
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

CABINET

**Held on Tuesday, 25 November 2008 at 9.30 am in
Norfolk Room, The Committee Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mr J.W. Nunn (Chairman)
Mr S. Askew
Mr P.D. Claussen
Lady Fisher

Mr W.H.C. Smith
Mrs A.L. Steward
Mrs T. Hewett

Also Present

Mr J.P. Cowen
Mr P.J. Duigan

Mr R.F. Goreham

In Attendance

Julie Britton
Lisa Hilton

Trevor Holden
Stephen James
Ray Johnson
Tim Leader
Robert Leigh
Mark Stokes
Ian Vargeson

- Senior Member Services Officer
- Senior Marketing and Communications Officer
- Chief Executive
- Policy and Performance Manager
- Assistant Director (Services)
- Deputy Chief Executive
- Head of Marketing and Communications
- Strategic Director (Services)
- Member Services Manager

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147/08 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

148/08 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

There were no apologies for absence.

149/08 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Messrs P Duigan, P Cowen and R Goreham were in attendance.

150/08 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

- (a) The Skills Pledge

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It had been agreed to take this matter as an item of urgent business. The urgency had arisen through timetable constraints.

The UK was the fourth largest economy in the world but its prosperity had been constrained by its relatively poor skills base. In June 2007 a national initiative called the Skills Pledge had been launched. It aimed to eradicate low skills by ensuring that 95% of the adult population achieved a level 2 academic or vocational qualifications by 2020. For organisations the Skills Pledge was a voluntary, public commitment to support all of its employees to develop their skills in order to take the organisation forward.

The Executive Member for People First urged the Cabinet to support the signing of the Skills Pledge.

The Chief Executive advised that over the last 12 to 18 months the Council had made significant progress with key competencies. This Pledge was a commitment to shape the skills and knowledge of the Council and its residents.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive informed Members that the Pledge was a supporting tool to drive towards Investors in People. All the things that this Council were doing were right to move this authority forward.

Options

- 1) To sign the Skills Pledge.
- 2) Not to sign the Skills Pledge could be seen as a lack of commitment to the development of staff and would also mean that the Council could not access any additional government funding available.

Reasons

Signing up to the Skills Pledge would be a public demonstration to staff that the Council was fully committed to them and to their training needs. The Skills Pledge would provide a vehicle to get across to staff the key role that training was felt to play in the organisation.

RESOLVED that the Skills Pledge be agreed and signed on behalf of the Council by the Chief Executive, the Executive Member (People First), the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition Group.

(b) **Local Government Review - Update**

The Deputy Chief Executive provided Members with an update on this matter and sought Members' guidance on the next steps, depending upon the outcome of the recent judicial review hearing. The result of the Hearing was expected by the end of the week.

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The idea of a referendum had been discussed with other districts and it was felt that now was the time for the Council to prepare for a referendum on the Local Government Review to allow the people of Norfolk to have their say.

The Opposition Leader said that if a referendum was to happen it was imperative that the public be provided with all relevant information to enable them to reach a decision. He also felt that Breckland Council should engage with other authorities as part of the planning process. In response, it was explained that a referendum, according to the law, had to be supplied with objective information and had to be carried out carefully, which meant avoiding political statements.

The Leader felt it to be only right and proper that the public had the opportunity to make their views known. It would not be the most exciting topic but it was important to ask them what they thought the future of Norfolk should be.

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission suggested that the people of Lowestoft and Suffolk should be included in the debate as it was important for Breckland to understand their views. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the referendum would not take place until January 2009 which was after the Boundary Committee's decision on 31st December, by which time it would be known whether these areas were proposed for inclusion in a new unitary structure. The Chief Executive understood the reason behind the aforementioned suggestion but explained that the rules of a referendum precluded this.

Additional funding of £2,000 was requested to be allocated to the existing funding of £45,000 for the proposed referendum.

Options

To agree or not to agree preparation and further funding for a referendum.

Reasons

A referendum would ensure public participation in the Local Government Review.

To comply with the law, a referendum had to be supported by objective information and therefore needed careful preparation.

RESOLVED that

- 1) preparations be made for a referendum on Local Government Review;
- 2) additional funding of £2,000 be allocated to the existing funding of £45,000; and
- 3) subject to the Boundary Commission's decision, the Leader and the Chief Executive be authorised to implement the plans for a

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referendum to take place after 31st December 2008.

151/08 RELEASE OF FUNDS - MANAGEMENT OF LANDFILL SITE AT RUTHERFORD WAY, THETFORD (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The Assistant Director of Services presented the report which concerned a former 2.76 acre landfill site which the Council owned at Rutherford Way in Thetford.

Additional funding of £30,000 was requested to manage and provide a remediation options appraisal for the site in line with Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. A sum of £48,000 had already been requested and had been included in the Capital programme for approval.

An application for Defra funding had been made to cover the cost of this work but was not guaranteed. A decision was expected from Defra by the end of November 2008.

Options

To release the funds for further management and assessment of whether remediation works were required.

Reasons

Further investigation and a risk assessment were required as it was the Council's responsibility under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Council was also responsible for making the best possible future use of this site, optimising its value to the authority and to Thetford.

RESOLVED that the additional funding of £30,000, to manage and provide a remediation options appraisal for the Landfill Site at Rutherford Way, Thetford in line with Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 be approved.

152/08 TRANSFER OF LAND AT CHESTNUT SQUARE, GREAT HOCKHAM TO GREAT HOCKHAM PARISH COUNCIL (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The report sought Cabinet's approval for the transfer of five areas of Council-owned land at Chestnut Square, Great Hockham to Great Hockham Parish Council at nil consideration to be retained as amenity areas for the benefit of the Parish. All sites had very little value and a restrictive covenant would be imposed to prevent any future development.

The Ward Member for Great Hockham was in attendance and said that the Parish Council was very keen to acquire these parcels of land to protect the open space and to manage and maintain the mature trees on the site. He asked Members to endorse the recommendation.

Option 1

That the five areas of Breckland Council-owned land at Chestnut Square,

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Great Hockham be transferred, at nil consideration, to Great Hockham Parish Council, subject to a covenant being imposed restricting the use to amenity purposes only and that the legal costs associated with such transfer(s) be borne by Great Hockham Parish Council.

Option 2

That the five areas of Breckland Council-owned land at Chestnut Square, Great Hockham be transferred, at or above the District Valuer's valuation, to Great Hockham Parish Council, subject to a covenant being imposed restricting the use to amenity purposes only and that the legal costs associated with such transfer(s) be borne by Great Hockham Parish Council.

Option 3

That Breckland Council agree to transfer three areas to Great Hockham Parish Council (as shown edged in red on the plan attached to the report), at nil consideration, subject to a covenant being imposed restricting the use to amenity purposes only and that the legal costs associated with such transfer(s) be borne by Great Hockham Parish Council; and that the two areas as shown coloured green and marked HC1 and HC2 on the plan attached to the report be retained by Breckland Council and be sold on the open market.

Option 4

Breckland Council retain the five areas of land at Chestnut Square, Great Hockham.

Reasons for Recommendations

These areas of land were of no strategic significance and were important amenity areas for the benefit of the Parish of Great Hockham.

Great Hockham Parish Council was prepared to accept the transfer of these five areas and responsibility for the future maintenance etc.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the transfer of the five areas of Breckland Council-owned land at Chestnut Square, Great Hockham to Great Hockham Parish Council at nil consideration be approved;
- 2) a covenant be imposed restricting the use of the land to amenity purposes only; and
- 3) the legal costs associated with such a transfer be borne by Great Hockham Parish Council.

153/08 CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY FOR NORFOLK (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Strategic Director for Services presented the report which concerned

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the adoption of the Climate Change Strategy for Norfolk.

The main reason for adopting this Strategy was to create a framework for partnership working and would enable Local Area Agreement funding.

Full copies of the Strategy would be available for Members before the Council meeting in December.

The Strategy focused on delivering targets in the Norfolk Local Area Agreement. The five key strategic priorities included, travel and transport, economy and business, energy, thoughtful development and housing.

In response to a request, the Strategic Director for Services explained how the first two national indicators listed in the report would be determined.

The Executive Member for the Governance Portfolio asked how far off Breckland was from signing the Nottingham Agreement on Climate Change. Members were informed that a report on this matter would be presented to the Council meeting in January 2009.

For information, the Assistant Director for Services pointed out that the CO2 use for Elizabeth House was very efficient but due to the fact that the building ran on electricity and not gas, the energy certificate that the Council had to display had been categorised as an 'F', which in energy terms was not good. He felt that it was unfair that the Council should be heavily penalised for using electricity and for this reason the Council would be questioning Trading Standards on the legitimacy of this matter.

Options

To adopt or not to adopt the Climate Change Strategy for Norfolk.

Reasons

Adopting the Norfolk Climate Change Strategy would enable the pooling of resources to identify and plan for dealing with the existing and future impacts of climate change. Should the Council choose not to sign up to the Strategy the expectations of the Local Area Agreement for Norfolk would not be met; neither would the National Indicator NI188 which required a partnership approach. As a result the Council might not be in a position to benefit from any reward grants associated with meeting the targets.

RECOMMEND to Council that the Norfolk Climate Change Strategy be adopted.

154/08 CROXTON VILLAGE HALL (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Strategic Director for Services presented the report.

The Cabinet was asked to support a request for £11,980 from Capital Match Funding towards the renovation and installation of amenities in

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Croxton Village Hall.

All other funding sources that had been identified in the report had now been confirmed.

To meet present day standards, some of the improvements would be directed towards thermal efficiency, sound insulation and reduction in carbon emissions, in keeping with the Council's Environmental Strategy. The Council's Efficiency Awareness Officer would be working with Croxton Hall Committee to assist on these matters.

In response to a concern about the 24 year lease, the Chief Executive informed Members that it was most likely that Croxton would renew the lease after that time.

Options

- 1) to support Croxton Village Hall Committee by awarding a grant of £11,980, thus enabling completion of the work required to create a hall which would be frequently used and would be seen as the hub of the community, creating new opportunities for the residents of Croxton and the surrounding areas.
- 2) to reject the request of £11,980.

Reasons

The project was being delivered to a proactive community by a proactive Village Hall Committee, wishing to develop their parish for future growth and community events.

The project would create new opportunities for a rural area, encouraging community cohesion and an uptake in their village hall.

RESOLVED that a capital match funding sum of £11,980 towards the renovation and installation of amenities in Croxton Village Hall be approved, subject to:

- 1) a maximum sum of £11,980 or 27% of the cost of the scheme, whichever is the lower;
- 2) confirmation of the total cost of the project;
- 3) funding being allocated from the 2008/09 Match Funding Reserve.

**155/08 DRAFT CALENDAR OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS
2009-2010 (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

The Member Services Manager presented the Calendar of Meetings for approval. He explained that a suggestion had been made for an additional Council meeting to be allocated to 30th July 2009 to avoid a long gap over the August recess period.

Action By

The options available to Members were to recommend the attached schedule of meetings for the Council's approval, including the provision for a meeting of the Council on Thursday, 30 July 2009, or to suggest amendments.

The reason for the recommendation was to comply with Standing Orders and the scheme of delegation for the recommendation to Council for adoption of a calendar of meetings for 2009-2010.

RECOMMEND to Council that the schedule of Council and Committee meetings for 2009-2010 be approved, subject to an additional Council meeting being allocated to 30th July 2009 to avoid a long gap over the August recess period.

156/08 BUDGET SETTING REPORT - ESTIMATES 2009/10 (AGENDA ITEM 12)

This item had been withdrawn to allow a greater period of consultation.

157/08 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 13)

The Policy and Performance Manager presented the Quarter 2 Performance report which was for information purposes only.

The report provided information on how the Council was managing its finances to deliver value for money. It also discussed key areas of financial performance, forecasted outturns and all associated actions.

The key points of the report were explained.

This was the first time that performance issues had been formally reported to Cabinet. The Chief Executive considered this report to be quality at its best as it provided a strategic overview of the organisation. He commended the report and conveyed his thanks to the Performance team.

The Opposition Leader had concerns with the council tax collection local indicator and asked whether the Council's strategy towards bad debt had changed. The Chief Executive explained that the Council did have a high collection rate but it was likely that the global economy would have an impact on the collection of Council Tax. Measures would be taken to minimise the effect this might have. With regard to bad debts, Steve Knights, the Revenues and Council Tax Manager would be contacted to ask if there had been any changes to the method of chasing bad debt. In response to these concerns, the Deputy Leader was certain that quite a rigorous process was already in place as it was one of the Revenues section's key national indicators. He and the Anglia Revenues Partnership were more concerned with Housing Benefit Grants and he urged the Council to prepare itself for an increase in benefit claims and the downturn in council tax collection.

Further concerns highlighted related to efficiencies and complaints by

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Service Area. With regard to efficiencies the Deputy Leader felt that these targets should be reviewed as they would be difficult to maintain in the current financial climate. As far as complaints by Service area was concerned, Members felt that it was a shame that compliments had not been included even though it was more likely for a member of the public to pass on a complaint rather than a compliment. The Chief Executive explained that the Council had received 24 complaints in this quarter which, from across the residency base, worked out to be less than 1% of the population of Breckland.

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission was disappointed with the amount of customers that had been dissatisfied with Thetford Leisure Centre. The Assistant Director for Services explained that there had been major managerial problems but Members would see a complete turnaround in the next quarter.

Members noted that the recycling rate for October had been the best it had ever been.

The report was noted.

158/08 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 14)

The next meeting of the Cabinet would be held on Tuesday, 13 January 2009 at 9.30am in the Norfolk Room.

The meeting closed at 10.35 am

CHAIRMAN