

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 5 January 2012 at 2.00 pm in the
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

PRESENT

Councillor C Bowes (Substitute Member)	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr C G Carter	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mr T. J. Jermy (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mr A.P. Joel	Mr B. Rose

Also Present

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris
Mr A.C. Stasiak	Mr W. R. J. Richmond

In Attendance

Terry Huggins	- Chief Executive
Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Teresa Smith	- Committee Officer (Scrutiny & Projects)
David Spencer	- Joint Deputy Planning Manager
Ben Wood	- Business Development Manager

1/12 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2011 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2/12 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies had been received from Mr P Cowen and Mrs D Irving.

Mrs C Bowes was present as substitute for Mrs Irving.

Mr Kybird had sent apologies that he would be late for the meeting (he arrived at 2.30pm).

3/12 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

4/12 DECLARATION OF INTEREST (AGENDA ITEM 4)

Mr R Richmond and Mr W Richmond declared personal interests in Agenda Item 7 by virtue of owning land in the Site Specifics submission.

5/12 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Mr G Bambridge, Mr M Kiddle-Morris, Mr W Richmond and Mr A Stasiak were in attendance.

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6/12 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Mr Stasiak had been invited to update the Commission on his Portfolio. He was accompanied by his Executive Support Member, William Richmond.

Mr Stasiak said that he worked with able and forward thinking officers who dealt with a wide range of areas including Internal Communications, Marketing, the Print Room, Performance and Risk.

Mr W Richmond explained that the Print Room had been reviewed in September to determine whether the service should be outsourced, improved or retained as was. It had been decided that improvements should be made to maximise its potential. New ways of working had been introduced and these included a new procedure for print requests which provided greater accountability.

Mr Stasiak said that there had been significant work regarding Shared Management since the Election and the Performance and Business Improvement Teams had been at the forefront of that work. Monitoring performance was critical for joint working and the Performance Plus system used by South Holland had replaced the TENS system to enable both authorities to access information from any location.

Each authority had its own priorities and the challenge for the Portfolio was to provide a co-ordinated approach that measured performance and took residents needs into consideration. He was pleased with the direction of travel, but there was still a lot of work to do.

He went on to give an update on the work programme:

Completed

A new Business Development Manager had been recruited
Food and Health & Safety services had been reviewed
Housing Advice and Homelessness services had been reviewed
Front Office optimisation had been completed.

In Progress

The Environmental Protection service was being reviewed
A strategy was being developed to market key products of the Council to generate income if possible
Benefit realisation was being developed

To Do (January to April)

Conclude the Environmental Health reviews
Review Private sector Housing
Implement new ways of working

Everything was being looked at and questioned to find improvements and make savings.

Mr Rogers asked if there was any chance that the Council would purchase development land for industry as the current owners were not selling small plots. He explained that there were 646 houses being built in the vicinity and if the Council bought the land and offered it to small businesses it could provide employment opportunities for the residents

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of the new houses and cut out the need for them to travel to work.

Mrs Matthews said that she was impressed with the Contact Centre. She asked for clarification of the changes to the print room and also for an explanation of the terminology used.

Mr Stasiak advised that previously the print room had operated on a kind of 'ad-hoc' system with print requests not always being attributed to specific departments. The new procedure had addressed that problem. He asked the Business Development Manager to explain the terminology further.

The Business Development Manger explained that the reviews that were being done were led by the respective Service Managers, supported by the Business Improvement Team. They were looking at systems and ways of working to find efficiencies to make savings and at the same time enable officers to do their job more effectively. With regard to Environmental Health, the changes included upgrading the ICT system and implementing mobile working.

Benefits realisation meant knowing how the Council was performing, how much it was spending and how much it was saving as a result of the reviews.

Mr Bambridge asked how much money could be made from the Print Room and Mr Stasiak said that they were actively seeking additional work from outside the Council. Officers were working on that and the possibility of providing a service to Town and Parish Councils was being investigated. However, Mr W Richmond advised that at the last Town & Parish Council Forum flyers had been handed out advertising that opportunity and the response had been 'luke warm'. He asked Members to pass on any ideas they might have to maximise the print room's potential.

Mr Joel asked if the website was being used to advertise the offer to provide a printing service. He also asked if it was possible for the Council to provide printing for the upcoming Police Commissioner's election.

The Chief Executive advised that Election printing was a very specialised and controlled function with only about four Printers nationally being allowed to do that work.

Mr Stasiak also pointed out that there was a fine line to be drawn as every printing job brought in could impact on business out in the community. He was anxious to generate income, but he did not want to be in competition with the people that Members were elected to serve.

The Chairman thanked Mr Stasiak and Mr W Richmond for their presentation.

7/12 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK AND CORE STRATEGY
(AGENDA ITEM 7)

Mr Kiddle-Morris, Executive Member for Assets and Strategic Development introduced David Spencer as the new Joint Deputy Planning Manager, joining Breckland from Capita.

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The Joint Deputy Planning Manager explained the background to his update. At the Cabinet meeting in November one recommendation of the Annual Monitoring Report had been to start work on the review of the Core Strategy in 2012. The Strategy had been adopted in 2009 and was due to be reviewed on a three yearly basis.

Since the adoption of the Core Strategy there had been some significant changes and these would be taken into account during the review. These included:

- the Thetford Area Action Plan which included proposals for 5,000 new homes (reduced from 6,500)
- the Government's draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- the removal of the Regional planning process
- the review of the European Habitats regulations by DEFRA (at the request of the Secretary of State)
- the effect on viability of on-going infrastructure work

Local Policies would still need to be backed up by local evidence and it was important that the Core Strategy review did not damage the confidence of communities, infrastructure providers and developers in the current LDF. The review would involve consultation and conclude with an Examination in Public by an Independent Inspector.

In the short term, the timeframe for a Review was influenced by the committed work programme with included:

- the Examination in Public of the Thetford Area Action Plan (1st week of March)
- progressing the Attleborough Area Action Plan
- progressing the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy)

In the early summer the final version of the National Planning Policy Framework would be available, as would the Government's Review on the European Habitats, both of which would provide certainty for the way forward with a Core Strategy Review which was likely to form the new Local Plan under the emerging NPPF.

Mr Joel congratulated the Deputy Planning Manager on his new job. He asked when provisions in the new Localism Act relating to Parish Councils could be implemented.

Mr Kiddle-Morris explained that within the Localism Act was the Neighbourhood Plan which could be put together by a single Parish Council or a group of parishes. The Plan could detail what houses, factories, etc a parish wanted. It had to be pro-growth, conform to the Local Plan and would be subject to an independent examination. Once those requirements had been met the Plan would need to receive at least 50% of the vote in a local referendum to be adopted.

Mr Bambridge was concerned that it would be very difficult for small parishes to develop a Neighbourhood Plan, even if they grouped together, as they might lack expertise and might not be able to afford the costs. He also questioned whether current restrictions such as

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Special Areas of Conservation would prevent growth.

Mr Kiddle-Morris agreed and said that the Council had not been consulted on the Government's Review of Habitat Directives. The Core Strategy and Site Specifics both included a Stone Curlew buffer which had been supported by two Independent Inspectors. He thought it would be interesting to see what happened.

He confirmed that it would be difficult for small parishes to put together a Neighbourhood Plan. The Council might be expected to provide assistance but that would have cost implications. He thought it likely that a lot of parishes would not progress a plan because of the amount of work involved.

Mr Bambridge hoped that, despite the difficulties, the Council would be able to provide support in return for a contribution, as the officers had the knowledge and the work would be the same for most plans.

Mr Kiddle-Morris recommended Members should visit the CLG website (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/introductionneighbourplanning?view=Standard>) to see the documents associated with the Neighbourhood Plan. However, until the NPPF was in place to give a steer on sustainability it would be very difficult to process a Neighbourhood Plan.

Mr Kybird asked if the Council should actively seek to be consulted on the Habitats work and Mr Kiddle-Morris asked the Deputy Planning Manager to consider that.

The Chairman asked to what extent newly completed dwellings would be factored in to the review of the Core Strategy. The Deputy Planning Manager explained that under the previous Regional plan system, the timeframe for planning included an element of what had already been built and what remained to be allocated. Under the new system there was a degree of flexibility concerning the period of the Plan but past performance on planning delivery would influence the Review. The key starting question for a Core Strategy Review would be "what is the starting point and where should the Plan run up to". Officers would need to look at past delivery as well as considering emerging household need from latest projections and local evidence.

Mr R Richmond congratulated the Deputy Planning Manager and said that he had enjoyed the presentation. He asked if there would be any opportunities for growth in villages not previously identified as Service Centres.

The Deputy Planning Manager advised that the five criteria previously set for growth villages could be reviewed. It would be up to each Local Authority to determine which facilities were required to support sustainable growth based on local evidence.

Mr Kiddle-Morris noted that under the previous regime, sustainable development meant that residents had to be able to walk or cycle to access services including work. In the countryside, where there was little or no public transport, a car was essential and sustainability needed to be defined in a rural context. Other villages would be looked at besides those already identified as Service Centres. He also

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suggested that villages could be clustered together to provide the necessary facilities as that would still cut down on travelling.

The Chairman asked that towns should also be looked at concerning public transport issues as they had the same problems as villages.

Mr Kiddle-Morris concluded by saying that Breckland was one of only 36 Local Authorities with a Core Strategy in place. That gave it protection and once the NPPF was approved, the Core Strategy could morph into a Local Plan.

The Chairman thanked the Executive Member and Deputy Planning Manager for their presentation.

**8/12 DISCRETIONARY AND NON-DISCRETIONARY SERVICES
(AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Business Development Manager presented the report which provided a commentary to prompt discussion. The work summarised in the appendices had been rigorous but did contain flaws and might raise more questions than it answered.

It had been very difficult to get answers as there was no definitive list of Discretionary and non-Discretionary services. He had concluded that it would be difficult to legally define services for budget purposes. It was not a black and white issue, as the removal of one service could potentially impede the rest of the Council's functions.

As a starting point he suggested that the Council needed to look at what was important for the area, to look at the Service Plan and to decide what was the minimum they wanted to achieve and what resources were available.

In response to a question from Mr Kybird it was confirmed that Car Parking was the responsibility of Asset Management.

Councillor Bowes asked if the Council charged for private water supply analysis and also what the annual cost of the MTF Programme Management was (referring to the items listed on page 13 of the supplement).

It was agreed that the Development Services Manager would provide more information direct to Councillor Bowes. Mr Kiddle-Morris was able to advise that the MTF Programme Management was funded by Growth Point money.

Mr Bambridge was glad that the report had prompted discussion. He said that as the Council represented the community it needed to consider what residents wanted and needed.

The Chairman noted that some discretionary functions were covered by grant funding and other income.

The report was otherwise noted.

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9/12 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS (AGENDA ITEM 9)

(a) Housing Task & Finish Group

The Minutes of the first meeting had been tabled. The Chairman of the Task & Finish Group said it had been a basic 'setting out' meeting. The next meeting would be held on 20 January 2012.

10/12 SHARED SERVICES (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Chief Executive had been invited to provide an update on Shared Management with South Holland and to advise Members of progress regarding Great Yarmouth.

He was pleased with the way that sharing with South Holland was bedding in. It was less than 12 months since Shared Management had commenced and in that time they had come a long way. They had supported both Councils in refreshing their Corporate Plans. They had also supported the budget preparation at both Councils acknowledging the need to find savings. To that end the service reviews were on-going in an effort to drive down costs.

There had been one joint meeting of the Councils which, due to poor weather, had had a lower turnout than expected, but it had been a successful, informal event.

The Chief Executive, together with the Leaders of both Councils, was doing work with the Local Government Association using the Partnership as an example of Good Practice.

However, there were still areas to be worked on and there was no complacency. There was more fine tuning to be done and two specific issues had been identified as:

- KOGs (Key Managers mostly employed wholly by one authority but taking on additional responsibility) – more support to be provided
- Members' expectations concerning availability and contactability – trying to improve. Visibility was also being addressed by trying to ensure that Senior Managers were available on Council meeting days, etc.

Work with Great Yarmouth was on-going. The timeframe had been delayed, but all three Leaders were still committed.

Great Yarmouth had elections every year for one third of their Members and would therefore be having an election in May. Originally it had been hoped to have the whole process completed by then, but as it would be necessary for all three Councils to hold two Council meetings; one to agree in Principle, subject to a 30 day consultation period, then a second meeting to approve the proposals, it had been decided that that timeframe was unduly hasty. It had therefore been agreed to have the first Council meeting early in March and the second meeting after the consultation and election, in May, for the final sign off.

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It was also considered appropriate to align those Council meetings and so special Council meetings would be arranged at all three authorities for early March. In the meantime at Breckland the proposals would be presented to LJCC on 26 January 2012, then General Purposes, then Cabinet.

Mr Bambridge thanked the Chief Executive for an interesting and helpful update. He thought that communications had already improved recently and asked what had been the biggest problem with joining up and did the Chief Executive think that would be exacerbated by the expansion.

The Chief Executive said there had been no big problems. Having to manage two sets of Members with different expectations had been a challenge which he thought he was getting better at.

The Chairman asked if there would be any correlation of calendars for the three Councils and the Chief Executive acknowledged that there had been liaison with South Holland for the 2012/13 calendar to avoid clashes particularly with the Planning Committee.

Mr Rogers asked about car park charges. He wanted to know how much it would cost to install the ticket machines and how long it would be before it showed a profit. He suggested that if car park charges were being considered because the Council was short of money it might be better to add 10 pence to the Council Tax bill instead.

The Chief Executive did not know the answer to the detailed questions but said that a reasonable assessment had suggested that comparable charges to other Local Authorities would make the car parks break-even. The suggestion being made to Cabinet was that they provide the resources to allow a detailed business case to determine how charging might work. However, even if the business case supported the ability to cover costs from charging, it would only be to pay the costs of maintaining the car parks. Also, it would still be the Members' choice to decide whether it was an option they wished to choose. Members would be provided with alternative options and provided with the information to allow them to make an informed decision.

The Chairman suggested that any further questions on that subject should be put at the Cabinet meeting. He thanked the Chief Executive for his update.

11/12 HEALTH SCRUTINY (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 11)

Mr Kybird confirmed that no meetings had been held.

12/12 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 12)

None.

13/12 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM)(AGENDA ITEM 13)

None.

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14/12 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 14)

Mr Kiddle-Morris was invited to provide the Executive Member update for the next meeting.

15/12 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 15)

The arrangements for the next meeting on 9 February 2012 were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.15 pm

CHAIRMAN