

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**Held on Thursday, 4 April 2013 at 2.00 pm in the  
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Mr T. J. Jermy (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr C G Carter	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mrs D.K.R. Irving	Mr S.G. Bambridge (Substitute Member)

**Also Present**

Mrs B Canham	Mrs L.S. Turner
Mr W.H.C. Smith	

**In Attendance**

Helen McAleer	- Senior Committee Officer
Dylan Powles	- Customer Contact Manager
Riana Rudland	- Community Development Manager
Kevin Rump	- ICT & Customer Services Manager
Robert Walker	- Assistant Director of Commissioning

**13/13 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**14/13 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Cowen, Mrs Irving and Mr Rose. Mr Bambridge was in attendance as Substitute for Mr Rose.

**15/13 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

Mrs Canham, Mr Smith and Mrs Turner were in attendance.

**16/13 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Mr Smith, Executive Member for Internal Services had been invited to update the Commission on his Portfolio.

He advised Members that his Portfolio employed more staff than

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any other:

- 65 at the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP)
- 7.69 in the Human Resources Team
- 1½ for ICT (the ICT & Customer Services Manager being a shared post with South Holland)
- 20 in the Customer Contact Centre
- 5 at the Dereham Customer Service Centre and
- 4 at the Thetford Customer Service Centre.

The Portfolio had an employee related budget of about £3million for 2013/14. Between 2010/11 and 2012/13 total savings of over £876,000 had been achieved, which was on a par with the Shared Services savings. Further efficiencies were anticipated through the new contract with Norfolk County Council for ICT provision and additional partners and changes at the ARP. He thanked his Directing staff, Managers and Officers for the considerable work done to achieve those savings. He then gave a brief overview of each area of the Portfolio:

ICT

Up until 2010 Steria had provided ICT support under contract. Savings of about £565,000 had been made by bringing that service in-house whilst four options were considered for the way forward. Those options had been:

1. to join with ARP Partners
2. to go with NCC
3. to keep in-house; or
4. to join with Compass Point (used by South Holland)

NCC had been chosen and the Council now had access to 250 ICT support staff (in place of the previous 6 or 7) and also access to additional expertise. Six posts had been transferred to NCC and six to West Suffolk, who had taken over ARP ICT responsibility. The NCC contract would be managed by a Governance Board and had a strong Governance Document. It was such a good document that the Executive at NCC wanted to use it as a model throughout the County Council and Mr Smith thanked the ICT & Customer Services Manager for the amount of work he had put into that.

The support function to Members had been replaced and Councillor Bambridge, as e-Champion, was now the point of contact between Members and ICT. The system worked well and saved money.

One Member of staff had been retained and transferred to the Contact Centre to maintain the website. It was noted that although the Portfolio had responsibility for maintaining the website it did not edit the content – that was up to each service

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area.

ARP (Copies of the ARP prospectus were circulated to Members)  
The Partnership had been set up in 2004 by Breckland and Forest Heath. They had both been experiencing significant problems with revenues and benefits. At one time it had taken 100 days to process a claim – that was now down to 7-9 days. The Partnership now consisted of four authorities with two more likely to join shortly. It delivered efficiencies of over £2million per year and over the eight years of its existence there had been an £8.25million saving on revenues and benefits. It was an internationally recognised service and had received delegations from Kosovo and China. It had Beacon status and provided training and support to other Local Authorities.

The ARP had very good staff and Mr Smith particularly mentioned Rod Urquhart (Operations Manager) and Sharon Jones (Head of Shared Service). Sharon currently had a dual role, looking after 'number crunching' and having the strategic overview. At the last meeting of the ARP Joint Committee it had been agreed to put in a Head of Service to relieve Sharon of the strategic role. A new management structure had been agreed which would provide a significant cost reduction although that had not been the primary motive, which had been to transform the service to be more efficient and even better quality.

The ARP was growing more complex and was becoming unwieldy as more Partners joined. Two options were being considered; each Local Authority could take on a particular function or a TECAL company could be created. Some of the technicalities of a TECAL company were explained to Members.

HR and Training

Between 2010/11 and 2012/13 the Council had reduced staffing by 39 posts without performance being adversely affected. The HR Team tried to drive down absenteeism. The level of days lost by sickness per calendar month was very stable, despite significant organisational changes.

(Copies of the Training & Development prospectus were circulated to Members.) Breckland Training Services was a new venture which had been authorised by the General Purposes Committee in October 2012. To date it had done very well and Mr Smith was confident that it would be making a positive contribution to the Council within the year. Training had been provided to other Local Authorities, Town & Parish Councils and the University of East Anglia.

Customer Contact Centre

The Contact Centre took payments of nearly £1million per year and arranged about 3,000 Direct Debits. It dealt with all enquiries at the point of contact and tried to eliminate failure of demand,

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which was when people rang the Council but did not get through. On average it took about 67 seconds for a call to be answered. The year to date figure was skewed by Council Tax bills which had been sent out recently. Generally the abandoned and engaged rate targets were being exceeded.

The Contact Centre dealt with about 150,000 calls per year and 31,000 personal visits. The reception and Out of Hours service had been restructured resulting in savings. Future ambitions were to have a quality assurance system and for the Contact Centre to take on additional work. The Contact Centre Manager had been tasked with obtaining ISO accreditation.

Mr Smith concluded by inviting Members to visit the ARP to see the complex nature of their work.

Mr Gilbert thought that the Training Company was an excellent idea. As a member of the Member Development Panel he encouraged Members to take advantage of the in-house training opportunities.

Mrs Canham was concerned that Contact Centre staff were judged on how long they were on a call and said that speed was not always the way to give customer satisfaction. However, it was confirmed that staff did not have targets for dealing with queries quickly.

Mr Joel asked three questions: Could there be a message on incoming calls to advise where the caller was in the queue? Did the ARP recruit short term staff to deal with high demand and was the Training Service making money?

It was noted that the Council could offer a call back service to save people waiting for long periods but that it did not have the technology to advise callers of the average wait time.

The ARP did take on temporary staff to deal with busy periods.

The Assistant Director for Commissioning explained that the Council was only charging to recover its costs at the moment, not to make a profit. Costs would be covered by the end of the first year and income was being generated. The service was being offered at a very competitive price and due to the trainers' abilities they had a very good reputation and were winning work for the Council.

The Chairman asked why residents could not pay for their Council Tax by cash or credit card and was advised that some people had got into debt using their credit cards which did not reflect well on the Council. Cash was problematic and was too expensive and time consuming for the Council to accept. People were being encouraged to pay by Direct Debit.

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Mr Bambridge advised that it was possible to pay by cash at the Post Office using the barcode on the Council Tax bill.

The Chairman thanked him for that information. He had also been very impressed with the Breckland HR service which had been used by Thetford Town Council. He thanked Mr Smith for his update.

**17/13 CONTACT CENTRES (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

This item had been discussed under Agenda Item 6 above. The item was noted.

**18/13 CCTV AND GRANTS (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Community Development Manager gave Members a brief overview of the reasons behind the changes to the Match Funding process. From feedback received following previous applications it was clear that people found the forms complex and the time taken to make the decision too long.

Under the previous process the Grant Panel had only met quarterly. Applications received immediately following a Panel meeting had to wait three months for the next meeting and if additional information was required that compounded the delay. Larger grants then had to be passed on to the Cabinet cycle which increased the length of time applicants had to wait.

The aim of the new process was to reduce the turnaround from five to six months to an average of eight weeks. That would be achieved by using the SharePoint system. All information would be stored on the website. Applications would be scanned in, scored against priorities and guidance and any additional information could be requested and added to the system. An e-mail would then be sent to all Executive Members. They could log-on, score and comment on the application. The Grant Panel had been scrapped.

After 14 days officers would check the comments and note any conditions requested. Small grants would be approved under Delegated Powers. Large grant applications would go straight to Cabinet.

The final version of the new paperwork was almost ready. There was now just one form for all types of grant distributed by the Council. It could be posted out and there was also a printer-friendly version.

The new system had already been trialled with a few groups and feedback had been positive. The process had been simplified, the Corporate Objectives made clear and the scoring criteria

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explained.

Mr Joel asked if Ward Members would be notified of applications and was advised that a question on the new forms asked for confirmation that Ward Members had been notified. If left blank the form would be returned to the applicant. Ward Members would be e-mailed when an application was received and advised of the likely decision date. Ward Members could then comment and give reasons for their support, or otherwise. It was a good opportunity for community groups to engage with Ward Members.

Mr Bambridge thought it would be good if all applications could be listed on the Members' Page for Members' information as they might be interested in applications from adjoining Wards.

The Executive Member for Localism, Community and Environmental Services said that she would make sure that all Members had a copy of all the paperwork, including the scoring criteria and guidance on meeting targets. She emphasised that Members could get involved and enjoy the publicity of being part of the grant process.

The Chairman noted that the National Lottery reviewed areas they had given money to and wondered if the Council did the same.

The Community Development Manager said that they had not done so to date, but that it was in the work programme to review. The new system would monitor performance against grants awarded to determine if the criteria had been met and what the outcomes had been.

The Community Development Manager advised that cost had been at the forefront of the redesign and officer involvement had been reduced to just one part time post funded from the grant pot. The Finance department could also access the new system which made the process more streamlined.

The Chairman was pleased that the new system made bid submission easier.

The Executive Member for Localism, Community and Environmental Services then moved on to give a verbal update on CCTV. A full written report would be presented to the next meeting.

On 31 July 2012 the Company which provided the Council's CCTV service went into administration and the system had been switched off. Since then the Council had been working with Kings Lynn & West Norfolk (KLWN) under a friendly agreement to reintroduce the service and would shortly be entering into a formal partnership agreement with them.

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The Community Development Manager explained the details. The system had been designed with a main server held off site. When the administrators had taken over they had switched off the system and the Council had had to make a quick decision about what to do. They could have bid for the server, but it used a software system that was not compatible with many other systems. Instead they had forged a relationship with KLWN who operated a CCTV for themselves and others. They had helped out with technical advice.

It had been decided to wait for the results of the Could We Should We survey to determine what residents wanted. From that survey it had been clear that a CCTV system was a priority. Since then work had been on-going to get the system up and running. It was now fully operational in Watton, Attleborough and Dereham but there were still some problems in Swaffham and Thetford where a total of 15 cameras still needed maintenance. Engineers were working hard to address those issues.

There had been BT and transition issues in getting the service restored. The key challenge had been transmitting images. The Community Development Manager thanked the police, as they were now beaming the images from their mast to Kings Lynn and they had provided that service within six weeks of being asked.

It was emphasised that between 31 July and the end of December KLWN had charged nothing for their services and the only costs incurred had been in acquiring new equipment. They were now being paid for maintaining and monitoring the service. KLWN in partnership with Breckland had been involved in more than 40 incidents and the police radio was actively monitored in their control room.

The Chairman said that he had requested the CCTV update as he had concerns about the lack of CCTV in Thetford. He was reassured that the system was being restored. He thanked the Executive Member and the Community Development Manager for their update.

**19/13 HEALTH & SCRUTINY (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

Mr Kybird circulated a diagram of the new organisational set-up of Norfolk Health Scrutiny. Norfolk would continue to operate a Joint Health Scrutiny Panel although it was not a statutory duty. District Council appointees to the Panel had to also be members of the County Scrutiny Panel. There would be regular meetings. Members of the public could attend Panel meetings.

There would be briefing sessions for new County Councillors on the changes to Health Scrutiny and it was suggested that it would be good for the Commission to receive that briefing.

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Mrs Turner was aware that Breckland was touched by three Clinical Commissioning Groups and she had sought guidance on the role of the District Council as it was not appropriate or experienced enough to give advice. Mr Kybird said that it was difficult to know the level of involvement until Policy was set.

Mr Bambridge was aware that one of the concerns of members of the public was the ambulance service. He asked what was happening to it.

Mr Kybird confirmed that the ambulance service had been scrutinised twice in the past nine months by the Scrutiny Panel. Any change in the type or level of provision had to come to the Panel to ensure equitable provision across the whole County. In response to concerns about ambulances queuing outside the hospital the Chief Executive had reported to the Panel and said that changes were being made.

Mrs Canham said that people that lived on the edge of the district might come under Suffolk Health Authority. She asked if there was any joint scrutiny and was advised that there was, particularly for mental health.

**20/13 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

It was noted that Cabinet had agreed to the Commission's recommendation regarding the land at Mackenzie Road.

**21/13 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

None.

**22/13 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

The Health Scrutiny briefing mentioned by Mr Kybird at Agenda Item 9 would be added to the Work Programme.

Mr Kybird also suggested that Members should be aware of the Emergency Response Plan. Mrs Turner said that communities were being encouraged to have an emergency plan. Plans could be very simple or major action plans and could include information on what to do in the event of specific contingencies; identifying places of safety, listing resources, etc.

It was agreed that Community Resilience and Members' involvement in that should be included on the next agenda. Mrs Turner said that the Emergency Planning Officer would come to the meeting.

It was clarified that although there were no meetings shown on the draft work programme for June and July they were still

scheduled to go ahead – but agenda items had not yet been put forward. The Scrutiny Officer was in the process of arranging a workshop for Members facilitated by the Training Officers, to formulate topics for future discussion.

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**23/13 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 13)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 16 May 2012 at 2pm in the Anglia Room were noted.

The meeting closed at 4.00 pm

CHAIRMAN