Extraordinary Meeting will be held to formally close South West Norfolk District, transfer Groups and assets to receiving Districts. Activities will take place to wind up the Charity and present final accounts.
- Application will be made to change the registration of the District to remove all existing groups from South West Norfolk and place them in new Districts.
- It is my intention, to cover POR 4.21h that on 31 December all District Appointments will be retired and the District will be closed.

January 2020

- Groups will complete the Annual Census within their new Districts.

Summary

While it is natural to feel sad when something comes to an end we must remember that Scouting is a movement. We have changed before and will change again.

We are guided by our heritage, but our legacy is only as old as the youngest Beaver Scout.

I am positive for a fresh start for Scouting in the South West Norfolk area

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long, sweeping diagonal stroke that extends towards the top right of the page.

Matthew Burrell
County Commissioner (Norfolk)