

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 3 March 2016 at 2.00 pm in the
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr T F C Monument
Mr S H Chapman-Allen	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mr T. J. Jermy	Mr A.C. Stasiak
Mrs S.M. Matthews	Mr J Newton (Substitute Member)

Also Present

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mrs J Hollis
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen	Mr P S Wilkinson

In Attendance

Greg Pearson	- Corporate Improvement and Performance Manager
Rob Walker	- Executive Director Place
Helen McAleer	- Senior Democratic Services Officer

14/16 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15/16 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Claussen, Crawford, Joel, Oliver and Webb. Councillor Newton was present as Substitute for Councillor Crawford.

16/16 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

17/16 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

No declarations were made.

18/16 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Councillors Bambridge, M Chapman-Allen, Hollis and Wilkinson were in attendance.

19/16 TASK AND FINISH GROUPS (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The Chairman noted that the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for People & Information had hoped to be present but was unable to attend due to another appointment.

The Corporate Improvement and Performance Manager summarised

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the work of the four Task & Finish Groups and then each of the Chairmen gave a brief account of progress.

Digitalisation had reviewed the strategy and policy at their first meeting; learned about the foundation of the new website at their second meeting; and would be looking at Social Media and the Customer Contact Centre at their next meeting.

Aligning Public Services had considered One Public Estate; had an early viewing of the new Reception area; and their next meeting would be held in Thetford where they would discuss the Early Intervention Hub.

Organisational Design had reviewed their workstream at their first meeting and at their second meeting had received an update on the work of the LGA and reviewed the projects for the People Plan, Digital Passport and Service Reviews of Democratic Services, Legal Services and Corporate Improvement & HR. Councillor S Chapman-Allen (Chairman of the Group) said that at their next meeting they would be holding an LGA workshop and he encouraged other Members to attend.

Commercialisation had also reviewed their workstream and some specific projects at their first meeting. They were carrying out a review of the commercial asset base; third party goods and services; procurement best value and looking at how to enable local businesses to get Council contracts. They were also reviewing the Garden Waste scheme.

The Chairman thanked the Corporate Improvement and Performance Manager for his update. He suggested that the four Task & Finish Groups (T&FG) be combined for a period of time. A lot of the workstreams were interlinked; particularly Digitalisation which cut across the whole programme. Bringing them together would enable issues to be addressed in a speedy manner.

It was important to address the two questions of 'Where are we going next' and, more importantly 'What is the benefit realisation?'

Councillor S Chapman-Allen was not sure that it would be beneficial to join the Groups and other Members agreed.

Councillor Jermy thought it was key for Members to be part of the journey and felt that small meetings gave the opportunity for a lot of involvement. He was not against merging, but was concerned it could cause a lack of consistency.

Councillors R Richmond and Hollis both wanted to continue as separate Groups.

The Executive Director Place said that from an Officer perspective he supported a merger because of the amount of cross-cutting issues and the similarity of discussions that were being held by each Group. It would also help with resourcing capacity.

The Chairman focussed on Digitalisation. However much the Council invested in that programme it would not be able to reach about a third of

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residents due to poor Broadband services. He hoped that the T&FG would do more work on that issue. It was an issue that was raised at a lot of Parish Council meetings. If the Council relied too heavily on digital access it would not reach a lot of people.

Councillor Jermy thought that slimming down the website would help as it currently included a lot of unnecessary content which made access more difficult for those with slow Broadband.

Councillor Bambridge agreed and said that in some of his Wards people could not get mobile phone service either. He suggested that the Digitalisation Group should look at mobile phone masts to see if a better service could be provided.

The Chairman pointed out that the work on digital technology cut across all the Groups which was why he thought it would be beneficial to bring them all together. Many remote areas of the world had better WiFi capability than parts of the UK and that needed to be addressed.

Councillor R Richmond advised that people with low Broadband speeds could get a Government voucher towards satellite costs but he was concerned that the monthly charge was much greater than Members had been told.

The Chairman thought it was an important area for the Commission to look at.

He moved on to the Aligning Public Services project of the DWP co-location. He thought the changes to the Reception area had improved the building.

The Executive Director Place agreed and said it was working well. He had been concerned about possible pressure on car parking but that was also working well with a regular turn-over of visitors.

The next projects for the Group were DWP co-location at Thetford and Early Intervention Hubs at Thetford and Dereham. The Thetford Hub was getting started.

The Chairman raised concerns about how people were expected to access the Hubs. It was a large District with poor rural bus services which made it very difficult. There was a similar issue caused by the closure of many local Magistrates' Courts.

The Executive Director Place advised that providing video access to the Courts using Council office space was a project being undertaken at South Holland.

The Chairman suggested that Town and Parish Council buildings could also be used to provide such facilities. He then asked about benefit realisation.

Councillor S Chapman-Allen's said his Group would be looking at three completed projects at their next meeting. A project closure document had been devised and that would set out the benefits and the lessons learned. They would also be receiving information about the expected

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savings from the Legal, Democratic Services and HR reviews and learning what Service Managers were hoping to achieve. That information would allow the Group to monitor progress and ensure it was in line with the Corporate Plan and with residents' expectations.

The Corporate Improvement and Performance Manager said that all projects would have a Benefits Card and a close-down report in future. They were strengthening their approach to ensure a transparent process.

Councillor Stasiak said that the involvement of the Commercialisation T&FG meant that the Council would be more active in looking for investment opportunities. With regard to Housing, the Council was working with Breckland Bridge to develop some pockets of land and other areas would be looked at.

The Chairman suggested that if the Council was depending on rental income to underpin its budget for the next four years it needed to ensure that it was achieving the best possible yield and it might need to invest to improve the opportunities.

Councillor Bambridge thought that it was a very important area as the Council's rental income brought in as much money as Council Tax. He thought it should be monitored closely and that the Council should be building houses as well, as that was an area that could make even more money to support the District.

The Chairman returned to his proposal to bring the Task & Finish Groups together periodically. He asked the Officers to look at that suggestion and work out the best way forward.

20/16 HEALTH SCRUTINY (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Nothing to report.

21/16 SCRUTINY CALL-INS (AGENDA ITEM 8)

None.

22/16 COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Councillor Newton noted that at the last Council meeting Members had been informed that Devolution was moving fast and he felt that any decision on that subject should be delayed until after the European Union Referendum. He suggested that the Council should hold a vote on the EU so that residents would know how Members were thinking.

23/16 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 10)

Representatives from the Citizens' Advice Bureau would be coming to the next meeting to inform Members about the sort of issues they were facing on a day to day basis and the service they were providing.

BT Openreach and Breckland Bridge would be invited to future meetings.

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Devolution was a subject for a future agenda. The public had little awareness about it and discussion at Scrutiny would be an opportunity to provide them with more information.

The Executive Director Place suggested that it would be best to wait and see if the Norfolk/Suffolk/Cambridgeshire proposals were successful and the Chairman agreed that if they did not proceed it would not be necessary to discuss the matter at Scrutiny.

Councillor R Richmond raised the subject of the South Norfolk Clinical Commissioning Group and the Chairman agreed that Health, Mental Health and Healthy Living issues should be considered. There was a need to examine what was happening with health 'in the round' and that could be a one-issue future meeting.

The Executive Director Place suggested that there were two options: to have a themed meeting on Health and invite everyone involved, or focus on a specific issue and only invite the relevant responsible bodies.

Councillor S Chapman-Allen asked if the Planning service could be monitored as he had concerns about the number of Officers that were leaving.

The Executive Director Place advised that there was no provision in the contract with Capita to control staff numbers. However, Scrutiny could discuss the performance and delivery of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). He had raised the issue of the caseload for Officers himself, as he had concerns about its impact on performance, recruitment and retention.

Councillor Richmond had raised concerns with the Head of Capita about officers failing to return telephone calls. He commended Mike Brennan who went the 'extra mile' in providing information.

24/16 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The arrangements for the next meeting on Thursday 21 April 2016 at 2pm in the Anglia Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.40 pm

CHAIRMAN