

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 14 July 2011 at 2.00 pm in the
The Gallery Bar, Watton Sports Centre, Dereham Road, Watton IP25 6EZ**

PRESENT

Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr A.P. Joel
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr C G Carter	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 R R Richmond

Also Present

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr W.H.C. Smith
Mr W R J Richmond	

In Attendance

Terry Huggins	- Chief Executive
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Rory Ringer	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Robert Walker	- Assistant Director of Commissioning

43/11 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

44/11 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

None.

45/11 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

46/11 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 4)

During discussion of Agenda Item 9 (Parking Task & Finish Group) Mr Byrne declared a personal interest with regard to charging for parking, as a member of the Norfolk Police Authority, Fire & Rescue Service Regional Management Board.

47/11 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Mr W Smith was in attendance for Agenda Item 6 only. Mr G Bambridge and Mr W Richmond were also in attendance.

48/11 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Mr W Smith explained that Portfolios had changed since the election

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and he now had responsibility for the Customer Contact Centre and Human Resources as well as ICT and ARP. He then gave an update on each area.

ICT

ICT had been in-sourced creating savings of about £317,000.

The ICT Manager had left the authority and been temporarily replaced by two interim managers. Their fees were being shared by South Holland and the ARP was also making a contribution. They had been asked to review the ICT service and put forward options. Their research indicated that the best option was to join with other partners. Potential future savings of around £300,000 had been identified.

The first priority was to maximise savings for the Council. All options for ICT would be considered and these included outsourcing, joining with Compass Point, Norfolk County Council or ARP. Mr Smith was keen to develop ICT in partnership with the ARP to provide capacity and resilience and to be able to offer the 'full package' to customers.

Mr Rogers asked if the likely savings would off-set the effects of the £1.2million shortfall and Mr Smith confirmed that they would and that if the favoured option, of joining with the ARP, was chosen savings could be in excess of £600,000. The Chief Executive advised that that figure would not be reached within the next financial year.

Mr Smith then asked Mr Bambridge to update Members on the Members' IT roll-out.

Mr Bambridge explained that he had been made E-Champion in May and had concentrated on the roll-out which had gone reasonably well with a few hiccups. Members were asked to let him have their comments for a report he was writing about the process, which would be presented to the Joint Audit & Scrutiny Panel in October.

Three Members were still experiencing problems with the new equipment, mainly due to line quality, and BT was working to rectify that. One Member was using his Norfolk County Council kit and one Member had no IT equipment. Four Members had yet to make an appointment to have their equipment delivered. It was hoped that all Members (with the exception of the one who did not use IT) would be connected a week before the deadline date of 29 July 2011. A series of training sessions were being organised which it was hoped would be mandatory, as there were new elements of the equipment that Members needed to be aware of.

The Helpline was being used to good effect. Members were asked to emphasise the importance of using the system to all Members as a few people were trying to by-pass the system which caused enormous problems. He had not received any complaints from those Members that were using the helpdesk and he asked to be informed of any problems. The service agreement required a two hour response and that was one of the things that would be reviewed at the Joint Audit & Scrutiny Panel meeting in October.

Mrs Irving said that the IT service was vastly improved now that it was in-house. She asked if the new e-mail addresses for Senior Managers

had been added to the Outlook address book. The Chief Executive advised that the move over to the new e-mail addresses was in transition. Once complete the address book would be updated.

Mr Gilbert agreed that the Helpline was excellent. However, he asked if a free text field could be added to the drop-down menu as it wasn't always possible to allocate a problem to the items in the list. Mr Bambridge agreed to raise that matter at the next project meeting.

The Vice-Chairman commended Mr Smith for sharing information with his colleagues. He asked for clarification of the projected additional savings. The Leader had commented that the Council would ensure that the partnership with South Holland was working well before looking for other opportunities – was that still the case?

The Chairman also asked if there were any residual issues from in-sourcing of the ICT contract.

Mr Smith advised that there had been some problems with the Steria contract. Its termination had left the Council vulnerable with regard to Disaster Recovery. At the recent Business Improvement & Projects Sub-Committee a paper had been adopted to release funds to enable a new Disaster Recover system. Other contracts organised by Steria had yet to come to an end, but no further problems were envisaged.

The Chairman felt that lessons should be learned for the future. He asked if measures were in place to prevent the same problems from happening again. Mr Smith noted that the Contract Monitoring Team had been set up to oversee such things. It had been temporarily overtaken by joint working and staff changes but was now back on the agenda.

The Chief Executive advised that the new structure contained a Commissioning arm which in time would include a generic contract monitoring role.

As part of the further development of the partnership with South Holland Mr Smith had asked for a service function analysis and he thanked the Business Improvement Team for the quality of the work they had done. He handed round a sheet which set out the statutory and discretionary functions of the Council with a breakdown of their costs and man-hours. A similar exercise would be carried out at South Holland and the results would provide an extremely potent management tool.

ARP

It had been a very successful year. Bury St Edmunds had joined the partnership and East Cambridgeshire, who had originally been clients, had also bought in to share the risks and benefits. In 2010/11 there had been about £1million to share between Breckland, Forest Heath and East Cambs. The share decreased with an additional partner, but it was a smaller share of a larger profit.

A member of staff had been recruited to find additional work for the ARP and he was employed on a commission basis.

Customer Contact Centre

There had been a lot of investment in the CCC and also in the

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Joanne
Linton

Councillor
Gordon
Bambridge

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Breckland Local Offices. Mr Smith wished it to be put on record that when he had taken over responsibility for the CCC it had been left in very good order by the previous Executive Member, Lady Fisher.

The interim ICT managers had been asked to give an overview of the service and they considered it to be one of the best in the region with average call waiting times of only 73 seconds and up to 90% first point of contact resolution.

One problem with the local offices was their cost per transaction. It might prove necessary to reduce opening times but Mr Smith was keen to keep the facility as he said not everyone had access to e-mails and vulnerable and anxious people needed face to face contact.

The One Stop Bus was also very successful and well used and put the Council in the public eye.

Human Resources

Mr Smith thanked the officers concerned for their work in the TUPE of staff from Steria to Breckland which had gone very well.

The HR department would be reviewing all Policies and Procedures and would also be ensuring that any future contracts were well negotiated.

The Chairman invited Members to put questions to the Executive Member.

Mr Joel asked about the future of the One Stop Bus. He agreed that it was very much appreciated, especially by older residents. He was concerned that it was only funded until September.

The Chairman thought that it was essential that the bus and local centres should be maintained. It should not just be a question of money. The district covered over 500 square miles which meant some residents had long distances to travel. The bus and local centres were desperately needed.

The Chief Executive sounded a word of caution with regard to the Bus. He said that it was well used in some places but that Members needed to look at its overall use before reaching a conclusion on its future.

He also advised that as things stood, in 2014 there would be a Unified Social Benefit. There would be no more Housing Benefit and the Government expected 99% of claims to be made on-line. That might lead to pressure to provide a social service to residents.

The Chairman reiterated that the Council needed to support and help people and the Commission had to act as a cautionary role to Cabinet.

He thanked the Executive Member for a very helpful presentation.

49/11 JOINT WORKING ARRANGEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Chief Executive gave an update on Shared Management.

There had been some staffing issues and it had been necessary to find alternative solutions for some posts such as Legal Services. A

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Business Development Manager had been recruited and would be starting in early August. The Environmental Health Manager had withdrawn from the post and the Building Control Manager was managing both teams at present whilst the situation was assessed. The Community Development Manager would be moving on and a replacement would be recruited. The Chief Executive said it was healthy for people to be ambitious and to move on.

The new Senior Managers had spent time establishing good relationships with their teams and their Portfolio Holders. They were now working at establishing the same good working relationships with all other Members. The new system was bedding in well.

Efficiency aids such as common processes were being developed. The Committee report format had been aligned and the governance structure and performance reporting were also being aligned and proposals would be reported to Audit and Governance Committees.

Video conferencing had been established and was well used, saving time and money on travel. Members would soon be receiving training on the use of Web-Ex which would enable them to take part in conversations via telephone and video conferencing with access to shared information on screen.

All shared managers were moving to new e-mail accounts to ensure that they could receive e-mails from both authorities wherever they were.

The next stage would be to identify areas for further vertical integration to make savings. More opportunities for sharing services would be sought. A Joint Informal Board had been established between the two authorities and would hold its first meeting soon. Scrutiny Chairmen would be invited to attend as observers.

Finally, both Leaders were aware of the potential for additional savings through increasing to three partners. That would only happen when the time was right and if the right partner could be found.

The Vice-Chairman asked if in future briefing notes could be provided so that Members could formulate questions in advance of the meeting. He was concerned that Scrutiny was last on the agenda for the new Shared Managers, as it had done excellent work over the years and helped Cabinet to make informed decisions.

As a result of an informal meeting he understood that some officers feared being invited to attend the Commission. He asked the Chief Executive to promote the Scrutiny function and encourage the officers to be more enthusiastic.

The Chief Executive said that although all of the Shared Managers had not had an opportunity to get to know the Commission yet they would take the time to do so. He asked Members if they would like an informal session to be arranged.

The Chairman felt that it would be good to sit down with the Senior Management Team and Portfolio Holders to explain Scrutiny and encourage information exchange. He suggested that when 75% of

Senior Managers were in place the meeting should be arranged.

The Chief Executive suggested that the autumn would be a good time.

The Vice Chairman emphasised the fact that the importance of Scrutiny needed to be understood. Scrutiny was about making things better and helping Cabinet to make decisions that moved the Council forward. He was disturbed that Officers were not comfortable to attend.

The Chairman added that another aspect was a tendency for officers to misunderstand why questions were asked. They needed to understand what was being done to steer the Council towards better outcomes.

The Chief Executive was surprised and disappointed to hear that officers had a negative view of Scrutiny. It was not something he had been aware of and he was sure it was not fed by Senior Management. He could understand junior staff finding it daunting but hoped that Senior Managers were comfortable to come to Scrutiny.

The Chairman wanted to take matters forward in a constructive way to engage with the officer corps.

Mr Kybird asked if the authority would be responding to the Open Public Services White Paper and if Scrutiny would be involved. The Chief Executive advised that he had been planning to take the matter to the Executive and he would invite them to feed their draft through to Scrutiny.

The Chairman raised the question of a joint filing system for Members. He felt that issues raised across both Councils should be accessible by Members of both. Mr Bambridge agreed to look into it.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for his update.

50/11 BRECKLAND BUSINESS PLAN (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Chief Executive provided the update in place of the Performance Team Leader.

At the beginning of the financial year the Corporate Plan was reviewed and revised and cascaded down to individual Business Plans. Due to the elections, the new administration and the scrapping of a lot of National Indicators it had been sensible to delay the process.

A new Corporate Plan was now being prepared. The two Cabinets had met jointly and agreed the headline messages. Individual priorities at each Authority had been developed. Managers had been tasked with reflecting those in the new Plan.

At the end of August the Plan would go to the Executive to check that requirements had been correctly captured. The draft would then go to Scrutiny, etc. Comments would be reported back to Cabinet and then a final draft would be presented to Council for adoption.

Service Managers and Portfolio Holders would be setting new service plans which would include performance measures. There was new freedom to select performance measures that were meaningful. It was

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Councillor
Gordon
Bambridge

considered that a separate meeting of the Commission would be needed to allow input into the Business planning that would take place.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for the update.

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Rory
Ringer,
Teresa
Smith

51/11 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Democratic Services Team Leader presented the report which sought approval of the Membership and Terms of Reference of the next Parking Task & Finish Group review in Dereham.

The Chairman noted that under the Chairmanship of Mrs Matthews the previous reviews had run well with good public participation.

Mr Rogers pointed out that there had been an item in the local press which said that the majority of people wanted free car parking and he hoped that Breckland would keep that.

The Vice Chairman echoed his comments and said that free parking was key to Dereham. He also requested that Ward Representatives be included as witnesses to the review.

The Chairman agreed to that and pointed out that the reviews were not looking at charges, their main aim was to look at tensions that existed. In the case of Attleborough the Town Council had actually requested parking charges to try to prevent people parking all day and travelling to Norwich and other places by train, to work.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) that the Democratic Services Team Leader would liaise with Mrs Matthews to establish a quorum for the Task & Finish Group. Members should include Mrs Matthews as Chairman with Mr Martin, Mr Duigan, Mrs Spencer and Mrs Irving; and
- (2) to approve the Terms of Reference and the Project Plan.

Mr W Richmond volunteered to be a member of the Group.

(a) **Joint Scrutiny Working Group**

The meeting on 23 June 2011 had been held to review the way in with each authority dealt with Scrutiny. At South Holland there were two Committees, one dealing with Performance and the other with Policy.

The Chairman informed Members that following frank and open discussions with Councillor Brian Alcock, Chairman of one of the two Scrutiny Committees from South Holland, it had been agreed that each Council would carry on as it was.

The future of the Commission was safe. There would be no joint scrutiny arrangements for the time being and any future joint meetings would be by video link.

The Vice Chairman suggested that the joint management arrangements with South Holland may need to be scrutinised in future

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and that would be best to be done as a joint arrangement.

The Chairman agreed and said that was what had prompted the meeting.

52/11 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The report was noted.

53/11 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (AGENDA ITEM 11)

None.

54/11 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (AGENDA ITEM 12)

None.

55/11 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 13)

The Chairman thanked everyone that had attended the training session at which they had focussed on future work for the Commission.

He advised Members that he had received a formal letter from the Shadwell Estate in Thetford asking the Commission to investigate decisions regarding future development in Thetford. The letter had been passed to the Deputy Chief Executive as the Chairman did not wish to respond to it without an official review.

Timing was an issue and the Commission would need to deal with this issue at its meeting on 1 September 2011 and then advise Cabinet of the implications. The Review of the LDF was already timetabled for that meeting and officers would have to address the matters raised in the letter at that meeting.

All Commission Members would receive a copy of the letter.

Mr Bambridge asked if representatives from Shadwell would be invited to attend the Commission meeting and the Chairman confirmed that they would.

Regarding future items, the Vice Chairman asked if the Commission could receive a presentation on Discretionary and Non-discretionary services.

He also mentioned the financial pressures on Homelessness, which was not a discretionary service and asked if that could be looked at.

Mr Joel asked if it was likely that the Council would be obliged to home any travellers displaced from the site in Essex which was to be closed. The Chief Executive explained that the Council was required to provide a number of pitches for travellers, based on a Travellers Needs Assessment. If the displacement increased the need it would be dealt with at the next assessment review.

Mr Gilbert asked if some Members and Officers could have a pre-meeting to discuss who to invite to the review of future residential development to be held on 6 January 2012.

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With regard to the Health Review scheduled for 6 October 2011, Mr Joel urged caution as he said that Health reviews never seemed to reach any conclusion. The Chairman felt that the scope of the review would be clearer once the details of the Localism Bill and the extent that responsibility had devolved to District level was known.

Mrs Irving asked if the programme of Executive reports had been confirmed and was advised that the aim was to invite the Executive Members in turn or to tie-in with a specific agenda item.

56/11 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 14)

The arrangements for the next meeting on 1 September 2011 were noted.

The meeting closed at 4.25 pm

CHAIRMAN