

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**COUNCIL**

**Held on Friday, 9 March 2012 at 10.30 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                       | Mrs J A North             |
| Mr C G Carter                       | Mr J.W. Nunn              |
| Mr T R Carter                       | Mr R. R. Richmond         |
| Mr C. S. Clark                      | Mr W. R. J. Richmond      |
| Mr P.D. Claussen                    | Mr M. S. Robinson         |
| Mr J.P. Cowen                       | Mr J.D. Rogers            |
| Mr R.W. Duffield                    | Mr B. Rose                |
| Mr B J English                      | Mr F.J. Sharpe            |
| Lady Fisher                         | Mr I. Sherwood            |
| Mr K.S. Gilbert                     | Mr W.H.C. Smith           |
| Mr R.F. Goreham (Vice-<br>Chairman) | Mrs P.A. Spencer          |
| Mr S R Green                        | Mr A.C. Stasiak           |
| Councillor E. Gould                 | Mrs A.L. Steward          |
| Mr T. J. Jermy                      | Mrs L.S. Turner           |
| Mr A.P. Joel                        | Mr M. A. Wassell          |
| Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris               | Mr N.C. Wilkin (Chairman) |
| Mr R.G. Kybird                      |                           |

**In Attendance**

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Dominic Chessum | - Joint Marketing & Communications<br>Team Leader |
| Terry Huggins   | - Chief Executive                                 |
| Maxine O'Mahony | - Director of Commissioning                       |
| Mark Stokes     | - Deputy Chief Executive                          |
| Julie Britton   | - Senior Committee Officer                        |

**29/12 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bowes, Mr Childerhouse, Mr Darby, Mr Duigan, Mrs Irving, Mrs Jolly, Mr Lamb, Mr Monument, Mr Simon Rogers and Mr Skull.

**30/12 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Mr Jack Ramm

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A moments silence was held for Mr Jack Ramm a former Breckland Councillor, Norfolk County Council Chairman and Mayor of Thetford who had recently passed away. He had served on various committees during his time at Breckland and had been a very popular, well liked gentleman and for those that knew him, he would be sadly missed. Commiserations were conveyed to his wife and family.

**Tandem Tour**

On a lighter note, the Chairman was pleased to announce that the tandem tour, the very onerous cycle ride that he and the Leader of the Council were attempting, had been organised for 5 May and all proceeds raised would be donated to the Chairman's charity, Quidenham Hospice. The cycle ride would start at 8.00am in Thetford to be in Attleborough by 10.00am, Watton at midday, Swaffham at 2.00pm and Dereham at 4.00pm. Members' support was welcomed and he hoped that many of them would turn out to encourage them on their way.

**31/12 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

None.

**32/12 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 4)**

The press and the public would be excluded from the meeting only if Members wished to discuss matters in relation to Appendix D of the report, the Consultation Document.

The report was otherwise discussed in open session.

**33/12 BRECKLAND, GREAT YARMOUTH AND SOUTH HOLLAND SHARED MANAGEMENT (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

The Leader of the Council introduced the shared management report and explained that Breckland Council had tried many innovative ways to make financial savings before the Government withdrew its funding from local authorities. He said sharing top officers from the three councils would increase the team's resilience and allow money to be used on front-line services and protect those services that affected the public.

The Chief Executive said that it was Members who had to decide on the direction they wanted to take. All three Councils had considered the report in a short space of time, South Holland had agreed the recommendation at its meeting on 7 March, Great Yarmouth had approved the report at a Special Council meeting on 8 March and now it was the turn of Breckland. Although the report was still in draft form, it had been through a number of preliminary mechanisms/meetings for consideration; therefore, Members should

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be quite familiar with what was being asked.

If approved, financial savings and improved resilience would be gained by this joint venture with the introduction of a new director and the fact that it responded to a new political management arrangement. It also made effective use of what was a very expensive resource. It would also open up further shared arrangement opportunities such as procurement issues.

All costs of implementing the shared management team would be shared equally by the three authorities and the structure itself would be based on key functions of local government. More importantly, each of the three councils would stay very much separate and in control of its own destiny. Great Yarmouth was a willing partner and had signed up to these principles.

There was a section within the report that dealt with the important relationship with the three Councils and Members were informed that if this particular matter was discussed the Chief Executive would have to declare an interest and leave the room.

The Opposition Leader said that it seemed like only yesterday when Breckland Council began sharing services with South Holland and as far as he was concerned had been like a leap into the dark. In his opinion, there had not been a sufficient amount of analysis as to whether or not this venture had been a success and he believed that Breckland Council should not be making a decision at this moment in time until it was clear that there had not been any effect on the quality and level of services provided. Given the information available, the Labour Group did not support this rush to share services with another authority as the Group felt that the risks associated with this move to be of concern, particularly given the limited financial savings available.

The Opposition Leader assumed that there had been considerable debate amongst the Conservative Group Members regarding this proposal and that they had been privy to more discussion and debate than the Labour Group. He therefore felt that there was not enough information at hand to make an informed decision which was why his Group would be opposing the proposal. He pointed out that he had emailed senior council officers for information such as; figures relating to staff turnover over the past few years, staff absenteeism rates and levels of complaints from the public. This would have been indicators of the consequence of sharing with South Holland and therefore a good barometer of sorts. Unfortunately, this information had not been provided, and he therefore assumed that it had not been collated as part of this process.

The Labour Group was fully supportive of this Council looking to do things differently and that it was prepared to push boundaries but the Group felt that this boldness could easily become foolhardiness.

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The Opposition Leader failed to understand the wider vision for this venture as logic suggested that in order to get maximum benefit from sharing services you would join up with those authorities that were geographically closest. He asked Members to consider what would happen if sharing services was considered not to be the best option for either District as un-sharing services would be even more difficult to unravel. At the end of his debate, he pointed out that as the shared services family grew, did this not look more like a unitary council that just lacked the unitary governance structure.

Cllr Wassell felt that the assertion of the Opposition Leader in relation to Conservative Members having been privy to more information than the Labour Group was totally incorrect. He was surprised by the comment made about this venture providing limited financial savings as in his opinion £100,000 was a significant amount to save and asked the said Member if he had any alternative ideas.

The Executive Member for Internal Services reminded the Labour Group that Breckland Council already worked in partnership with ARP which had been recognised nationally. This further shared management venture was fairly unique but innovative and the proposal had been debated quite considerably. The Council needed to find efficiencies by not cutting services.

Cllr Borrett stated that all Councils faced difficult times and all had to find financial savings. A £100,000 saved without any reduction in services and no Council Tax increase seemed like a very good idea.

Cllr Sherwood pointed out that this proposal was all about local representation and could not be compared to a unitary set up. Everyone in the room had heard the Chief Executive state that all Councils would remain separate. The public were not worried who Breckland, South Holland or Great Yarmouth joined up with as long as a good service continued to be provided.

The Overview & Scrutiny Commission Chairman could not see the comparison between unitary and local democracy as they were completely different. Breckland Council was looking to save £3.5m over the next few years - this was a lot of money and to do nothing would be totally irresponsible. The join up with South Holland had provided different strings to Breckland's bow and the notion of joining up with Great Yarmouth was about attitudes and willingness to change. All three authorities were using their initiative. It would provide further opportunities and with modern technology allowed us all to do things differently on a much bigger scale just as in the private sector.

The Executive Member for Performance & Business Development said that the outcomes between South Holland and Breckland had been measured and there had been no complaints. He was

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surprised to hear that the Opposition Leader had felt disengaged as the same report had been to various committees of which all Members had had the opportunity to attend.

The Opposition Leader said that he had attended some of the meetings but had not been availed of the staff absenteeism figures and had still not had a response from the senior officers.

Cllr Clarke, a Labour Group Member asked the Chief Executive if he would still be able to focus on local issues. In response, the Chief Executive advised that he would be an advocate across all three authorities and would ensure that he was aware of any key strategic issues. He hoped that he would be a good ambassador for all Members as it was them who paid his salary as a manager.

Cllr Sherwood pointed out that it was Members who 'shouted' on behalf of their towns not the management and he hoped this was realised.

The Executive Member for Finance & Democratic Services asked Members not to forget that they were locally elected to represent local people.

Cllr Monument felt that the Labour Group had not fully understood the thinking behind this proposal. Members would not be affected as they would still continue to serve their own communities; a unitary authority would have been completely different as it would have taken local representation away.

Cllr Borrett said that he would have felt embarrassed coming to this meeting if he had not received and studied all the necessary information. This matter had been debated at great length and all Members had had the opportunity to attend the various meetings. He felt it would be extremely irresponsible if the Labour Group took part in the vote.

Cllr Gilbert who was in support of the shared management proposal was surprised but pleased that the Council's involved were only expecting to make a few redundancies. He asked if this was due to there being a few existing vacant posts. He agreed with the aforementioned points that a lot could be learnt from each authority which could only benefit all three councils.

The Vice-Chairman mentioned the fact that when the Labour Government was in power no Council had been short of funding. He was unhappy that Members were going to be making a decision on such an important matter as he felt that an informed decision should not be made as the information that the Labour Leader had requested had not been forthcoming. He queried the second recommendation of the report, to approve consultation with trade unions and staff, as he thought that such consultation should have

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been carried out before a decision was made.

The Leader pointed out that this particular recommendation could not be implemented until a decision to move forward on this proposal had been agreed. If approved, Trade Unions and staff would be consulted and redundancies would be kept to an absolute minimum. This proposal was not about trying to abolish councils, this was about protecting choice locally and local Councillors would be and were safeguarding that choice. Breckland Council had a choice on council tax and had chosen not to increase, it did have the opportunity to increase it by 3½% but it had not as Breckland Council did not want to dip into peoples' pockets for services that the Council provided. The financial savings overall were in fact £600k for the shared management team and it was still delivering efficiencies. As far as the Chief Executive's role was concerned, it was a strategic role unlike Members whose role was to task the Council's policies to their communities.

Following a vote on each recommendation of which the Labour Group abstained, it was

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) the principle of the three authorities working together with a joint Chief Executive and Management Team be approved;
- b) consultation commence between trade unions and staff on the proposal as described in the document;
- c) all responses from the consultation and the final structure, selection process and slotting in process be considered by the Chief Executive and the three Leaders and the joint proposal be brought back to the Annual Council meeting on 24 May 2012; and
- d) Terry Huggins be appointed as the joint Chief Executive for the purpose of implementing the proposals (other statutory appointments e.g. Head of Paid Service to be dealt with when the Managing Director ends his employment).

The meeting closed at 11.15 am

CHAIRMAN