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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

CABINET

Held on Tuesday, 7 May 2013 at 9.30 am in
Norfolk Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham

PRESENT

Mr J.W. Nunn (Chairman)	Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris
Mr M. A. Wassell (Vice-Chairman)	Mr I. Sherwood
Councillor E. Gould	Mr W.H.C. Smith
Mrs L.S. Turner	

Also Present

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mrs E. M. Jolly
Councillor C Bowes	Mr M J Nairn
Mr P.J. Duigan	Mr W. R. J. Richmond
Mr T. J. Jermy	Mr M. S. Robinson

In Attendance

Vicky Thomson	- Assistant Director - Democratic Services
Julie Britton	- Senior Committee Officer
Alison Chubbock	- Accountancy Manager
Lisa Green	- Senior Marketing and Communications Officer
Trevor Holden	- Interim Chief Executive

Action By

32/13 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

- a) Breckland Community Infrastructure Levy – Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule and Viability Assessment (Minute No. 28/13)

3rd paragraph on page 4 of the agenda to add the word 'except' at the beginning of the wording in brackets to read "(*except*' for the purposes of inspecting.....)".

- b) 5th paragraph on page 7 of the agenda the word 'lied' at the very end of the sentence to be amended to '*laid*'.

Action By

33/13 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

An apology for absence was received from Mr P Cowen.

34/13 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Mesdames C Bowes, E Jolly and Messrs G Bambridge, P Duigan, T Jermy, M Nairn, W Richmond and M Robinson.

35/13 CAPITAL OUT-TURN 2012/13 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Vice-Chairman presented the report which detailed the final end of year Capital outturn figures for 2012-2013. Members were reminded of similar reports received for each of the preceding quarters.

Referring to the under-spend of £1.753m highlighted in the table at the bottom of page 11, Members were informed that this under-spend was due to capital projects that had been delayed (further detail could be found at Appendix A of the report). On page 12 of the agenda, a carryover of £1.618m to 2013-14 was requested. The difference between the under-spend and the requested carryover figures showed a saving of £134,843 against the 2012-13 Capital Programme.

The Capital Financing requirement at the top of page 13 of the agenda was also highlighted. The figures in this table represented the amount of resources that were available before the Council had to borrow. The figure of £11.45m for the year 2012-13 would mean that the Council had £11.45m to invest in the District before it would have to resort to borrowing. This was a credit to all the Members and Officers involved.

The Capital Financing requirement figure would decline over time until 2014-15, the Council would then have a net borrowing requirement of £79k. Much of this change was due to the investment in the Riverside project. A full review of the expected spend and receipts would be undertaken to ensure that Breckland's Capital Programme remained affordable and provided value for money.

The recommendation was highlighted.

In response to a question in relation to the under-spend, Members were informed that the reason for the under-spend was due to projects not coming forward in the proposed timeframe.

The Chairman felt that these projects should be reviewed again by the Portfolio Holders. He also felt that this review should be linked into the Efficiency Programme which he asked to be brought forward prior to the summer recess.

The Executive Member for Internal Services agreed with the aforementioned suggestion as it could mean that further significant savings could be made.

In response to a concern in relation to the recommendation, the Chief

Action By

Executive advised that each of the projects listed would come forward with a business case and all would have to be agreed by Cabinet.

Option 1

To recommend to Full Council that the final capital budget, outturn position and funding for 2012/13 and the capital budget and funding for the revised 2013/14 Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix A and B of the report are approved.

Option 2

To make changes to Appendix A and B of the report before recommending to Full Council that the final capital budget, outturn position and funding for 2012/13 and the capital budget and funding for the revised 2013/14 Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix A and B of the report are approved.

Reasons

The recommendation would ensure the Capital Programme for 2013/14 was amended along with the necessary funding

RECOMMEND to Council that the final capital budget, outturn position and funding for 2012-13 and the capital budget and funding for the revised 2013-14 Capital Programme as detailed in Appendix A and B of the report be approved.

36/13 DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Executive Member for Performance and Business Development presented the report which sought Members' approval of the Breckland Digital Communications Strategy and the implementation of associated actions.

The Digital Communications Strategy comprised of two parts, the first being the Strategy itself and the second the Action Plan (attached at Appendix A of the report). Members were asked to note the final action which was to continue research and development as technology and social media opportunities arose. The Government was constantly issuing new instructions to all Councils that it wanted the migration of people to digital as a key target.

The recommendations were highlighted.

The Executive Member for Internal Services referred to recommendation (d), the cessation of the Council's magazine. He felt that 'Voice' had helped the Council in many ways over the years particularly in relation to customer satisfaction. He also felt that the time to cease the paper copy would be when an electronic version was available; he did not agree that it should be stopped now as it was a magazine that was appreciated by everyone who did not have access to IT.

The Executive Member also referred to other elements such as the cost of the Digital Newsroom; however, he was happy to support them all but not the cessation of Voice.

Action By

The Vice-Chairman wondered whether the timing of this report was appropriate as it seemed to be a desire from Government that Councils should not compete against newspapers. He did not want the Council to contravene a piece of legislation and therefore felt that Breckland Council should wait until the consultation/White Paper had been completed.

The Executive Member for Localism, Community & Environmental Services reminded Members of the results from the 'Could We Should We' exercise one of which was to stop Voice. Referring to recommendation (b) of the report she felt that it would be rather prudent to approve the creation of a 'digital newsroom' and suggested that the word 'approve' be changed to 'investigate'. She further suggested that a survey should be undertaken to establish Breckland residents preferred communication channels.

The proposal to change the word 'approve' to 'investigate' in relation to recommendation (b) was seconded.

The Executive Support Member for Finance & Democratic Services agreed with the aforementioned suggestion. All the public wanted was reassurance that there was someone to contact if there was a problem. She raised concerns about the Council's Twitter account not having a corporate image unlike the Voice magazine which, in her opinion, did have a corporate image and was delivered to every household in Breckland.

The Executive Member for Assets & Strategic Development was unsure whether the Council had any evidence of target audience but pointed out that the real interface with the public was through the Ward Representatives. He mentioned the Parish magazines that were delivered free to residents most of which had a space available for Ward Reps to add a few lines too.

The Executive Support Member for Performance & Business Development urged the Cabinet to support the recommendations.

The Opposition Leader thought it was important that the Council communicated to all of its residents. The Voice magazine, in his opinion, was very self congratulatory, highlighting issues/matters that had already happened; whereas, the recommendations listed would ensure that the Council was more up to date.

The Executive Member for Localism, Community & Environmental Services stated that 99% of residents within her Ward were in regular contact with her as Shipdham did not have a parish magazine. She felt that Breckland's website should be refreshed and made more user friendly.

The Executive Member for Internal Services agreed with the comments made by the Support Member for Finance & Democratic Services in relation to Voice. It seemed to him that the Council would be destroying something that had served the people well.

Action By

The Executive Member for Performance & Business Development had listened with great interest to all the valid points raised some of which could be addressed; however, the way forward was digital but he stressed that it was not the intention of the Council to force digital migration onto people living in a rural area. He felt that the Vice-Chairman had raised some valid points too in relation to Government advice which had to be grasped at some point. He was also very passionate about public engagement and agreed to some extent with the idea of Ward representative issues being included in parish magazines. With regard to branding/corporate image, he pointed out that Breckland did have a branding for Breckland's Twitter account but there was not one for Members which he preferred. The Executive Member for Performance & Business Development also felt that websites were out of date and a digital news hub was the way forward as it would be live and would always be kept up to date.

The Chairman agreed with the point made by the Executive Member for Internal Services and also with the point about communications continuing to be a moving feast. It was also about engagement, some of which cost the Council a great deal of money such as the match-funding grants and the Pride Awards. Did the Council still want these, did they do what the Council wanted them to do? He proposed a review on both to establish how this pot of money should be used for public engagement and to defer this report for further information.

Cllr Bambridge said that he would not support a move to remove such funding. In response the Chairman explained that he did not mean to stop it, what he wanted from Officers/Members was to reassess how the Council should engage with the public.

Options

Digital Strategy

1. To adopt the Breckland Digital Communications Strategy and associated action plan.
2. Do nothing.

Digital Newsroom

1. Approve the creation of a 'digital newsroom' for the Council.
2. Do nothing.

Webcasting

1. To rule out webcasting at this time due to annual costs but agree money set aside for the initial first year of webcasting to be used as a one off investment into developing other digital services at the Council.
2. To rule out webcasting at this time due to annual costs and take the money set aside for the initial first year of webcasting as savings.

Action By

3. To agree the principle of webcasting and ask Officers to procure the best value for money service. Agree to use the savings from Voice to finance the first year of webcasting and create a budget within the Democratic Services Directorate to finance future years.
4. Do nothing.

Voice

1. Cease design, production and distribution of the Council's magazine 'Voice' with immediate effect and realise the savings budgeted for and reallocated staff time associated with the magazine to development of digital communications.
2. Reduce the number of issues of Voice per year.
3. Retail current levels of production of the Voice per year.

Reasons

Adoption of the digital strategy will ensure the Council explores and, where deemed appropriate, exploits all the opportunities which emerging digital technologies present. Each recommendation detailed within the report supports the shift towards increased use of digital technology for communication with the aim of increasing speed and quality of communication whilst minimising costs.

Following further discussion, it was agreed that the recommendations should be rewritten or removed, and it was:

RESOLVED that

- (1) the recommendations as detailed at items (a), (b) and (c) of the report be deleted and :
- (2) the recommendation as detailed at item (d) of the report be amended to read as follows:
 - a) to suspend the design, production and distribution of the Council's magazine 'Voice' with immediate effect, pending current legalisation changes, and to allow further validation of communication channels to be available to Members to inform a final decision on the future of Voice; and
 - b) Officers to undertake a review of Communications staff and budgets across the Council to support the Strategy including areas as the Pride campaign.

37/13 ANGLIA REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP (AGENDA ITEM 9)

- a) Strategic Review (Minute No. 17/13)

Action By

The Executive Member for Internal Services provided Members with a detailed overview of the strategic review.

b) Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership meeting held on 14 March 2013 be noted.

**38/13 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PANEL (FOR INFORMATION)
(AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The Minutes of the Member Development Panel meeting held on 3 April 2013 were noted.

39/13 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The arrangements for the next meeting were noted.

The meeting closed at 10.20 am

CHAIRMAN