

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

(Author: Mark Broughton, Member Development & Scrutiny Officer)

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 23 JULY 2009

COMMUNITY FORA AND TASKFORCE

1. Purpose of Report

The report is a discussion document relating to the use of community fora and taskforces operating within Breckland.

2. Recommendation

Members are recommended to agree the OSC undertake a full and formal scrutiny review of the arrangements concerning Community Fora and Task Forces in the round.

Note: In preparing this report, due regard has been had to equality of opportunity, human rights, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental and risk management considerations as appropriate. Relevant officers have been consulted in relation to any legal, financial or human resources implications and comments received are reflected in the report.

3. Information, Issues and Options

Background

3.1 The initial Community Forum in the District was established in Thetford in the summer of 2008, followed by one in Attleborough earlier this year. The intention behind establishment of these fora was to institute area based working through a community focus. Running hand in hand with the Thetford Forum is the Thetford Task Force which was set up to resolve locally identified issues in the town on the back of the six monthly public Forum meetings. Similar arrangements apply to Attleborough.

3.2 It is intended that further community fora be rolled out to the three remaining towns in the District (Swaffham, Dereham and Watton) by the end of this year.

3.3 The constitution and terms of reference of the Thetford and Attleborough Task Forces are attached at Appendix 1.

Issues

3.4 The role of the Fora and Task Forces and how they fit-in to the existing Breckland machinery of meetings and informal groups is unclear. There is uncertainty over how or whether issues are being addressed adequately, if they are raised at all or are being given the opportunity to be raised in the first place.

3.5 The introduction of the newly instituted Councillor Call for Action mechanism may be seen as another route which partly duplicates the work of the Fora, as this is essentially another way to resolve outstanding issues, working through elected members.

3.6 The Task Force meetings are not public meetings but partner/agency attendance has been consistently good since their formation. Forum meetings have been well attended with up to 200 people regularly attending the bi annual meetings in Thetford and Attleborough. Meetings of the fora are publicised through posters and local media (i.e. Breckland Voice).

3.7 Whilst the area fora which have been set up and the three others pending roll out by the end of the year will all be based in towns, there is a question mark therefore over how and when residents in the rural areas of the district can expect to be offered an opportunity to engage in a similar way.

3.8 Is the format of the fora and task forces – which are essentially the same in both Attleborough and Thetford – the optimum approach? A “one size fits all” arrangement may be challengeable and different models adopted elsewhere may be worthy of consideration.

3.9 To what extent will community fora fit with the ongoing decentralisation agenda e.g. in terms of participatory budgeting? Likewise, to what extent do community fora inhibit community-based scrutiny?

3.10 Are the range of representatives from agencies on the Task Forces appropriate or complete, and are the voting arrangements reasonable? For example there are no representatives from the voluntary sector, from business or from youth stakeholders invited to attend the Task Forces.

3.11 To what extent is there duplication and overlap between the various agencies and organisations at both strategic and operational level and what effect does this have on outcomes and outputs?

3.12 Are the reporting lines clear and unambiguous? How does this model fit with the Local Strategic Partnership?

3.13 Are the level of resources provided to the fora/task force adequate, how are they sourced, and are they targeted effectively to produce sustainable outcomes?

3.14 In overall terms there is a justifiable reason to examine the bigger picture and to assess how the fora and task force operate generally taking into account

- Their effectiveness (what have they delivered) and what value they are adding in the round
- Any duplication between what the forum does, what the task force does and how this relates to the existing Breckland machinery
- The relationship between these bodies and the objective of delivering community-based scrutiny
- Relationships between the constituent bodies of the Task Force and the attitudes they have towards the fora and the Task Forces

Options

3.15 Essentially there are two options moving forward.

3.15.1 Take no action and retain the current arrangements with three new fora on track to be established in Swaffham, Dereham and Watton later this year.

3.15.2 Carry out a full formal Scrutiny review of the Community Fora and Taskforces, their effectiveness and relationship with the existing Breckland machinery building on best practice and incorporating local factors.

Reasons for Recommendations

3.16 There is clearly uncertainty over the role and effectiveness of the present community arrangements and a review would allow a comprehensive assessment of their worth and effectiveness. It would also enable an assessment to understand whether this is the best way of interacting at the community level, taking into account the entirety of the Breckland machinery.

4. Risk and Financial Implications

4.1 There is a risk that the existing arrangements are not delivering optimum outcomes and that they do not reflect established best practice.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 None

6. Other Implications

6.1 Equalities, S17 Crime & Disorder Act, S40 Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006, Human Rights, Others: None

7. Alignment to Council Priorities

7.1 Building Safer and Stronger Communities

7.2 Your Council, Your Services

8. Ward/Community Affected

8.1 All

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