

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 24 May 2007 at 2.15 pm in the
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr R.F. Goreham (Chairman)	Mrs D.K.R. Irving
Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr A.P. Joel
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mr C.R. Jordan
Mr J.P. Cowen	Mr K. Martin
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe	Mr J.D. Rogers

In Attendance

Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Keith Davis	- Interim Chief Executive
Mark Finch	- Chief Accountant
Sian Hall	- Senior Committee Services Officer
Iain Hook	- Interim Operations Manager (People First & Cabinet)
Ray Johnson	- Asset Manager and Acting Operations Manager (Commercial Services/Environment)
Stephen McGrath	- Principal Committee Officer
Kim Parks	- Performance Officer
Mark Stokes	- Business Transformation Director & Acting Deputy Chief Executive
Mike Tuck	- Interim ICT Manager

Action By

54/07 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed the new Members and advised on the protocol for the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

55/07 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

56/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Messrs S. Chapman-Allen, R. G. Kybird and B. Rose.

57/07 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Mr P. Cowen declared an interest in item 13 (Minute No. 65b/07) the nature of which related to his profession as an architect. Mr Cowen was able to stay for the item and be involved in any discussion.

Action By

58/07 INTERNAL AUDIT

Sandra King, Audit Manager - South Norfolk Council, presented the Annual Report on Internal Audit Activity for 2007/2007.

The report had been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003, the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Amendment) (England) 2006 and the CIPFA Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government 2006. It contained an opinion as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's systems of internal control for 2006/07 comments on Internal Audit Activity in 2006/07 delivered against the Annual Audit Plan and also provided performance information for the Internal Audit Service.

Unfortunately, during April/May 2006 there were major problems with the external contractor regarding the resourcing of the Annual Audit Plan for 2006/07. Resourcing issues caused by staff sickness and turnover were not fully resolved until the Autumn by which time some slippage against planned reviews had occurred. This, in turn, had an adverse impact on performance indicators for the Internal Audit Service and completing individual audit assignments by 31 March 2007. Members were assured that the contractor had recruited staff and now provided a stronger dedicated team.

The overall standards of internal control were satisfactory, based upon the internal audit work undertaken in relation to the 2006/07 Annual Audit Plan. The overall position was that, whilst recommendations had been made to improve procedures and controls in a number of areas, there were no instances in which internal control problems created significant risks for Council activities or services. Furthermore, it was pleasing to note that managers were committed to addressing control issues and/or adopt best practice recommended by Internal Audit, within a 2-5 month timescale of the issue of final audit reports.

Members queried the high priority issues in relation to ICT, in particular, the need for an IT Disaster Recovery Plan. ICT was of paramount importance when considering the recommendations from the Project CREATE team. There were also concerns with regard to the ICT Management situation as the current Interim ICT Manager would shortly be leaving Breckland.

In response the ICT Manager stated that a new short-term Interim ICT Manager would be replacing himself and plans were in place to recruit a full-time member of staff for this post.

With regard to the ICT Disaster Recovery Plan this Plan was in place and was tested on a regular basis. However, what was missing was the documentation to prove that all these assessments were in place. Without the documented proof the Audit Assessors could not state categorically that the ICT systems were in place.

Further to this the risk associated with using 3 sites would shortly be reduced as the servers from Cardiff would be moved to Thetford at little extra cost.

Action By

RECOMMEND to Cabinet to recommend to Full Council:

- (1) To receive and note the Annual Report of the Audit Manager.
- (2) To note that the overall standards of internal control were satisfactory during 2006/07.
- (3) To note that the satisfactory opinion on internal control is taken forward into the Council's Statement on Internal Control for 2006/07.
- (4) To note that initial feedback on the effectiveness of Internal Audit indicates enhancements are being made to service delivery and that closer adherence to the Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the United Kingdom is currently ongoing.

59/07 STATEMENT OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The Chief Accountant and Section 151 Officer presented the Statement of Internal Control (SIC) and the review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit.

The statement had been prepared using evidence gathered internally while reviewing controls, as well as using the work of the internal auditor to review the operation of key controls, and findings from external audit reports. The SIC reflects the findings of this review, and recommendations for making the internal control environment more robust, as well as comments made by the Audit manager in her annual report.

With regard to the lack of documentary evidence in certain service areas Members were informed that this would be addressed and would be place in the near future.

Members discussed the issue of the Police requesting funding from Breckland Council for projects. It was agreed that this issue would be subject to a review through the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

RECOMMEND to Cabinet to recommend to Full Council to approve the Statement of Internal Control and the review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit.

60/07 ANNUAL AUDIT INSPECTION LETTER

The Chairman queried the reason why the Annual Audit Inspection Letter had been presented to Cabinet before the Commission.

In response the Interim Chief Executive stated that there was a timing issue in relation to when the Audit Commission could present the report.

Action By

The main messages for the Council were as follows:-

- Breckland Council had a strong focus on improvement. 70% of Performance Indicators had improved which was above the average of 58% and 42% were in the best quartile which was above the average of 31%.
- Local people were getting some high quality services, especially in benefits and were experiencing improved access to services and information and overall customer satisfaction was improving.
- The impact of migrant workers on the local area had been recognised and steps had been taken to integrate them into the local communities.
- Business and improvement plans matched Council priorities and robust performance management assisted delivery. Capacity had recently been enhanced by key partnerships with both Parkwood Leisure and Capita.
- Strategic Housing was not improving and Cultural Services were judged to be 'poor' in a recent inspection.
- There was a lack of engaging and consulting well with older people.
- Risk management, although improving was not fully integrated with performance management framework and annual delivery plans.
- Senior management capacity had been stretched although this should be resolved when the new Chief Executive takes up his post.
- The Council made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ending 31 March 2006, except for the failure to put arrangements in place to manage its significant business risks.
- Overall corporate governance arrangements were satisfactory but further work was necessary to develop risk management arrangements.

Many of the issues referred to in the report had either been resolved or work was currently being undertaken to resolve the issue and Members were informed that the Audit Manager understood that there was a timing issue with the release of the Audit Inspection Letter and not all improvements could be included within the statement.

RESOLVED that the Annual Audit Inspection Letter be noted.

Action By

61/07 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANELS

(a) **Panel 2 - Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2007**

(i) Local Strategic Partnership Inclusion Strategy – Progress Report (Minute No. 20/07)

The Chairman of the Panel advised that they had received an interesting and informative presentation from Kevin Ambrose of Ambrose Associates Consultancy Limited who had been appointed to develop the Social Inclusion Strategy.

(ii) Review of the Council Website and Intranet (Minute No. 21/07)

The Chairman of the Panel advised that there were further improvements being made to the Council's website.

Members were advised that the Modern.gov system had recently 'gone live' and would provide easier access to committee documentation.

(iii) Adoption

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 2 held on 13 April 2007 be adopted.

62/07 WORK PROGRAMME

(a) **Current Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that following a monitoring exercise at the Watton Horse Fair a report would be forthcoming in July.

With regard to the Dog Warden Service Review a small Working Party had been set-up but the work had not yet been completed. It was therefore agreed that the report should come forward direct to the Commission rather than organise another meeting of the Working Party.

It was agreed that the Police and Funding Issue be placed on the Work Programme for Policy Development and Review Panel 2.

Members agreed that there should be a review of the elections incorporating the count and all other aspects of the election process including polling stations. It was agreed that this issue should be reviewed as soon as possible as Keith Davis, Chief Executive and Returning Officer, would be leaving on 31 July 2007. It was therefore suggested that a Task and Finish Group be set-up to include Mr K. Gilbert, Mrs S. Howard-Alpe, Mrs S. Matthews and Mr G. Bambridge. The first task would be to discuss the issues in relation to the count followed by all other election issues.

Action By

RESOLVED that

- (1) the report regarding the Dog Warden Service Review be presented to the Commission;
- (2) the Policy and Funding Issue be placed on the Work Programme for Policy Development and Review Panel 2; and
- (3) a Task and Finish Group be set-up comprising Mr K. Gilbert, Mrs S. Howard Alpe, Mrs S. Matthews and Mr G. Bambridge to review the election count in the first instance followed by all aspect of the elections process.

(b) Forward Plan

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Big Lottery Children's Play would be discussed by Policy Development and Review Panel 3.

With regard to queries relating to Section 106 Agreements Members were advised that Policy Development and Review Panel 1 were in the process of reviewing all matters relating to planning. Furthermore, it had been agreed to the General Purposes Committee to recruit a Section 106 Officer.

(c) Member Issues

These were discussed as part of Minute No. 62a/07.

63/07 LOCAL PERFORMANCE PLAN 2007-08

The Performance Officer presented the Local Performance Plan for 2007/08 and requested that Members recommend that Cabinet recommend the approval of the document by Full Council.

A Member queried the Performance Indicator to increase the Breckland Household Income to £18,000 and was informed that the last figure published as £16,000 so this would be an expected increase of £2,000.

64/07 PUBLIC TOILETS - REVIEW UPDATE

The Asset Manager and Acting Operations Manager (Commercial Services/Environment) advised Members of the current negotiations with regard to transferring Public Toilets to the Town Councils.

It was originally agreed to transfer both the Public Toilets together with Open Space but the Open Space would now be dealt separately by Joe Liggett, Senior Leisure Manager.

Members were informed that the report would be presented to Cabinet in July.

Action By

65/07 PROJECT CREATE TASK AND FINISH PANEL

(a) Appointment of Members for 2007/08

It was agreed that the Project CREATE Task and Finish Group Membership should be comprised of Mrs S. Howard-Alpe, Mrs D. Irving, Mr C. Jordan, Mr A. Byrne, Mr R. F. Goreham and one Independent Member to be confirmed.

RESOLVED that the Membership of the Project CREATE Task and Finish Group be as follows:

Mrs S. Howard-Alpe, Mrs D. Irving, Mr C. Jordan, Mr A. Byrne, Mr R. F. Goreham and one Independent Member to be confirmed.

(b) Minutes - 14 May 2007

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group presented the minutes and advised that the recommendations of the report had been modified by the Group which were in-turn accepted by Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed minutes of the Project CREATE Task and Finish Group held on the 14 May 2007 be adopted.

66/07 NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 5 July 2007.

The meeting closed at 4.25 pm

CHAIRMAN