

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

**Held on Tuesday, 19 March 2019 at 2.00 pm in the  
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Councillor E. Gould (Chairman)	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr P. M. M. Dimoglou	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mrs T. Hewett	Mr M. J. Nairn
Mr T. J. Jermy	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mr A.P. Joel	Mr P. S. Wilkinson (Substitute Member)

**Also Present**

Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr P.J. Hewett
Mr S. H. Chapman-Allen	Mrs L.S. Turner
Mr P. R. W. Darby	

**In Attendance**

Jon Berry	- Head of Development Management
Mark Dally	- Director of Regulatory Services (Capita)
Anna Graves	- Chief Executive
Stephen Ottewell	- National Director Capita Planning & Building Control
Rob Walker	- Executive Director Place
Simon Wood	- Director of Planning & Building Control
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader

**20/19 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**21/19 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brame, Crawford and Oliver. Councillor Peter Wilkinson was in attendance as substitute.

**22/19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)**

None.

**23/19 URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**24/19 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

**25/19 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

Councillors Bambridge, Darby, Hewett and Turner were in attendance.

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**26/19 CAPITA CONTRACT REVIEW**

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The Director of Regulatory Services (Capita), Mark Dally introduced himself together with colleagues Stephen Ottewell National Director of Planning and Building Control (Capita), Simon Wood Partnership Director (Capita Breckland), and Jon Berry Head of Development Management (Capita Breckland); and gave Members a detailed presentation on the current Capita Breckland partnership.

Mr Dally explained to Members how the decisions he had made as a Director at the end of 2018 had over stretched the team in Breckland and did not deliver the service the planning authority had been used to. He had been called in to meet with the Strategic Partnership Board to present a service plan that would deliver and sustain improvements which would be under the leadership of Simon Wood. He explained how through recruitment he had strengthened the team and had listened to Members concerns about the need to understand planning issues locally. He believed that under the leadership of Simon the team would feel empowered and led to deliver the core business that was required.

The Partnership Director, Simon Wood explained his ethos would be to communicate directly with Members, Parish Groups and individuals to enhance the planning process within Breckland. He had recently held an Agents Forum which feedback received had been positive. He went on to say how he was keen to ensure he worked closely with his staff to create a stable business by ensuring all staff were developed through learning and development. He added that the Key Performance indicators so far had been reported as good but was keen to develop the indicators further to improve performance to the best of their ability.

The National Director of Planning and Building Control, Stephen Ottewell informed Members of his responsibility on the development of a business plan that would be presented and endorsed at the Strategic Board in April. He re-iterated how it was crucial that changes were made to the existing Key Performance Indicators to raise the bar of service delivery and to ensure they reflected the key service delivered. As a result Members were informed that a new customer satisfaction indicator would be added to capture feedback. Mr Ottewell explained the Business Plan and due to the effect of market forces, it was not anticipated that the growth threshold of 130% of the Annual Core Charge would be achieved as originally expected. In response a revised profit shared mechanism to allow for growth was explained. Members were informed how the planning services were linked to the Corporate Plan ensuring that appropriate support was given to the planning team to deliver services.

Councillor Nairn was pleased to hear improvements had been made in the management structure, and asked what plans were in place for resilience to ensure that the issues caused at the end of 2018 would not happen again.

Mr Dally said there had been an increase in management at a local level. To mitigate the risk, both Mr Berry and Mr Wood lived within Breckland area. A review of pay and conditions had been undertaken to motivate staff, as well as regular one-to-one meetings and team meetings being held to develop staff through their careers. Members

heard how one member of staff had just been supported through his degree. Mr Wood added it was not about pay and benefits, but empowering staff to have confidence in their own decision making judgements and wanted to ensure staff were included on decisions in how the service would be delivered going forward. Mr Ottewell said there were two vacancies outstanding within the team but was confident that they would be filled shortly.

The Chairman had heard that staff had a one-month notice period and asked if this would continue. Mr Ottewell said notice periods had been highlighted and were currently engaging with staff about changes to terms and conditions.

Councillor Jermy highlighted that when the contract had been reviewed in the past, staff retention had been mentioned, but at the time staff felt there should be more flexibility in the working patterns and asked if this had been improved. Members heard how there had been a recent review of the terms and conditions for staff with an annual pay review seeing a level increase over and above market value. Capita were keen to invest in their staff and by holding performance reviews could see where staff required training, and provide support where required. In addition, staff had the ability to work remotely due to the excellent service provided by Breckland IT which was working well.

Councillor Jermy was pleased to hear that IT had improved as that had also been raised as a major issue in the past. He went onto ask about how the Key Performance Indicators should be reported on a quarterly basis and what was being done to allow Councillors to scrutinise performance. Mr Ottewell clarified that he was working with council colleagues and on the basis that the changes to the Key Performance Indicators were accepted by the Strategic Growth Board, and committed to report back to Members to explain the performance indicators in more detail.

Councillor Wilkinson asked what strategic plan was in place to ensure that major developments (referring to Attleborough and Thetford) were delivered to agreed timescales. Mr Wood said significant resource was required to facilitate such large scale developments and whilst there was no exact strategic plan discussions were in place on resourcing to ensure a successful delivery.

The Chairman asked what could be done to ensure the villages also delivered what they had committed to building. Mr Wood was aware of work being undertaken through the housing strategy team to ensure sites were developed. However, he asked to be contacted if Members were aware of sites not being developed in order to have conversations with developers and local parishes.

Councillor Dimoglou offered thanks to Mr Dally for being open and honest and admitting failings and was pleased to hear the presentation and how it concentrated on developing the team. He said there had been talk of a validation checklist for developers when submitting an application, and asked if this was in place. Mr Berry said a review was underway with the current validation checklist and it was hoped a new checklist would be in place in June. In addition, a credited agents scheme would be implemented to give agents an incentive that validation would be carried out within a premium time if the checks had

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Stephen  
Ottewell

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been carried out correctly.

Councillor Dimoglou went on to mention that he had seen an increase of permissions going through with permitted development rights removed, and asked for a reason for this. It was explained that permitted development rights should only be removed where there were exceptional circumstances necessary to make a development acceptable. However, he would raise the issue with Officers, to ensure the permitted development rights were only removed where absolutely necessary.

Councillor T Hewett felt the presentation was geared to developers and agents, but it was the rural parish residents that were concerned about inappropriate development and it was critical that residents had reassurance their voices were heard. She went onto ask for more information on the profit share mechanism. Mr Wood re-iterated that everyone was a customer and encouraged the recognition that Members had within the planning system, and would endeavour to meet residents when he could.

Mr Ottewell explained the £1.5m quoted was a projected figure. A primary reason for this would be that Breckland would become a hub for joint venture partnerships however there have been dramatic changes in markets and local government support. There was a new mechanism in place and it was felt that a profit share on a 50:50 basis was achievable over time an example given was the Salford Partnership which had been developed and managed. Mr Dally added the service had to be stable and Breckland would be in a good place to provide strong references on how the new model was working in order to help win further contracts.

Councillor Kybird felt the pre-application advice could be weak and asked if there were plans in place to charge a fee for that advice and if the advice would be available for public record. Mr Wood agreed and added a paper would be presented to the Strategic Board to look at the pre-application process which had been supported at the agents' forum. There were a number of benefits including the reduction of enquiries, and the scale of charges to be considered. It was agreed it would also ensure that pre-application consultations were consistent.

Councillor Matthews asked what Officers had done to improve the service. Mr Dally said he had been held accountable by both Members and the Chief Executive. As a result Officers had received examples with copies of correspondence to show the level of pain that had been endured during the difficult period. However, as a result of the hard work that has been put in, it was thought there could be an opportunity to attend the Local Government Association conference to show how the service had been turned around and what could be delivered at a District level.

Councillor P Hewett asked where Capita felt there had been disconnect between the number of customers frustrated with the service and the Key Performance Indicators showing customer service. Mr Wood explained there were two elements - delivering the formal planning service with efficiency and quality, and the ability to engage with customers as much as possible. He was aware there had been issues that needed to be addressed but since the 1 January 2019 there had

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been a reduction in the number of formal complaints received. He encouraged a direct approach in order to deal with issues. Mr Dally added they had listened and heard voices of parishes and agents and a valid point had been previously raised about the residents and could see the perception that had been given. Mr Wood added a new web-based customer satisfaction survey would be introduced to allow anyone to provide their experience on the planning service would be used as a benchmark.

Councillor P Hewett asked what work had been done to show which Key Performance Indicators reflected what had failed in order to set achievable targets. Mr Ottewell said the changes would increase the minimum level below which penalties apply and new ones would be set for things that were deemed important; all of which would be agreed at the Strategic Growth Board.

Councillor P Hewett asked what differences there had been between the Breckland and Barnet operations. Mr Dally confirmed the issues at Barnet had been different to Breckland and whilst the detail was private he assured Members that no matters related to the services provided at Breckland.

Councillor Joel asked what would be the future of the team currently responsible for delivering the Local Plan. Mr Wood informed Members that as soon as the Local Plan team received the inspectors report there would be a need for a review which would commence quickly.

Councillor Richmond was pleased the first phase of the Thetford SUE was being developed and went on to ask what the timescales would be for when the next reserved matters would be delivered. Mr Wood said there had been a lot of work going on behind the scenes to discharge conditions before further work could be developed, but agreed to provide an update for Members on where the major project was at.

Simon  
Wood

Councillor Darby asked that when an application be submitted with changes, they were highlighted on the Officers report to make it clear. Mr Berry confirmed this had been raised and further information would be added to the Officers report.

The Chairman also requested further detail be added to the Planning Portal, as at times there could be a number of 'consultee comments' and make it difficult when searching for specific points. Mr Wood agreed and would ensure his team would label issues with more detail on the portal.

Councillor Jermy asked for assurance on how valid the savings figures were. The Executive Director for Place confirmed that when the contract commenced there would be a saving of £123,000 per annum which had been removed from the revenue budget, delivering a saving to the Council of £1.3m to date. Mr Ottewell added that as the contract progressed through delivering the Hub partnership model, the benchmarked figures presented were based on projections of delivery elsewhere.

Councillor Turner asked that consideration be given on the vision of housing options for older people going forward and had been involved

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in discussions with developers that were very keen on delivering a similar approach to the Danish model. Mr Wood was happy to speak with the developers to hear of the innovative ideas as both the Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework required the Authority to address all sectors of housing.

The Chairman asked for further information on how it was decided to give an extension of time to applications for Parish Councils. Mr Berry said they tried to accommodate requests from Parish Councils for extensions of time where it fell within the statutory deadline period. However it had been raised at the recent Agents Forum to be clear on best practice and would therefore tighten up the process on agreeing an extension of time.

Councillor T Hewett asked what support would be given to Members with the delivery of the Local Plan to Parishes. Mr Wood understood there should be more engagement with Members and would be happy to discuss the Local Plan with Members and Parish Councils going forward.

Councillor P Hewett suggested a specific Key Performance Indicator be added that would link precisely the consultation between Members and Capita regarding time, frequency and duration which would alleviate a 'them and us' situation. Officers would consider the suggestion.

The Chairman thanked the team for their detailed report that assured Members and was confident with the team in place would achieve what they had set out to achieve.

The Deputy Leader expressed his thanks to the Chairman as it was her last meeting as Chairman and Councillor. He said since being Chairman of the Commission she had taken it from strength to strength ensuring robust and challenging questions were asked of Members and partner agencies. He thanked her for her hard work over the past years and wished her well for the future.

**27/19 NEXT MEETING**

The arrangements for the meeting on 30 May 2019 at 10:00am in the Anglia Room, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke, Dereham were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.50 pm

CHAIRMAN