

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**Held on Thursday, 10 July 2008 at 2.15 pm in the
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris
Mr A.J. Byrne	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr J.P. Cowen (Chairman)	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr B. Rose
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe	Mr A.C. Stasiak
Mr A.P. Joel	

In Attendance

Susan Allen	- Standards Officer
Mark Broughton	- Member Development Officer
Sheila Cresswell	- Member Services Officer
Trevor Holden	- Chief Executive
Gordon Partridge	- Principal Environmental Health Officer
Alistair Rusholme	- Street Scene Contracts Manager
Mark Stokes	- Strategic Director (Services)
Ian Vargeson	- Member Services Manager
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Member Services Officer

50/08 CHAIRMAN

The Chairman announced that he would have to leave part-way through the meeting due to another engagement. In the absence of the Vice-Chairman, the Committee

RESOLVED that on the departure of the Chairman, Mr. M. Kiddle-Morris to take the Chair to conclude the meeting.

51/08 MINUTES

A correction to the table of parishes in minute 45/08 was made to include a parish objection in regard to the payphone location at The Street, Sparham, subject to which the minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs. D. Irving, Mr. R. Goreham, Mr. K. Martin and Mrs. S. Matthews.

53/08 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

HM Revenue & Customs Change Programme

The Chairman announced that HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) were currently consulting on a change programme with stakeholders.

Action By

The Chairman proposed that Policy Development and Review Panel 2 be asked to debate the issues around the proposed changes and inform the consultation response. HMRC local representatives and the Member of Parliament were being invited to attend. The HMRC changes affected the citizens of Breckland through the proposed closure of the Revenues office in Dereham.

RESOLVED that the Policy Development and Review Panel 2 be asked to debate the matter at its next meeting on 24 July 2008 and formulate a response on behalf of the Commission for submission by the consultation deadline.

Action By

Ralph
Burton

54/08 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Mr. Norman Phillips and Mr. Derek Kendall (public speakers) were in attendance for agenda item 6 (Watton Horse Fair).

55/08 WATTON HORSE FAIR (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The Principal Environmental Health Officer reported that the further investigations into the operation of the Watton Horse Fair, as requested by the Commission, had now been completed. It was re-affirmed that the Fair did not require any planning consents and that there were no contraventions of any licensing activities. However, there was evidence of unauthorised stationing of caravans on land adjoining the Fair site. Accordingly, a comprehensive options report with a view to prosecution was being prepared for consideration by the Commission and the Cabinet at their next meetings.

A member was disappointed that the report was not yet available for discussion. Mr. Phillips and Mr. Kendall added their concerns over the length of time taken to bring the matter to a conclusion and that if the Council failed to institute a prosecution in the matter, it could set a precedent over the stationing of caravans on the land.

The position was noted.

56/08 BT PUBLIC PAYPHONES RATIONALISATION PROPOSALS IN BRECKLAND (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report of the Working Group, which had been commissioned to produce the final submission to BT of the Council's recommendations and final decision notification under the consultation process.

The Working Group had recommended that the following 19 payphones be retained:

- Billingford: Festival Road
- Caston: The Green
- Cranworth: Swathing
- Little Cressingham: Watton Road
- Dereham: Moorgate Road
- Dereham: Shipdham Road
- Little Fransham: Main Road
- Hardingham: High Common

Action By

- Holme Hale: Cook Road
- Hockering: The Street
- Mundford: Swaffham Road
- Mundford: West Tofts Road
- Narborough: Eastfields
- Sparham: The Street
- Thetford: Anne Bartholomew Road
- Thetford: Glebe Close
- Watton: Norwich Road
- Weeting: Hockwold Road
- Woodrising

The report detailed the issues that had been identified regarding payphone usage, vandalism and anti social behaviour, theft, mobile phone signal strength and the BT consultation process.

So far as usage was concerned, the conversion of payphones to cashless facilities was felt to be a contributing factor in the decrease in use. By way of example, call usage at the box in Little Cressingham had stood at 500 in the year prior to its conversion to a cashless facility, since when usage had dropped to 37. Additionally, the numbers of boxes out of action awaiting repair or maintenance was also felt to have impacted on the usage figures provided by BT.

With regard to the consultation process, it was noted that a number of the site notices required to be erected by BT to give public notice of the consultation were either erected late or not at all.

Under the consultation process, BT had to respond in respect of the payphone boxes to which the Council had objected and no action on them could be taken in the interim. There was an appeal process and it was hoped that it would be possible to influence the outcomes through negotiation. A progress report back would be made in due course.

The Chairman of the Working Group added that following on from the suggestion previously made, they had enquired whether BT would be prepared to leave the red K6 boxes in situ after removing equipment but the answer had been 'no'.

The Working Group had also overturned nine parish objections to the removal of boxes as there were insufficient grounds to support their retention, the combined number of calls from these boxes totalling just 97.

There had been 33 parish responses covering 41 boxes proposed for removal. Where there had been no response, the Working Group had accepted the removal of those boxes.

During discussion, Members of the Commission regretted that BT had withdrawn its phone card facility and felt that people were either reluctant to use the cashless facilities or, in the case of the elderly and young people, did not have a credit or debit card and therefore could not make use of those facilities.

In answer to a question, it was noted that it was not possible to confirm whether the retention of one box currently earmarked for closure would result in the loss of another.

Action By

A member advised that he understood that the Ministry of Defence was raising objections to the closure of boxes in Mundford due to poor mobile signal strength. It was suggested a similar case could be made in regard to the boxes at Bodney Camp and at Wretham, although in the latter case it was noted that the Parish Council had supported its closure.

Another member drew attention to the Vodaphone network map reproduced in the report which he felt was very misleading; in his experience there was no signal strength along the A47 corridor and Wensum Valley, nor in the Sparham or Lenwade areas shown on the map. He also reiterated the view that BT needed to take account of the strong social value of payphones in the rural villages.

The Chairman of the Working Group replied that the map was illustrative only of one network. Furthermore, while the social value of payphones was acknowledged, BT was facing commercial issues. The Working Group had supported the retention of those boxes where there was evidence of social and other needs but had reluctantly had to agree with some closures where usage was very low or even nil.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and BT's response be reported back in due course.

Mark
Broughton

**57/08 ENVIRONMENT AND SECURITY SERVICES CONTRACT
MONITORING UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Street Scene Contracts Manager presented the report which updated members on performance of the Environmental Services contract for the period January to March 2008.

Members were pleased to note the upturn in customer satisfaction rates.

In regard to the improved performance on street cleansing, a member wondered if this was a consequence of requests to the contractor by parishes or individuals to point out problems.

The Contracts Manager replied that it was important that customers and officers did alert the contractor so that problems could be dealt with. He accepted the member's concern that problems were not being picked up at the outset. However, he assured the Commission that officers met regularly with the contractor to deal with issues generally and, where there was evidence of persistent problems, these were addressed. The Strategic Director (Services) added that officers also met regularly with the Town Clerks and other town representatives, when any issues could be raised.

In answer to questions, it was explained that the contract had an output specification and the contractor was expected to operate on an 'as needed' basis. Monitoring was required to be undertaken by the contractor and allocate work to areas of need as necessary. If areas were being missed, then these needed to be notified so that they could be corrected.

A member noted that the report did not include figures for waste to landfill and the Contracts Manager undertook to provide these after the meeting.*

Action By

Alistair
Rusholme

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

*Footnote: The figures for waste to landfill were as follows:

- Jan-March 2008 – 7622.66 tonnes
- Total for 2007-08 – 27,896.40 tonnes

58/08 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING POLICY AND STRATEGY (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Member Services Manager presented the report.

It was noted that the adoption of the documents formed an essential part of the Council's aim to achieve Charter status on Elected Member Development and Training.

Mr. Bambridge mentioned that he was a member of the East of England Member Training Panel which was organising a Member Training Day on unitary authorities and was also planning training on Member Champions. He could provide information from the Panel to any members who wished it.

The Commission endorsed the adoption of the two documents, which had also been supported by the Member Development Panel and Policy Development and Review Panel 2.

RECOMMEND to the Cabinet that the Member Development and Training Policy and Strategy be adopted.

- Vice-Chairman in the Chair -

At this point, before leaving the meeting, the Chairman drew attention to agenda item 13 (Work Programme), and highlighted that he was keen to see Member-led issues on local and rural areas taken forward, and to see more members engaged in the scrutiny process, as referred to in the Annual Report.

In particular, he wished to take forward a review of the needs of the Market Towns and the rural areas and the Boundary Commission's Local Government Review in Norfolk.

Finally, he drew attention to a meeting to be held on 29 July 2008 when he would be meeting with the Panel Chairmen to consider future scrutiny arrangements. Members were invited to submit any comments to the Scrutiny Officer.

59/08 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL LETTER (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Member Services Manager presented the report on the Annual Letter from the Local Government Ombudsman, the details of which were noted.

Members were pleased to note the further reduction in the average

response time, which now stood at 15 days, well within the LGO's target of 28 days.

The Commission was also very pleased to note the LGO's extremely favourable comments on the Council's liaison arrangements with his office and his commendation of the Council for its openness in this area and its willingness to learn from the complaint experience.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

60/08 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANELS (AGENDA ITEM 11)

(a) **Panel 3 - Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2008**

(i) **Housing Benefits: Anglia Revenues Partnership (Minute 19/08)**

The Commission noted the Panel's report in this matter concerning the changes in the payments system and the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance. The Panel had recommended certain amendments.

RESOLVED that the amendment, as proposed, to include a reference to a right of appeal in the Vulnerability and Safeguarding Policy is endorsed.

Rick Steels

(ii) **Thetford Healthy Living Centre (Minute 20/08)**

The Commission noted the Panel's report on this matter and agreed the importance of ensuring that a representative of Norfolk County Council was in attendance at Development Control Committee meetings to advise members on transport or highways issues in respect of applications in those instances when the results of a required Transport Assessment were unknown.

RESOLVED that the Development Control Committee be asked to consider that in cases when proposals were being taken to Committee before the results of a required Transport Assessment were known that a Norfolk County Council representative be asked to attend the meeting to advise on the matter.

Phil Daines

(iii) **Adoption**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 3 held on 17 June 2008 be adopted.

(b) **Panel 2 - Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2008**

(i) **Member Development and Training – Policy and Strategy (Minute 18/08)**

This item was dealt with under Minute 58/08 above.

Action By

(ii) Adoption

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 2 held on 23 June 2008 be adopted.

61/08 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION - ANNUAL REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 12)

The Member Development Officer presented the report.

A grammatical correction in the first line of the Introduction in the Annual Report was noted.

Members noted the drivers to the further development of the scrutiny function in Breckland consequent upon the changes being introduced by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, as noted on page 80 of the Report.

It was confirmed that members of the Commission would have the opportunity to consider any proposed changes to the scrutiny structure.

RESOLVED that the report be approved.

Mark
Broughton

62/08 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 13)

A member requested details of the item in the Forward Plan on Redcastle Furze Re-roofing. The Member Development Officer undertook to clarify the position and to reply to the member after the meeting.

So far as the Work Programme was concerned, it was noted that the Working Group on the CCTV Review was due to hold its first meeting on 22 July 2008.

As noted in minute 55/08 above, the report on the Watton Horse Fair would be considered at the next meeting on 4 September.

There were no further amendments or changes to the Work Programme to be noted at this stage.

63/08 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 14)

The arrangements for the next meeting on 4 September 2008 were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.40 pm

CHAIRMAN