

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

COUNCIL

Held on Thursday, 19 December 2013 at 10.00 am in the Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham

PRESENT

Mrs S Armes	Mr K. Martin
Mr S. Askew	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mrs K. Millbank
Mr W.P. Borrett	Mrs L.H. Monument
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mr T F C Monument
Mrs B Canham	Mr M J Nairn
Mr C G Carter	Mrs J A North
Mr T R Carter	Mr J.W. Nunn
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen	Mrs K. Pettitt
Mr C. S. Clark	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mr P.D. Claussen (Chairman)	Mr W. R. J. Richmond
Mr J.P. Cowen	Mr M. S. Robinson
Mr P R W Darby	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mr P.J. Duigan	Mr B. Rose
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr I. Sherwood
Mr R.F. Goreham	Mr W.H.C. Smith
Councillor E. Gould	Mr A.C. Stasiak
Mr T. J. Jermy	Mrs A.L. Steward
Mr A.P. Joel	Mrs L.S. Turner
Mrs E. M. Jolly	Mr M. A. Wassell
Mr C.R. Jordan	Mr N.C. Wilkin
Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris	Mr D.R. Williams JP
Mr R.G. Kybird (Vice-Chairman)	

In Attendance

Simon Best	- REV Active Project Manager
Julie Britton	- Senior Committee Officer
Paul Corney	- Head of ARP
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Geoff Rivers	- Interim Chief Executive
Mark Stanton	- Economic Development Manager
Steve Udberg	- Asset & Property Manager
Kevin Ward	- Growth Programme Manager

100/13 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

101/13 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bowes, Childerhouse, Duffield, Green, Irving, Lamb, Sharpe, Skull and Spencer.

Action By

102/13 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

The Chairman invited Members to partake of mulled wine, sausage rolls and mince pies at the end of the meeting.

The Vice-Chairman said that he had attended a Service of Thanksgiving for the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing on Wednesday 27th November at Ely Cathedral.

103/13 DECLARATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

No declarations were made.

104/13 CABINET MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 5)

- a) Extension of Existing European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Programme for the Council's current funded Local Enterprise Growth and Efficiency (LEGE) 'Grants4Growth' Programme (Minute No 97/13)

RESOLVED that the offer of additional funding of £2 million from the East of England European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programme for the Council's current Local Enterprise Growth and Efficiency project (LEGE) branded as *Grants4Growth* be accepted.

- b) Financial Performance Quarter 2 2013-14 (Minute No 98/13)

The Leader of the Labour Group said that they were not in favour of moving the Housing Benefit subsidy. The Council should support people with housing need and therefore Labour Members would vote against the recommendation.

RESOLVED that the additional housing benefit subsidy income of £112,320 be vired to efficiencies.

- c) Reference from the Overview & Scrutiny Commission – Town /Parish Council Localised Council Tax Grant (Decision Call-In) (Minute No 101/13(2))

The Leader of the Labour Group pointed out that the Minutes of a meeting between the Local Authorities Association and the Minister had been read out. He thought that should have been included in the Minutes as the Minister had said that he continued to support the Grant being passed on. That had been repeated and clarified again on Wednesday 18 December in a Local Government Council Tax report.

That point was noted by Members.

d) Adoption

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 3 December 2013 be adopted.

105/13 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION (AGENDA ITEM 6)

It was noted that Councillor Sharpe had been in attendance at the meeting, and that the recommendation on page 17 had already been moved under the Cabinet Minutes.

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 21 November 2013 be adopted.

106/13 PLANNING COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

RESOLVED that the confirmed Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 25 November 2013 be adopted.

107/13 GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 8)

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 27 November 2013 be adopted.

108/13 NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE AND OTHER SEATS (AGENDA ITEM 9)

RESOLVED that:

Boundary Review Working Group
Councillor Jolly to replace Councillor Wassell

Planning Committee
Councillor Chapman-Allen to replace Councillor Bambridge
Councillor Joel to become a Substitute Member

109/13 REV ACTIVE - END OF PROJECT REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Executive Member for Assets & Strategic Development introduced Mark Stanton, Economic Development Manager and Simon Best, REV Active Project Manager who were to give a presentation on what he described as a very successful project. It had started off with scepticism and ended by surpassing all expectations and had now grown into Grants4Growth.

The Chairman told Members that the Executive Member had been unwell and unable to attend the business breakfast held in Snetterton on 20 September when Members and local businesses had got together to receive the 'end of term' report for the Rev Active project. He had been

Action By

overwhelmed by the strength of support from businesses for the Economic Development Team. It had been Mark Stanton's vision that had made the whole project possible. Every town had benefitted and the Council owed a huge debt of gratitude to Mark.

The Economic Development Manager said he was glad that the Executive Member could now see the presentation that was given at the celebratory breakfast event. He thanked him for his support and guidance over the last four years. At the breakfast a number of businesses had provided testimonials which had given a boost to the presentation and he gave a couple of examples.

The REV Active Project Manager then gave the presentation (which can be accessed at http://www.revactive.co.uk/ppt/RA_19-12-13.ppt).

Rev-Active had originally been a three year package to give practical support to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to reduce costs, increase competitiveness and stimulate growth and resilience.

It had exceeded all targets set resulting in at least 96 jobs being safeguarded, at least 80 jobs being created, over £9.5million savings and a reduction of 75,115 kilo tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Following on from that success the Grants4Growth programme would provide capital and revenue grants to promote investment and efficiencies.

Members were invited to take copies of the Evaluation Report.

The Leader of the Council said that the project was indicative of Breckland Council's involvement in the community. He was proud of the team and all Members joined him in applauding their achievements.

In response to a question the Economic Development Manager advised that there were 13 staff involved in all projects of which only 1.5 were directly funded by Breckland.

The Chairman said it was a phenomenal achievement by a small team and a genuine good news story.

110/13 MOTIONS RECEIVED (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The Chairman read out the Motion received from Councillor Canham.

Councillor Williams declared an interest as a member of a Social Housing Board. However, Councillor Canham said she was a member of a Housing Association but felt that it was not necessary to declare an interest as it was a general motion, not specific to one Association. Both Members remained in the room and took part in the discussions.

Councillor Canham said that she had lived in social housing her whole

Action By

life and had worked to improve the lives of tenants for the last 20 years. Her concern was that the new 'bedroom tax' was causing problems for many people because there was a shortage of one and two bedroom properties in the District. Most of the old Breckland housing stock had been three bedroom houses. Times had changed and the available properties did not match the need of local people. She gave examples of people affected by the reduction in benefit. They wanted to move into smaller accommodation but could not. In another case a disabled tenant was classed as having two bedrooms, but due to the modifications to the property to meet disabled requirements there was only one bedroom. House prices and rents were rising and so was unemployment, resulting in an increased demand for social housing.

The Executive Member for Planning, Building Control and Housing thanked Councillor Canham for her Motion as it highlighted what the Council was doing. They were working closely with the Housing Associations, particularly Flagship Housing to get properties re-designated from two to one bedroom. Flagship Housing actually had 38% of two bedroom properties; higher than other Housing Associations, but they were always being encouraged to produce more. The problem was that they had planning permission, but they were not building. There was money in the Portfolio budget for social housing and the Council was really trying to produce smaller properties.

Councillor Jermy was grateful for the Executive Member's response. He thought that the Housing Associations did want to build but were affected by funding cuts. He had not realised what a problem the 'bedroom tax' would create initially, but he had been contacted by many people affected by it. He gave the example of an older lady, employed on the minimum wage with health problems, living in a two bedroom property. She had had to take on a lodger against her wishes. That was not a one-off situation. 90% of affected people wanted to move into a smaller property. He urged all Members to support the Motion to send a message to residents that the Council understood their problems.

Councillor Joel advised that in Old Buckenham there was a new development of social housing providing one, two and three bedroom accommodation which would be available for those with links to the village from June 2014.

Councillor Williams explained that it was up to the Registered Social Landlord to define how many bedrooms a property had and they should be challenged. It was national policy, not a Council policy that was causing the problems.

The Executive Member for Planning, Building Control and Housing agreed that there were cases where two bedroom properties had been converted to one bedroom but were still designated as two bedroom and they were doing their best to sort that out with the Registered Social Landlords.

Action By

Councillor Canham confirmed that tenants were facing the same problem across the county. She accepted that it was not the Council's fault but said that a clear message should be sent that help was needed.

Councillor Cowen noted that a Task & Finish Group of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission had looked at housing need. The problems were mainly with the Housing Associations, particularly Flagship. They would not build smaller properties because of the cost. The Council had commissioned a survey and told the Registered Social Landlords what was needed but they would still not build smaller properties. There was not a lot the Council could do except bring pressure to bear.

Councillor Goreham agreed that it was not the direct responsibility of the Council, but he pointed out that neither was Economic Development and yet the Council had achieved great things in that area. It was not up to the Council to debate Government policy but it could deal with anomalies and inequalities for the people in its District. The Motion was good because it sent out the simple message that the Council would do its best to provide the right size, type and mix of properties for its residents.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that the Council did care about all its residents. He quoted a personal example of a disabled relation living in converted accommodation with one bedroom but still classified as having two. Flagship had been very reluctant to re-categorise the dwelling due to financial viability. Flexibility was needed from the Housing Associations. The ARP worked hard to ensure that people were not disadvantaged in such cases. He applauded the Motion and hoped that the Registered Social Landlords would take note of the comments made.

Councillor Askew agreed with all that had been said but thought that the Council should have more policies in place to provide one and two bedroom properties. There were many suitable pieces of land in rural areas and those possibilities should be taken into consideration.

It was noted that the Local Plan Working Group would be considering new draft policies on the housing size and mix for the District.

The Chairman concluded the discussion by saying that it was lovely to hear the Council united as one on this matter.

111/13 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 11)

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

112/13 RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT, THETFORD (AGENDA ITEM 12)

The Executive Member for Assets & Strategic Development presented the report which outlined the proposed agreement for the build out of the Riverside Development. The conditions were explained. Officers were present to answer any questions.

Councillor Cowen noted that documents referred to on Page 50 were not attached to the report. The Growth Programme Manager advised that they were all standard documents which had been reviewed and found to be sound.

The Leader of the Labour Group commented that Labour Members would abstain from voting. They wanted the development but felt that they did not have enough information on the whole project.

After further questions about risk and the progress of the LABV the Executive Member for Assets & Strategic Development made clear to all Members that the one premise of the LABV was to ensure the early delivery of the Riverside redevelopment.

RESOLVED that the Head of Asset Management should instruct the Council's Solicitor to sign and seal the Agreement for Lease and Lease on 19 December 2013.

113/13 REFERENCE FROM ARP JOINT COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 13)

The Executive Member for Corporate Services & Quality Assurance presented the item and told Members that the ARP was a most successful partnership which had been in operation for a decade. During that time it had expanded from two to four members, improved the quality of service to residents and provided savings.

The proposal was to admit Fenland District Council as full members of the partnership. They had looked at other partners and had chosen to apply to the ARP.

The other authorities mentioned in the report were joining the ARP in a different format, as a shared service, not a full partner.

He commended the recommendation to Members, subject to due diligence and he thanked the Head of ARP for all the work that he and his team had done.

In response to a question from Councillor Kybird the savings from the expansion were clarified.

The Head of ARP explained that in the past new partners had been brought to Thetford, but with the advance in technology and the ability to link databases, Fenland staff would stay in their location. That model was working well with the shared service authorities.

Action By

RESOLVED that subject to due diligence, Fenland District Council be admitted as a full member of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership with effect from 1 April 2014.

The meeting closed at 11.20 am

CHAIRMAN