

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 18 March 2010 at 2.15 pm in the
Assembly Rooms, Swaffham**

PRESENT

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

Also Present

Mr M. Kiddle-Morris

Iceni Partnership

Mr T. Dickens
Ms V. Mason

In Attendance

Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Andrew Grimley	- Principal Environmental Health Officer
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Mark Stokes	- Deputy Chief Executive
Kevin J Taylor	- Head of ICT

18/10 MINUTES

The Scrutiny Officer updated Members on the recommendations to Cabinet from the Task & Finish Groups.

Discretionary Rate Relief – all the recommendations had been endorsed by Cabinet.

Community Fora – all the recommendations had been endorsed by Cabinet with the caveat that Item (1) would require ‘buy-in’ by the relevant Ward Members.

A Member noted that the case referred to, in the fourth paragraph of page eight of the minutes, was in Carbrooke and not Watton.

Subject to the amendment noted above, the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr J Gretton and following the meeting were received from Mr S Chapman-Allen.

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20/10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Mr J Rogers declared a personal interest in Min No 9/10 as a County Councillor involved in authorising the S106.

Mrs S Matthews declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 as a Director of the Icen Partnership.

21/10 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

Mr M Kiddle-Morris was in attendance for Agenda Item 7.

**22/10 PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY - ICENI PARTNERSHIP
(AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Mr Tony Dickens, Chairman and Ms Vicky Mason, Support Officer, were in attendance to give Members a presentation to mark the tenth anniversary of the Icen Partnership.

Mr Dickens explained that Breckland Council and Swaffham Town Council had worked to bring people together to form a community partnership. Public consultation had identified the issues that local people were most concerned about: the need for a community centre and the refurbishment of the Assembly Rooms. Funding had been achieved through CER to meet those needs and part of that funding had been to provide for the upkeep and running costs of the buildings.

The Town Partnership had been formed as a sub-committee of the Town Council and included members from other interested groups. All were volunteers, apart from the Town Councillors and Partnership Officers. Their main purpose was community support and four thematic groups had been set up to achieve the goals set out in a ten year plan.

A lot of the Partnership's efforts went into supporting new start-up groups and helping other organisations with arranging events. Young people had been involved in the design of the Community Centre and money had been raised to set up a Wi-Fi Café. Events had been run to reduce anti-social behaviour and the Partnership had won National awards for Action for Market Towns in 2008 and for Social and Community in 2009.

A Member asked about the Credit Union and was told that Partnership Officers had received the necessary training to provide banking facilities and these were well supported. There were many loan requests, but users were also being encouraged to become savers.

There was concern that the structure of the Partnership supported the town but neglected the villages and Mr Dickens explained that the services and advice were made available to all. The Partnership did want to help villages, but currently they were not coming forward. Recently the Partnership had wanted to promote improved public transport and to be involved in a pilot project to identify the key needs and gaps in the current service. Letters had been sent out to all the local villages asking for interest, but only one had responded positively.

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Another Member noted that there had been a much more positive response to the Participatory Budgeting scheme which had attracted 27 bids of which eight were from villages.

In response to a question about the funding for the Youth Worker and other staff it was explained that the Partnership had been successful in bidding for money (Match Funded by Breckland Council) which it had used to purchase some industrial units. The rents from those units, together with money from office rental and hall hire, provided the income which allowed the current level of activities. Ms Mason also noted that the young people had received a grant of £12,000 to run the Youth Club and that money covered the wages of the Youth Worker.

The Chairman was concerned about the apparent lack of a budget and he asked about the Constitution of the Partnership.

Mr Dickens explained that there was a yearly budget but that monies were not specifically allocated to events, as generally, the Partnership was not using its own money for the activities. The Constitution had been put in place by Breckland Council when the Partnership started and was fairly standard for charity organisations.

Finally, the Chairman commented that the Partnership did not seem to be applying for much Match Funding from the Council. He said that there was a pot of money available and the Council was keen to work with the Partnership. He thanked Mr Dickens and Ms Mason for their presentation.

23/10 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Mr Kiddle-Morris spoke to the Commission in his capacity as Executive Member for Economic and Commercial Services. He explained that he was still new to the job, only having been appointed on 9 November 2009.

The key objectives of the Portfolio were to:

- encourage inward investment and diversification into the local economy;
- promote the start-up and growth of local businesses; and
- promote the development of a more skilled workforce.

The two branches of the Portfolio were Asset Management and Economic Development.

Asset Management covered the following areas:

Building Services

- Facilities Management (Elizabeth House, Breckland House and the Guildhall);
- Car Parks, Roads and Footpaths

Commercial & Industrial Property

- Commercial Property Portfolio (about £2million revenue)
- Land Sales – Active Land Management

- Commercial Development
- Lease Cars

Economic Development was a more nebulous, unstructured but very successful department. Its main areas of involvement were:

- Business support
- Supporting local employment through skills development
- Growth Point – Programme Management for Moving Thetford Forward
- RevActive supporting business development
- Thetford Enterprise Park
- Snetterton Utilities
- Dragons Den

Mr Kiddle-Morris explained that he had not known much about the Portfolio when he had been appointed but he understood the importance of preparing for future growth when the economy picked up. Therefore, going forward, they would be looking at the properties owned by the Council and ensuring that they were suitable for use now and capable of meeting future needs. He wanted to ensure that there were small starter units available to encourage businesses. He was aware that some villages had quite large industrial estates and he hoped to be able to put small units there to make the local economy more sustainable.

A Member supported this but said that it would be necessary to liaise with the planning department to ensure applications for rural businesses were supported. He felt that there was a need for a Council-wide policy. Mr Kiddle-Morris said that this had to be tackled through the LDF process.

The Vice-Chairman felt that business start-up and specialist advice was vital for small business people and should be advertised by every means available. He was also concerned that the Council should work with other district councils and Norfolk County Council to ensure 'joined up' economic strategies and policies. He complimented the Executive Member on his plans for the future and asked him what he considered to be the most important strand of the Council's economic strategy.

Mr Kiddle-Morris said that the rural economy was the key issue. Work was already being done, in conjunction with Norfolk County Council, to tackle the problem of poor broadband availability as this was vitally important to businesses. It was suggested that BT should be invited back to speak to the Commission.

A Member asked about the lack of skills in the district and Mr Kiddle-Morris said that they were facilitating training for specific workforces, but that they were not equipped to provide basic skills.

An Attleborough Member was concerned about the lack of information he was receiving about the Council's response to the travellers at Victory Park and this concern was echoed by another Member who said that Ward Representatives should be kept in the loop about what was happening in their areas. Mr Kiddle-Morris asked the Deputy Chief Executive to e-mail the Member with an update.

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The same Attleborough Member asked about the Snetterton Market planning application. He felt that the Market was the gateway to the Snetterton Circuit and needed a Master Plan to ensure that it was not developed piecemeal. He also felt that it would be a good place for new small business units.

The Chairman said that there was a need to link economic development and planning – they could not be divorced from each other as they were inextricably linked. Jobs, housing and infrastructure could not be generated without a Master Plan but there did not seem to be one.

Mr Kiddle-Morris agreed that his Portfolio and the Planning Portfolio needed to be in close contact – and they were. However, he felt that Government policy was written on urban grounds and it was dictating what they were trying to do.

A Member asked about the future, when the A11 had been dualled. He was concerned that there would be people and jobs but no overall plan and no power either.

Mr Kiddle-Morris said that power and infrastructure were the shortcomings. Something had to be done, now, to ensure that the district was ready for the business that would come in when the A11 was dualled. Work was already underway to try to sort out the power, water and broadband issues. He said that there were some businesses interested and some schemes under discussion, but the details were confidential at this stage. In response to a question he said that the project for Snetterton Heath had a projected timeline of three years.

The Chairman thanked Mr Kiddle-Morris for his presentation.

24/10 REVIEW OF CONTAMINATED LAND STRATEGY (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Principal Environmental Health Officer presented the report which sought the establishment of a Task & Finish Group to provide insight into how Members wished to proceed with developing the Contaminated Land Strategy for the district.

This was a very complex subject and the Principal Environmental Health Officer thought it would be useful to set aside specific time to discuss it.

The Chairman asked why contamination could not be dealt with on a site-by-site basis as they came forward for development and the Principal Environmental Health Officer explained that the Council had a statutory duty to develop a strategy to examine contaminated land across the whole area. Planning had been used to assist in the process and conditions could be applied requiring site investigations. However, there were around 2000 sites with past contaminated use (such as gas works, landfill, pits, etc) which needed to be examined. A plan was needed to enable prioritisation of work on sites that posed the highest risk to local residents.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said that they wanted to ensure that sites were cleaned up as part of the planning process but that there were cases where conditions had not been applied and others where contractors had started work without realising that

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investigations were required to be carried out. In those instances it was up to the Planning Enforcement and Building Control teams to ensure that conditions were complied with.

The Chairman asked why a standard condition requiring site investigation was not applied in every case and the Principal Environmental Health Officer explained that it was a contentious subject which blighted land development. If conditions were applied without sufficient evidence of contamination it could lead to an appeal being lodged.

A Member suggested that the Council should not be spending money looking at old sites with potential contamination, but should concentrate on live sites.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer said there were a number of options which was why they wanted direction from Members. There were statutory requirements, planning constraints and local knowledge all to be taken into consideration. They were required to look at 'high risk' sites, but some of those did not actually pose a real problem.

The Chairman agreed that there should be Member involvement and said it would be put on the workplan.

The Scrutiny Officer asked what the timescale was and the Principal Environmental Health Officer said that an internal audit in the autumn of 2009 had identified the need for a review. Ideally the work should be completed by the summer, however if the work programme was in place by then it should be sufficient to satisfy the auditors needs.

25/10 CONTRACT MONITORING - STERIA IT CONTRACT
(AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Head of ICT presented the report.

The report showed good performance against the contract, however, it was noted that the performance targets were set in 2003 and expectations had changed since then.

Service had been 'good' over the past 12 months. This had been supplemented by additional monthly performance monitoring, ensuring that the contract delivered to the agreed standards.

The Chairman said that the service agreement should have had incremental performance improvement targets built into it. He had received a log of service interruption communications for the period November 2009 to March 2010 which was why the review had been added to the work programme. He asked if there had been a real drop in performance or if it was because more and more was being asked of the system. The Head of ICT explained that all Members were on 'system outage' circulation lists which included planned downtime. These periods did not impact on service performance targets, but could impact on service perception.

Other Members voiced their concerns about the service and its impact on their ability to do their work and to provide good service to their constituents.

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The Head of ICT advised that a refresh programme of laptops was planned for the following year and that he was engaged in investigating options for when the current contract came to an end in May 2011.

The report was noted.

26/10 SHARED SERVICES (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Chairman gave Members a verbal update on the latest Joint Overview and Scrutiny meeting which had been held in Long Stratton due to no venue being available in Wymondham. Future meetings would be held alternately in Attleborough and Wymondham.

The meeting had been called to review the Feasibility Report submitted by the Consultants following detailed consultation with Members and Officers. The report had said that there was a good fit between the districts and had recommended that they move forward with a full Business Plan. Three Options had been identified:

Option 1 – Single Service Delivery Organisation – one workforce providing the services to the two Councils. The likely approach is for the two Councils to appoint a joint senior management team that would then have responsibility for implementing the wider shared services agenda;

Option 2 – Opportunistic Sharing – the two authorities retaining separate workforces but sharing services based on a case by case examination of the benefits and disbenefits attached to each option; and

Option 3 – Shared Back Office – the two Councils sharing all of their “back office” activities. In order to get the critical mass that is required to generate savings from Revenues and Benefits and Customer Services are included, though they are not, strictly speaking, back office activities.

Option 1 had been chosen by the Joint Committee but there were areas of the report that needed improving. More information was needed and the Governance arrangements would be put in place after the Business Case had been approved.

There were also timing issues due to the impending Elections. The next meeting of the Joint Committee had been due to be held on 5 May, but the Business Case would not be ready in time. Officers would discuss an appropriate timeframe with the Consultant.

One key aspect would be the appointment of a Joint Chief Executive which should take place between July and September, but due to the holiday season was more likely to start in September.

The Chairman noted that the agenda for the meeting had been prepared by South Norfolk and the report had been put below the line. However, at the meeting it had been decided that this was inappropriate and the discussions had taken place in public session. It was important for the residents of both districts to know that the Joint Committee was doing a good job and therefore only commercially sensitive details would be discussed below the line.

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The Vice-Chairman was pleased as he considered that all scrutiny should be treated in that way. He was concerned about a proposal for 'mirror' officers to take over vacant positions. The Chairman agreed and said that it had not been decided if that was the right model.

Some Members of the Commission had not seen the report to the Joint Committee and it was agreed that hard copies would be circulated to them.

Mark
Broughton

27/10 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM)

There were no items.

28/10 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM)

There were no items.

29/10 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman noted that only three Task & Finish Groups would run at any one time in future. The LDF Task & Finish Group was on-going.

The following items were added to the work programme:

- Planning and Building Control Contract Monitoring – to ensure that the contract was meeting its requirements and to address concerns with respect to Land Charge Searches and recruitment.
- BT – to invite a representative to discuss broadband issues.

The Scrutiny Officer advised Members that following on from the Scrutiny Workshop held on 11 March 2010 he was preparing a discussion document for the next meeting.

A Member suggested that there were lessons to be learned from the Watton Airfield development in terms of strategic planning, involving NCC, the police, the PCT and the planning department.

The Chairman was also concerned about the legacy being left in Thetford and a local Thetford Member noted that no local Members were involved in choosing the topics to be discussed at the Moving Thetford Forward Board meetings.

Executive Member Updates

The Scrutiny Officer would rationalise the work programme for the next meeting.

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30/10 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Commission would be held in the Town Hall, Queen's Square, Attleborough, at 2.15pm on 29 April 2010.

The meeting closed at 4.50 pm

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CHAIRMAN