

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**Held on Thursday, 17 October 2013 at 2.00 pm in the  
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Mr T.J. Jermy (Vice-Chair, in the  
Chair)

Mr A.J. Byrne

Mr C G Carter

Mr K.S. Gilbert

Mr A.P. Joel

Mr R.G. Kybird

Mrs S.M. Matthews

Mr R.R. Richmond

Mr B. Rose

**Also Present**

Councillor C Bowes

Councillor S.G. Bambridge

Councillor M. Chapman-Allen

Councillor J A North

Councillor M.S. Robinson

Councillor L.S. Turner

Councillor M.A. Wassell

Ms S Bull

Mr A Ireland

- Anglian Water

- Environment Agency

**In Attendance**

Philip James

Helen McAleer

Phil Mileham

Teresa Smith

Mark Stokes

- Interim Planning Policy Team Leader\*

- Senior Committee Officer

- Deputy Planning Manager

- Committee Officer (Scrutiny & Projects)

- Deputy Chief Executive

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**56/13 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**57/13 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cowen and Councillor Irving.

**58/13 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

Members wished Councillor Kybird a very Happy Birthday.

**59/13 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING  
(AGENDA ITEM 5)**

Councillors Bambridge, Bowes, Chapman-Allen, North, Robinson, Turner and Wassell were in attendance.

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**60/13 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Councillor Wassell reminded Members that he had only been appointed as Leader of the Council one month and twelve days before. He said it had been a steep learning curve but he had been supported by the Officers and had received a good briefing from the previous Leader.

His style was open and he had a consultative approach. He expected high standards and believed that mutual respect was vital on both sides.

He was delighted to have appointed Councillor Turner as his Deputy as they worked very well together. He believed that the Executive team was strong and had a mixture of talents that would serve the Council and residents of Breckland well.

As each Executive Member would present to the Commission on their own Portfolios his update would focus on the key strategic areas.

Medium Term Financial Plan

The initial draft would be presented to Cabinet on 3 December, prior to public consultation. The draft Government settlement was due in December. The final Plan would be presented to Cabinet on 11 February 2014 and to Council on 27 February, along with the Council Tax setting report.

It was currently expected that the budget would balance in 2014/15 but the future of the plan would be dependent on the Transformation Programme delivering on-going income and efficiencies. The strategic use of balances in the next two years would buy time to set up a robust programme to reduce the funding gap over the longer term.

Transformation Programme

The main objective of the programme was to bridge the budget gap over the next five years. The Shared Management Team (SMT) was accountable for identifying opportunities, defining the business case and realising the outcomes of the programme. Elected Members would make the decisions regarding implementation.

The programme had a two-pronged approach. It would seek to make efficiencies where possible and to increase income. Some strategic 'enabling' projects had been identified and were currently at the proposal stage. They included:

- Shared procurement and contract management;
- A joint customer access strategy;
- The introduction of shared document management and other technologies to improve working practice; and

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- Strategic ICT

Breckland and South Holland Councils had been awarded £385,000 between them from a Government pot of £6.9million to support and promote shared service projects. Only projects with a clear and proven benefit to the taxpayer would proceed.

A Procurement and Contract Management report and another on Customer Access were scheduled to be presented to Council on 7 January 2014. The Leader suggested that the Transformation Programme should be reviewed as part of the Commission's work programme.

Shared Management and Services

The initial project brief in October 2013 had been to reduce the cost of shared management across Breckland and South Holland by about £700,000. The structure implemented in April 2011 was estimated to have reduced costs by £1.075million. Further savings were still being sought with on-going reviews of service provision.

Both Councils remained as separate, democratically accountable bodies. There was no requirement for common provision of services except where it worked for both parties.

No work was being carried out on finding a third partner at the moment as both Leaders agreed that stability was needed in the run-up to the 2015 elections. A third partner would only be taken on if they matched the culture that had been developed by Breckland and South Holland. The trust between the two authorities had been built up with joint Cabinet meetings and good communication. The Senior Managers had created a strong bond. They had been shortlisted for the Local Government Chronicle Award of 'Management Team of the Year' and had only just missed out on gaining that prestigious award.

Shared Services

Outside of the Shared Management agreement work was also being done to share services with other Local Authorities and possibly other organisations outside of Local Government. Two current examples were the shared Housing Manager (with Kings Lynn & West Norfolk and South Holland) and the CCTV service which were run for the Council by Kings Lynn & West Norfolk. Innovative ways of sharing services were being sought to either generate income or to reduce costs and to drive efficiencies.

Interim Management Arrangements

Geoff Rivers had been appointed Interim Chief Executive for an initial five month period. The timeline and duration of that appointment was dependant on the recruitment process for a permanent Chief Executive. That process had started and Members would be kept informed of progress.

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Councillor Richmond commented on the interaction between the Council and the Police through the Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) and said that there had been good results from working together. However, Members were not receiving feedback from the SNT and he wondered if that was due to staff shortages.

The Leader was aware that Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel (SNAP) meetings were held in a number of towns but that attendance was variable. He agreed that interaction was vital and asked the Executive Member for Community and Environmental Services to comment on the staffing issues.

Councillor Turner advised that the number of Breckland Officers had reduced, but the number of Police Officers involved in the Operational Partnership Team (OPT) had increased. She recommended that Members attend CAG (Community Action Group) and SNAP meetings which were publicised on the Police website and asked them to let her know of any issues.

Councillor North said that the SNAP meetings at Attleborough were closed to the public and District Councillors could only attend if they were specifically invited.

Councillor Turner was disappointed to hear that and said that she would speak to the Police. The purpose of the meetings was for residents to attend.

Councillor Bambridge suggested that details of the meetings should be on the Breckland website as well.

Councillor Joel was concerned about the levels of support Members were receiving from Capita and asked if recent leavers had been replaced.

The Leader was conscious of the need to keep the pressure on to ensure that Capita were fulfilling their requirements.

The new Deputy Planning Manager was present and introduced Philip James who had taken his place as Manager of the Planning Policy Team. He said that Capita were working on filling the other vacant posts.

Councillor Gilbert was aware that Capita staff were under a lot of pressure and almost at breaking point and Councillor Matthews complained about a lack of response to an Enforcement issue she had raised due to pressure of work and she asked the Leader to look into that.

A new Enforcement Manager had been taken on recently. The Leader was aware that there was a backlog of work and he would take that matter up with them but he thought that Enforcement was improving. Capita had performance targets set, but staffing levels

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were not in the control of the Council.

The Chairman asked the Leader for his views on the environmental issues associated with fly tipping and littering and the Leader responded saying that he thought that ultimately it was education that was needed. He was aware that NCC was considering reducing their waste site opening times and he thought that would be a bad idea. Generally he felt a robust approach was required.

The Executive Member for Community & Environmental Services said that people were taken to court for fly-tipping/littering where it was in the public interest to do so. In other cases restorative justice was used. Members needed to be pro-active as the quicker that fly-tipped items were cleared the better.

The Chairman noted that NCC was scrapping their CCTV system and he asked if Breckland would do the same.

The Leader advised that there were no plans to scrap the system which was not just useful for crime reduction but had also helped in other ways, such as identifying people in medical distress. The big budget deficit needed to be measured against the usefulness of the system.

Councillor Byrne informed Members that the new Chief Constable was holding a meeting that was open to all on 25 October.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for his update.

**61/13 PLANNING FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN BRECKLAND  
(AGENDA ITEM 7)**

Adam Ireland from the Environment Agency (EA) and Sue Bull from Anglian Water (AW) were in attendance and each gave a PowerPoint presentation.

The Environment Agency was governed by legislation including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and European Union obligations in the Water Framework Directive (EUWFD).

The agency welcomed the opportunity to work with the Council to assist in the formation of the new Local Plan. Natural environment Policies in the Plan needed to be evidence based and should set out the strategic priorities to address the provision of water supply and waste water. The aim of the Policies should be to prevent new or existing development being put at risk by water pollution. Adequate infrastructure was needed to support sustainable development.

Contamination was an important issue for consideration, as was flood risk and climate change. There was also a legal duty to co-operate between Planning Authorities and other bodies.

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The EA was the lead authority for implementing the EUWFD. That required waters to be managed sustainably and maintained to good physical standards, defined in the River Basin Management Plan.

Potential constraints on growth in Dereham and Attleborough had been identified in the outline Water Cycle Study commenced in 2007. Potential solutions had been identified to facilitate further growth. During the development of the Council's Core Strategy it had been agreed that monitoring should take place and the additional data available provided an opportunity to revisit and update the study. During the new Local Plan preparation the water strategy would need to be reassessed to consider changes brought about by the economic climate. Problems would be identified and ways to address them would be sought, together with means of funding.

In response to a question raised about the de-silting of Nunns Bridges in Thetford, Mr Ireland advised that watercourse management was determined through medium and long term plans. Work was focussed on the areas with the greatest flood risk as the EA had to concentrate on reducing risk to the public and property.

In summary, the EA would be working with officers on the Local Plan process to assess water infrastructure requirements and to address the issues. The EUWFD was aimed at reconnecting people with quality rivers and spaces.

Councillor Turner asked what the EA was doing about a large fly-tipping problem on private land in the district and Mr Ireland asked her to provide the details so that he could look into the matter.

Councillor Bambridge thought it was important that the EA looked at large planning applications in rural areas with regard to flood risk as in some cases developers were discharging to ditches that did not go anywhere. He thought that the Agency should take a more rigorous approach. Mr Ireland advised that there was a duty on landowners to keep ditches clear and the Agency had to focus on main rivers. The EA did look at sites over one hectare and required specific drainage details which included looking at the impact on receiving watercourses, but they did not have enough people to look at every development application.

Councillor Bambridge suggested that Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) should be used more and should be statutory consultees on planning applications.

Councillor Richmond asked about borehole licences and whether there would be a reduced number allowed in future. He pointed out that there was no way to grow vegetables without water.

Mr Ireland noted that a vast majority of the area was under water

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stress and renewals, reviews and new applications for borehole licences were considered in depth. New licences were unlikely to be issued due to ground water levels. The Agency would identify the reason for the use of the borehole. They understood the need to ensure livelihoods and food production. Each licence was considered on a case by case basis, but they were looking for savings.

Members then received the Anglian Water (AW) presentation by Sue Bull. She talked about planning for sustainable growth. She said that AW was keen to work with the Council and stakeholders. They welcomed the opportunity for early engagement. The main issues were climate change and the need to adapt and seek measures to reduce flood risk and carbon emissions.

They had adopted the 'Love Every Drop' logo and set a whole range of challenging goals to halve their carbon. A lot of waste water treatment (now known as water recycling) was energy intensive. They needed to transform their ways of working and to work with others to inspire and change behaviours through an active education programme.

They had a 25 year management plan which was reviewed every five years. It involved extensive consultation on how they provided water and spent money. The plan was based on both National and local growth predictions.

There were no major concerns about supply and demand in the Breckland district. The aim was to ensure no detriment to existing customers or the environment when considering new developments. They gave pre-planning advice and offered solutions. Funding contributions were required from developers for any infrastructure upgrades that were needed.

With regard to leakage they worked hard to address the problems. They aimed to make the best use of resources. Currently about 65% of customers were metered and that number was expected to increase to 85% by 2015.

Moving on to discuss specific areas of the District, Ms Ball advised that AW had worked with the Council and the EA on the Local Development Framework (LDF) and had looked at the Water Cycle Study. At that time there was insufficient water to allow growth in Attleborough. However, since then they had developed the ability to monitor flows and had established that growth could be accommodated. The EA agreed with that. They would continue to monitor the network.

Dereham had little capacity in the current flow permit. But Mattishall had capacity to accept further flows and by diverting flows from Dereham to Mattishall additional capacity could be provided in Dereham.

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Thetford had available capacity to accommodate the proposed growth profile, including the Strategic Urban expansion with no need for additional water recycling facilities.

A question had been raised about rural areas without sewers. In the five year period between 2010 and 2015 £70million would be invested to provide foul water drainage to about 3000 properties; about £16million would be spent in Breckland. AW was a regulated company and their Business Plan had to go to Ofwat.

Their expenditure was focussed on upgrading systems that were harming the environment. They had no provision for growth. Developers were expected to make contributions for growth.

Councillor Bambridge was disappointed that rivers were not being used for power generation. He asked them to consider that and also water farming, as some areas in the District were suitable for that. Finally he mentioned that he had experienced problems when trying to contact AW through their website and Ms Bull asked for details so that she could look into that.

With regard to power generation and water farming, she said that they looked at all possibilities and she would take his suggestions into consideration.

Mr Ireland advised that hydro-electricity required a volumetric head and that it was very expensive to move water. However, with regard to water farming he said that the EA tried to ensure that NCC Mineral and Waste sites alongside rivers were utilised.

Councillor Kybird said it was a shame that weed cutting had not been carried out in Thetford town centre as rubbish collected in the weeds and was an eyesore. Mr Ireland agreed to look into the programme of works.

Councillor Richmond asked about the number of fish lost due to the hot summer and Mr Ireland said that the EA needed to be advised of areas where fish were in distress as soon as possible as they did have means of assisting in oxygenation.

The Chairman asked if the risk to humans was considered when the programme of works was prepared as the silt levels at Nunns Bridges could be a danger to children playing there and Mr Ireland advised that it was predominantly flood risk that was considered but he would investigate further.

The Chairman thanked Ms Bull and Mr Ireland for attending.

**62/13 HEALTH SCRUTINY (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 8)**

Councillor Kybird had circulated the outcomes and actions from the

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Norfolk Health Scrutiny meeting held the previous week. He also mentioned a detailed report on King's Lynn hospital's problems in recruiting locally due to poor educational standards.

**63/13 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 9)**

Nothing to report.

**64/13 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 10)**

Nothing to report.

**65/13 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

The Scrutiny Officer advised that following the comments of the Leader in his update she would add reviews of the Transformation Project and the Safer Neighbourhood Teams to the work programme.

The Chairman was keen for the Housing Associations to be invited to the next meeting so that Members could ask them about their management of the housing stock.

The Leader of the Council suggested that they could also be asked about their policy on disabled adaptations. It seemed that the Housing Associations did not currently keep a record of which properties had been modified.

Councillor Bambridge noted that a review of Rate Relief was on the future items list and should be considered in time for the end of the financial year.

Councillor Kybird also asked that an update on the Business Continuity Plan should be added to the programme.

**66/13 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 21 November 2013 were noted.

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm

CHAIRMAN