

Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting 20th March 2014 @ 2.00pm

Public Participation

Questions raised by:

Mr Roger Atterwill – Chairman, Swanton Morley Parish Council

- 1) In relation to item 6. on the agenda could I please ask what level of training is provided for councillors who are members of the planning committee? Is this training carried out by an external body and if so please can you provide me with the name of the training provider and indeed please can you confirm if the training is provided by legal experts (ie lawyers) or is it carried out by professional planning consultants who can perhaps provide a more practical perspective?
- 2) In relation to item 8. on the agenda I would like to remind members that in 2009 Breckland Council entered into a 15 year contract with Capita Symonds to outsource its entire planning department. The press reports from the time quoted a Council representative as saying that this was a 15 year “trail-blazing deal”. At the time it was also reported that Breckland council’s in-house planning dept. had a 90% performance satisfaction level and that 50 existing staff would be transferred to Capita under a TUPE arrangement. Capita’s own press release stated that the contract is expected to generate £5.7M in savings to Breckland Council. Please can I have answers to the following questions:-
 - a) Please confirm what the current customer satisfaction rate is and how is this figure arrived at?
 - b) What is the department’s policy on its response time for incoming enquiry telephone calls and emails? At the present time the dept. does not seem to have a voicemail system for general enquiries?
 - c) How many staff does Capita now employ in the department?
 - d) Please confirm exactly how much of a monetary saving has been made for Breckland Council so far since the contract started in 2009? Again, please provide substantiation for the figure provided.
 - e) In recent weeks the planning portal has apparently been upgraded. As a frequent user I can say that this has resulted in a service which is significantly less user friendly. Please can you explain why and will this be improved?
- 3) Finally, I was recently very pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation to the Chairman’s reception to be held on 8th April at Barnham Broom Hotel. The invitation states that the event is being sponsored by Capita. Mr Chairman, could I please suggest that any councillor present here today who will be attending this reception should declare an interest for the sake of clarity. I am sure you will agree with me that the general public needs to have confidence in this committee’s work and that indeed the term Overview and Scrutiny Commission should not be construed as a Self-Congratulatory Commission.

Thank you for your time.