

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**Held on Thursday, 15 March 2012 at 2.00 pm in the  
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr C G Carter	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mrs D.K.R. Irving	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mr T. J. Jermy (Vice-Chairman)	Mr B. Rose
Mr A.P. Joel	

**Also Present**

Mrs E. M. Jolly	Mrs L.S. Turner
Mr W. R. J. Richmond	Mr M. A. Wassell

**In Attendance**

Sarah Bruton	- Environmental Services Manager
Stephen James	- Senior Internal Consultant
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer

**30/12 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2012 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**31/12 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr A Byrne.

**32/12 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

None.

**33/12 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 4)**

Mr R Richmond and Mr W Richmond declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7a by virtue of owning property in Breckland with tenants receiving Housing Benefit.

**34/12 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Mrs E Jolly, Mr W Richmond, Mrs L Turner and Mr M Wassell were in attendance.

**Action By**

**35/12 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

**Action By**

The Executive Member for Localism, Community & Environmental Services advised that she would concentrate on updating Members on two key areas of her Portfolio, dealing with the Olympic and Jubilee celebration plans and the Serco contract.

**Communities**

The review of the service was well underway and the consultation period had finished. Recruitment had commenced for a Communities Manager who would work across all three authorities and for a Pride Co-ordinator/Team Leader for Breckland. The whole Communities Team would be working under the Pride umbrella.

Ways were being sought to maximise both financial and human resources. The grant system was being reviewed to make it more efficient and effective and the review of the Local Strategic Partnership was also well underway.

The Portfolio was involved in a variety of events to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics. There had been 49 applications for street parties and by careful financial management all had been supported. Grants would be used for a variety of purposes, including the purchase of time capsules, tree planting and to fund cream teas for care home residents.

There had also been 11 applications for grants towards Breckland Olympic Torch relay events. One was from Attleborough High School which would be hosting the original 1948 Olympic Torch and holding a Family Olympic Sports Day in June.

At the conclusion of the Paralympics the Tour of Britain would commence and the first stage would take place in Norfolk and Suffolk. The Council had agreed £10,000 of funding to support events to celebrate the Tour which would pass through Swanton Morley and Dereham. Those events would encourage tourism and provide an economic boost for Breckland.

There had been many offers of royal and jubilee memorabilia which would be displayed in a travelling show which would tour the District.

The Light Dragoons had been invited to parade through Dereham on their return from Afghanistan towards the end of the year. The newly refurbished Dereham Memorial Hall would be used for the reception if the offer of the welcome home parade was accepted.

Norfolk County Council (NCC) had cut its Youth Service and seven district-based Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) had been created across the County. The YABs promoted local ownership

**Action By**

by young people. The Executive Member was the Chairman of the Breckland YAB which would appoint a Youth and Community worker to support youth activities using a £45,000 commissioning budget provided by NCC. The YABs were multi-agency and various Members were involved.

The Chairman noted that he had attended a meeting in Mattishall about community development which had included an excellent presentation by a teenager from Great Yarmouth about dealing with deprived communities.

The Executive Member was aware through her work with Youth and the Older Persons Forum, that Great Yarmouth had very similar ways of working to Breckland. She was convinced that the expansion to include joint working with Great Yarmouth was the right way forward for the Council.

The Chairman was sure that across the board there were other areas of excellence in South Holland and Great Yarmouth that would be very useful for Members to learn about.

The Executive Member advised that her Interim Community Development Manager was already working across both Councils and that the teams were working together to maximise resources and skills to deliver a service that was fit for purpose.

Mr Gilbert asked if the Council was ready to deal with the implications of the Localism Act. He was concerned that there could be a lot of minority groups seeking support.

The Executive Member said that it would be difficult to judge what demand would be until more details were available. They were developing systems to allow the Communities Team to be an enabling team. Localism was about empowering people and giving control back to communities with a degree of responsibility.

With regard to the empowering aspect, the Vice-Chairman noted that there were courses being run on Neighbourhood Planning, etc. He wanted to ensure that groups would be able to access money for their projects and suggested that the Council should facilitate courses to assist groups in accessing pots of money from other funding sources.

The Executive Member advised that that already happened. There was also a system called Delta which provided the facility for members of the public to access funding on-line. She hoped to fund purchase of the system through the Pride project.

Mr William Richmond asked if there was anyone lined up for the Olympic Torch relay and was advised that there had been 12 applications. The Breckland stage of the torch relay would start at the Village Games in Watton and would visit all sorts of places

**Action By**

including lots of schools.

Mr Robert Richmond asked if there were any facilities for older people with regard to IT training, following the withdrawal of the One Stop Bus. He asked if computer training could be done through village halls.

The Executive Member confirmed that Pride funding was supporting training being held in village halls. Another route to access services and avoid isolation was through the Older Peoples' Forum which already had 100 Members and provided a voice for people over 50 years of age. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) would be held on 27 March at the EcoTech Centre and would focus on energy.

Work was also being carried out with Great Yarmouth on a 'Sloppy Slipper Exchange'. It was known that many older-people's falls were caused by poorly fitting footwear. It was hoped that the Councils could work with a Norfolk footwear provider and podiatrists in a scheme to be launched before Christmas aimed at reducing the number of falls.

With regard to the One Stop Bus, Mr Joel suggested that children could help older people and schools should be encouraged to facilitate that.

The Executive Member was joined by the Environmental Services Manager and they updated the Commission on the Serco contract which was due to end in 2015. Extension or renewal of the contract was currently being reviewed. At a recent meeting profit and loss had been discussed. A financial analysis had been carried out and a report would be presented to Cabinet in May to secure a decision.

The team had negotiated a shorter contract which would end at the same time as contracts of neighbouring authorities. This would put the Council in a good position to negotiate a County-wide contract at a later date if desired.

The street cleansing service had been reviewed to provide a better programme of cleaning of hot spots whilst at the same time finding further efficiencies and a review of the Grounds Maintenance service was underway.

The Executive Member mentioned that in the report to Cabinet in May there would be a recommendation to no longer provide wheeled bins for new properties with effect from 1 June 2012.

Members were concerned by that proposal and discussed its implications. There were a number of questions raised including:

- What would happen if a householder refused to buy a

**Action By**

wheeled bin?

*Under current legislation the Council could stipulate the size of receptacle for rubbish, and could refuse to collect rubbish if those requirements were not met.*

- Should developers pay for the bins, not the householder?  
*It was hoped that developers would provide the bins, but the Council could not enforce that requirement under the current planning policies.*
- Should the provision of bins be a condition on planning permissions?  
*This was part of a broader issue which needed to be addressed. Currently there was no requirement for developers to provide storage space for bins. This was a particular problem in Conservation Areas. A new Planning Policy would be required.*
- Would existing bins continue to be maintained / replaced?  
*Existing properties would not be required to buy replacement bins, the scheme only applied to new houses.*

Other questions raised which could not be answered were: what would happen to all the extant planning permissions for new houses if the new scheme started on 1 June 2012, and; would the new scheme create a black market in stolen bins?

The Executive Member acknowledged the concerns but explained that although the Council had provided free bins in the past it could not continue to do so. Many other Councils charged for wheeled bins to generate income. There would be a new Development Control Policy which would pass responsibility back to the community. Although they were aiming to introduce the new scheme on 1 June 2012 she would take Members' comments on board and she would discuss them with the Executive Member for Assets & Strategic Development.

Moving on, the Chairman noted that under the Localism Act Parish Councils could bid to take control of grass cutting. Many farmers had machinery capable of doing that job. Parishes could join forces and provide a service which would be more effective. Rural Parishes should be approached to see if they would be interested.

The Environmental Services Manager agreed saying that most of Serco's work was in the towns and covering the many small pieces of land in rural areas was time consuming.

The Vice-Chairman was aware that NCC had asked Thetford Town Council to take responsibility for some areas of their land providing funding for some but not all. Economies of scale meant

**Action By**

that the Town Council was able to do the work more economically.

Mr Joel was keen to keep the Serco contract as he did not receive any complaints about them as they were always on time and polite.

Mr Kybird noted that some primary pedestrian roads were often lined with cars which made street cleansing ineffective. The Environmental Services Manager agreed and said it was very difficult to get people to move cars. If Members gave her details of specific areas she would try to address the problem.

Mr Gilbert asked about litter picking. He was aware that it was carried out on A-roads but wondered if it happened in the Towns as well. There was a problem with litter in some areas of Watton and he asked if it was Serco's responsibility.

The Environmental Services Manager advised that the five town centres had dedicated teams which cleaned them every morning. Other areas were more of a problem, but again, if Members knew of specific areas that needed attention, they were asked to let her know. The Council had an Enforcement Officer and people had been taken to court for littering.

A particular problem on A-roads was litter falling from rubbish lorries which were not properly covered. The team was dealing with the major haulage companies to try to address that issue.

Mr Gilbert explained that he was talking about litter dropped by pedestrians.

Mr Wassell said that the police maintained that they did fine people regularly for littering. He thought that the majority of the problems in Watton were on school routes and that getting teachers to educate the children about littering might be the answer. He also suggested another possibility would be to use May-Gurney as they worked with prisoners from Wayland and were keen to use them on community projects.

The Chairman and Members thanked the Executive Member and Environmental Services Manager for their extensive report.

**36/12 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

(a) **Housing Task & Finish Group**

Mrs Matthews (Chairman of the Group) told Members that there had been a useful and very interesting two and a half hour meeting at which they had worked on the Council's Allocations Policy. The meeting had been run on a workshop basis with input from the Housing Associations.

**Action By**

They had discussed who they wanted to house and who they did not want to assist and there had been a consensus to move to a closed Register and to require local connections. No conclusions had been reached about the qualifying period for local connections which she acknowledged would be difficult to determine.

Mr Jermy said it had been a very enjoyable meeting at which everyone had used their local knowledge to contribute to the debate. He mentioned that he had spoken to the Executive Member for Planning & Environmental Services about the proposed five year tenancy tenure. If someone had a local connection it was more likely that they would want to stay and not move on.

The Chairman of the Commission agreed. He also said that he had spoken to the Deputy Chief Executive about Flagship Housing's failure to agree to the Council's requirements.

Mrs Jolly advised that two recent applications at Planning Committee had included affordable housing elements, but the requirement had been lowered from 40% to 21% for financial viability reasons and there were not as many one-bedroom dwellings as hoped, but it had been considered better to have some rather than none.

Mr Kybird noted that when Thetford expanded it would be essential to have key-worker allocations. He asked if that was within the Group's remit and the Group Chairman said that it had been mentioned.

Mr Joel asked if key workers moving from other parts of the country should have a qualifying period and the Commission Chairman suggested that in such cases the recruiting employee could be a sponsor. However, there were unemployed people in the District and young people without jobs and the Council needed to focus on jobs and homes for them.

He thanked the Group Chairman for her update.

**37/12 SHARED SERVICES (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The Senior Internal Consultant informed the Commission that all three Councils had agreed in principal to shared services. A consultation period was taking place and would run until 12 April 2012. Feedback would then be collated and a report would be presented to all three Councils on 24 May 2012. If approved a 'slotting in' process for officers would take place.

The Chairman thanked the Senior Internal Consultant for his update.

**Action By**

**38/12 HEALTH & SCRUTINY (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 10)**

Mr Kybird informed Members that unfortunately the Norfolk Health & Scrutiny meetings coincided with Breckland full Council meetings. Therefore, he and Lady Fisher had agreed to attend future meetings alternately and report back to the Commission.

**39/12 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 11)**

None.

**40/12 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 12)**

None.

**41/12 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 13)**

The Chairman noted that the Scrutiny Officer was unable to be present. The April work programme looked too full and he sought agreement to move some items to future agendas.

The following items would be considered at the April meeting:

- Shared Services – as it would be the last meeting before the full Council decision
- Discretionary / Non-Discretionary Services – to know where the Council stood at the end of the financial year
- Homelessness Strategic Delivery Plan
- Breckland Tenancy Strategy
- Street Trading – as the Executive Member had asked the Commission to consider whether street trading should be under the umbrella of Environmental Health

Any urgent matters that came up in the meantime would be included as necessary. The Deputy Chief Executive and the Director of Commissioning had been asked to advise the Commission of any issues that might need scrutinising.

Members agreed that the rest of the items on the work programme should be moved back. Suggestions were then made for future items.

Mr Rogers referred to land in Watton that was available for development. He asked why Breckland was not buying it to provide employment for the residents of the 1000 additional houses that had been built.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the Executive Member's presentation at the last meeting and suggested that the marketing

of the commercial portfolio should be scrutinised.

The Chairman thought that both issues should be considered together on a future agenda.

Mr Kybird asked about the utilities particularly in view of the impending hosepipe ban. The Chairman explained that the Scrutiny Officer was doing her best to arrange a utilities meeting.

Mr William Richmond asked for a report on how the Customer Contact Centres were doing in the towns.

Mr Robert Richmond asked for flooding to be considered.

Mrs Matthews said that County Councillor Ann Steward had advised the Town Council that Swaffham was one of seven areas chosen to take part in a pilot scheme to create jobs. She asked for more information.

Mr Gilbert suggested that Norfolk County Council should be invited to the Commission as there was too much duplication.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their input.

**42/12 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 14)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 26 April 2012 were noted.

**Action By**

The meeting closed at 3.20 pm

CHAIRMAN