

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**Held on Thursday, 12 July 2018 at 2.00 pm in the  
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Councillor E. Gould (Chairman)	Mr T. J. Jermy
Mr D. R. R. Oliver (Vice-Chairman)	Mr A.P. Joel
Mr P. M. M. Dimoglou	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr R. F. W. Brame	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr D. M. Crawford	Mr M. J. Nairn
Mrs T. Hewett	Mr R. R. Richmond

**Also Present**

Mr J. Newton	Mrs A. M. Webb
Mrs J. Hollis	Mr P. R. W. Darby
Mrs L.S. Turner	

**In Attendance**

Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Ross Bangs	- Housing Manager
Alex Chrusciak	- Director of Planning and Building Control
Stephen James	- Communities & Environmental Services Manager
Riana Rudland	- Breckland Place Manager
Simon Stubbs	- ICT Project Manager
Rosie Hill	- Customer Contact Centre Team Leader

**67/18 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 31 May were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

**68/18 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

None.

**69/18 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)**

None.

**70/18 URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**71/18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

**Action By**

Action By

**72/18 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

Councillors Darby, Hollis, Newton, Turner and Webb.

**73/18 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE**

The Executive Member for People and Information presented an update to Members on both Customer Services and IT.

The Customer Services Centres had recently moved into the Libraries in Watton, Attleborough and Swaffham with good feedback received from both customers and the libraries.

The management team had been proactive by working closely with service areas across the authority to manage the workload and staffing expectations. The new customer access strategy would ask members what service they expect to see in the future.

Councillor Joel thanked the Customer Service team for their work and asked if the 'press a number' had been looked into to make it easier for the caller. It was explained that whilst there had been issues in the past, the system did now work. However, if Members had any evidence that the system did not work, details should be passed to the Executive Member.

Councillor Crawford had recently experienced an issue whereby he was offered a call-back within a 2-day period which had not been helpful, and asked if there had been enough staff to support calls. The Customer Contact Centre Team Leader explained that staff would be called upon, trained and used during peak times such as Council Tax and elections.

A Councillor said it was frustrating when he had called for an Officer via the Contact Centre, but the officer was not available. The Contact Centre Team Leader would suggest that when a member called, they would transfer the councillor through.

Councillor Turner raised an issue whereby if an officer called a Member mobile phone, it registered as a missed call with the generic council number; so the Member was not aware who had called them. Officers were asked that if they called a Member on their mobile phone, they left a message with their number to call. The Executive Director for Governance said she would advise Officers through staff briefings and newsletters.

The Executive Member went onto provide the second part to her portfolio update which covered a presentation on ICT. Members were reminded how the service had been brought back in-house in November 2017. The detailed presentation included information on the breakdown of calls that were received and responses that were provided.

The Member ICT Working Group were considering new ICT requirements for May 2019.

Members expressed how pleased they were with the new service and

thanked the ICT team for their outstanding work.

**Action By**

**74/18 COMMUNITY ASSET REGISTER POLICY**

The Communities and Environmental Services Manager provided Members with an update on the Community Asset Regulations 2012. The Council had a duty to establish and maintain a list of assets that were of community value, and should act as an intermediary between the community and local bodies to enforce against provisions set out within the Act.

Parish Councils or community groups could nominate an asset with community value however there was a need to demonstrate the connection with that asset. There were restrictions within the regulations that, as an example, if a Pub wanted to change the use to a bed and breakfast planning permission would need to be sought.

The Chairman asked if permission would still be required for demolition if the pub had already closed. It was agreed that permission would still be required.

The Chairman felt the current way of working was reactive and asked if it could be more proactive. The Communities and Environmental Services Manager said a neighbouring authority already had a proactive approach and felt the way of working could be considered for Breckland.

Councillor Jermy asked if the team would have capacity to deal with the work or if it should be staggered approach across the District. The Communities and Environmental Services Manager said if vast number of applications were to be received it would put his team at pressure. He suggested he would consider how to manage the process going forward and report back to the Commission with a proposal. He would also provide members with a list of the type of asset that could be included.

Councillor Dimoglou raised caution over being proactive and felt if a pub had closed it was for a reason; therefore what would be the benefit for Breckland if houses were built on the land. The Chairman felt if something could be done to protect assets within a village, the Council should be proactive about it.

The Chairman thanked the Communities and Environmental Services Manager for his report and agreed that the proposals would be discussed at the next meeting of the Commission.

**75/18 MARKET TOWN INITIATIVE**

The Communities and Environmental Services Manager provided Members with an update on the Market Town Initiative.

Members had agreed £250,000 would be invested to ensure the market towns within the District were economically viable with a unique sense of identity. The launch of the new Shop-Appy initiative offered residents an easy way to shop locally. An event had been planned for business communities in Swaffham to discuss how they could work together

**Action By**

collaboratively.

Work was underway to support Thetford Town Council who were preparing a Heritage Lottery bid to provide funding to promote the historic features of the town.

In addition, work was underway with both Swaffham and Watton Town Councils who looked to enhance the signage along the Peddars Way walk.

The 'Glutton' had been purchased to be used across the market towns and good feedback had been received on how this had cleaned up hard to reach areas within the towns.

The next step involved developing a project to raise awareness within the communities and how to improve infrastructure going forward. Members were informed that recruitment was underway for a Market Town Initiative Officer, who would aim to work with the market towns to deliver projects.

Councillor Hewett was pleased to hear about the initiatives, but asked for a fact sheet to enable Councillors to share information with the Parish Councils. The Communities and Environmental Services Manager felt that communication was important and that communities understood the co-ordinated activities to protect the market towns. He suggested a monthly newsletter could be sent to Members to share with Parish Councils. Members supported this idea and he would ask the Market Town Initiative Officer to initiate the work when they were in post.

Councillor Richmond asked for a breakdown on how much the Glutton had cost per household. It was a suggestion that the Communities and Environmental Services Manager would look into.

Councillor Matthews was pleased to hear of the number of people that used the Shop-Appy within Swaffham and that it was a fantastic idea.

Councillor Turner asked how the App was monitored, as she was aware that whilst a number of shops were listed, products had not been uploaded. Members were advised that Officers were working with businesses to support them in updating their pages.

Members were informed that the Shop-Appy had been operational for just over 2 months, and 98 businesses had already signed up. A target of 200 businesses had been set. Google analytics was being used to track information that would be discussed with the businesses to improve the usage of the app. Support was being given to businesses by holding training events.

Councillor Jermy encouraged Members to read the Mary Portas report that highlighted the local high street should focus on their niche to provide an enjoyable customer experience. He had sympathy that it was a challenge and felt disappointed businesses in Thetford had not listed their products on the App. He asked what level of subsidy would be given if all 200 shops signed up. It was confirmed that if all businesses did signed up for a year it would be a cost of £38,000.

Councillor Richmond asked what support could be given to rural areas to improve transport that would help residents get into the market towns. It was explained there was ongoing discussion with Norfolk County Council to improve public transport links.

#### **76/18 FLY-TIPPING UPDATE**

The Communities and Environmental Services Manager had been asked to update Members on the statistics for fly-tipping following the changes that had been made at Norfolk County Council in April 2018. Members were informed that the collection of fly-tips during June 2017 was 72 collections, and in June 2018 it was 70.

Councillor Jermy asked for information on the tonnage rate together with the cost. The Communities and Environmental Services Manager would provide the information at the next meeting.

Councillor Hollis had noted that whilst there was not a large increase in the fly-tipping, asked if more DIY waste had been tipped rather than the usual household waste. Members were informed that whilst there was no evidence that it had changed, a review was being carried out in partnership with Serco to understand the type of fly-tipping taking place.

Members were pleased the fly-tip had been collected very quickly once it had been reported; but felt more work needed to be done on educating residents on what could and could not be taken to the recycling centres, and should promote opportunities for re-use and re-cycle.

The Chairman suggested that a Task and Finish Group should be set up to consider ways on educating residents and to look at campaigns with schools to encourage re-cycling. She asked that Councillor Jermy to Chair the group.

The Breckland Place Manager said it would be an ideal time to have a Task and Finish Group as a new strategy was being considered by the Norfolk Waste Partnership which could feed into that Group.

Councillor Turner felt that Breckland should advocate websites that promoted re-cycling through its social media.

#### **77/18 NEW PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Business Improvement Officer introduced the new key performance indicators (KPIs) to Members.

Councillor Oliver highlighted that the Freedom of Information request target should read 100% and not 95% as it was a statutory duty to respond within the 20-day period. It would be amended.

Members were pleased with the proposed KPIs and asked for it to be considered for a KPI on empty commercial property be added.

#### **78/18 CAPITA**

The Director of Planning and Building Control gave a detailed

#### **Action By**

Stephen  
James

**Action By**

presentation to Members that covered the planning validation process; consultation; case officer allocation and workloads; and the decision making process.

Planning Validation

There were two sets of criteria the planning application should follow in order to reach the validation process. The impact of not receiving quality applications resulted in a back-log of validations and the number of valid applications that were received was very low.

Members were informed whilst applications could be submitted via the planning portal, a large proportion was still received via the paper format. The planning team still generated a significant amount of paper but work was underway to look at the way it could be improved, such as producing CDs with plans, or having specialised scanners. The improvement of the new GIS system allowed for link with the Ocella system and would improve performance.

A checklist was being prepared to aide the applications received to ensure the application followed the validation process quicker.

The Chairman asked if there was a reason for the lack of planning submissions through the planning portal. Whilst the answer to this was not known, work was underway to collaborate with planning agents to encourage them to submit their plans on-line.

Consultation

The main issue with the consultation process was that consultees may not respond in time. However, for smaller scale applications a local flood authority officer sat with planning to work on planning applications. Whilst a deadline could be given, a decision could be made in the absence of that consultation information, but that was on a case by case basis.

A Member asked that if a planning application was delayed within their ward that they should be informed. The Director of Planning and Building Control said the way in which the reports were generated did not always recognise if an application had been delayed, but work was underway to resolve the reporting mechanism.

Case Officer Allocation and workloads

The average case load at any one time was 40 applications per officer. There was a case officer with 51 live cases in their name, however some were in abeyance as not all information had been received, but were still allocated. It was expected that the junior officers would have a higher number of cases, whereas the principle officers had lower levels due to the complexity of cases.

There were currently two vacancies within the team, and members were informed how it was particularly difficult to recruit to vacancies within the District. However, in order to assist the team, there were a pool of 11 officers in the organisation who worked across the country, supported applications for Breckland Council and helped to unlock the ability of those that were local.

Decision Making Process

The Director for Planning and Building Control explained how Capita worked in partnership with Breckland to make recommendations but it

**Action By**

was a Breckland Council officer who made a final decision.

A recent review of the Planning Committee had been carried out by the Planning Advisory Service of which an action plan had been produced to make amendments.

Councillor Richmond raised concern that if an Officer who worked away from Breckland dealt with a case that required a site visit it would get missed and they would not be aware of local situations. The Director of Planning and Building Control said where there was an expectation of a site visit then there was a need for the case officer to know the area and visit the site. However, if there were individual cases where it did not happen it should be reported to him.

The Chairman thanked the Director of Planning and Building Control for his report and asked if Members had further questions they should be directed through the Democratic Services Officer.

**79/18 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

(a) Housing Task & Finish Group

Councillor Turner said Members had spent a day with Flagship which had proved to be very useful. A number of outcomes had come from the meeting, including a request that Flagship offered to present to Members on the ward information pack that would be provided to all Members.

Members were asked that if they agreed to a presentation it was felt the Task and Finish Group had achieved what it had set out to do.

The Chairman asked for a presentation to be given after a full Council meeting as it would be of benefit to all Members, but asked that Councillor Turner agreed the principle with Cabinet members in the first instance. If there was agreement a presentation could be organised for Autumn 2018.

Councillor Matthews expressed her disappointment as she had not received any feedback from issues that she had raised with Flagship.

Councillor Jermy proposed that the Group be paused for a period of time in order to monitor the changes for a further 6-month period. However, Members agreed to close the Housing Task and Finish Group subject to the presentation received at full Council.

**80/18 OUTSIDE BODY FEEDBACK (STANDING ITEM)**

Councillor Turner advised that there were now seven Youth Advisory Groups; five within each of the Market Towns, one in Litcham and one in the Buckenhams. She encouraged Members to get involved and meet with the Youth groups. She had recently attended a Youth Advisory Board meeting in Swaffham who wanted to learn more about Democracy. It was a very useful meeting of which comments had been forwarded to the Leader.

Action By

**81/18 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM)**

None.

**82/18 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM)**

None.

**83/18 WORK PROGRAMME**

Members asked for an update on the questions they had raised in relation to the presentation received from Highways.

Councillors asked for the following items to be added to the work programme:

- To receive a presentation on Universal Credit.
- To receive a snapshot on the Section106 monies.

**84/18 NEXT MEETING**

The arrangements for the Special meeting on Friday 17 August at 10:00am in the Anglia Room, Elizabeth House, Dereham were noted.

**85/18 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**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.

**86/18 MINUTES**

The private and confidential minutes were agreed and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 5.35 pm

CHAIRMAN