

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 3

**Held on Tuesday, 1 April 2008 at 2.00 pm in
Norfolk Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr R.G. Kybird (Chairman)	Mr P.J. Duigan
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe (Vice-Chairman)	Mr R. Kemp
Mr G.P. Balaam	Mr B. Rose

In Attendance

Anita Brennan	- Strategic Housing Manager
Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Riana Rudland	- PFI Monitoring Officer
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Committee Officer

11/08 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs. D. Irving and Messrs. J. Labouchere, F. Sharpe and M. Spencer.

13/08 LEISURE PFI UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The PFI Monitoring Officer presented the report, which provided an update and overview of the PFI leisure contract and the performance of the Dereham Leisure Centre and Breckland Leisure Centre and Waterworld at Thetford since the start of the new leisure contract in April 2007.

Overall usage of the Centres had increased, particularly in the case of Dereham, with increases standing at 27.01% at Dereham and 6.54% at Thetford.

The figures for swimming use were especially pleasing, with an overall increase of 14.73% at Dereham and 24.66% at Thetford.

The increased swimming use was particularly dramatic, as nationally figures for swimming were in decline. The results in Breckland were attributed to the high quality swimming lesson programme and the Aquazone branding offered by the contractor, Parkwood Leisure.

Equally successful results were reported on the sports development plan and the camp adventure programme, which had proved popular and was gradually increasing. More especially, the rural holiday sports programme delivered in partnership with the Council had been hugely successful, with over 160 sessions to date, which had achieved 100% satisfaction ratings and a number of sessions reaching capacity in terms of attendances.

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Consequently, more sessions were being planned to facilitate the increased numbers.

The early problems with the tiles in the learner pool at the Dereham Leisure Centre had been resolved and no further problems had occurred. Only a couple of other minor construction defects remained to be resolved by the constructor at the Dereham Centre within the warranty period. Downtimes at the Centre in Thetford had been minimal, with only two hours unavailability of part of the pools in this period due to a minor gas leak.

Although outside the remit of their contract, Parkwood had undertaken a refit of the kitchen and café area at the Thetford Centre to enhance the facility.

As part of their contractual requirements in terms of operating standards, Parkwood Leisure were in the process of acquiring the QUEST accreditation awarded to leisure centres and covering areas such as health and safety procedures, customer care, sports development, staffing requirements and training and cleaning standards. Part of the award process included a mystery customer visit as well as staff interviews and assessment of policies and procedures. Parkwood were due to be assessed for this accreditation around the middle of April. In order to maintain the standard, they would be reassessed on a regular basis.

In answer to questions, it was explained that all target groups in the development plan of the contract had been met and baseline information had now been gathered in respect of Breckland's own requirements on target groups. Sport England targets were used in the improvement plan and baseline data was now being gathered for monitoring of those targets. Provided the contractor could show it was striving towards meeting its targets and meeting all the aims of the contract, there was no financial penalty.

So far as the rural transport scheme provided last summer was concerned, it was reported that, disappointingly, there had been no take up of this facility by the public. However, it was planned to repeat the scheme again this year.

A member asked whether there was any possibility of introducing a transport scheme between Attleborough and either of the Leisure Centres. It was explained that Attleborough and Swaffham were not within the PFI contract but the idea could be looked at.

The rural holiday scheme for this Easter period included a trial in Attleborough and, if it proved successful, it was proposed to add it into the future rural programme.

It was noted that Parkwood was due to make its annual report at the end of April, which would give a breakdown of all memberships, usage and trends. It was also proposed to vary the reporting timetable to the Panel to coincide with the contractor's end of year report. The next monitoring report would, therefore, be made to the Panel at its July meeting and thereafter on a six-monthly basis.

RESOLVED that the Panel notes the report and the successful results in usage, which were against the national trend but also notes the poor take-up on last year's rural bus provision scheme.

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MONITORING REPORT MARCH 2008 (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Strategic Housing Manager presented the report, which set out progress against the delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan.

The report outlined the background to the development of the Housing Improvement Plan in response to the Audit Commission's inspection report in May 2005. The recommendations contained in the Improvement Plan formed the basis of the Council's Annual Delivery Plan and the Strategic Housing Service Plan for 2007-08 and 2008-09. These documents in turn influenced the staff appraisal process and the development of statutory documents, such as the housing and homelessness strategies.

Progress against the targets contained in the Plan had been consistent since its adoption, despite pressure on the team to respond to other national and local targets not contained within the Improvement Plan itself.

The majority of targets had been met. Several targets were in the final stages of delivery, although some targets remained to be met as they were influenced by corporate rather than strategic housing issues or timescales.

The Strategic Housing Manager explained progress against the items contained in the Strategic Housing Performance and Improvement Plan and highlighted the following matters:

- *Migration to customer services centre*: This was on hold pending the corporate service review of Business Transformation and also related to requirements for development of a corporate access strategy.
- *Development of a diversity strategy*: The BME housing research study was completed and a Norfolk-wide Action Plan was in process of development. A report on this subject had been made to a previous meeting showing positive results.
- *Affordable housing policy*: A review of affordable housing policies was presently being undertaken through the LDF process and a new affordable housing policy was due to be completed during the year following the LDF consultation process. The timeframe on the LDF process was variable but the housing team were working closely with the planning policy officers.

In connection with this item, members discussed the potential economic implication of a 40% affordable housing policy on planning applications. It was explained that it would not be a blanket policy but the Council had to take account of what was a reasonable percentage of affordable housing to be applied to a site. Detailed background affordability assessments were made

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on all planning applications before recommendations were proposed and members could request this information when considering applications.

- *Norfolk-wide physical and sensory disability strategy:* Breckland was the lead authority on this item for the Norfolk Supporting People client group and was a member of the commissioning body of the group. The draft strategy had been completed and would now go out to public consultation. This work was being undertaken in tandem with the Norfolk Supporting People Strategy. Regional funding changes under the Local Area Agreement framework would play an important role in this area in future.
- *Empty property and fuel poverty strategies:* These formed part of the private sector housing strategy, which was currently under review. The strategies on empty properties and fuel poverty were also under review, looking at how people accessed grants and loans etc. Fuel poverty was one of the national performance indicators.
- *Intervention strategies to target disrepair in the private sector:* A district-wide rural scheme was in development and being discussed with the Government Office for the Eastern region.
- *Review and improve target timescales allocated to dealing with DFGs:* This was a complex system. Changes had been proposed to the application process to help applicants and improve the process of distribution of grants but the amount of funding available was constrained.

A further update would be given to the Panel at its July meeting. In the meantime, focus would be given to the corporate issues affecting the Improvement Plan.

Members discussed the question of value for money (VFM) of the housing service and whether the cost of the service would reduce if extra funding could be drawn down. The Strategic Housing Manager explained that a VFM review was to take place this year. A number of funding bids had been submitted for a number of initiatives. However, the point was made that the cost of the service was influenced by the needs to improve and meet demand for the service.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the report be noted; and
- (2) bearing in mind the Audit Committee's role in regard to the issue of Value for Money, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission be asked to consider whether it or the Panel should review the results of the VFM review of the housing service prior to or after consideration by the Audit Committee.

15/08 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The schedule was noted, subject to the following amendments:

- PFI Leisure Centres: Performance update - Schedule for 29 July 2008 meeting
- BVPI 166: Environmental Health – Delete from programme as performance status was now 'green'.
- Thetford Healthy Living Centre: Green Travel Plan – Confirmed for next meeting on 13 May when a representative from Norfolk County Council would be in attendance for further discussion on this item.

The Chairman raised the question of the overall provision of football pitches, particularly having regard to the deficit of pitches in Thetford. Another member added that there was also a deficit in Dereham.

It was understood that such areas would have been included as part of the Open Spaces Audit that had been carried out by the Council and therefore it was proposed that a scrutiny review of the Open Spaces Audit should be undertaken to consider the implications for sports areas provision and how the deficit of football pitches could be addressed.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the amendments to the work programme be agreed;
- (2) the Overview and Scrutiny Commission be asked to consider agreeing to a review by this Panel of the implications from the results of the Open Spaces Audit in relation to sports areas provision and how the deficit of football pitches, particularly in Thetford and Dereham, could be addressed.

16/08 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on 13 May 2008 were noted.

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The meeting closed at 3.15 pm

CHAIRMAN