

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 2**

**Held on Thursday, 28 February 2008 at 10.00 am in  
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Mr C.R. Jordan  
Mrs J. Ball  
Mr S.G. Bambridge  
Councillor Claire Bowes  
Mr M.J. Griffin

Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris (Chairman)  
Mrs S.M. Matthews  
Mrs L.H. Monument (Vice-Chairman)  
Mr D.G. Mortimer  
Mrs P. Quadling

**Also Present**

Mrs D.K.R. Irving

**In Attendance**

Annalisa Graziano  
Ian Vargeson  
Mark Broughton

- Committee Officer
- Democratic Services Manager (Breckland)
- Scrutiny Officer

**1/08 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**2/08 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

- Councillor Diana Irving.

**3/08 REVIEW OF COUNCIL WEBSITE**

Lisa Hilton, the Corporate and e-communications Officer and Jonathon Collision, the Web Officer, were invited to the meeting to give an update on the review of the Council Website.

The Corporate and e-communications Officer brought Members' attention to 4.7 of the report, which highlighted that since a Socitm report during February 2007 stated the Council website was Standard rather than Transactional, a great deal of work had been carried out working towards the site being Transactional. It was explained that making the site Transactional would ensure that it was more customer-focused by increasing the number of transactions available to the public. In addition, an index had been created for online forms enabling residents to report a number of incidents including abandoned vehicles, fly tips and full recycling bins. An addition, an online form was being processed to allow users to register food businesses online.

A Member asked whether Planning Applications could be online. In response, the Panel were advised that an application called '1App' was in the process of being installed for use on the Council website, which would supply electronic forms for individuals to complete when

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submitting a planning application with the aim of simplifying the planning process. Members were advised that the system manages all applications electronically through a central government portal which then distributes applications to the correct Council. It was noted that '1App' would be going live at the beginning of March. In addition, a new DMS's (Document Management System) was in the process of being sourced for Planning and Building Control.

Members expressed the importance of the all forms for the Council being available by paper as well as online, as many residents did not have internet access or even computers.

The Panel were advised that the common links to Planning and Building Control had all been made more user friendly and accessible by being placed in specific headings ensuring they were more noticeable to the user. A Member stated that accessing the Planning pages on the website was very difficult especially compared to South and North Norfolk websites. The comment was noted.

The Scrutiny Officer brought Members' attention to Appendix A of the Report and highlighted that he did not feel that a great deal of progress had been made since the last report to the Panel during June 2007. In response, it was explained that not all the developments had been noted in Appendix A as many of them were covered in the body of Report.

Members were pleased with the progress that had been made with the website and hoped that it would continue to develop in such a positive way.

It was agreed that this item would be brought back to the Panel every six months.

**4/08 ACTION PLAN UPDATE - ALL MEMBERS MATTER PROGRAMME FOR BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL**

The Democratic Services Manager gave an update on the Action Plan for the All Members Matter Programme. A review had been carried out by the Local Government Information Unit of Member Support following which a report was produced identifying possible areas for improvement. In July 2007, Officers analysed the report and produced an action plan to deliver the improvements. The action plan was revisited during January 2008 and an update of the action plan was attached to the report for Members' information.

It was highlighted that although only a couple of the areas had been completed, generally a lot of progress had been made with the aims of the action plan.

A Member asked why only legal issues relating to planning were mentioned in the action plan and felt that this should be amended to cover Members being updated on all changes to law relating to all service areas of the Council.

**Annalisa  
Graziano,  
Stephen  
McGrath**

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**Annalisa  
Graziano**

Regarding Members being sent letters requesting they send all outside bodies' minutes to Committee Services for inclusion in the e-library, it was noted that this had been done before new Members were elected last year. It was confirmed that the letter would be re-issued to take account of any Members that did not receive the letter in the first instance.

Members mentioned the importance of reviewing the difference in Members' allowances for Members in rural areas and urban areas. The Democratic Services Manager advised Members that this had not been addresses yet; however, it would certainly be looked into as part of the new panel's investigations.

A Member felt it was important to note that when all the items from the Action Plan were completed they would have to be re-visited every four years to take account of new councillors.

Members noted the progress that had been made and expressed their congratulations to the Democratic Services Team.

**5/08 COUNCILLORS WARD INFORMATION**

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report detailing that the last Comprehensive Performance Assessment asked Breckland Council to review the Training, Development and support provided to its Elected Members. Following this, the Local Government Information Unit carried out a review of Member Support and produced a report identifying possible areas for improvement. One of the areas for improvement was to supply Councillors with a robust information source for advance notice and consultation on issues affecting their Ward. Officers carried out Member surveys, research comparing other councils' practice and internal Officer consultation following which it was agreed that e-mail should be recommended as it was the best method of communication for receipt/audit purposes.

It was highlighted that the Report had been to the Member Training Panel on Monday, 18 February 2008 and the draft minutes of this meeting were briefly discussed for Members' information.

A Member raised concern that having an I.T. based solution for updates (e.g. e-mail) although a reasonable option was subject to error as it required a human trigger. During discussion, Members were all of the opinion that they were not consistently being kept informed of what was happening in their respective Wards. Members stressed that the main reason for needing to be copied into correspondence was due to finding themselves in very embarrassing situations on a number of occasions where unbeknown to them Officers had attended meetings etc within their Wards without them being notified. A Member suggested that Ward representatives should be copied into all correspondence, with a few exceptions, but particularly with regard to planning applications. The Chairman agreed with the above suggestion.

A Member requested that on all planning correspondence a point of contact should be clearly noted, for example, the Officer's initials, to

enable Councillors to clearly identify who was working on each case load.

It was noted that Members were becoming increasingly frustrated with the slow processing speed of their laptops which was highlighted as an area of concern especially in light of the Ward updates coming via email.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that it should be the responsibility of Service Managers to ensure that their teams kept Members up to date; clearly this had not been happening in every case. The importance of providing information to Members needed to be reinforced although to ensure full compliance could prove difficult.

**RESOLVED** that the IT option in conjunction with points 6.1 and 6.2 of the Report be agreed.

**6/08 WORK PROGRAMME**

Members gave consideration to the proposed work programme. It was agreed that the Work Plans of the Sports/Arts Development Officers due to be taken to the next Panel meeting on Thursday, 3 May 2008 be carried over to the subsequent meeting of the Panel on Thursday, 8 May 2008.

It was agreed that at the meeting scheduled for Thursday, 3 April the Panel would give consideration to items for the Work Programme for the year ahead.

It was noted that together with the Work Plans a report was scheduled for the May meeting on the Mental Health Issues from the Norfolk and Waveney Mental Health NHS Trust. Members were asked to give consideration to what they may like to discuss regarding Mental Health Issues.

**7/08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Policy Development and Review Panel 2 be held on Thursday, 8 May 2008 at 10.00 a.m. in the Norfolk Room, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham.

The meeting closed at 10.43 am

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CHAIRMAN