

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 23 July 2009 at 2.15 pm in the
The Regency Room, Assembly Rooms, Market Place, Swaffham PE37 7AB**

PRESENT

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris
Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr K. Martin
Mr R.F. Goreham (Vice- Chairman)	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr J.R. Gretton	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mrs D.K.R. Irving	Mr B. Rose
Mr A.P. Joel	Mr A.C. Stasiak

Also Present

Mr P.J. Duigan	Mrs T. Hewett
Mrs J. Ball	

In Attendance

Mark Broughton	- Member Development and Scrutiny Officer
Ian Vargeson	- Member Services Manager
Julie Britton	- Senior Member Services Officer
Stephen McGrath	- Member Development Team Leader
Mark Stokes	- Strategic Director (Services)
Monica Coffey	- Customer Services Manager
Robert Walker	- Sustainable Communities Manager
Adam Colby	- Senior Business Improvement Officer
Maxine O'Mahony	- Head of Human Resources
Kevin J Taylor	- ICT Manager
Christine Brain	- Scrutiny Manager – Forest Heath District Council

63/09 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

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a) **Scrutiny Review – Sickness Absence (Minute No. 54/09)**

The Member Development and Scrutiny Officer reported that Shirley Matthews had been appointed as Chairman of the Task & Finish Group. Diana Irving and Robin Goreham had agreed to join this Group. The purpose of the Group was to review sickness absence and to look in more depth at the issues affecting sickness absences and the steps being taken to address and reduce absence rates. The Group would also be looking at comparative information for benchmarking purposes and target setting for the future.

b) **BT Payphones – Response to BT Proposals for Cashless Conversions (Minute No. 60/09)**

The O&SC had requested that letters be sent to the two local Members of Parliament to present the Council's case evidence of

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opposing the conversion of telephone kiosks to cashless facilities in rural areas. Members were informed that replies had been received in which the said MPs had given their support.

c) Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

64/09 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

An apology for absence was received from Mr A. Byrne.

65/09 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

The Chairman informed Members of the following items of urgent business.

(a) Investors in People (IiP)

A workshop had been held on the 14th July to complete a Member diagnostic report and as a consequence the Chairman had asked for the matter to be brought to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission as a number of concerns had been raised which he felt required immediate attention.

The Executive Member for Performance & Communications, the Head of Human Resources and the Member Development Team Leader were present for this item.

The Member Development Team Leader reported on the outcome of the Special meeting of the Member Development Panel which had been held immediately following the workshop. He advised that four Members had been appointed as IiP Champions to work alongside the IiP Officer Champions. The Members who had been appointed were Gordon Bambridge, Ian Sherwood, Diana Irving and John Labouchere.

The Head of Human Resources had been invited to the meeting to provide clarity about the IiP process following the Member workshop on 14th July. She provided Members with the background of IiP, the benefits of achieving the accreditation, why the Council wanted to achieve the standard, what the Authority had done so far, what actions had been made and what the next steps were.

Councillor involvement in the IiP process was part of a commitment to the Member Development Charter.

In October 2008, as part of the overall aim to achieve IiP accreditation across the Council, the Human Resources Team had agreed to work towards achieving IiP status by March 2010.

The organisation had set an objective of achieving IiP accreditation by March 2010.

To achieve IiP accreditation a four step process had to be followed:

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- Step 1 – Baseline review – to establish where the Council was as an organisation
- Step 2 – Develop an action plan and implement improvements required
- Step 3 – Mock Audit from liP
- Step 4 – Audit from liP and achievement of the accreditation.

liP Champions had been identified for each Service Area. In order to establish a baseline position a diagnostic report had been carried out in December 2008 on all staff by the liP Champions with the help of the Council's designated liP Consultant. Areas of improvement had been identified. The overall percentage for the Authority was 63.5%. 80% was needed to be awarded the liP Accreditation; therefore the Council was only 16.5% behind target. Members were asked to bear in mind that this report had been completed at the time of major reorganisation within some areas of the Council which would have had a detrimental effect on the overall score.

The diagnostic report that the Members had completed would be included in the overall score.

Examples of the improvements/actions that had been undertaken were explained. All teams would need to complete the diagnostic report again in September to understand how the Council had improved since December 2008.

Once Members' had their results these would be collated with the staff report providing a set of results for the organisation as a whole.

A Member asked if there would be any further training for officers following the diagnostic tests.

Other Members had been surprised that the score, and what had been achieved by the organisation so far, had not been communicated to staff or Members as they had not been aware of the results up until now.

The Chairman reported that he had spoken with the Chief Executive who had been equally concerned following the comments that had been made after the workshop/presentation. His advice had been that the liP status was not the be all and end all; although the quality mark was desirable, achieving benefits from the review and consequent improvements was the real objective. He had emphasised the fact that it was important to remember that at the time the survey had been undertaken staff morale had been low compared to now. The Chairman did feel, however, that the communication concern should be taken on board. He was sure that if the survey was to be completed again there would be a very different result.

A Member was of the opinion that the miscorrelation of the result was the biggest matter that the authority had to overcome. The Member Development Team Leader explained the reasons why the Members survey had not been carried out at the same time as the staff.

The Strategic Director for Services reported that 63% was a good score in comparison to other authorities and would have been much

higher if the re-organisation had not taken place at that time.

A Member wished to know if the services that had been transferred to Capita would be graded within the liP; if not, he felt that Capita should be encouraged to take part. The Chairman advised that Capita, as a business, had to do well and should have the same ethos for its services as Breckland Council had. The Human Resources Manager stated that she had spoken with Capita and she had been assured that they were on the right track.

The Executive Member for Performance & Communications had no doubts about the Council achieving liP status and was pleased to see that a detailed action plan had been put in place that would be to residents' benefit.

The Chairman was confident that now four liP Member I Champions had been appointed to join the Officer Panel, any concerns that Members had would be addressed.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chairman thanked the Officers for attending and it was agreed that liP would be added as an item on the Work Programme for the October meeting.

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Mark
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(b) **Failure of the Council's IT System**

The Chairman, with the support of the Executive Member for the Business Transformation Portfolio, had asked that this matter be brought to the meeting as urgent business.

The ICT Manager was in attendance to discuss the failure of the Council's IT system following the storms on Friday, 17 July. He appreciated how frustrated everyone had been and provided details on how it happened, the recovery plans that were in place and how to manage such incidents in the future.

On 17th July, Dereham and the surrounding areas suffered a significant electrical storm. Elizabeth House conducted several lightning strikes, with the result that electrical currents travelled down cables and disabled some of the Council's communication systems.

The ICT Team had left the matter with the Council's suppliers, where the expectation had been that the service would be up and running on the Monday, following the storm. The fault could not be found and the internet remained out of action.

The ICT Manager announced that the problem had since been resolved and explained that an internal component on the network had been affected. The new part had been ordered and recovery plans were now in place. The component that had failed had been outside the Council's domain; however, it was anticipated that the internet would be up and running by the end of the day or in the morning.

The ICT Manager apologised for the problems this had caused the Council, but assured Members that if the same problem occurred again the affect would be minimal. He explained that the ICT Team

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would now be focusing on the following three areas: prevention, improved contract management (clear lines of responsibility) and resilience (fall over to an alternative).

A Member felt that it would have been helpful if Steria had been represented at the meeting. Members were informed that there were many grey areas within the contract that required immediate attention particularly with regard to receiving an end to end service. The component that had been affected was not covered in the contract; this could have been due to change of management, change of supplier or lack of clarity in scope of contract. The ICT Manager explained that the old contract had been merged into the new one 18 months previously and the contract was due for renewal in another 18 months time.

A Member felt that the ICT Team should focus on identifying things that could go wrong in the future to prevent this happening again. He further felt that with the amount of money that was being spent on the present suppliers, the Council should be receiving a first class service.

The former E Champion pointed out that he had been absolutely assured by Steria that the Council would receive an end to end service. Clearly, this had not happened and he felt that this part of the contract should be checked.

In response to a question as to who would be paying for the new piece of equipment, the ICT Manager advised that Breckland would be paying for it but it was hoped that the costs would be recovered.

The Chairman expressed his misgivings about the service and suggested that an ICT Task & Finish Group should be created to work alongside the ICT Manager

The Strategic Director for Services agreed with the above suggestion as he felt that not only could the Group look at lessons learnt but it could also look at options and procurement processes.

A Member felt that two or three Members ought to follow the whole ICT process through for the duration of the current contract.

It was

RESOLVED that

- 1) a Task & Finish Group be set up to review the ICT contract, to look in more depth at ICT issues and the steps being taken to address them ;
- 2) the Member Development and Scrutiny Officer invite nominations from the non-executive Members of the Council for the membership of the Task & Finish Group.

Mark
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66/09 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 4)

None.

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67/09 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Mrs T. Hewett, Mrs J. Ball and Mr P. Duigan.

A Member thought that it had been agreed that an Executive Member be present at future meetings to discuss his or her portfolio as a specific item. In response, the Member Development & Scrutiny Officer advised that he had asked for this to be suspended until after the re-organisation. The Member Services Manager pointed out that a report on the restructure had been issued as a supplementary item to the Council Agenda and would be discussed at the meeting on Thursday, 30 July.

68/09 CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRE (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The Customer Services Manager explained that the report highlighted the volume of calls that had been received by the Contact Centre up until the year end.

The Senior Improvement Officer from the Business Improvement Team was in attendance and explained that back office processes that were being reviewed to establish how the Contact Centre service could be improved in the future.

One of the improvements included expansion of the Contact Centre. The Customer Services Manager confirmed that the extra space was going ahead and it was explained how savings could be made with the re-allocation of certain staff. Another matter discussed were the letters being sent out by ARP which the public had found difficult to understand.

A Member asked how much it would cost to install extra incoming lines in the Contact Centre. The Customer Services Manager advised that the ICT Manager was looking to extend the digital platform. He was also looking at an array of options and the costs involved.

Other questions related to the amount of calls unanswered and whether the Contact Centre had adequate staffing levels. In response, Members were informed that staffing levels were inadequate to answer the amount of calls coming in to the Contact Centre. Extended hours or extra staff being brought in at the busier times of the day was being considered. A Member felt that the hours should be expanded rather than reduced, more lines should be installed and the letter writing should be investigated.

Members were informed that the Council's website could be made more transactional which would help to reduce the amount of calls coming in to the Contact Centre.

The Chairman mentioned the Contact Centre's voicemail. The current message being used was directing the public to use the Council's online service whilst the internet and email systems were down. The Customer Services Manager said that she would rectify this problem.

The report was otherwise noted.

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69/09 JOINT EUROPEAN AND COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS - JUNE 2009 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Member Services Manager presented the report which concerned the administration and conduct of the elections held in June 2009.

The objectives of both the Regional and Local Returning Officers of completing the election process in accordance with the law and Electoral Commission guidance had been satisfactorily achieved.

In response to a point about how the Tellers were only allowed to approach electors on the way out of the polling station, the Member Services Manager advised that the Local Returning Officer had used the discretion available to him to ensure a smooth election and minimise possible confusion among voters. He reminded Members that Tellers did not have any official standing at an election.

A Member thanked the Member Services Manager and the Electoral Services Manager for the courteous way that they had dealt with the political parties and candidates throughout.

There were some concerns raised about postal votes or proxy papers not being received by some of the electorate and appropriate warding of new developments in Dereham. The Member Services Manager explained that with it being a combined election the postal vote/proxy process had been very complex; there had been all sorts of permutations. He assured Members that all papers had been sent out and in cases where delivery failed, voters had the option to be issued with a replacement. A Member felt that Royal Mail should be contacted about postal issues.

The Chairman praised the Electoral Services Team and the staff who assisted with the elections.

70/09 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

The Chairman of the Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group presented the Minutes of the meetings held on 24 June and 8 July respectively.

(a) Affordable Housing - 24 June 2009

There was some concern with S106 issues particularly with regard to what happened with the financial contributions and commuted sum payments which came with them. The Vice-Chairman of the Task & Finish Group stated that the Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Enabling) would be producing a report on this matter for the next meeting of the Task & Finish Group which would be fed through to the O&SC meeting on the 3 September.

RESOLVED that the confirmed Minutes of the meeting of the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group held on 24 June 2009 be adopted.

(b) Affordable Housing - 8 July 2009

The Vice-Chairman of the Task & Finish Group reported that the

representatives invited from Lovell Partnerships and Bidwells who were supposed to provide presentations to the meeting had unfortunately been unable to attend. However, the Principal Planning Officer (Major Projects) had given a thorough brief to the Group. He had outlined current planning policy at the national and local level covering the various issues associated with housing, such as housing design, planning standards, building for life and the Breckland Design Guide, amongst other things. A list of items had been added to the work programme for the 3rd September meeting.

A Member said that there were a number of people in his Ward that could not afford to purchase housing in the area. He felt that more land should be released so that more good quality housing at an affordable price could be built in rural areas.

Members' attention was directed to a definition that had been provided at the bottom of page 50 of the Agenda as there was some confusion about the meaning of affordable housing being commonly mistaken as social housing.

The Chairman of the Commission pointed out that he would like to see low cost housing that people could afford being provided which could be put on the open market. He mentioned that Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) would be interested in sites that had less than 20 dwellings.

The Vice-Chairman of the Task & Finish Group reported that RSLs had been invited to a Group meeting but had not taken up the invitation.

Another Member who wanted to see more properties built that people could afford to buy asked about S106 monies and how much was in Breckland Council's "pot".

The Chairman of the Task & Finish Group said that he would like to see the financial case for each of the types of housing.

A Member mentioned the park homes sites that could be seen as another way of meeting housing needs. He felt that there was a demand for these types of homes and it was a way of getting people on the housing ladder. He asked that this matter be brought to a future meeting. The Member also mentioned exception sites. He felt that a rental scheme should be formed with regard to land owned by developers.

A suggestion was put forward that Members pay a visit to housing being built on the outskirts of Colchester. This build was a totally affordable, innovative new concept to tackle the growing problems facing first time buyers.

There was agreement that all of the aforementioned matters should be discussed alongside the Housing Strategy item at the O&SC meeting on 15 October 2009. A suggestion that representatives from all local Housing Associations be invited to attend was supported.

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Mark
Broughton

RESOLVED that

- 1) the aforementioned matters be included in the Commission's future work programme;
- 2) the unconfirmed minutes of the Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group meeting held on 8 July be adopted.

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71/09 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Member Development & Scrutiny Officer explained that the report was a little different from previous years. This year had seen the separation of the Audit function from the Scrutiny function and the establishment of a series of Task & Finish Groups.

Some of the changes had arisen as a consequence of the Council responding to directives and initiatives from Central Government but many were as a direct consequence of the Members' desire to ensure, as far as possible, that the service supplied to the people of Breckland were of the highest standard and provided real value in these challenging times.

As in previous years the Annual Report would be sent to all town and parish councils in the District and be placed on the Council's website.

Referring to the work that had been undertaken during the last year, a Member reported that the Horse Fair would be held in Mildenhall in future which was out of the Council's jurisdiction.

RESOLVED that the report be approved.

72/09 COMMUNITY FORA (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Member Development & Scrutiny Officer presented the report.

The report drew Members' attention to Community Fora and the Task Forces that had been established.

The initial Community Forum in the District had been established in Thetford in 2008, followed by one in Attleborough earlier this year. The intention behind the establishment of these Fora was to institute area based working through community focus.

The issue surrounding these arrangements was the role of the Fora and Task Forces; how they fitted into the existing Breckland meetings and informal groups were unclear.

The introduction of the Councillor Call for Action might be seen as another route which partly duplicated the work of the Fora.

The Task Force meetings were not open to the public but partner/agency attendance had been consistently good since their formation. It was intended that further community fora be rolled out to the three remaining towns in the District (Swaffham, Dereham and Watton) by the end of this year.

Was the format of the Fora and Task Forces – which were essentially the same in both Attleborough and Thetford – the optimum approach? A “one size fits all” arrangement might be challengeable and different models adopted elsewhere might be worthy of consideration.

Were the range of representatives from agencies on the Task Forces appropriate or complete, and were the voting arrangements reasonable?

The Member Development and Scrutiny Officer felt that now would be a good opportunity to look at what the Task Forces had achieved and review these bodies before the others being planned were rolled out.

The Chairman believed that there would be three more fora introduced in the near future. This was an opportunity to look at best practice and try to bring together all these various strands to the benefit of the community.

The Sustainable Communities Manager stated that it would be advisable for Members to establish what was working and what was not working in Thetford and Attleborough before the Council rolled out any more. Both Task Forces were always well attended but had no delegated powers or budgets. He provided details of the membership and who could be invited, and also highlighted the successes made by them.

He agreed that there was a need to look at links with Scrutiny and the Councillor Call for Action.

A Member expressed his concern about rural areas not having any connection with the towns and believed that it would be a good idea to have some kind of rural forum. He mentioned the area committees that Inspire East had set up and felt that it would be a good idea to have a chat about getting something up and running for rural areas sooner rather than later. In response, it was agreed that the Sustainable Communities Manager would look at what Inspire East had done to address such communities.

A Member was unsure where these organisations sat and how matters from these fora were reported back to Breckland Council. The Sustainable Communities Manager said that he would check whether the Minutes were sent out to the press and public.

The Chairman felt that the above questions were appropriate. He explained that the Moving Thetford Forward Board was a very wide ranging organisation that had a huge amount of work to do with having Growth Point status. However, this type of organisation was not going to be needed in other market towns. The Task Forces consisted of elected members who should be able to drive policies through. The Task Forces or the Councillor Call for Action did not have and would not have any budgets. The issues came from single interest groups: for example the Thetford Society started the Moving Forward Board and the Attleborough Task Force started with a small amount of land owners. The Thetford public had become involved and improvements had occurred as a result. He felt that if the Council was considering moving forward with the three remaining market towns then it should have a member led group to work with officers and consider the local

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Rob Walker

Rob Walker

issues in which of the towns was chosen next. The towns relied upon the villages surrounding them so these should not be ignored.

It was agreed that a Task & Finish Group should be set up to look at the issues surrounding these fora. The membership should consist of one member of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and a wider invitation be sent out to two non-executive members.

RESOLVED that

- 1) a Task & Finish Group be set up to undertake a full and formal scrutiny review of the arrangements concerning Community Fora and Task Forces in the round;
- 2) Mrs. S.M. Matthews be appointed as a member of the Group; and
- 3) the Member Development and Scrutiny Officer be authorised to invite nominations from two non-executive Members of the Council to complete the membership of the Task & Finish Group.

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73/09 JOINT SCRUTINY (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The Scrutiny Manager from Forest Heath District Council was in attendance for this item.

The Member Development and Scrutiny Officer presented the report which asked Members to consider taking a joint approach to future scrutiny of the Anglia Revenues Partnership.

From a scrutiny perspective, a panel had been previously established to oversee the development of the partnership; however, this had subsequently dissolved approximately two years ago.

Members were asked whether they felt that the Partnership was being adequately scrutinised. There were two clear options as to how joint scrutiny could be undertaken. One approach would be to form a small panel consisting of perhaps three members from each council meeting twice a year. Meeting venues could rotate between Breckland and Forest Heath and the appropriate portfolio member from each council could attend to be held to account for the Partnership's performance against the relevant targets and indicators and to describe future plans. A second way forward could be for each Council's Scrutiny Committee/Commissions to consider the ARP's performance annually and either co-opt or invite a member(s) from the other Council's scrutiny body for the purposes only of that specific item.

It was reported that discussions at Officer level between Breckland and Forest Heath had indicated that a joint approach might be favoured.

The Chairman mentioned the growth in business from the ARP and explained the importance of ARP being out in the market place with ARP Trading.

The Member Development & Scrutiny Officer felt that to ensure democratic accountability the Panel should consist of three or four members from each authority. A Member suggested that anyone from the Audit Committee would be a good choice. In response, the

	<u>Action By</u>
<p>Chairman advised that ARP was growing for all the wrong reasons at the moment due to the current financial climate; therefore, as a scrutiny function the performance of ARP was important. The Audit Commission would certainly be looking at ARP Trading.</p> <p>RESOLVED that subject to receiving a formal agreement from Forest Heath District Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) a joint scrutiny approach be adopted;2) a dedicated Panel with representatives from each council be set up; and3) a meeting to be held at least twice a year using a rota basis for venues.	Mark Broughton
<p>74/09 <u>SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 12)</u></p> <p>There were no items.</p>	
<p>75/09 <u>COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 13)</u></p> <p>There were no items.</p>	
<p>76/09 <u>WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 14)</u></p> <p>It was agreed to bring forward the BT Broadband item from 26 November to another date and that the information on the issues reported under Minute No. 65/09(b) be included.</p> <p>It was proposed that liP be added to the Work Programme for 15 October.</p> <p>It was further proposed that the appropriate people from Capita be invited to the meeting on 15 October under the Contract Monitoring item and to include the Cabinet Support Member.</p> <p>Another suggested item was the Green Agenda Panel objectives. It was noted that a report would be produced on this matter for the Commission in the near future.</p> <p>The Chairman concluded by saying that it was necessary to keep up the pressure on BT as far as payphones were concerned. He gave an example of a coin operated public telephone in his Ward that now needed to be completely replaced.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the work programme be amended as noted above.</p>	Mark Broughton
<p>77/09 <u>NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 15)</u></p> <p>Arrangements for the next meeting on 3 September at Dereham were noted.</p>	All to Note

The meeting closed at 4.45 pm

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CHAIRMAN