

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 12 February 2015 at 2.00 pm in the
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr T. J. Jermy (Vice-Chairman)	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mr A.P. Joel	Mr B. Rose

Also Present

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr P R W Darby
Mrs B Canham	Mr P.J. Duigan
Mr T R Carter	Mrs L.S. Turner
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen	Mr M. A. Wassell

In Attendance

Stephen Leggater	- NCC ICT
Robert Leigh	- Head of Information & Customer Access
Simon Linsley	- Interim ICT Manager
Helen McAleer	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Officer
Emily Spicer	- Senior Waste and Recycling Officer
Simon Stubbs	- ICT Project Manager
Vicky Thomson	- Democratic Services & Legal Manager
Robert Walker	- Assistant Director Community

13/15 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14/15 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Carter and Irving.

15/15 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

16/15 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

None.

17/15 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Councillors Bambridge, Canham, T Carter, Chapman-Allen, Darby, Duigan, Turner and Wassell were in attendance.

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18/15 EXECUTIVE MEMBER PORTFOLIO UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Councillor Turner, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Community & Environmental Services had been invited to update the Commission on the Environmental Services side of her portfolio. She introduced Emily Spicer, Shared Environmental Services Manager.

The new kerbside Recycling Revolution had started on 1 October 2014 and ten road shows had been held to promote the improvements to the scheme and the additional items that could be recycled. Quarter 3 had seen an increase in dry recyclables from 20.48% to 22.38%

Recent court cases for fly tipping offences had seen some successes with costs awarded to the Council and fines issued. These matters were only taken to court when it was in the public interest. There had been 150 fly tips reported by the public in Quarter 3 and 97% of those had been collected by the end of the next working day. The Council was working closely with anti-social officers employed by Flagship.

Members were encouraged to use the 'Report It' button on the Council's website and to encourage their constituents to do the same.

The Serco contract was regularly monitored and in the recent Customer Survey they had achieved over 90% customer satisfaction. The amount of waste to landfill had reduced since November. The business continuity plan was being reviewed.

The Council's decision to introduce a charge for providing waste bins to new properties had achieved a 100% take-up and in 2013/14 had resulted in £26,300 in income and for the current 2014/15 year that amount had risen to nearly £28,000.

The good news story was that there had been savings made on the budget due to early payment discount.

Councillor Gilbert noted that the grass cutting season was approaching and he asked if there had been any progress on using machines which collected the grass cuttings. The Environmental Services Manager said that she was working with Serco and looking at all options.

Councillor Joel was pleased to be able to report on a very prompt response by Serco to a call about missed bins.

The Vice-Chairman was pleased about the recent successful prosecution of a Thetford landlord for fly tipping. There had been a discussion on Radio Norfolk about the cost of fly tipping in Norfolk as a whole and he wondered if there was any data on the cost to Breckland. He felt that the Council needed to publicise their figures for responding to fly tipping reports to enforce the message that if the public reported it, it would be cleared.

The Deputy Leader agreed and added that sadly if fly tipped rubbish was left other people tended to add to it, so the sooner it could be reported the better. Again she urged Members and Officers to pass on the message that fly tipping could be reported to the Council by phone

or through the website.

Councillor Gilbert thought that phoning was not as successful as using the website as he was aware of a resident who had reported some fly tipping by phone that had not been cleared for three months.

The Leader of the Council was disturbed to hear that and asked for more information so that it could be looked into as it was not acceptable. There should be the same level of service however it was reported.

Councillor Kybird was aware of some fly tipping which had been collected recently in Thetford from beside a waste bin which had then been removed without reference to the Ward Representative.

The Assistant Director Community was not aware of that and said that he would look into it.

Councillor Richmond asked whether there had been any requests for larger recycling bins. He also complimented the service when brown bins had been frozen and another lorry had been sent to deal with the problem.

The Environmental Services Manager had not received any requests for larger bins but if anyone was really struggling for space they should contact the Council.

Councillor Bambridge had attended one of the Roadshows and he thanked the staff for a very positive and worthwhile experience. He suggested that more should be held as it was a good opportunity to meet people. He was advised that more Roadshows were planned for March and they would include a refresher on what could and could not be put into the recycling.

The Leader of the Council asked for all Members to be notified of the dates.

Councillor Joel noted that the Council had compensated villages and towns for their loss of income from glass recycling in 2014/15 and wondered if there was any intention to do so again. He was advised that there were other items which could be collected such as textiles and small electrical items which would give credits. Residents could also continue to use the communal glass recycling bins to support their community fund raising. The Council did not intend to make further payments.

The Vice-Chairman was concerned about the number of damaged recycling bins, especially those without lids. He asked if there was a charge for replacing them and the Deputy Leader advised that as long as there was a genuine reason the bins would be replaced free of charge.

She also pointed out that although 'bring-banks' in villages were useful for raising funds for individual communities, the credits that the Council raised from recycling were used across the whole District.

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Emily
Spicer

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The Chairman asked if the Council was in the upper quartile for recycling compared to other Councils and was advised that Breckland was in the middle. He suggested that there was room for improvement then and a clear need to do more. He thought that being able to recycle more in their bins helped people in rural areas and he suggested that batteries were another item that could be recycled locally to help Parish Councils recoup some of their recycling credits.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Leader and the Environmental Services Manager for the update.

19/15 ICT CONTRACT (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Head of Information & Customer Access advised Members that he had been in post for a couple of weeks and he had been looking at the IT provision across both Councils. He would give a verbal update and Simon Linsley and Steve Leggater (NCC – also new in post) were present to answer questions.

Progress had been made with the backlog of projects but there were still concerns as there were some critical deadlines approaching and resource issues had been identified.

There were currently 31 live projects of which eight were red, eight were orange, 11 were green and four were blue (complete). Progress had been driven by Breckland interim staff. A Governance Board was being put in place to monitor performance and to look at the project plans and risk register. There was still a lack of performance data, despite repeated requests.

A meeting had been set up between NCC and CPBS (Compass Point Business Services) to progress some of the projects.

There was a need to invest in more permanent resources and it was proposed to get resources from the transformation reserve. It had already been agreed to utilise internal audit to review end-to-end processes.

He then moved on to update Members on some of the on-going projects:

- Members IT Refresh was on schedule and there would be a demonstration of the equipment at the next Council meeting.
- Disaster Recovery was improving and should be completed in April.
- PSN Compliance was due to be completed by the end of April but there were two areas where additional information was needed.
- Desktop Refresh was behind schedule but two critical areas were being delivered (HR and Democratic Services).
- Citrix Farm was being replaced to provide PSN compliance and enhanced functionality. Due to the need for specific skills the Council had committed to support the NCC Server Team with an additional two engineers for four months. The resource was within the current budgets.
- Exchange Server (Mail) was an area of concern as the current system was approaching end of life and was not PSN compliant.

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In conclusion progress was being made and plans were being put in place to address areas of concern and critical projects working alongside NCC and Compass Point. More capacity and expertise were needed.

The Head of Information & Customer Access said that he would welcome the opportunity to return to the Commission to provide further updates and was happy to answer any specific questions.

The Chairman thanked Mr Leggater for coming as the Commission had been trying to get someone from NCC to come and talk to them for some time. Councillors and Officers were not happy with the level of service being provided. Nor were they happy that they had found it necessary to recruit staff to do the job that they were paying NCC to do. At least that was their perception. It was a serious issue and as more and more responsibility was devolved to local level there was more and more reliance on ICT.

The Leader of the Council said that the bottom line was that the Council was paying twice to ensure that they were providing the required service. The ultimate concern was to have the best service and he was willing to invest in that if necessary.

The Head of Information & Customer Access explained that the agreement with NCC was quite basic and did not provide for IT architecture and future planning so the issues were not all at NCC's door. He accepted that the Council needed to put in additional resources but was not happy that they were currently having to micro-manage the service.

Councillor Duigan asked what structure the new Governance Board would have and was advised that once the Service Agreement was defined the aim would be to align the performance data with service delivery.

Councillor Chapman-Allen asked if the Members Refresh was on time and within budget. She also wanted to know if the laptops would be ready so that existing Members could receive training before the election to reduce the strain on the IT department.

The Interim ICT Manager confirmed that the project was on track and that two elements of training would be provided; Windows 8.1 and IT training for such things as logging in and connecting to Broadband. The training would form part of the Members' Induction Programme. The order for the new equipment would be placed shortly and it would take six weeks to delivery, which was in advance of the election.

Councillor Chapman-Allen hoped that the equipment could be guaranteed before then and Mr Leggater responded by saying that the message was clear. He too was unhappy with the level of service being provided. He would be dedicating one day a week to turning the projects round and would be out and about in the District and visiting Breckland. He could guarantee that the equipment would be on time and that training would be delivered too, as they had just done that at Yarmouth.

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Councillor Gilbert asked if it was possible to break out of the contract with NCC if things did not improve and he was advised that there was a termination clause with six months' notice by the Council which would give time to find an alternative solution. However, they were currently working on getting on with critical projects.

The Leader of the Council thought that the ideal solution would be to stay with NCC if they could provide the required service.

The Chairman pointed out that the Council had to have a fall-back as it had to be in a position to carry on delivering services.

Councillor Joel asked about the Helpdesk. He believed that NCC Members got a better service than Breckland Councillors.

Mr Leggater said there was an average speed for answering calls which was the same for all organisations. They were working to improve that time and would hope to see improvements within the next 6-12 months.

The Leader of the Council challenged that as he believed that NCC Members had a different telephone number to call and that number was answered, whereas the one used by Breckland Members was not.

Mr Leggater said he was not aware of that. He would look into it and respond within 24 hours.

Councillor Kybird asked if 'on-line planning payments' was one of the red or orange projects. Councillor Bambridge confirmed that work was being done and the Council would be able to accept payments by debit and credit cards soon.

The Chairman asked if that applied to payments through the Planning Portal and the Assistant Director Community advised that there had been problems between the Planning Portal and the Ocella software system used by the Planning department. However, Councillor Bambridge said that he had been assured that people would be able to pay for planning applications on-line.

Councillor Canham said she had been experiencing problems but she had not bothered to log a call as she was not able to wait in all day for a return call. She asked if any consideration had been given to using Apps to improve customer service

The Head of Information & Customer Access said that was a good point. The Council's number one priority was to improve digital access to services. People should not have to download forms or pay by cheque. Services should be available on-line, whilst still maintaining choice for those that did not want to use that route. Up until now there had been no co-ordinated approach and some areas had better service than others. It was an item high on the agenda and part of the investment was needed to work with each service area to deliver what customers wanted.

The Leader of the Council advised Councillor Canham that there was now a process where Members with IT issues could book an appointment with IT and leave their equipment to be fixed whilst they

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were attending meetings at the Council offices.

The Chairman asked about mobile working which was something that had been discussed for a number of years. Members were frustrated that Officers were out and about in the District and had the opportunity to flag up issues not in their service area and provide feed back. For instance, Building Control Officers could report fly tipping. But it was still not happening.

The Interim ICT Manager explained that there was a lot of work to ensure that the infrastructure was robust enough. They were concentrating on mobile phone technology and identifying needs as part of the digital agenda.

The Chairman said it had been a long time coming and he was glad to be told it would be happening this year.

He thanked the Officers and particularly Mr Leggater for attending.

20/15 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Leader of the Council introduced the report as Chairman of the LABV (Local Asset Backed Vehicle) Board.

At the last full Council meeting the project Partner had been agreed and the Board were now undertaking some intense work before the matter was returned to Council to be finalised. To ensure that due diligence was observed the report was suggesting that a Task & Finish Group (T&FG) should be involved.

The Strategic Property Manager then explained the reasons for the request and the importance of ensuring that the project created value for money. The T&FG would be asked to independently review the detailed financial proposals.

The proposal was in the 'Financial and Legal Close' stage and had to be completed by 26 March so it was a tight timescale. Due to that he proposed that delegated authority be given to the T&FG to report directly to Council, rather than back to the Commission.

The Chairman suggested a Special, single item meeting of the Commission instead.

The Strategic Property Manager then turned to the composition of the T&FG. Due to the complexity of the financial details it was proposed that six Members would be a manageable size and it was further suggested that some of those be selected from the Audit Committee as they would bring expertise to the Group.

The Leader of the Council drew attention to paragraph 1.9 of the report and emphasised the sensitive nature of the confidential information that the T&FG would be reviewing and asked Members to bear that in mind.

The Chairman had discussed the proposal with the Chairman of the Audit Committee and they had agreed that six would be a good number – three from Audit and three from Scrutiny and that those Members

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should have technical knowledge and provide representation from those areas where work would be carried out. He proposed himself and Councillors Jermy and Kybird as representatives from the Commission.

He acknowledged the tight timescale but felt that one meeting would not be enough, three were needed.

The proposed representatives from the Commission were agreed and it was confirmed that Councillor Jordan (Chairman of Audit) would decide on the three representatives from that Committee.

The Strategic Property Manager asked for clarification of the meetings required and the Chairman said that there should be an initial briefing with Officers, then a meeting of the Members to decide what other information was needed and a final meeting in March. The outcomes would be reported to a Special meeting of the Commission which would then make a report to Council.

21/15 HEALTH SCRUTINY (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Chairman noted that a number of issues had been raised when the Commission had discussed the problems of Watton Medical Practice. One issue was that there was no duty for health professionals or the NHS to be consulted on planning applications.

Councillor R Richmond had attended a meeting at which six surgeries had voiced concerns that they would not be able to cope with the additional patients from the large number of housing schemes coming forward in Dereham. They had asked him to pass on their concerns to the Commission.

The Chairman said that it confirmed the issues previously identified. There was a serious shortage of GPs in Breckland and the de-registration of patients that had happened in Watton might happen elsewhere. Medical practices needed to be informed about future development to give them the opportunity to plan for increased patient numbers. The Commission had discussed the possibility of lobbying MPs to change Planning Law to make medical people statutory consultees.

The Assistant Director Community said that housing growth and the retention of GPs were both issues. Lincolnshire had similar problems. Planning Authorities needed to get together with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to deal with the issues. Meetings were taking place at high level to see how best to address planned housing growth and medical service provision.

Councillor Kybird said the issue of GP recruitment was the subject of a Task & Finish Group of the County Health Scrutiny Committee. They were looking at the number of patients per GP and the number of appointments, which were both rising, causing an imbalance in the system. There was also a need to focus on Care Homes.

Councillor Matthews pointed out that Swaffham Surgery had land and had wanted to expand but had been told they could not by the NHS. Practices needed to lobby the NHS to tell them of their problems and

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raise awareness and then the NHS should lobby the Government.

The Deputy Leader noted that Shipdham Surgery wanted to expand to take on a new GP but had no money to build an extension.

Councillor Darby was aware that patients from the Watton Surgery were now being seen in Swaffham and dental patients from Swaffham travelled to Watton for treatment. There would be problems when the new developments in Swaffham were built.

Councillor R Richmond thought that the medical practices were already lobbying but they had specifically asked the Commission for help.

The Assistant Director Community said the problems were recognised from an Officer point of view. He asked Councillor Richmond to reassure the practices that conversations were happening.

Councillor Kybird reported that the Health Scrutiny Committee had been told that there was no need for new surgeries in the next ten years. The GP services were commissioned by the NHS and there was a move to do that jointly with Primary Care Groups, but that was not currently linked to the provisions of buildings, etc. Everything needed to be joined up.

22/15 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (AGENDA ITEM 10)

None.

23/15 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (AGENDA ITEM 11)

None.

24/15 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 12)

It was noted that the Capita contract would be on the Agenda for the next meeting and possibly Inspector Paul Wheatley who would be invited to report back on what the Police were doing with regard to the closure of Public Enquiry Offices.

The Leader of the Council advised that he had written to the Police on behalf of the Council about the lack of consultation on those closures. He suggested that the Chief Constable should be invited rather than the Inspector, or whoever had carried out the review.

25/15 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 13)

The next scheduled meeting would be on 26 March 2015 at 2pm (following full Council in the morning).

The date of the Special meeting was agreed as 17 March 2015 at 2pm in the Norfolk Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

CHAIRMAN