

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**Held on Thursday, 7 October 2010 at 2.15 pm in the  
The Village Hall, Mundford**

**PRESENT**

Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr A.P. Joel
Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr K. Martin
Councillor Claire Bowes	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr B. Rose
Mr R.F. Goreham (Vice-Chairman)	

**Also Present**

Lady Fisher

**In Attendance**

Stephen McGrath	- Member Services Manager
Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Mark Stokes	- Deputy Chief Executive
Robert Walker	- Director - Community Services
Andrew Grimley	- Principal Environmental Health Officer
Darryl Smith	- Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Enabling)
Kay Wilcox	- Technical Officer, Environmental Health
Roger Wilkin	- Interim Environmental Services Manager

**85/10 MINUTES**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2010 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**86/10 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr S. Chapman-Allen, Mrs D. Irving and Mr R. Kybird. Cllr C. Bowes and Mr G. Bambridge were in attendance as substitutes.

**87/10 URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**88/10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Mr Gilbert and Mr Rogers declared a personal interest in Agenda item 11 (b) (Watton Parking Task and Finish Group) by virtue of being Watton Town Councillors.

**89/10 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

Lady K Fisher and Mr SG Bambridge were in attendance.

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**90/10 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE**

Lady Kay Fisher, Executive Member for Environmental Well Being and Communications, had been invited to attend the meeting to update Members on the key ongoing issues and policies within her portfolio and to answer any questions.

She began her presentation by stating that she was proud to be the Executive Member in charge of two of the most public facing departments (rubbish collection and the Call Centre) in the Council. In addition, her portfolio also covered Marketing and Communications which was responsible for all our relationships with the media (local, national and international).

The total budget for her portfolio is £5.3m; which is made up of £1.159m for Customers Services, £3.7m in Environmental Services, and £450,000 for Marketing and Communications. To date, this financial year, there had been a £200,000 under spend, 31.7% of which was down to timing and staff vacancies.

Lady Kay Fisher stated that the Marketing and Communications Department had really taken off, headed up by the Assistant Director of Communications and Communities. They had recently been involved in the media enquiries for the revised smoking policy. Other achievements included the redesign of Breckland Voice, refreshing the website, market research to identify the priorities of local residents and the development of Social Media.

The Customer Service and Contact Centres provide public access to our services, so it is important that they are efficient and well run. The early problems are many calls receiving an engaged tone have now been resolved, with the average down from 70% to 24% and an average wait of thirty seconds which is good for call centres.

Further ways to improve service provision in future include making more staff available at peak times, and an investment in technology to upgrade the telephony system and server. The professionalism of the staff is to be commended, and Lady Kay Fisher invited Members to either act as a mystery shopper or attend the Contact Centre to listen to calls. All views on how the service operates – both positive and negative – would be welcome.

Despite that, given the financial constraints the authority is facing, a detailed strategy on a way forwards or indeed backwards is required. It is true that urgent improvements have to be made in-house, including a better interface with some departments, more protocols and better training throughout the Council. Likewise, it would be a good time to consider providing call centre expertise to the wider market - including other councils, our ARP partners, statutory providers and even small businesses. Members would need to determine whether this was something that we wanted to invest in and promote, or do we just want to join in with other providers.

The Customer Service Centres in our market towns were another opportunity for us to engage with the public. Thetford and the new facility in Thetford are thriving, but the offices in Attleborough, Watton

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and Swaffham are less busy, and thus more costly. The future of these facilities would need to be discussed after the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review on 20 October 2010.

One of the most challenging issues that Members face is refuse collection and pollution, mostly litter. The challenging targets for waste performance have slipped slightly due to the recession and people buying less, thus recycling less. A decision was made that it was not economic for the authority to invest in additional collection services such as food waste, or a kerbside collection. However, the village hall recycling centres and WEEE electrical days (when over 30 tonnes were collected) have proven extremely popular.

Likewise, the contract with our contractor, Serco, is being reviewed by Members and officers alike. It is intended to provide more biodiversity in public open spaces, and different ways to connect with the public and educate them about recycling and saving energy.

A Green Agenda Panel has been instigated to promote Green Initiatives throughout the Council, which along with the work being undertaken by the Pride in Breckland team (e.g. The Wensum Valley Project, plastic bottle bid to the Guinness Book of records, etc) is very exciting. REV Active has been engaged to survey our energy usage and waste management in-house, to learn about energy saving appliances, develop energy saving solutions to properties old and new (and we will be visiting the Eco House in Thetford shortly).

The Green Panel members are not debating hot issues on climate change, or delivering pronouncements on the merits of wind turbines, ground source heat pumps, solar panels, anaerobic digesters, etc; but are looking at ways to change behaviours in order to reduce energy costs and promote more sustainable living. No matter which Government is in power, some form of carbon or energy tax is imminent in order to manage the earth's resources more proactively.

This just provides a flavour of my exciting life at Breckland Council.

During discussion of the presentation, the following comments were made:-

- A discussion ensued as to why Wayland Hall was not being used. It was pointed out that the disabled access needed to be improved, albeit work was already underway to rectify this.
- With regard to the One Stop Bus, there was a need to improve communication as to when the bus was visiting a particular locality. Indeed, last month it broke down and nobody was told that the vehicle would not be visiting that week. It was felt that publicity through posters and local magazines should be used to advertise an excellent service.
- Likewise, the route for the bus should be reviewed. It currently visits villages that have excellent internet access, but not other communities which cannot access broadband.
- The Department of Communities and Local Government was currently consulting with local authorities regarding council

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newsletters and magazines. It is expected that councils would be limited to a maximum of four each year, whereas we currently provide six to our local residents. We would feed into this consultation process.

- The use of the Contact Centre to provide a service and generate income from public and private sector companies, like the Attleborough GP surgeries, should be explored. In response, Lady Fisher explained that before this could be implemented, there was a need to improve the technology and performance of the team. The staff were excellent, but there is a need to drive better performance.
- Likewise, it was felt that these organisations could be offered some space within Breckland Voice in which to publicise their services to local residents.

Lady Kay Fisher was then thanked for attending, providing an interesting presentation and answering Members questions.

**91/10 HOUSING STRATEGY 2008-13**

Members were asked to consider and adopt the Housing Strategy for Breckland for the period 2010-2013. It was explained that this document would cover the strategic housing functions for the authority and would replace the previous strategy which had been adopted in 2005.

The Principal Housing Officer informed Members that the Council had adopted numerous strategies and policies in the past five years. In addition, responsibility for the Housing Register and allocations had been contracted out to ARPT.

It was pointed out that the new localism agenda for the new Coalition Government would shape the future provision of housing. At this stage, however, there was insufficient information available as to how this would affect the authority and also the grants that we used to provide prevention services.

The Principal Housing Officer then took Members through the key parts of the strategy and highlighted the changes made at Executive Board. In addition, the document would be corrected for typing mistakes and a glossary of terms added.

During discussion of the report and strategy, the following comments were made:-

- The localism agenda needs to be different at a village level compared to the district level in order to reflect local needs within an area. It was pointed out that the Housing Strategy has to reflect the needs of the whole district, and then applied at a local level (e.g. provision of affordable housing).
- A Member highlighted that a development in Carbrooke had caused numerous problems in that locality. In response, the Principal Housing Officer replied that the local Housing

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Associations were now trying to address the causes of the problems.

- A discussion ensued about the infrastructure capacity to support additional development in some towns. It was pointed out that some villages had both the capacity and local interest to provide small developments. It was felt important to invite the appropriate utility companies to attend a future meeting of the Commission to discuss this issue
- A number of Members highlighted the key pieces of intervention and support that were being provided by the Housing Department. It was felt important that these should continue to be provided, even if the grant funding was cut or reduced.
- Given the stagnant housing market, there was a need to bring empty homes back into occupation. The Principal Housing Officer gave a brief resume of powers available to the authority if a property was left unoccupied or was falling into disrepair.

It was therefore **RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET** to adopt the revised Breckland Housing Strategy 2010-2013.

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It was further **RESOLVED** to invite all the appropriate utility companies to attend a future meeting to discuss the infrastructure requirements to deliver the additional housing needs for Breckland.

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**92/10 NORFOLK HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Mr Labouchere was not in attendance to present his report.

The report was noted.

**93/10 SCRUTINY OF FUTURE ICT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Member Services Manager presented the report which requested Members to set up a new Joint Audit and Scrutiny Panel to review the provision of ICT equipment and facilities for Elected Members ahead of the District Council Elections in May 2011, with a view to completing the investigation by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission be elected:

- P Cowen
- G Bambridge
- C Bowes.

**94/10 SHARED SERVICES**

In the absence of the Director of Corporate Resources, the Interim Environmental Services Manager gave an update on Shared Services. He explained that Maxine O'Mahony was Project Sponsor and he was Project Manager.

A Project Board had been established incorporating the Leader and two

Executive Members, together with the Joint Chief Executive and Directors from each Council. A Project Team was working alongside the Project Board to deliver the new Management Structure.

It was explained that the first stage of the review was to deliver a minimum 35% saving in overall management costs from 2011/12. The process for achieving this cut was explained to Members. This would enable improved service delivery and a rationalisation of the commissioning/client functions.

During discussion of the presentation, Members were advised that the General Purposes Committee was responsible for agreeing the new management structure, with any financial implications above budget provision having to be agreed by Full Council. The role of Scrutiny would be to ensure that service delivery was being maintained by the proposals.

It was agreed that the Chairman and Member Services Manager discuss with the Director of Corporate Resources how the Shared Management Structure would be scrutinised in future.

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**95/10 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

(a) Contaminated Land Task & Finish Group

In March 2010, a Task and Finish Group was established to review the original strategy in light of an internal audit report and the need to identify the council's new priorities for investigating contaminated land and the procedures to be used in prioritising work activities taking account of the resources available.

A revised strategy has now been produced – see attached. The draft document recommends that the Council's objectives and priorities are set as follows:-

- The strategy to be consistent with the minimum requirements of the statutory guidance
- Identify high risk sites to undergo a detailed risk assessment regardless of ownership
- Determine whether any sites are contaminated land
- Ensure that remediation is carried out by the appropriate person
- Review redevelopment of sites as consultee to the Planning Department and make recommendations to assist in ensuring that any land contamination is dealt with at the time of new development to ensure it is suitable for its intended use
- Minimise the Council's risk of obtaining new liabilities associated with land acquisition of further land.

Under proposals in the strategy, each site that is considered to have a potential for contamination would have to undergo a six stage

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process. This is in order to make a decision on whether the site should be determined as contaminated land under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The six stages, which are identified in the strategy, are:-

- Initially identify potentially contaminated sites
- Establish the potential hazards of sites
- Carry out a preliminary desk study to establish the potential risk for each site working in turn through the high, medium and low hazard sites
- Undertake a detailed desk study to further quantify this risk
- Carry out intrusive investigation
- Determine whether the site is contaminated land and needs remediation.

With regard to timescales for completing this work, the key deadlines are:-

- Within 12 months – to have undertaken preliminary desk studies for all sites which have a high potential hazard score. There are currently less than 20 in this category.
- Within 36 months – produce the risk score for the high potential sites to identify the sites with the highest risk; undertake the detailed desk study for the sites with the highest risk scores; and begin the preliminary desk studies for the sites with a medium potential hazard score.

It was confirmed that the document would need to be subject to consultation with appropriate external organisations before adoption.

During discussion of the report and strategy, Members sought clarification on the number of contaminated sites within Breckland, how these would be inspected, who is responsible for funding this work and the process of dealing with contaminated sites.

Accordingly, the Commission **RECOMMENDS TO CABINET** that the attached revised Strategy and Work Plan, as detailed in the draft revised contaminated land inspection strategy, be approved.

(b) **Parking Task & Finish Group**

The Commission received a comprehensive report from the Task and Finish Group which had been set up to examine the on and off street parking provisions in Watton.

The primary directive had been to establish if improvements could be made in respect of car parking provision in Watton to Breckland residents, businesses and visitors.

The Task and Finish Group would continue its work to examine the

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parking provisions in all five market towns, moving next to Swaffham.

The Commission supported the majority of the recommendations in the report, only amending recommendation 8 to incorporate the Town Council's observation about allowing parking on the High Street on Wednesdays from approximately the stretch from Barclays Bank to Lings.

Accordingly, the Commission: **RECOMMENDS TO CABINET THAT:**

- 1) The Council retains its policy of providing free parking in all three Breckland-owned car parks in Watton.
- 2) The Council adopts parking orders to cover the Goddard's Court and Thetford Road car parks in Watton with a maximum 2 hours period of parking for business hours.
- 3) The Kittell Close car park be retained as a long stay facility without any time limit.
- 4) The Council stipulates a minimum default fine of £30 for infringement of the short term parking orders.
- 5) The Council seek a partner agency to undertake off street parking enforcement in the Thetford Road and Goddard's Court car parks at an early opportunity.
- 6) Norfolk Constabulary resumes operational and regular on-street enforcement both in the High Street as well as other residential areas fringing the commercial centre of Watton at an early opportunity in order to increase turnover of parking spaces and aid traffic flow.
- 7) Breckland Council, Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Constabulary liaise over de-criminalisation of on-street parking in Watton in a multi-agency approach, seeking a transfer of responsibility and action enabled through joined-up thinking and use of resources.
- 8) Norfolk County Council – as the Highways Authority – undertakes a full assessment of restricting parking to only one side of the High Street only (with parking to be permitted on the High Street on Wednesdays from approximately the stretch from Barclays Bank to Lings), in order to facilitate the traffic flow in future, such an assessment to also include the extension of the bus bays to accommodate two buses, the possible relocation of the existing pedestrian crossing and take into account any relocation of the taxi rank.
- 9) Breckland not seek to implement any resident parking permit schemes in the town as the evident issues in regard to residential parking can be best addressed through on-street enforcement.
- 10) Officers speak to the local bus operators and Norfolk County Council to request that any vehicles being temporarily parked up should utilise the dedicated bus parking spaces at Kittell

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Close car park rather than being parked on narrow residential streets.	
11) Breckland Council undertakes remedial works to bring the Thetford Road car park up to an acceptable standard in terms of surfacing and white lining as a matter of urgency.	SU
12) The appropriate agency ensures grounds maintenance is properly carried out in respect of ensuring that approach signage is free from obstruction from overgrown foliage.	
13) An action plan be devised in order to track implementation of the recommendations and report progress into the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in June 2011.	
<b>96/10 <u>SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM)</u></b>	
None.	
<b>97/10 <u>COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM)</u></b>	
None.	
<b>98/10 <u>WORK PROGRAMME</u></b>	
The Scrutiny Officer presented this item.	
The only changes required to the programme were:-	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To invite the Chief Executive to attend the meeting in February 2011.</li><li>• To invite the various utility companies to attend a future meeting (as per minute 91/10)</li><li>• To ask the Car Parking Task and Finish Panel to begin a review of on and off street parking in Swaffham, with a view to reporting back to this Commission on 24 March 2011.</li></ul>	MB
<b>99/10 <u>NEXT MEETING</u></b>	
The next meeting of the Commission would be held in the Town Hall, Attleborough on 18 November 2010.	

The meeting closed at 5.00 pm

CHAIRMAN