

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**COUNCIL**

**Held on Wednesday, 22 July 2020 at 10.00am pursuant to the Local Authorities and Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020**

**PRESENT**

Mrs L.S. Turner (Chairman)	Mr P.J. Hewett
Mr R. F. W. Brame (Vice-Chairman)	Mrs J. James
Mr S Askew	Mr T. J. Jermy
Mr R. Atterwill	Cllr T. Kiddell
Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mr M. Kiddle-Morris
Mr T. Birt	Mr R.G. Kybird
Mr W.P. Borrett	Mr I. Martin
Councillor C. Bowes	Mr K. Martin
Mr M. P. Brindle	Mrs L.H. Monument
Miss H. Bushell	Mr P. Morton
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen	Mr M. J. Nairn
Mr S. H. Chapman-Allen	Mr J.W. Nunn
Mr E. Colman	Mr D. R. R. Oliver
Mr H. E. J. Clarke	Mr M. S. Robinson
Mr P.D. Claussen	Mr I. Sherwood
Mr J.P. Cowen	Mrs S. E. Suggitt
Mrs H Crane	Miss T. Taylor
Mrs V. Dale	Mr S. Terry
Mrs S. Dowling	Mrs A. M. Webb
Mr R.W. Duffield	Mr D. Wickerson
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mr N.C. Wilkin
Mrs K. Grey	Mr P. S. Wilkinson
Mr C. Harvey	

**In Attendance**

Maxine O'Mahony	- Executive Director of Strategy & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Rob Walker	- Executive Director Place
Mark Stinson	- Executive Manager Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Alison Chubbock	- Chief Accountant (Deputy Section 151 Officer) (BDC)
Stephen Scowen	- Major Projects Delivery Manager
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer

**Cllr Brame opened the meeting**

**42/20 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

Nominations were invited.

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Lynda Turner be elected Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year.

**Action  
By**

**Councillor Turner in the Chair**

**43/20 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Nominations were invited.

After being duly proposed and seconded and with no other nominations being made it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Roy Brame be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year.

**44/20 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ashby, Carter and Duigan.

**45/20 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 4)**

Cllr Birt mentioned that he had not received responses to the Point of Order that he had raised at the previous meeting in respect of not receiving exempt reports within the legal time frame (page 4 of the agenda pack) and not having access to the intranet (page 19 of the agenda pack).

Mark Stinson, the Executive Manager for Governance apologised to Councillor Birt and asked the Democratic Services Officer to follow this up for him after the meeting.

Subject to the above matters, the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record - to be signed by the Chairman as soon as reasonably practicable after the meeting.

TS/JB

**46/20 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 5 (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

The Executive Manager for Governance advised that in order to keep the business on the agenda as manageable as possible, non-essential business such as, the reporting of Committee Minutes, had been removed. The Council was therefore asked to suspend Standing Order 5 of the Council's Constitution.

Following a show of hands, it was

**RESOLVED** that Standing Order No. 5 be suspended.

**47/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

None declared.

**48/20 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Chairman had prepared a short résumé for her year to date.

Firstly, the Chairman reflected on the time when Cllr Nunn, the previous Leader of the Council, contacted her to ask if she would consider standing as Chairman of the Council for the year 2019/20. She had been honoured at this request and was honoured to serve a second year.

Together with the Vice-Chairman, up until 9 March 2020, 103 civic events on behalf of the Council had been attended ranging from a cup of coffee with 2 Dereham veterans in their homes, to the many civic services and receptions. The Chairman

recounted a number of memorable events. The most memorable, however, had been her own Civic Service held at All Saints Church in Shipdham in July 2019.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and since 9 March 2020 after raising the flag for Commonwealth Day, the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman had attended a number of virtual events including the Change of Command at Lakenheath and the Armed Forces Day. Both had been kept up to date with civic news, appointments and information and both had supported photo shoots in the market towns in respect of the 'Shop with Confidence' Campaign and when able had visited local residents and local businesses all at a safe distance.

The Chairman reminded Members of her two nominated charities, The Daisy Programme in Watton and Leeway in Norwich both of which were trying to break the chain of domestic abuse. She was pleased to announce that over £3k had been raised and donated accordingly.

The Chairman thanked all Members for their continued support. She also thanked the Vice-Chairman and his wife for all their support and conveyed further thanks to Kathryn Boddy, her secretary and the Democratic Services Team for supporting both the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman.

No charity would be nominated for this civic year; instead, the Chairman had decided that any monies raised would be put towards a community event so that individuals and community groups could be thanked for their contributions and resilience during the pandemic.

The Chairman said she would do her best for Breckland in whatever shape or form that she could and thanked Members again for their continued support.

#### **49/20 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Leader was delighted that so many Members were in attendance for this Annual General Meeting to reflect on what had been quite a year for the Council.

The last few months had clearly brought major challenges and had required the Council to change its focus and priorities in order to best serve the immediate needs of Breckland's residents and businesses.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank everyone for their support in responding to the pandemic and the role that all Members had played in keeping residents informed and protected as much as possible.

Members had passed messages on to residents within their Wards about the help available, made frontline teams aware of vulnerable residents, been involved in delivering food parcels and made welfare calls. Whatever the contribution, the Leader felt that the way Members had responded as a whole council – alongside support from local volunteers - had been fantastic.

He pointed out; however, that he did not want to overlook the excellent progress that had been made by the Council prior to the pandemic.

As a Council, its priority was to make sure the district was a great place in which to live, work, visit and invest. The delivery of quality, cost-effective services - such as regular bin collections, housing support and tackling anti-social behaviour was at the heart of what it did.

**Action By**

The Council played a key role in the health and wellbeing of its residents, delivering sustainable growth, and driving positive change among the communities.

Core services such as community safety, economic development, planning, housing, leisure, wellbeing and environmental services had been increasingly recognised as vital components of local health systems.

The Council had been helping vulnerable people protect themselves from harm or exploitation, with a particular focus on tackling county lines drug exploitation, domestic abuse and violence, social isolation, and mental health.

This included extending the popular Silver Social Arts Programme for a further three years, working with expert organisations, such as the Daisy Programme, that supported people experiencing domestic abuse, and reviewing opportunities to provide mental health first aid training to members of our communities.

Steps had also been taken in managing growth of the district - both in terms of housing and jobs and adopting the new Local Plan in December 2019 that would be used as a blueprint for growth until 2036, subject to review.

Another area of focus for the Council was climate change. The environment was an important issue for residents who wanted the Council to take action. The Council had committed to developing a long-term sustainability policy and programme of activity to address this issue. This would focus on ways the Council could be more environmentally friendly as an organisation, ways it could influence its communities through statutory powers, and ways to empower communities to make greener lifestyle choices.

Whilst the pandemic had unfortunately slowed some of this work, it had not stopped the Council from making progress. In the last few months it had:

- Confirmed that the Council would be switching to a green energy tariff for its buildings from October this year;
- Promoted how it would work with housing developers to find opportunities to include bird and bee bricks and other environmentally friendly initiatives as part of the Council's planning function;
- Launched an initiative to let some green verges in the district grow longer to create wildflower havens for bees and hoverflies.

The recent pandemic had dominated everyone's lives in recent weeks and months, and it seemed likely that all would have to continue to deal with the coronavirus in some shape or form for the foreseeable future.

From the start, the Council had moved the vast majority of its staff to work from home, created a support hub to care for its residents and set up grant processes to distribute funding to businesses in need – all in just a matter of weeks.

More than 3,600 people in Breckland had been classed as 'extremely vulnerable' by the NHS, with many unable to shop for food or collect vital medication. The Community Hub, using many redeployed officers, with fantastic support from volunteers and local businesses, sent out more than 15,000 meals, made deliveries of medication and made welfare calls to those residents when they needed it most.

The lockdown period had clearly hit a number of businesses hard which was why the Council had also set up a 'Shop in Confidence' campaign to encourage people back to the high streets safely and help local businesses bounce back.

Support for businesses had also seen the Council distribute around £27m of national and local grant funding to support local businesses through a very difficult period. This had been a phenomenal response in contacting hundreds of local eligible businesses to ensure that they received the support they needed and the Council continued to offer support in terms of grant funding and expert advice going forward.

Covid had also brought significant financial pressures due to increases in costs compounded by lost income in some areas. Initially, the Council was looking at cost pressures of £3.7m in the current year, but through Government grants, the use of one-off reserve funding, and reviewing some projects, it had mitigated this gap down to around £220k. A revised, detailed budget would be presented to Council in September for review and approval.

The Leader hoped that all Members would join him in commending all officers for the speed, efficiency and effectiveness with which they had responded to this international issue.

While the office remained closed to the majority of staff for the time being, work was well underway to plan recovery and consider what the future would look like. The Council was looking to retain some of the positives that had come about – such as its proven ability to work in an agile way.

Looking ahead, the Council would continue to deliver against its vision of ensuring the district remained a place where people and businesses could thrive.

It would continue to deliver core services, but new opportunities would also be sought to enhance the district and help local people fulfil their full potential.

Continued support would be provided for Breckland residents, particularly those most vulnerable through initiatives such as the 'TripStart' transport scheme for unemployed or economically inactive individuals, the Silver Social Arts programme and Early Help collaborative working.

The Council would continue to support its economy to thrive, working both at a strategic level – through partnerships with the LEP, local growth programmes and as members of the Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor – all the way through to on the ground support for local businesses, such as the local 'Confidence' campaign.

All Members had a major role to play in all the above, as well as emerging wider discussions that could come through to Norfolk, such as a drive for devolution and local government reform.

Breckland Council had an excellent track record of delivering for the people it served and he was confident that this would continue over the forthcoming year.

Members were invited to ask questions.

Councillor Brindle congratulated the Chairman for being re-elected for the ensuing year. He expressed a concern about bin collections and asked the Leader if Serco could be requested to be a little more imaginative in the way they carried out the contract in respect of Thetford. The riverside was a popular place for residents and visitors to the town during the summer months even more so since the pandemic. As a result, the bins along that route were full well before the next collection was due and litter was being put on the ground alongside the bins that was blown about

by the wind. He asked the Leader if Serco could be persuaded to empty the bins more frequently.

In response the Leader informed Councillor Brindle that he would look into this; however, he hoped that everyone would appreciate that the Council's priority during the pandemic was to support household collections during this crisis. There had been a reduction of Serco staff at times due to isolating and other personal reasons, and he was aware that there had been a large increase in the volume of litter in popular tourist spots within the District during the crisis. The Leader stressed the importance of individual responsibility – if a bin was full, residents and visitors should take their rubbish home and place it in their own refuse bin.

Councillor Mark Robinson, the Executive Member for Community, Leisure & Culture reminded Thetford Members that a Town Council project was currently underway to map the locations of all the bins within the town and felt that once completed it would be a good idea to share that information with Serco.

Councillor Birt also congratulated the Chairman. He was aware that the Leader had attended the Attleborough Town Council meeting held on 13 July 2020 where he spoke about post-Covid recovery and had stated that, from a Breckland perspective, its priorities and focuses for residents and businesses would change. He asked the Leader if he could expand on what these changes might be and when Members might have a chance to discuss and scrutinise them.

On a point of process, the Leader advised that this question should really be taken under agenda item 9 – 'Questions without Notice'; however, he was happy to respond.

The Leader explained that the world post-Covid had changed and throughout the pandemic the Council had supported many vulnerable residents and businesses across the District and in doing so the Council had to deal with a phenomenal amount of data and information alongside good working practices. As part of the recovery process this work and support had to continue and, in the coming months within the Council's 'Recovery' statement, Members would most likely see the Community hub system being extended and made a permanent part of Breckland 'business as usual'. This Community Hub had been so successful, working collectively with Town & Parish Councils, voluntary groups, Norfolk County Council and other partners to ensure that vulnerable residents across the District continued to be supported moving forward.

Likewise, in the Council's business economy and investment support, had enabled an understanding of the needs of its residents and businesses to a greater extent than ever before and, as a result, the Council would have to extend and improve its Business and Investment Support Team. These were just some of the schemes that would be coming forward and the Cabinet was working diligently with senior officers across the Council to pull forward some of these ideas and suggestions. Additionally, in light of the emerging recovery budget, there would, in due course be a refresh of the Corporate Plan.

Councillor Jermy, the Leader of the Labour Group, congratulated the Chairman on her re-appointment and on behalf of the Labour Group took the opportunity to thank her for the welfare calls that she had made to Members, including his Group, that were really well received during the lockdown. He asked the Leader about furloughing, a question that he knew the Leader had asked at the New Anglia LEP Board meeting as he had read the Minutes, where the Leader had challenged the LEP to make available figures for the numbers of people that had been furloughed

in each District. He wondered if the Leader would take this opportunity to highlight what support there might be from the Council for any businesses considering making staff redundant across Breckland once the furlough scheme changed/ended as the months progressed. He would like to see businesses supported by the Council; therefore, he asked if the Leader would take this opportunity to highlight what was or could be made available.

To date, HMRC had not been overly generous with furlough data relating to businesses across the County. New Anglia LEP, Norfolk County Council Economic Development Team and Breckland's own Economic Development Team were aware of some businesses throughout the District who had already raised a number of concerns in respect of not being able to sustain their current workforce when the current furlough scheme changed at the beginning of August and ended in October 2020. As part of that, and in response to Councillor Jermy's question, Breckland Council were working hard with New Anglia LEP, the DWP and the New Anglia LEP Skills Board to try and align possible vacancies so that those individuals could quickly re-apply for jobs, whilst working out the skills gaps in certain sectors. Breckland Council and other Councils across Norfolk were working at pace to help respond to the possible increase in job losses. Lack of central Government data was making this work more difficult. Part of the Council's recovery, post-Covid, included increased focus on supporting businesses through the Business Support Team.

Councillor Atterwill mentioned the question that Councillor Brindle had asked earlier. He felt that there was a serious problem in the District, a complete lack of respect for the open countryside, the amount of rubbish/litter that had been left in some of the most beautiful areas was, in his opinion, horrendous. He was aware that there were volunteers going out on a regular basis to clear up this rubbish to protect the environment and the wildlife. He asked if Breckland Council along with the Town & Parish Councils could do a piece of work to promote the fact that everyone needed to have more respect for the countryside such as the much earlier 'Keep Britain Tidy' campaign that he felt had sadly fallen by the wayside. He hoped that Breckland Council could take this up through its Communications Team and Members to really emphasise the fact that it was not difficult to bag up your own rubbish and take it home and put in the refuse bins provided by Breckland Council.

He also asked the Leader if he would join him in saying a special thank you to the Democratic Services Team. Councillor Atterwill felt that all the staff within the Team had done a fantastic job throughout, whilst also recognising that it had been a herculean effort to get these virtual meetings up and running. As he himself had sat in on many of the meetings, he knew that Julie Britton and Teresa Smith were always a little nervous at the beginning of the meetings making sure that everyone was named properly and could be seen and heard; therefore he would like his thanks, on behalf of the Independents, to be placed on record and he hoped that everyone else would join him too as the Team had done a sterling job to ensure that all Members could carry on with their council work and communicate with their residents.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Atterwill for his kind remarks and felt that all Members would echo his sentiments.

The Leader completely endorsed all Councillor Atterwill's remarks. Contemplating arranging a meeting for all Members whilst being streamed live via Youtube and Facebook to possibly hundreds of people he could appreciate the pressure the Team were under and he thanked all the Democratic Services Team not just for

supporting meetings and Members but for helping many vulnerable people and businesses through the Community Hub. He completely agreed with Councillor Atterwill's comments about litter; everyone had access to their own domestic bins and in response to Councillor Brindle's earlier question, he urged everyone to take responsibility and have the decency to take their rubbish home. Members were reminded of the Council's strong Enforcement Team, the envy of colleagues across the County, where officers had done an incredible job in respect of fly-tipping. Some of the income had been ring-fenced from the fines collected and predominantly that had supported an education scheme in schools in certain target areas across Breckland.

He would also be more than happy to ask the Cabinet Member and Officers to study, with interested parties such as Town & Parish Councils, how a better campaign could be created across the District. The Leader pointed out that he was aware of a successful campaign in Yorkshire and that the Council could organise something similar in Breckland.

### **50/20 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 6 (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The Chairman explained the process of how the questions and responses would be provided.

Councillor Birt was pleased that so many questions had been raised but pointed out that he had been informed by a Chief Officer in November 2019 that any responses provided would be made available prior to the meeting to allow the author of the question time to consider a subsequent response. As this had not been demonstrated at this meeting, he asked if the correct procedure could be explained.

In response, Mark Stinson, the Executive Manager for Governance explained that procedurally, there were two options available, the question could be responded to at the meeting or within 5 working days after the meeting. Under normal circumstances, where there was sufficient time, the questions would be circulated and responses provided prior to the meeting. On this occasion, there had been a large number of questions and with everyone working remotely it had been difficult to co-ordinate; however, from a strictly procedural perspective, Councillor Birt was informed that there was no requirement to circulate such questions and responses prior to the meeting.

#### **Question 1: Councillor Helen Crane to the Executive Member for Planning – Cllr Paul Claussen**

The residents of Breckland need to have confidence in this council that S106 obligations are monitored and invoices sent to developers on time and chased accordingly if payment not received. The delay in this meant that Saham Toney did not receive a substantial sum of money when the developer submitted a planning obligation application some years after the development was completed and had never received an invoice from this Council, it only coming to light when I became District Councillor for Saham Toney and spotted a large sum of money on the available list, which turned out to actually not be available, having never been invoiced at the trigger point. Can we confirm to the Council that there is now a robust system in place to ensure that this will not happen in the future?

**RESPONSE:** Cllr Claussen thanked Cllr Crane for her question and apologised for the issues surrounding the payment of monies to Saham Toney Parish Council.

**Action By**

The S106 process in the Council has been undergoing change in the last 12 months and updating all its records. There is improved co-ordination between the Planning Department and Finance to ensure that all received monies are properly recorded and kept up to date.

Invoices have been issued on old applications where monies have not been received following an extensive audit exercise.

Inevitably some developers, once they have been reminded of their obligations, choose to seek to modify the obligation. Any such application has to be assessed against the Local Plan and National Planning Guidance.

From the end of this year, we will be required to provide an Infrastructure Funding Statement which will detail how monies received from S106 payments has been spent.

The work is underway to ensure this is done in line with the requirement.

This, together with the measures introduced over the last 12 months will ensure that the monitoring of S106 Agreements is robust and the problems you have experienced are not repeated.

Councillor Crane was satisfied with the response and she hoped that going forward that no other Parish Council would lose the amount of money that Saham Toney unfortunately had. She had received an apology from Rob Walker, the Executive Director of Place which she had passed on to the Parish Council but of course this had been of little help at that point in time. As Breckland Council did not have a legal obligation to monitor S106 Agreements monies, she asked what advice the Council should give to Parish Councils in monitoring such funding.

The Executive Member for Planning felt that Councillor Crane had done a good piece of work by raising awareness of these matters but reminded Members of what he had said towards the end of his response in respect of the Council providing an Infrastructure Funding Statement detailing how monies received from S106 payments had been spent. This work was already underway and would be available from the end of 2020. In the interim, Councillor Claussen said that he would be happy to send some form of communication about this to all Parish Councils.

**Question 2: Councillor Keith Gilbert to the Chairman of Planning Committee - Cllr Nigel Wilkin**

Can the Executive Member for Planning please explain why the members of the Planning Committee Chairman's Panel found it appropriate for Planning Application 3PL/2019/1554/D, land at Thetford Road, Watton, for 180 dwellings, one of the largest and most controversial and sensitive applications seen in Watton, to be determined under officer delegation, rather than for it be considered by the Planning Committee, thereby denying members of the public who had many concerns about the application the right to address the Planning Committee and raise their concerns.

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Nigel Wilkin thanked Councillor Gilbert for his question.

The scheme of delegation requires only the following types of Planning Applications to be considered at Chairman's Panel:

**Action By**

- Applications which are called in (subject to the criteria as set out in the constitution)
- Where a development is contrary to Policy
- Applications where it is known that the applicant or agent is a Councillor or a member of staff.

Officers can also decide to take further applications to Panel to obtain a view on whether they should be held at Planning Committee if it is considered they raise sensitive or potentially contentious issues.

Members of the Panel are asked to consider the 'sensitivity' of application and make a recommendation to officers as to whether these should be heard at Planning Committee or not. In this instance the application and its sensitivity were discussed, and the members of the Panel came to the view that the application was not so significant it warranted a hearing at Planning Committee.

Of specific note was that the application was a reserved matters application, where the principle of development had already been established by the granting of the outline planning consent. Members noted that any outstanding issues could be adequately dealt with and resolved by planning officers.

A supplementary question raised by Councillor Gilbert:

Councillor Gilbert asked whether, given this was a controversial application that had caused a great deal of anger in Watton due to the lack of transparency, the Chairman believed that now was the time to look again at the role and remit of the Chairman's Panel and also the scheme of delegations for planning applications.

Councillor Wilkin responded that many of the queries raised on this application had already been dealt with and had consequently been brought to Members' attention at the Chairman's Panel. One of the most significant concerns related to the properties on Cannon Close in respect of overlooking and the distances between the new and existing dwellings that had been addressed accordingly in the Reserved Matters application. There had been a great deal of debate between Members and Planning Officers at the Panel meeting where most of the concerns had been covered. In view of this, the Chairman felt that it was unnecessary to bring the application to the Planning Committee to be debated even further.

Councillor Gilbert felt that his question had not been answered and accordingly repeated what had been missed.

In response, Councillor Wilkin advised that a review of the Panel and the subsequent delegations was coming forward.

**Question 3: Councillor Tim Birt to the Executive Member for Planning – Cllr Paul Claussen**

The members of Local Plan Working Group (LPWG) were selected without disclosure of a brief or invitation to the opposition groups for discussion. At Cabinet of 1-June-2020 Cllr Claussen said Members were asked to volunteer to work on the LPWG and he would ask them to disclose their "credentials", so:

- a. To whom was the request to volunteer to serve on the LPWG submitted?
- b. How was the selection of the LPWG members made?

- c. What are the skills, attributes and expertise do the selected members bring to the LPWG?

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Claussen thanked Councillor Birt for his question.

There are no legal or constitutional rules in respect of the allocation of seats to the working group.

Membership of the LPWG was approved by Full Council at its meeting on 28 November 2019. It does not appear from the Council minutes as though there was any challenge to the membership put forward to Full Council.

The request for Volunteers for the group was canvassed amongst Members of the Ruling Group. The selection was based upon what attributes the members of the group could bring to the working group and I am aware that Members have indicated at previous meetings of the working group what those attributes are. I am satisfied that they bring experience of working on such groups previously, a willingness to challenge and a desire to produce a Local Plan that will serve the residents of Breckland for years to come.

As a pre-amble to the question, Councillor Claussen stated that he had been very disappointed with the way the membership of the Local Plan Working Group had been politicised and undermined.

Following the response, Councillor Birt looked forward to a further written response to his question above which he would follow up with letter with a supplementary question contained within it.

**Question 4: Councillor Terry Jermy to the Leader as Chairman of Cabinet – Cllr Chapman-Allen**

Could the Leader, as Chairman of Cabinet, confirm what alternative governance structures were considered in relation to the Working Plan Working Group prior to determining that a working group consisting of solely members of the ruling group would achieve the best outcome for Breckland residents?

**RESPONSE:** The Leader thanked Councillor Jermy for his question.

As there are no legal or constitutional rules in respect of the allocation of seats to a working group nor is it a decision-making body. It is the decision of Breckland's Cabinet with what they felt will be the best outcome for Breckland residents.

A supplementary question was raised by Councillor Jermy.

Given that the Local Plan was such a sensitive topic throughout Breckland and as such everyone involved should have faith in the process, Councillor Jermy asked the Leader if he would commit to reviewing what other governance structures were in place with planning authorities nationally to ensure that Breckland's residents were getting the best possible result.

The Leader stated that democracy was key and the democratic mandate for Breckland residents were under a Conservative ruling Group and as such it was a Cabinet decision to establish a Local Plan Working Group which he hoped supported all residents and businesses across the District. He would be more than happy at the right juncture to work with any Members of the Council and more importantly with the communities and businesses through the Local Plan Working Group to ensure that Breckland had a most suitable Local Plan.

**Question 5: Councillor Stuart Terry to the Executive Member for Planning – Cllr Claussen**

Could the Cabinet Member for Planning confirm whether the Local Plan Working Group will be completing a review of the effectiveness of the previous Local Plan Consultation and Engagement Strategy?

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Claussen thanked Councillor Terry for his question.

The Council will agree a new Statement of Community Involvement that will govern the nature of community engagement in the preparation of the Local Plan Review. It is important to note that whilst the Council wishes to engage all statutory and non-statutory stakeholders in the preparation of the Plan there are aspects of the Plan that will be fixed (for example, the housing requirement and need for the Plan to conform with legislation and national planning policy) and that there will be competing views expressed on aspects of the Plan where a judgement will need to be made.

**Question 6: Councillor Chris Harvey to the Executive Member for Planning – Cllr Claussen**

Could the Cabinet Member for Planning confirm what additional resources the Council would need to allocate to complete the full refresh of the local plan and what the cost of these additional resources will be?

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Claussen thanked Councillor Harvey for his question.

The cost of the Local Plan has yet to be established and will be dependent on the agreed content of the Local Plan and the areas it seeks to cover. Much of the cost will be the production of evidence bases to inform the plan and underpin it at Examination. The work is being done to understand what will be required and what the cost implications over the next four years will be. It should be noted that the majority of the work required would be the same for a partial review of the Local Plan and that it will be more cost-effective to do a full review than to do a partial review and have to start work almost immediately on reviewing those areas of the plan that did not form part of the partial review.

**Question 7: Councillor Mike Brindle to the Executive Member for Planning – Cllr Claussen**

Could the Cabinet Member for Planning confirm if there are any risks associated with undertaking a full review rather than a partial review? Will those risks apply equally to the whole district?

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Claussen thanked Councillor Brindle for his question.

There are risks associated with any review of a Local Plan. However, it is considered that these are significantly reduced if a full review is carried out. A longer time period provides greater opportunity for risks to be managed and mitigated. This is particularly important where the risk is out of the Council's control. The main risks are as follows:

- Understanding the housing requirement. It is not yet known what the housing requirement for Breckland will be or when it will be published.

**Action By**

- Agreeing a viable and deliverable Development Strategy that delivers a 5-year housing land supply
- Changes to National Planning Policy / Planning White Paper (uncertain as to when and implications).
- Any further consideration around the implications of the recent Covid-19 outbreak
- Duty to Co-operate / securing statements of common ground with key external stakeholders in developing the Plan
- 5 Year Housing Land Supply: If the Council does not submit the review in accordance with Policy INF 03, or is unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing land then para 11(d) of the NPPF will apply. That refers to the 'tilted balance' which is applied when 'the policies which are most important for determining the application are out of date' It does not follow automatically that just because one of the policies for determining an application is out of date, the tilted balance must be applied and permission granted.
- Financial, staff Resources and Project Management.

These risks will also apply to a partial review but will have significantly greater impact in terms of programme and the robustness of the final document.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Brindle stated that the purpose of the question was to try to justify the reason for having a full review rather than a partial review as he could not see the logic in having a partial review. The review would include transport and not green issues yet the two were wholly interlinked; therefore, all he was really asking Councillor Claussen was whether he was correct in thinking that the Council was travelling in the direction of a full review.

Councillor Claussen stated that the simple answer was 'yes' a full review had been agreed at Cabinet.

**Question 8: Councillor Roger Atterwill to the Executive Member for Planning – Cllr Claussen**

Can the Cabinet member for Planning please confirm the advantages and disadvantages of the Council undertaking a full review of its Local Plan compared to a partial review.

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Claussen thanked Councillor Atterwill for his question.

The main advantages of preparing a full review of the local plan are:

- Council decisions will likely be better informed (based on an appropriate evidence base and more effective duty to co-operate).
- Public consultation could be more extensive than that required to meet the minimum required to meet statutory requirements. A longer timetable allows time for greater and more effective community engagement including on different options for development and policy development if this is deemed to be appropriate.
- There is more robustness in undertaking a full review as critical risks (including for example, changes to national planning policy) are more likely to be able to be more successfully managed given the extended time period for production.
- Enables the Council to consider additional strands of new policy development over and above those required by the Inspector (including aspects of design and climate change).

- The Council is required to undertake a full review of the Plan within 5 years. By undertaking this task now, it enables full consideration to be given to all aspects of the Plan Review in a single document thereby removing any concerns that the planning Inspectorate may have regarding examination of a split Plan.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Atterwill mentioned the disadvantages which he believed had not been properly conveyed to all Councillors. The disadvantages of a full review being undertaken was that in November 2022 it was likely that 10 policies would be out of date and would therefore carry less weight in terms of decision making in respect of planning applications. He felt that the Council should be made aware of this as it would have an effect on every community. Councillor Atterwill read aloud the relevant policies. He felt that this was a grave concern for all communities that the Council represented. All had thought that a final Local Plan had been adopted but within 3 years they could all suddenly be vulnerable to aggressive development applications.

Councillor Atterwill also felt that even as an opposition member, all should work together as everyone, whatever the political affiliation, wanted this to work and be the best Local Plan for the District and for all communities. The opposition would scrutinise and put forward suggestions in the hope that collective decision-making would be better for Breckland's communities. All had tried to engage but at the first meeting of the LPWG, Members were denied access to the meeting, and at the last meeting, it was stated that members who were not appointed to the LPWG would be muted and unable to speak. This had obviously caused some consternation.

Councillor Claussen stated that the Local Plan Working Group was an informal meeting, it was not a formal Committee and it had no decision-making powers and as such, was not subject to rules on public access, publication of agendas, minutes or political proportionality and going forward the ruling Party and the Cabinet would be making the decisions.

**Question 9: Councillor Harry Clarke to the Executive Member for Planning – Cllr Claussen**

The Capita contract is due to finish part way through the process of undertaking a full review of the Local Plan. Could the Cabinet member for Planning confirm that contingencies will be put in place to ensure continuity of service should council resolve to change course with regard to the provision of planning services.

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Claussen thanked Councillor Clarke for his question.

The Capita contract is due to expire in June 2024. As part of the contract the Council has the option to provide 12 months' notice to Capita to extend the contract for one additional period of 5 years after which the contract would automatically terminate.

The Council has several options:

- Extend the contract
- Take the service back in house
- Find another supplier

In any of these scenarios the officers within the existing service will be protected under employment and contract law and will continue to provide planning services and ensure continuity of all those services.

As a supplementary question, in terms of contingencies and the outlined legal position Councillor Clarke asked if he could be sent other models of planning provision including in-house provision. Notwithstanding the legal position of the contract but taking into account the Government White Paper that was forthcoming that could affect the planning service; therefore, he hoped, as part of the contingency, that this was also looked at in terms of risk of delivering the Local Plan.

**Question 10: Councillor Susan Dowling to the Executive Member for Housing – Cllr Webb**

Could the Cabinet Member for Housing confirm how many new dwellings have been completed in Breckland for each of the last 10 years, given the local plan target is for 612 per year”

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Webb thanked Councillor Dowling for her question and highlighted the figures below:

2011/12	342	612
2012/13	321	612
2013/14	416	612
2014/15	486	612
2015/16	609	612
2016/17	789	612
2017/18	530	612
2018/19	733	612
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4226</b>	<b>4896</b>
2019/20	Monitoring delayed due to Covid 19	

Councillor Webb explained that from 2019 to 2020 the monitoring of the data had been delayed due to Covid-19.

**Question 11: Councillor David Wickerson to the Executive Member for Housing Cllr Webb**

In view of the current crisis with lack of Affordable Housing and the continuing pressure being applied by developers to reduce the required percentile of same in housing developments can the Cabinet Member for Housing please advise the number of Affordable Homes that have been completed for the last 10 years and what that number represents as a percentage of the total number of homes completed. This could form part of an Affordable Housing review including the question of whether Breckland District Council should consider the option of building council owned properties.

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Webb thanked Councillor Wickerson for his question.

The council is keen on delivering affordable housing for our residents and below you can see the housing completions in Breckland for last ten years. The table presents total housing completions per annum which includes within it the number of affordable housing completions. The percentage of affordable homes against this total has been presented in the table, as well as the total number of housing completions against the objectively assessed annualised target of 612 per annum. The figures for the years 2018 – 2020 are estimates at this stage. The number of

affordable homes completed includes the delivery of shared ownership and shared equity homes.

Over the past ten years the average yearly percentage of affordable home completions is 20% and affordable home completions have been consistently below the average in the past four years. The council reduced the percentage requirement of affordable homes on sites of ten or more homes (or 0.5ha or more) from 40% to 25% in March 2019, which was seen as beneficial to enable more affordable home completions as developers could make this viable on their schemes.

Registered Providers and developers have confirmed that schemes on site from March have been delayed by 3 months due to Covid-19. The council wants to ensure that sufficient number of affordable home completions are delivered each year for the needs of our residents and look for creative and new opportunities for delivery by working with RPs, developers, Parish Council, Community Groups, private landlords and landowners.

**Table 1: Delivery of market and affordable housing since 2010 in Breckland**

Year	Total Housing Completions	Affordable Housing Completions	Percentage Affordable Homes Completed	Percentage of Total Housing Completions Against Target
2010/2011	376	80	21%	61%
2011/2012	342	53	15.50%	56%
2012/2013	321	118	37%	52.50%
2013/2014	416	87	21%	68%
2014/2015	486	119	25%	79%
2015/2016	609	61	10%	99.50%
2016/2017	789	143	18%	129%
2017/2018	530	96	18%	87%
2018/2019	733	168	23%	120%
2019/2020	N/A	139	N/A	N/A

Councillor Wickerson thanked Councillor Webb for a very full and professional response to his question and looked forward to further dialogue.

**Question 12: Councillor Philip Morton to the Executive Member for Customer Engagement – Cllr Sherwood**

**Question:** Can the Cabinet Member for Customer Engagement confirm how he will ensure that full advantage is taken of the governments retrofitting fund to improve the Housing stock in Breckland and mitigate Climate Change.

**RESPONSE:** Councillor Sherwood thanked Councillor Morton for his question as it allowed him the opportunity to speak on something that he was passionate about.

Breckland Council is not a stock holding authority and all housing was transferred to the Peddars Way Housing Association (now Flagship Group).

Breckland Council has declared a climate emergency and is introducing a number of new measures to address climate change as highlighted as a Standing Item at each Cabinet meeting.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Morton appreciated that Breckland Council did not have any housing stock but asked what measures the Council could take in respect of working with Flagship and incentivise them to adopt the Government scheme. He was conscious of the funding available that the Council should take advantage of.

Councillor Sherwood agreed with the aforementioned remarks, local residents of Flagship would be keen to see this happen and any organisation such as Flagship Housing Group would want to take full advantage of this, and dialogue was being had.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their patience to these questions and she hoped they found them useful.

**51/20 QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 7 (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The Chairman reminded Members that the period for questions under this Standing Order was limited to not more than 30 minutes and if anyone had any questions to direct them to the Leader, Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen who would answer them or direct them to the appropriate Portfolio Holder.

Councillor Jermy reminded the Leader that in 2019, Breckland Council submitted two funding applications to the Government's Towns Fund to provide much needed support to both Thetford and Dereham town centres. Sadly, both these applications had been unsuccessful but very recently the National Audit Office published a report into the Government's decision-making process criticising how these had been selected. The report revealed all the scores for the towns submitted and the Thetford application scored higher than both Norwich and Ipswich, both were awarded funding, and the Dereham bid scored more highly than Norwich but neither Thetford nor Dereham had been successful. He had noted that two thirds of the successful applications were in Conservative Party areas ahead of 2019s General Election and he asked the Leader if he would write to the Secretary of State asking why these Breckland towns had been overlooked for this funding despite their high scores in the assessment process.

In response, the Leader advised that he had seen sight of the audit report but had not studied it as yet so he was thankful to Councillor Jermy for his question. If it was appropriate to do so he would certainly write to the Secretary of State confirming his disappointment and frustration with the system if what Councillor Jermy had said was indeed accurate.

Following the agenda item at the recent Overview & Scrutiny Commission regarding the current situation in Attleborough, and the Chairman's response in questioning the validity of this item, and the involvement of Breckland Councillors, Councillor Wickerson asked the Leader if all Members could be sent advice and guidance from the Council's Legal Team on the extent of Breckland Councillors becoming directly involved in the internal affairs of town councils.

The Leader advised that the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission was in attendance and part of this question could be directed to him. In terms of the Council's involvement in this matter, the role of Breckland Council was not to intervene and be involved with the governance of statutory bodies of town or parish councils. The role of a District Council was to work in partnership with many different bodies including town and parish councils. There had been concerns

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about Attleborough Town Council and there was an opportunity, through the Overview & Scrutiny Commission (O&SC), to consider these concerns. The O&SC would be receiving this item again for discussion as part of its agenda at the next meeting in September and the Commission maybe minded to write to the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister or others in relation to governance in respect of parish and town councils. The Leader reiterated that it was not the responsibility of Breckland Council to intervene directly in the day to day management of another body.

Councillor Clarke asked the Leader if he agreed that the use of video recordings and livestreaming at meetings had been useful to residents and communities who could see their elected representatives dealing with the challenges that the Council faced and asked if this would continue after the post Covid-19 period was over. He also asked the Leader if he would consider extending the use of such technology where this might support wider engagement and reduced travel costs - such as potential evening meetings.

The Leader advised that as Members were aware, the Regulations only allowed the Council to operate in this type of environment until May 2021; however, under the WorkSmart 20:20 programme, the Committee Suite was undergoing refurbishment to ensure that the technology was in place so that meetings could be streamed live and recorded for residents to watch at their leisure. In relation to when meetings were called that was at the discretion of the Chairman of those Committees whether it was during the working day or in the evening or at weekends to facilitate the best engagement of Members of the Council. He re-affirmed that all formal meetings were held in public but from a Constitutional perspective they did not necessarily involve public participation.

Councillor Harvey informed the Leader that Thetford Coach Services had sadly stopped their bus service to the Barnham Cross Estate that took people to Thetford Town Centre. This service had been heavily relied upon by elderly residents, but the company had blamed Covid-19 and for the difficulty of too many parked cars in the area. He asked if the Leader would agree to write to Thetford Coach Services and invite them to discuss this issue with the Council to look at possible solutions.

The Leader pointed out that Councillor Jermy had already mentioned this to him and a letter had already been sent to Thetford Coach Services, and as an example, had cited the size of Breckland's waste collection vehicles that had successfully managed to negotiate around many parked cars around the District. He had also made it clear that this was a vital service within the Council's biggest market town. The Leader hoped that he would get a response to his letter shortly so that the information could be shared accordingly with Thetford Members.

Councillor Atterwill asked the Leader if he had seen the Terms of Reference for the Local Plan Working Group (LPWG). In the document it stated that the meetings would not be open to the public but it also said that materials would be circulated to all Members of the Council on a confidential basis; including the wording, that all agendas, Minutes and presentations must be treated confidentially by Members unless otherwise stated. He asked the Leader if he knew when these Terms of Reference were agreed and who by as he had trawled through Cabinet and Full Council Minutes going as far back as when the Local Plan was adopted in November 2019. He had not found any reference to the Terms of Reference being brought to a Full Council meeting or a Cabinet meeting to be agreed. He felt that all Members should have had the opportunity to make a contribution at a meeting to discuss these Terms of Reference for the LPWG.

The Leader advised that he would provide a written response after the meeting.

**52/20 ANNUAL APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES, CHAIRMEN AND VICE-CHAIRMEN 2020-2021 (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

The Executive Director of Strategy & Governance (Monitoring Officer) presented the report.

In accordance with the Constitution, the Council was required to make appointments to the main Committees of the Council. In the case of formal decision-making meetings, the appointments needed to be politically balanced in accordance with the Political Group Regulations.

The attached appendix outlined all the Committees and the appointments and Full Council was asked to consider the recommendations set out in the report.

The recommendations would be taken en bloc and a role call would be taken for the votes.

Councillor Atterwill proposed an amendment to the appendix in respect of the membership of the Local Plan Working Group being increased from 5 to 7 to include Councillor Clarke and Cllr Wickerson. He explained the reasons why this proposal should be supported.

Councillor Jermy seconded the proposal.

Councillors Birt, Atterwill, Brindle, Clarke, Dowling, Gilbert, Harvey, Jermy, Morton, Terry and Wickerson asked for their votes in support of this amendment to be recorded.

Following the roll call, the amendment was lost.

A further roll call was taken on the original recommendations; and it was:

**RESOLVED** that:

1. the Council appoints for 2020 – 2021 the Committees and Panels as set out in Appendix A; and
2. where so indicated on the Appendix, the Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Councillors of those Committees and Panels subject to any changes that maybe notified by Group Leaders be appointed.

Councillors Birt, Atterwill, Brindle, Clarke, Dowling, Gilbert, Harvey, Jermy, Morton, Terry and Wickerson asked for their votes against the recommendations to be recorded.

**53/20 APPOINTMENT OF COUNCILLORS TO OUTSIDE BODIES 2020 - 2021 (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

The Deputy Leader, Councillor Claussen presented the report. He highlighted a number of changes to the following outside bodies:

- Norfolk County Playing Fields - Sarah Suggitt to be replaced by Mark Robinson

- Youth Advisory Board - Mark Robinson to be replaced by Ian Sherwood
- Water Resources East - Paul Claussen to be added as Sub.

Councillor Wilkinson pointed out that he had been omitted from the Youth Advisory Board and the Board of Governors to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital had not been included on the list. It was noted that these matters would be dealt with after the meeting.

**TS/JB**

A roll call was taken for voting purposes and it was:

**RESOLVED** that the representatives on the list of Outside Bodies be appointed.

**A comfort break was taken**

**54/202019-20 FULL YEAR FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (AGENDA ITEM 13)**

Councillor Philip Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance & Growth provided Members with a detailed overview of the actual full year financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2020.

Before presenting the report, Councillor Cowen reiterated and echoed the Leaders comments in respect of the tremendous work that all staff had carried out during this crisis. The Finance Team had pulled out all the stops to produce all the detailed content within the report against a background of having to do much more than their normal day job over the last few months, particularly with all the grants that they had managed and dispensed to the businesses in Breckland.

He drew Members' attention to a number of factors within the report to highlight where the Council had been and where it hoped and anticipated to head in the future, including:

**Revenue**

An above budget spend of £224k despite the fact that the Council had been able to mitigate overspend through judicious use of funds that the Council had and had managed to retain throughout the years. The key reasons for this overspend had been highlighted in paragraph 1.2 of the report.

This was not a position that Councillor Cowen felt incredibly comfortable with, but he was delighted that due to the judicious husbandry of the Council's finances over the last few years it was not as high as it could have been.

Paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 were highlighted and explained.

**Capital**

The actual out-turn showed a spend of £4,579k (71%) against the budget which had been anticipated and the reasons and rationale as to why the 100% had not been reached could be seen in the subsequent tables attached to the report.

Page 37 of the agenda pack included the actual revenue outturn chart and the net effect of moving financial resources from various budgets and reserves meant that the Council was £224k adrift.

Table 2 on page 38 of the agenda pack highlighted the significant variances and

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explained the reasons why the Council was in this position. Housing benefit was by far the largest amount closely followed by the one-off retained business rates.

The remaining figures contained in the appendices were explained in great detail.

There were a number of recommendations that Members were asked to consider, and it was suggested that these be taken enbloc.

Councillor Atterwill thanked the Executive Member for his comprehensive report. His question related to the overspend in respect of temporary accommodation due to the lack of affordable housing. He was concerned that, despite supporting the need for affordable housing, the Council seemed to concede to developers who sought to reduce affordable housing allocations. He asked the Executive Member if he had any suggestions as to what the Council could do about this to protect the monies in revenue being spent on temporary accommodation.

Councillor Cowen advised that temporary accommodation covered a range of topics and affordable housing was not the Council's responsibility; it was entirely in the hands of the builders/developers and whilst the Council set targets most came back with an 'open book' approach and the Planning Department and the District Valuer and Members would review and identify whether the scheme was viable or not. Beyond that he knew, as a Cabinet Member, that the Council was looking at providing its own accommodation and continued to look for alternatives. He deferred the remainder of the question to the Executive Member for Housing, Councillor Alison Webb.

Councillor Webb agreed with Councillor Atterwill's comments and further agreed that all Members were trying their best to provide more accommodation. The Housing Team was working very hard to find different ways of accommodating people. She reminded Members of a change to the rules in 2019 that said local authorities needed to provide accommodation for single people, this was quite new, and obviously the numbers had fluctuated and increased whilst also taking into account Government's recent ruling in respect of rough sleepers. Councillor Webb assured Members that the Team was working with those people to try and find proper accommodation whilst also trying to get them back into work. The Council was looking at every opportunity for all residents whether they were rough sleepers or not. She agreed that there was a problem, but everyone was working hard to address these issues.

Councillor Webb said that she would be more than happy to send an email to Councillor Atterwill covering the points that the Housing Team had been looking at and to discuss this matter further in future.

In response, Councillor Atterwill thanked Councillor Cowen and Councillor Webb for their comprehensive answers and looked forward to receiving further data. One further question asked, directed to Councillor Cowen, was if suitable premises became available for temporary accommodation in the north of the District did the Council have adequate capital reserves to put money into that.

In terms of temporary accommodation, Councillor Cowen pointed out that the Council was working with social landlords to try and match any voids in the system with the needs in the community. Beyond that, the Council was now in the process of putting its budget together for the coming year. As part of that budget process, projects such as Councillor Atterwill had highlighted would be looked at taking into account the capital, reserves and grants that were or being made available. The Council, together with the Assets Team and partners, would be looking at what the

Council might be able to do with other property elsewhere in the District. This all had to be driven by need; therefore, the location might be suitable, or it might not. Dealing with homelessness, housing etc was at the forefront of the Cabinet's agenda but whilst finances were somewhat constrained, through circumstances beyond the Council's control, these matters would be looked at imaginatively and constructively as to how the Council might deal with these issues.

Councillor Birt thanked Councillor Cowen and the Finance Team for the report, he would be voting for the proposals but wanted to express some significant concern. He presumed that the figures in the report were pre Covid and to be able to make those capital investments in normal times was going to have a knock on effect and possibly reduce the Council's on-going revenue and other matters such as the 5 year land supply. He felt that the investments shown on table 2 of the report should be drawn down to fulfil the Council's obligations.

In response, Councillor Cowen pointed out that there was no doubt that the Council was progressing its requirements for electricity both in Snetterton and Thetford that would help to deliver the necessary power for the housing growth. These were progressing at pace, but it had to be appreciated that progress also relied on engagement of third parties. The Teams were keeping the pressure up and doing all they could to ensure that these matters were progressed.

Following a roll call, votes were taken on the recommendations; and it was:

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the capital budgets (and associated funding sources) of £2,194,668 be carried forward into 2020-21 to support projects in progress.
- 2) the final capital out-turn and funding for 2019-20 as detailed in appendix B of the report be approved.
- 3) the revised capital budget and associated funding for the 2020-21 capital programme as detailed in appendix C of the report be approved.
- 4) the NNDR Pilot gain is utilised to cover the over-spend and that £214,489 is contributed from the Organisational Development Reserve and a further contribution is made from the Revenues and Benefits Reserve to cover the remaining over-spend.

**55/20 INNOVATIVE PROJECTS FUND - ACCEPTANCE AND SPEND OF GRANT, AND ASSOCIATED MATCH FUNDING (AGENDA ITEM 14)**

Councillor Philip Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance & Growth presented the report.

The purpose of the report was to accept and spend a grant award from the Innovative Projects Fund (IPF), along with associated match funding, on behalf of the Cambridge Norwich Tech Corridor (CNTC) for carrying out an exercise aimed at supporting and growing the manufacturing and engineering industry in the area.

This grant for approximately £181k, was for the New Anglia Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering (NAAME) project to drive innovation forward in various ways.

This funding if accepted would affect, not just Breckland, but other businesses

along the Tech corridor and the objective was to try and attract technology businesses into the District. It was a plan to try and build back stronger, not just Breckland but also Norfolk and in particular industries along the A11 that would then span out to other market towns both in the District and elsewhere in the County.

The key outputs had been highlighted at paragraph 1.7 of the report along with the medium and long-term objectives at paragraphs 1.8 and 1.9.

This was one of the key activities in the re-start phase and part of an integral component within the re-build phase over the next 3 years of the Cambridge & Norwich Tech Corridor's delivery plan. It was vital and the options available at 2.1 and 2.2 of the report were highlighted.

The Portfolio Holder hoped that after reading the expected benefits in paragraph 4 of the report, Members would be happy to support the recommendations.

Councillor Birt, in a previous role, had been involved in the manufacturing industry. He pointed out that there were a number of extremely capable companies in the area; however, there were some that could be overly enthusiastic and overconfident and as a word of caution he felt that any investment should be carefully monitored.

Following a roll call for voting purposes, it was:

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the Innovative Projects Fund grant to the value of £180,700, and associated financial contributions of £19,500, in order to support the delivery of an exercise aimed at growing the manufacturing industry in the area, as set out within this report be accepted; and
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive to sign the grant offer letters in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth.

**56/20 CORONAVIRUS - EMERGENCY GOVERNANCE MEASURES (AGENDA ITEM 15)**

Prior to presenting the report, the Executive Manager for Governance advised that he had a constitutional matter that required reporting for information only in respect of decisions that the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission (O&SC) had approved as not being subject to call-in due to urgency.

There had been two decisions that were urgent directly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Two of the Council's tenants had become subject to a Company Voluntary Arrangement (CVA) and in both cases a proxy vote on that matter needed to be taken very quickly. Relevant Members had been consulted and the reason for the urgency was that the Council would not have been able to respond in the timeline allowed had the Chairman not excluded the call-in.

Referring to the report, the Executive Manager for Governance advised that the coronavirus emergency had changed the way that people lived and worked, Breckland Council was no exception.

Social distancing requirements prevented the normal committee processes for decision making.

Regulations were in place until May 2021 allowing virtual meetings. There were a number of the Council's usual rules within Standing Orders and elsewhere in the Constitution that needed to be amended in order to accommodate this new way of working.

These changes would be temporary and the proposals within the report were set to expire at the point the regulations expired.

In addition, the crisis had tested some of the Constitutional provisions and one such provision related to the Chief Executive's emergency powers. Changes were only proposed to ensure that these powers could be used in the absence of the Chief Executive to make it clear that decisions taken in an emergency under emergency powers could not be called in.

Finally, Members were reminded of the implications if a Members failed to attend a meeting during a six-month period. Many scheduled meetings had been cancelled for a significant period of time and although virtual meetings were now permissible, there were fewer meetings available for Members to attend. At the same time, some Members could have potential difficulties that affected their capability to attend meetings, such as caring responsibilities, possible IT difficulties and potential illness. The report, therefore, recommended that the Council approves in advance any absence exceeding six months, and such prior approval to be effective until the Annual meeting in 2021.

Councillor Birt drew attention to page 60 of the agenda pack at Appendix A where he had spotted a small typo under Standing Order 41.3 referred to itself twice rather than referring to 41.2.

Councillor Birt also expressed some concern over some of the proposed changes set out in Appendix B relating to consultation with Cabinet.

The Executive Manager for Governance responded that there was a provision in the Constitution that would enable him to correct minor numbering errors. The changes proposed at Appendix B reflected the fact that, in an emergency, decisions often needed to be made immediately and it would not be practicable to do so in consultation with the Cabinet (but the delegation was always subject to consultation with the Leader).

Councillor Birt proposed that the 4<sup>th</sup> bullet point in Appendix B be re-instated and the words 'where practicable' be removed from the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet point.

Councillor Jermy had three points to make.

The first was about his disappointment at gender specific references in the document. In numerous cases it referred to 'he' and 'him' therefore, he felt that the document was not gender neutral and he provided an example.

The second point was around attendances. Attendance at a meeting needed to be set to ensure quoracy. He felt that this Council meeting was a fine example with Members being in attendance at the start of the meeting but not at the finish. Therefore, he asked if there were any provisions with the changes to note when Members were leaving a meeting for accountability purposes.

The third point was about the six-month attendance criteria changing for a longer period of time. Virtual meetings he felt made it far easier to attend as Members

could dial in from anywhere. He was not clear if the changes being proposed were Breckland specific or if this had been a national suggestion and was being adopted by other authorities.

On the first point, the Executive Manager for Governance apologised for not picking these up. The new Standing Orders were based on a model produced by the Association of Democratic Services Officer and Lawyers in local Government and tweaked to fit with Breckland's Constitution.

On the second point in respect of attendances etc, there were no particular requirements about leaving meetings early, which was also the case with physical meetings under the existing Constitution. This was a matter that could instead be picked up as part of the protocol/etiquette for virtual meetings.

Finally, on the third point about the six-month rule, this was something that a great many Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officers had raised as a concern across many authorities. Many were adopting the same approach given that it was unknown whether there might be a second wave which could affect attendance, whether there would be a Council meeting that was timed sufficiently to protect affected Members.

The Chairman, whilst not suggesting an amendment, would expect any Member out of courtesy, to let Democratic Services and herself know if they could not attend a meeting.

Councillor Atterwill had no issues with recommendations 1 and 2 but had concerns in respect of the third recommendation and wanted the current procedure in place to be clarified.

The Chairman provided Councillor Atterwill with an example.

The Executive Manager for Governance pointed out that Members' attendances were monitored and were a Member be approaching the six months absence criteria, where appropriate, a report would be brought to Full Council. The difficulty was that there were far fewer meetings and as such there may only be one or two opportunities. If someone was at the four-month point where they have had perhaps technical difficulties with remote meetings added onto a period of time when meetings were not being held, and then if there was a second wave, a meeting might not be able to be convened. The Executive Manager for Governance appreciated that this was unusual but Breckland Council was not on its own.

Councillor Birt's proposal for his suggested amendments was seconded.

Following the roll call, the amendment was lost.

A further roll call was taken on each recommendation; and it was:

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) Virtual meetings - that the amendments to the Council's Standing Orders and Access to Information Procedure Rules, set out in Appendix A of the report, be approved and the Constitution be amended accordingly, such amendments (with the exception of the proposed amendment to Standing Order no. 14.1) to apply up to but not including 7 May 2021 (being the date on which the virtual meeting regulations expire), or such longer period as

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the law allows virtual meetings to be held, the amendments then to be removed from the Constitution without a further report.

- 2) Emergency delegation to the Chief Executive - that the proposed amendments to the emergency delegation to the Chief Executive, shown in Appendix B of the report, be approved, and the Constitution be amended accordingly.
- 3) Vacation of office due to failure to attend meeting - that where any member fails throughout a period of six consecutive months to attend any meeting of the authority, including where an executive member fails to attend any meeting of the Executive or to take any executive decision, such failure be an approved absence due to the coronavirus peacetime emergency under section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Standing Order no. 56, up to and including the date of the Annual Council meeting in 2021.

**57/20 ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT**

None.

The meeting closed at 1.10 pm

CHAIRMAN