

---

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**Held on Tuesday, 22 February 2022 at 10.00 am in  
Anglia Room, The Conference Centre, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Cllr Lynda Turner (Chairman)  
Cllr Linda Monument  
Cllr Tristan Ashby

Cllr Robert Hambidge  
Cllr Susan Dowling

**Also Present**

Cllr Gordon Bambridge

Cllr Alison Webb

**In Attendance**

Samantha Armitage

Sarah Barsby

Stephen James

Sarah Shipley

Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy

Teresa Smith

Julie Britton

- Community Services Manager
- Assistant Director People and Governance
- Executive Director
- Assistant Director Health & Housing
- Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Democratic Services Team Leader
- Democratic Services Officer

**Action By**

**1/22 WELCOME (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The Chairman, Councillor Lynda Turner welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the new General Purposes Committee.

Officers were asked to introduce themselves when presenting their reports.

The new Terms of Reference attached to the Agenda were noted.

**2/22 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

An apology for absence was received from the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Colman.

**3/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

None declared.

**4/22 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 4)**

None.

**5/22 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

Councillor Bambridge, the Executive Member for Waste & Environment and Councillor Webb, the Executive Member for Housing, Health & Communities were in attendance.

**6/22 MEMBER TRAINING (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Sarah Barsby, the Assistant Director for People & Governance presented the report.

The report outlined the Member training programme. Additionally, as part of the former Member Development Panel (MDP), those Members had previously fed into a training needs assessment survey, and it was suggested that this draft survey should be shared with the General Purposes (GP) Committee Members ahead of the new intake of Councillors in 2023 after the District Elections to get a sense of what training was required.

Another survey undertaken at the last Member Development Panel was in respect of how the Members intranet pages could be improved, the Digital Team had been in attendance at that meeting to note any suggestions made, and since then, a new Members Page had been created in 'test format' and a link had been sent to MDP Members to obtain any feedback. This information would be shared with GP Members too, to get their views and how this page could be made into a more digital resource.

This Committee would then have proper oversight and an opportunity to have an input and both surveys would be circulated to GP Members after this meeting.

The Chairman mentioned the attendance statistics and the fact that many Members had asked for training sessions to be held via Zoom, but she had been disappointed that not many Members had taken up this opportunity. She was aware that training was voluntary and different ways of learning was being offered but felt that more should be done to encourage Members to attend.

On that point about non-attendance, Councillor Ashby asked if a process could be put in place of why Members had not been able to attend, to gather data, and suggested a drop-down menu.

The Chairman pointed out that this could raise a GDPR issue, and such training was voluntary, but it could form part of the survey response. This could be investigated provided any confidentiality matters were taken into account.

Members were informed that the assessment survey would provide a better understanding of Members' availability.

Councillor Monument felt it would be useful if great care was taken on how the questions were asked. She herself had no problems at all with attending meetings in person or virtually via Zoom but if she was asked to vote for either of these it would unfairly balance the count. She felt that the questions on availability/preference should include more detail to provide better feedback.

As a fairly new Councillor, Councillor Hambidge asked if the previous training

**Action By**

sessions held via Zoom were available to view.

Teresa Smith, the Democratic Services Team Leader advised that all training presentations were available on the Members' Page but if there was anything that he was interested in that he could not find she would try and assist.

Councillor Bambridge reminded the Committee that there were 49 existing Members that could be used as Mentors for any new Members.

Councillor Webb pointed out that the uptake for the housing presentations had been fairly low and was subsequently told it was because they were being held during the day when Members were at work. The Housing Team had then worked extremely hard to provide some evening sessions but even then, attendance had been low. This was disheartening for the Officers as a great deal of work was involved and it was very difficult to please everyone and therefore felt that the assessment survey would be very useful.

Councillor Dowling agreed with the aforementioned comments it was very difficult to get a time that was suitable for everyone but wondered whether some of the training should be made compulsory.

In response, the Chairman advised that some of the training was mandatory, for example Members who sat on the Planning Committee or the Licensing Committees, they had to attend such training sessions to be able to undertake their duties as a Member of those committees. She felt that the Code of Conduct should be mandatory and could be considered going forward. She also felt that training should be a commitment to the role of a Councillor not just to turn up at an occasional meeting.

Councillor Hambidge explained his daytime employment and the points system that had to be adhered to, to retain his licence and asked if it would be an idea to have a points system brought in for attendance at training sessions.

Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy, the Legal Services Manager said that she would have to explore the legality of such an idea of enforcing Members to attend training. She agreed with the Chairman that Licensing and Planning Committees were more or less an exception as they required certain training to carry out their roles and this would be further explored.

Councillor Monument could see the advantage in compulsory development training in her career but asked if there could be any form of sanction put in place when Members failed to attend.

The Legal Services explained that she would look into this as it could be tied in with the Code of Conduct, but the Council did not have authority to suspend Councillors for nonattendance at training.

The Chairman reminded Members that there used to be a personal development system in place for all Councillors where one to one interviews were held with Human Resources. This was done for those Councillors who had aspirations to become Chairmen or just for further development to assist them in their roles. In the first year that this was done, she had asked the Officer involved where this information was kept and had been told that it was just kept on file. She felt that such a programme should be created to enable

individual Councillors to state what training they would prefer.

The Assistant Director of People & Governance felt that some of the suggestions were quite attractive but wondered if it could be looked at in another way so it was more of an encouragement so the more points that were accrued those Members could reach a certain standard of professional development the same as a number of other organisations.

Councillor Webb felt that more thought should go into the on-line training. Members could then choose to do this at any time when they had the time with a test at the end.

Referring to the point made about compulsory training, Councillor Bambridge advised that this had been tried in the past and was deemed impossible plus it was not legal to limit what Councillors did simply because of lack of training. He emphasised the fact that the quality of the training had to be taken into account and mentioned the recent Licensing training session that had taken place which everyone thoroughly enjoyed.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their suggestions and between now and the next meeting the links to the surveys would be sent to Committee Members. Training would be a standing item on the agenda so further discussions could be had.

## **7/22 COMMUNITY TEAM SERVICE REVIEW (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Executive Member for Housing, Health & Communities was very pleased to bring forward the Communities Team Service Review report.

The Team had been working extremely hard on this review to ensure that the Council had the right skills in the right place. The pandemic had fundamentally changed the way the Council worked with its communities and had brought this authority much closer to other organisations who had worked hard throughout to ensure that everyone was keeping safe and well.

The Inspiring Communities theme within the Council's Corporate Plan set out the commitment to continue to harness the strength of working with community partners and organisations and to help them recover from the lasting affects of the pandemic. This was also in line with the upcoming Integrated Care system and the Government had recently published its vision for 'levelling up' the UK over the next decade.

This was a really exciting time working with Breckland's communities but to enable this to be delivered effectively and to make the most of the partnerships and other opportunities, the Council need to make sure that the right skills were in the right place. The structure that was required had been considered so that service outcomes could be met.

Samantha Armitage, the Community Services Manager was in attendance to provide further details and feedback from the consultation process.

This service focused on the Council's communities and covered the prevention of vulnerability through early intervention services such as collaboration with the Team's weekly multi-agency, multi-partner meetings, social prescribing

**Action By**

services, which were in partnership with the NHS providing holistic support to people with non-clinical needs and tackling issues through the Inspiring Communities programme such as loneliness, mental health, domestic abuse and County Lines.

The Team were also focusing on addressing health inequality through the integrated care system to improve the health and wellbeing of communities through the key partnerships and community engagement. Ensuring that Breckland residents had a safe place to live through the partnership it had with the Police in the Operational Partnership Team.

The proposed changes were highlighted (see section 1.5 of the report). It was also highlighted that the proposal would result in some contractual changes but would be cost neutral and would not increase the establishment numbers.

Councillor Ashby asked how it was cost neutral when the Team was going to be increased by two new posts.

The Chairman explained that the two extra posts were being funded by grant funding as part of Breckland's ongoing Inspiring Communities programme.

The Executive Member for Housing, health & Communities explained that £1m had been set aside for the Inspiring Communities programme and was being channelled into the areas to best help Breckland/s communities. Now that the pandemic had eased slightly, all needed extra help and therefore this was the ideal opportunity to refocus the Team.

The Community Services Manager explained that the budget line for the two additional 2-year fixed term posts had already been approved with the approval of the Vulnerability programme.

In response to a question the positions would be reviewed after two years.

The Chairman pointed out there were also 49 Members who were in close contact with their communities and could be of great assistance and urged Officers to work with them.

Members were informed that a framework and a structure was being built on how the Team was working with the communities and would be shared with Members.

Councillor Hambidge mentioned the need for training.

The Chairman agreed and pointed out after a Full Council meeting was always the best time for training session as most Members were already in attendance.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded, and it was:

**RESOLVED** that the implementation of the revised staff structure for the current Community Team as detailed in the report be approved.

**8/22 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 5 April at 2pm in the

**Action By**

Anglia Room were noted.

Further dates to be confirmed.

It was also noted that adhoc meetings could be required at times.

The meeting closed at 10.35 am

CHAIRMAN