

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 18 November 2010 at 2.15 pm in the
Town Hall, Queens Square, Attleborough**

PRESENT

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

Also Present

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Chief Supt Paul Durham
Mr P.D. Claussen	Sgt Terry Scott

In Attendance

Stephen McGrath	- Member Services Manager
Stephen James	- Policy and Performance Manager
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Maxine O'Mahony	- Director of Corporate Resources
Jane Osborne	- Committee Officer
Rory Ringer	- Elections and Scrutiny Manager
Kevin Rump	- ICT Project Manager
Darryl Smith	- Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Enabling)
Simon Stubbs	- ICT Project Manager
Mark Stokes	- Deputy Chief Executive
Robert Walker	- Director - Community Services
Roger Wilkin	- Interim Environmental Services Manager

100/10 MINUTES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2010 were confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

Introductions were made round the table. The Member Services Manager introduced Rory Ringer, the new Elections and Scrutiny Manager. They would be taking a joint lead on Scrutiny in future, supported by Teresa Smith, Member Services Support Officer, who was unable to attend the meeting.

101/10 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr K S Gilbert and Mr S Chapman-Allen.

102/10 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

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103/10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None.

104/10 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

Mr P Claussen was in attendance.

105/10 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Paul Claussen, Executive Member for Planning, Health & Housing, was in attendance to update Members on key ongoing issues and policies within his portfolio and to answer any questions. He was supported by the Deputy Chief Executive and the Principal Housing Officer.

Planning

The first year with Capita Symonds had just been completed and all contract targets had been achieved. To ensure that the Council took a more integrated approach to the strategic management and operation of the service the Chairman of the Development Control Committee had been invited to sit on the Contract Monitoring Board. He hoped everyone had read the annual report which had been issued with the Members Bulletin a couple of months ago which identified all matters relating to performance.

The Site Specifics document was going to Cabinet on 30 November 2010, after which it would go out for six weeks consultation until 16 January 2011.

The Thetford Area Action Plan would be presented to a Special meeting of the Commission on 6 December 2010 and then to the Moving Thetford Forward Board on 15 December 2010. Feedback from developers suggested that there was likely to be a planning application early in the New Year.

Strategic Housing

186 affordable homes had been delivered in 2009/10. 83 had been delivered so far in 2010/11 and it was hoped to achieve 154 by the end of the year. There was continued pressure on housing, with 2931 people on the Housing Register. 479 families had been housed since April, 850 people had been housed during the 2009/10 period.

The week commencing 22 November was "Empty Homes Week". There were believed to be about 799 empty homes in Breckland, but only 27 had been brought into use this year.

The Housing Team in Thetford had the services of Atlas and their expertise and knowledge was a real asset. Atlas was a sub-set of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

Strategic Housing was a big challenge and officers believed that some of the Norfolk wide cuts could bring a shift of budgeting which might impact on their ability to deal with the homeless.

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A consultation on the new Homes Bonus was currently running with the incentive to focus on development and affordable homes provision.

Environmental Health

The current Dog Warden was moving out of the district and so the Dog & Pest Control contract would be going out to tender.

Other matters

Promotion work had recently taken place on the Honour Awards to encourage healthy food take-up in restaurants, with positive coverage in the media.

“Scores on the Doors” had been implemented, with all food outlets in the district. The scores awarded were those from the last inspection of the premises. Concern had been raised as some of those were very out of date, however premises could apply to be re-graded. It was likely to be a statutory requirement to display the scores in future.

Members were then invited to ask questions of the Executive Member.

Mr Kybird asked if the Council would be responding to the new Homes Bonus consultation.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the consultation was currently focussing on an average Band D rate on every new house with an additional £350 for affordable housing. It was also looking at empty homes. The consultation further suggested that the funding would not be ring-fenced and that local authorities would have the opportunity to allocate resources to focus on local priorities to meet local needs.

Mr Goreham asked three questions:

- He was concerned that some staff had left the planning department since it had been outsourced and had not been replaced. He wanted reassurance that the organisation was being run efficiently.
- He asked about the Council’s statutory obligations with regard to homelessness; and
- He asked Mr Claussen to amend the dog warden contract to require more than one person to fill the role.

Mr Claussen explained that the Contract was for service delivery and that staffing levels were a matter for Capita Symonds to determine.

The Principal Housing Officer advised that although there were still some grants available to help with homelessness, there had been cuts in the support for older people, those suffering domestic violence and young people. These cuts were likely to lead to an increase in the number of people needing homes. Changes to Benefits would also lead to additional claimants and ways would have to be found to continue to support them.

The Chairman was concerned that Capita Symonds was not fulfilling some of their obligations, particularly with regard to enforcement. He was also surprised that information was not routinely distributed to

Members about what was being dealt with in their Wards which he thought was unacceptable as there should be nothing that they were not made aware of immediately.

He questioned the housing numbers which, although agreed by the Council, had been set in a context over which they had had no control. He felt there was a need to revisit the policy of not allowing new housing in unsustainable areas to allow more freedom especially with regard to infrastructure constraints. He asked what Atlas' remit was.

The Principal Housing Officer explained that they were an advisory team for the large scale applications; working as a link between the lead developer and Crown Estates. They acted as mediators and were also working on the Heads of Terms for the legal agreement to ensure that they met community and landowner aspirations. They also offered free training on dealing with large scale applications to Development Control Members.

Mrs Matthews was horrified at the number of homeless families and asked what was being done about that.

Mr Claussen said they were doing a combination of things but that the recession was hitting them hard. HCA funding had been reduced by 75% and it was hoped to use the new Homes Bonus to kick start development.

The Chairman asked how the figure of 2931 applicants on the housing register compared with previous years.

The Principal Housing Officer explained that the number was similar to the previous year, but they had managed to house more people than. They were seeing a steady increase in applicants to the Register. New houses created movement but currently there were mainly large applications in the pipeline and they took a while to filter through. Affordable housing rents were to be raised to 80% of private rented and this should create more capacity. She clarified that the Register was made up of people with a range of housing needs, including those seeking sheltered and special needs housing as well as homeless people.

Mr Claussen said that they were keeping a close eye on trends through the ARP where they were noting a measurable increase in applicants for Benefits across all three areas.

The Chairman suggested that this matter should be revisited on a quarterly basis to see how the figures correlated.

Mr Martin asked if the Council had any land they could put houses on and the Deputy Chief Executive advised that all Council owned land was being reviewed for development potential and the second tranche of sites were being presented to Cabinet on 30 November.

Mr Rogers asked if the Council was doing enough to pursue the requirements of legal agreements – particularly at Blenheim Grange. Mr Claussen advised that there was to be a meeting regarding gypsies/travellers on 25 November to receive an update and he would contact Mr Rogers with a specific response.

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Rory
Ringer

Paul
Claussen

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Mr Kybird was concerned that the cost of the legal agreements was affecting applications for low cost loans for private sector housing improvements. The Principal Housing Officer explained that although the loan scheme had not been successful, it was not because of the legal agreement costs. Those charges were capped and she would check the terms and let Mr Kybird know the details.

Darryl
Smith

The Chairman thanked the Executive Member and the officers for attending.

106/10 CRIME & DISORDER COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Chief Inspector Paul Durham, the District Commander for Breckland, gave Members a presentation in three parts :-

1. Overview of The Tactical and Task Co-ordinated Process (TTCG)
2. Strategic Review of the Norfolk Policing Model
3. Breckland Operational Partnership Team

1. The Chief Inspector explained the TTCG process. A meeting was held every four weeks to make informed decisions on finite resources. The district was divided into five Safer Neighbourhood areas and a traffic light system was used, with red signifying that there was an issue, orange flagging emerging issues and green indicating no significant issues.

The main problems at the moment related to rural crime, with farm machinery and agricultural plant being targeted by thieves. Overall crime was down by 2%.

Analysts used maps to plot incidents and give a breakdown of when, where and how crimes had been committed. They then made recommendations on where to focus police activity.

Members of the public were encouraged to phone in about incidents, including anti-social behaviour, to help provide an overall picture and to identify crime patterns.

Predictive trends indicated what might happen over the next four weeks and took account of events such as school holidays, bonfire night etc. However, these trends could be affected by various issues including the weather.

2. The Norfolk Policing Model (NPM) went live in 2009 and the current review would be looking at ways of identifying improved working practice and in making savings. Members were shown the Terms of Reference of the review and advised that the details of how cuts would be made would not be known until January/February 2011.

3. The Director of Community Services then updated Members on the Operational Partnership Team which had been set up six months previously. Three Community Safety Officers and three Breckland Council Officers worked together, based at Elizabeth House. Their strong working relationship had helped to streamline processes. They used their skills, together with data provided by the predictive calendar

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for planning purposes, targeting hot-spots and providing a 'joined-up' approach.

A successful funding bid had provided £6,000 for each of the market towns to support community safety projects. A family support worker was also being piloted

Sgt Scott, leader of the team, said that it was proving very successful. It was the first team of its kind in Norfolk and he was regularly contacted by colleagues nationwide, to see how it was working.

The fact that the team was co-located at the Council offices facilitated close working with departments such as Housing and Environmental Health. The public were being given an improved level of service as information was being passed on quickly and seamlessly. The team could respond quickly to protect the vulnerable and target their resources to improve service delivery.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Members asked the following questions:

Q. *What was the scale of substance misuse in the district?*

A. It was impossible to quantify, but action was taken when it had an impact on the community.

Q. *What was the Inweb system? Did it deal with incidents outside pubs?*

A. InWeb was a computer database which collated all the information associated with police attendance at public houses. It would only include information on incidents outside the public house if they were directly related to the licensed premises. Sgt Scott advised that his team had a system to highlight problems to the Council's Licensing team – another example of data sharing.

Q. *What was the 'point of contact' phone number for the Operational Partnership Team?*

A. 0845 456 4567

Q. *Have you used the new CCTV system in Breckland since it came on board?*

A. It was an invaluable tool, highly valued and always used if available when a crime had been committed.

The Vice-Chairman was concerned that the full effects of the cuts would not be known until next year. He suggested that the Chief Inspector should be invited back, as Members were all concerned about the potential adverse effects of the cuts.

The Chairman agreed. He said that the Commission had been appointed to scrutinise crime and disorder in Breckland and he suggested that the Chief Inspector should be invited to attend the next meeting to be held in Attleborough, in March 2011, when the outcome of the Home Office cuts would be known.

He praised the work of the Operational Partnership Team and said that the system was working well. It was a 'good news' story that should be

Rory
Ringer

made more of. He offered the Commission's formal support to protect capacity.

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107/10 PERFORMANCE (BY EXCEPTION) (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Chairman reported that there had not been a paper to follow on this item.

The Policy and Performance Manager said that it had been intended to bring specific items to the Commission for scrutiny. The recent Performance Clinic (now known as the Value for Money and Productivity Clinic) had begun to challenge Value for Money across Services and this was a new area for the Council to look at. Due to timescales however, it had not been possible to bring forward specific items to this meeting, however this would be possible in the future.

The Council had a good embedded and robust scheme of performance management in place, which had been recognised by the auditors. The Corporate Business Plan provided the overarching programme which informed the Service Plans and was underpinned by the TEN system. Members had access to TEN through the intranet.

Items that had been discussed at the recent clinic included the HONOR awards, Choice Based Lettings and the Licensing Business Transformation project, which had already realised benefits of improved customer service and productivity.

The Contact Centre was scheduled to have a telephony update in February 2011 and it was important that the deadline was met in order to avoid any impact from that on the Council Tax bill issue.

The Chairman advised that Choice Based Lettings was coming to the Commission on 6 January 2011. The communications issue was also something that needed to be scrutinised.

Rory
Ringer

108/10 INTERNET SERVICE (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Chairman explained that he had asked for this item to be included on the agenda due to the recent internet 'downtime' events experienced by the Council.

The Director of Corporate Resources introduced the two Officers who would advise Members on the background history, current position and next steps with regard to the connectivity issues suffered on 4 and 5 November.

The IT Project Manager outlined the background of the problems which had caused three interruptions to the Council's internet access. The cause of the disruptions had been identified as service cessations of the 2Mb service initiated at the exchange by BT, in advance of transfer to a new 4Mb service planned for 13 November 2010. These cessations had resulted in loss of access for Members and officers.

An on-site meeting would be held with senior Cable & Wireless staff to review the incidents, seek recompense and to determine whether Breckland would continue to do business with Cable & Wireless.

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One Member believed that since the change over weekend the internet service had been considerably faster.

Another Member said that the system was deplorably inadequate, and highlighted how imperative the customer service side of Members' roles was and how bad it was when email access was unavailable and constituents could not be replied to. She believed there were ongoing problems, and she had not noticed any increase in speed.

Concerns were raised that a strategic decision had been made without Member involvement.

The Chairman asked when the decision had been made to increase to 4Mb and by whose authority?

The Director of Corporate Resources was unable to confirm when the original decision had been made to upgrade the service. It was agreed that a Member would be invited to attend the meeting with Cable and Wireless on 10 December.

Returning to the problems experienced by Members, it was suggested that a text message could be sent to all Members advising them when service had been interrupted. The Chairman thought this was a good idea and said it should be implemented.

He thanked the team for sorting out the problem.

109/10 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS (AGENDA ITEM 10)

There were two issues currently being addressed:

- Review of ICT equipment and facilities for Members
- Car Parking in Swaffham

A review of the provision of ICT equipment and facilities for Elected Members would be held at a joint Audit and O&SC Panel on 24 November.

The Parking Task & Finish Group would meet next on 3 December to start the review of Swaffham. The Elections and Scrutiny Manager advised that at that meeting, Terms of Reference and the project work plan would be agreed. Future meetings would include a site visit and a public consultation meeting before the draft report was prepared with a view to being signed off at the meeting on 24 March 2011.

110/10 SHARED SERVICES (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The Shared Services Project Manager gave Members a brief update on the current position. A detailed presentation would be made to the Joint O&SC and General Purposes Committee meeting on 6 December, when a clearer picture would be available.

The project team had a clear objective - a shared management structure for both councils that would achieve 35% savings and result in a structure that was fit for purpose. It was a big challenge with a very tight timescale. Reports would be made to both councils in December

Kevin J
Taylor

Action By

and the new structure would be implemented by the end of the financial year.

All affected staff were being consulted on the draft shared management structure. As a result of the consultation an additional structure had been released. Details of the consultation and the responses being made were available on the intranet, together with job descriptions.

The next step would be for each council to hold their own joint scrutiny meetings. It had proved impossible to arrange a joint Breckland/South Holland scrutiny meeting prior to the inception of the new structure despite the Members' very strong preference for that. It was hoped that there would be some form of joint scrutiny in future.

The project team had visited Oxfordshire where they had already implemented a joint management structure and the comparison made was interesting. Concern had been raised that Breckland/South Holland's timescale was very challenging but in Oxfordshire the process had gone on for two years, and that length of time had proved to be one of the key challenges.

In conclusion, the project was very fast-track, it would be difficult to get it right and it was important not to lose talented people.

111/10 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (AGENDA ITEM 12)

None.

112/10 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (AGENDA ITEM 13)

None.

113/10 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 14)

There would be two meetings on 6 December 2010. In the morning, the Joint O&SC and General Purposes Committee would consider the Shared Management proposals and, in the afternoon, a Special O&SC meeting would review the Thetford Area Action Plan (TAAP). All Members were invited to both meetings and a buffet lunch would be provided.

The Chairman said that it was important to scrutinise the TAAP before it went to the Moving Thetford Forward Board. He was concerned that Norfolk County Council had not progressed the Transport Study. He was considering inviting Pigeon to the meeting as they were key partners in the process and he wanted the Commission to hear a balanced argument.

With regard to the Work Programme, it was suggested that the Partnership Scrutiny item scheduled for January should be moved back to the February meeting to allow it to be considered with the consultation results. That meeting should be held in Thetford.

The Vice-Chairman wanted the Member/Officer protocol to be reviewed. He was concerned at the lack of response from certain departments to enquiries from Members and suggested that this needed to be addressed before the new Councillors were elected in May. The

Helen
McAleer

Chairman agreed and said that the importance of notifying Councillors of things happening in their Ward, should also be included.

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Mark
Stokes

The Chief Inspector had been invited back to the March meeting.

Rob Walker

The County Strategic Partnership Scrutiny Panel were trying to call in Anglian Water to discuss water availability and sewage disposal. The Commission also wanted to speak to them on the same issues and he asked if the two could be dovetailed together.

Rory
Ringer

Finally a Member reiterated her request that future meetings should commence at 2pm. This was agreed and the schedule would be amended.

Helen
McAleer

114/10 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held at 2.00pm on 6 January, 2011 in the Anglia Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham.

The meeting closed at 4.55 pm

CHAIRMAN