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**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**CABINET**

**Held on Monday, 7 September 2020 at 9.30 am**

**THIS MEETING IS IN LINE WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POLICE AND CRIME  
PANELS (CORONAVIRUS) (FLEXIBILITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AND POLICE AND  
CRIME PANEL MEETINGS) (ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 2020**

**PRESENT**

Mr S. H. Chapman-Allen  
(Chairman)  
Mr P.D. Claussen (Vice-  
Chairman)  
Mr S.G. Bambridge  
Mr J.P. Cowen  
Mr P.J. Hewett

Mr M. S. Robinson  
Mr I. Sherwood  
Mrs S. E. Suggitt  
Mrs A. M. Webb

**Also Present**

Mr R. Atterwill  
Mr T. Birt  
Councillor C. Bowes  
Miss H. Bushell  
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen  
Mr H. E. J. Clarke  
Mrs H Crane  
Mr P.J. Duigan

Mr F. Eagle  
Mrs J. James  
Mr M. Kiddle-Morris  
Mr I. Martin  
Mr P. Morton  
Mr J.W. Nunn  
Mr S. Terry  
Mr D. Wickerson

**In Attendance**

Anna Graves  
Rob Walker  
Maxine O'Mahony

Alison Chubbock

Adrian Mills  
Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy

Teresa Smith  
Julie Britton

- Chief Executive
- Executive Director Place
- Executive Director of Strategy & Governance  
(Monitoring Officer)
- Chief Accountant (Deputy Section 151 Officer)  
(BDC)
- Strategic Manager (Billing & Benefits) ARP
- Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer  
BDC)
- Democratic Services Team Leader
- Democratic Services Officer

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**Chairman's Opening Remarks**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting he was pleased to see so many non-members in attendance.

The protocol for non-members wishing to ask questions was highlighted.

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**48/20 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July were confirmed as a correct record.

**49/20 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

None received.

**50/20 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

None.

**51/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 4)**

None declared.

**52/20 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

Councillors Atterwill, Birt, Bowes, Bushell, Marion Chapman-Allen, Clarke, Crane, Duigan, Eagle, James, Kiddle-Morris, Ian Martin, Morton, Nunn, Terry and Wickerson were in attendance.

Councillor Morton raised a question under this item.

Central Government was coming forward with a number of funding initiatives in respect of climate change such as the Green Homes Grant (local authority delivery scheme), to improve the energy efficiency of low-income households. Additionally, £1billion was going to be provided to encourage public sector decarbonisation. He asked if the Cabinet Member for Sustainability could confirm that the Council was taking advantage of these funding initiatives to negate climate change in Breckland.

In response, the Chairman advised that it was not normal practice for non-Members to ask questions under this item; however, he assured Councillor Morton that Councillor Ian Sherwood, the Executive Member for Customer Engagement and the Council's Member Champion for Breckland Sustainability Strategy would respond to this question under agenda item 11.

**53/20 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY) (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

The Leader knew that all Members were now aware that the Chief Executive, Anna Graves, had tendered her resignation and would be leaving both authorities, Breckland Council and South Holland District Council, early in October 2020.

He had worked with the Chief Executive for the past five years as Leader and as Deputy Leader and her incredible contribution, energy and determination, not just to this Council, but to the wider success of local government in Norfolk, Lincolnshire and the Eastern region, had been recognised. The networking and partnership skills built through her 30-year career in local government had helped position Breckland as a true partner of choice for many organisations within the eastern region and had made Breckland Council and its communities a greater place in which both residents and

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businesses could thrive. She had also championed particular areas such as domestic violence and modern slavery, raising awareness not just in the public sector, but within the wider community as a whole.

The Chairman pointed out that a formal announcement would be made at the Full Council meeting in September but in the meantime, he hoped that everyone would join him in offering their personal thanks to the Chief Executive for her tireless energy, commitment and service to the residents and businesses of Breckland and Norfolk and he wished her all the very best for the future.

He and Lord Porter were committed to the current partnership between Breckland and South Holland District Council and all options were now being looked at to cover the gap that the Chief Executive would create to deliver a road to recovery

The Chief Executive thanked the Chairman for his kind words.

On another matter, the Chairman highlighted the subject of the Devolution and Recovery White Paper that the Government had recently announced. Members who followed the MJ or the LGA news would be aware that the Government intended to publish this White Paper in the autumn 2020. Norfolk County Council was already holding a Cabinet meeting to discuss its commitment and direction of travel in response to the White Paper when published.

Breckland Council was committed to work through the opportunities for change with its partners across Norfolk and the wider eastern region and develop all options to improve the lives of residents and businesses. Everyone had a role to play in making sure that this publication was considered with an open mind but at present, without any details, it would be premature to discuss the options for Breckland Council; however, preparations were in hand to respond to the Government's anticipated Recovery and Devolution White Paper once published.

**54/20 BRECKLAND COMMUNITY FUNDING APPLICATIONS (STANDING ITEM)  
(AGENDA ITEM 7)**

Although, there were no funding applications to report, Councillor Mark Robinson, Executive Member for Community, Leisure & Culture, took the opportunity to remind Members that the funding scheme, administered by the Community Foundation had re-opened on 1 September 2020

**55/20 REVIEW OF THE LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME (LCTRS)  
FOR 2021-22 (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Executive Member for Finance and Growth presented the report, the first of three papers that he would be reporting on, all of which were being provided against an unprecedented background that had not been experienced before.

This was the eighth year that Breckland Council had implemented this locally set Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme that had to be reviewed annually. This latest iteration introduced a fluctuating earnings rule that would allow, if approved, a floating tolerance level to make it easier for customers to

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manage their finances month to month.

The current level of maximum benefit being 91.5% for working age claimants and a fully funded package for war pensioners, a key part of Breckland's Armed Forces Covenant.

Whilst living through these unprecedented times and given the impact of the Pandemic, that was affecting all of society and the potential to have a greater impact on the most vulnerable, the fluctuating earnings rule had proved particularly beneficial to many in the Breckland community.

The report identified that Breckland Council had seen a 500% increase in workload as a result of COVID 19 and although this was now reducing to a more typical level, the impact of the pandemic had not disappeared and local flare ups were likely to lead to an increase in casework for the team once more.

There were two options for Members to consider as set out in section 2 of the report. The recommendations in section 3 although unambiguous: should be retained and the scheme be reviewed again in the subsequent year.

Adrian Mills, Strategic Manager (Billing & Benefits) ARP, was in attendance to answer any questions.

Members were asked to support the recommendations.

Councillor Clarke welcomed the review and thanked the Executive Member for his report. He asked however, if the Council would be looking at any changes to the categories of support due to the pandemic in any further reviews going forward.

The Executive Member for Finance & Growth expected an 'open book' review to examine the implications of what everyone had experienced this year and an all Member input into further reviews going forward would be welcomed.

The Executive Member for Community, Leisure & Culture was really pleased to note the introduction of fluctuated earnings within the scheme. He felt that this was a small but significant strut in support for residents whose employment could vary from week to week in terms of income.

Options

- 1) That the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2021-22 be reviewed as outlined within the report and that Cabinet agree to retain the existing scheme for the 2021-22 year.
- 2) That the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2021-22 be reviewed as outlined within the report and Cabinet make other recommendations.
- 3) Do nothing.

Reasons for recommendations

The changes made to the current scheme have worked well – introducing a

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tolerance rule for the treatment of Universal Credit awards has reduced the number of notifications customers receive to amend their Council Tax payments, whilst providing stability for customer repayments whilst reducing customer contact.

Given the economic impact of COVID-19 on household budgets and rising unemployment, we do not recommend increasing the contribution rate this year.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2021-22 as outlined within the report be reviewed; and
- 2) the existing scheme for the 2021-22 year be retained.

**56/20 REVISED BUDGET 2020-21 (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The Executive Member for Finance and Growth presented the report

During these unprecedented times, he doubted whether any Member could recall a time when the Council had to consider a change to the budget part way through a fiscal year.

COVID 19 had had a significant impact on the workings and financial status of Councils throughout the United Kingdom and Breckland was no exception.

In June 2020 an interim report had been presented on the likely and potential impact of COVID 19 on the budget that had been set prior to the world changing in March 2020.

The Council had suffered losses through reductions in its income streams as shown in paragraph 1.3 and it had experienced additional costs as identified in paragraph 1.4 of the report.

Government support had been received to target some of the gaps that the pandemic had created and whilst the Government support had been substantial, it had not funded the budget gap fully as a result of the impact of the pandemic on Breckland.

However, the Executive Member was pleased to report that Breckland Council, through its prudent fiscal management, had been able to absorb the majority of the financial gap by drawing down reserves as shown in Appendix A of the report. This authority was confident that as it moved forward it would be able to put in place measures to address the £217k shortfall.

The Executive Member thanked the Teams within the Council who had worked in challenging and, at times, often difficult circumstances to put this revised budget together. This had been a workstream that had never been encountered before and hopefully one which would not occur again.

Full details that supported the revised budget had been set out in the report and appendix A highlighted the summary of the Revenue Budget amendments.

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Alison Chubbock, the Chief Accountant and Deputy S151 Officer was in attendance to answer any questions.

Members were asked to support the recommendations.

Councillor Clarke also paid tribute to the work of the Teams in these difficult circumstances not only for remote working, but for the challenges faced in respect of the reduction to the Council's position. He had noticed that the Council had lost revenue in a number of areas in particular, commercial services, following a number of abatements for tenants and he wondered if it would be possible to have a breakdown of where those particular gaps were taking into account that this would be commercially sensitive information.

The Executive Member stated that there had been a great deal of information that had gone into producing this report and due to the commercially sensitive nature attached to it, it had been summarised accordingly. He was sure that the Chief Accountant and her Team would be able to pull together a supportive document for Members whilst recognising that some of this information might not be able to be released.

Councillor Hewett, the Executive Member for Contracts & Assets, commented that it was odd to publicise and reflect on bad news but this authority had, as Councillor Cowen had said, like many councils, incurred losses and more costs due to Government grants not being met within the current spending plans. However, at the same time, and emphasising one point that had been mentioned earlier, through robust and careful stewardship, the situation that the Council was facing, was far better than, what he believed many councils had faced during this pandemic. Would this report create sensational headlines, probably not, would it receive the press it deserved in respect of the Council's financial propriety, probably not but would it allow the residents and businesses to thrive in future, absolutely, and he commended the report in terms of both the effort that had gone into it and also the effort it reflected in terms of making sure that the businesses and residents would thrive over the next couple of years.

Referring to the figures contained within Appendix A, Councillor Atterwill felt that the Council was looking at a substantial loss of income in respect of planning & building control and land charges etc. He asked the Executive Member for Finance & Growth whether the Council had the ability to claw back any of that income from Capita in terms of the contract. In response, the Executive Member advised that whilst it was clear that there had been a reduced number of applications submitted during this pandemic, Capita was not responsible for that reduction but he was aware through conversations with colleagues in the Capita Planning department that they had never seen such a large number of applications being submitted now. He anticipated that the planning income stream would recover and gather a little more momentum as there were significant applications in the pipeline coming forward.

As for the contract itself, and whether there was any claw back mechanism contained within it, the Executive Member was unable to respond as contracts did not form part of his Portfolio and deferred the question to Councillor Hewett, the Executive Member for Contracts & Assets.

Councillor Atterwill was reassured that if there was a provision for claw back,

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the Council would pursue it.

Rob Walker, the Executive Director for Place, explained that there was no such claw back mechanism within the contract. Income retention was not linked to cost expenditure directly; however, there were mechanisms within the contract if volume of work thresholds were not being met. Members were informed that historically, these volumes had been exceeded but whether this had been the case during Covid would be a matter that would have to be checked.

The Chairman thanked the Executive Member for Finance & Growth for his report and conveyed his thanks to colleagues within the Finance Team. Councils across the country were struggling and many that were announcing new budgets were changing the way their services were delivered whilst having to take money from their reserves. Breckland's proposal would mean that all services would continue to be delivered at the same level pre-Covid as well as remaining committed to all capital programmes that would make a great deal of difference to its market towns in future. He felt that through Breckland's stewardship, prowess and professional this interim budget presented before Members showed that Breckland Council's commitment to its residents and businesses was still there and he looked forward with Cabinet and council colleagues over these next preceding weeks to announce how Breckland would be changing to further improve its commitments on the back of Covid to ensure that Breckland had stronger resilience moving forward for all.

Councillor Atterwill recognised the difficult situation that everyone was in but to mitigate the deficit of £217k a substantial amount of Reserves would have to be drawn down or further savings would have to be made. He appreciated that Breckland Council was in a position where this Reserve could be used but this was money that this Council was having to use as opposed to being offset by Government funding and asked if there was any prospect of further Government funding expected.

In response, the Chief Accountant advised that there had not been any announcements from Government about further funding; however, there could be some more smaller amounts, such as New Burden grants where the Government covered the cost to councils in terms of re-billing processes. If any announcements were made, the Cabinet would be updated accordingly as part of the quarterly financial reports.

The Executive Member for Finance & Growth pointed out that the Council's General Fund currently contained £2.5m none of which had needed to be drawn down as other sources had been used. The Council was currently in a strong financial position and its plan was to build back stronger and better and would be entrenched over the next few months.

The Chairman reminded Members that a number of years ago the Council had removed its reliance on New Homes Bonus from its core budget that had allowed some of that money to be reinvested. He felt that all Councils up and down the country were experiencing some kind of financial struggle not forgetting every Government department that was also suffering financial impairment on the back of Covid.

Everyone had a duty and a responsibility to ensure that Breckland Council

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was spending its taxpayers' money in the most suitable and appropriate way whilst trying to achieve the biggest rate of return. The White Paper that was emerging was being classed as the recovery and devolution White Paper and part of that reform would be how Councils could recover and become sustainable moving forward. All Councils, whether across unitary, county, district or borough councils, had attempted to lobby Government to support everyone financially and billions of pounds had been pumped into the economy at pace from Government that had proved that the Government had listened to all concerns.

It was noted that subject to all the above and the forthcoming White Paper, the normal budget setting would still remain at the end of this financial year.

Options

- 1) That the additional revenue costs, funding and use of reserves as set out in Appendix A of the report be approved and that the changes to the capital programme set out in Appendix B and Appendix C of the report be approved.
- 2) Do nothing.

Reasons for Recommendations

To set a revised budget which reacts to the Covid-19 situation and provides a new budget to monitor against for the remainder of the year.

**RECOMMEND** to Full Council that:

- 1) the additional revenue costs, funding and use of reserves as set out in Appendix A within the report be approved
- 2) the changes to the capital programme as set out in Appendix B and Appendix C within the report be approved.

**57/20 QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020-21 (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The Executive Member for Finance and Growth presented the report

As of 30 June 2020, the forecast overspend was projected to be £217k as mentioned in the previous agenda item. This identified that, taking into account the lost income streams, the additional costs and the governmental assistance, coupled with Breckland's ability to draw on reserves to bridge the gap, the Council was still showing a potential overspend on its revenue budget.

The Capital budgets were showing an underspend of £5.8m and the reasons for this had been explained on page 31 of the report in tables 1 and 2. Additionally, there were some projects in the programme that had been funded externally through grant funding whereas others had been delayed for various reasons.

At this stage, it was anticipated that the majority of these capital projects would continue and some would be central to Breckland Council's desire to

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Build Back Stronger and position Breckland, its residents and businesses in a better place and one that was more readily able to drive its economy forward as we come out of the pandemic.

Once again, the Executive Member was indebted to the Teams in Breckland who had been providing all the information to the Finance Team so that this position statement could be presented to the Cabinet in as full detail as possible.

The report was for noting only.

Councillor Birt appreciated that this report was a working document but had noticed on page 28 of the report pack that a number of items had been classified as one-offs mainly in respect of commercial related matters. He wanted to know if any projections could be carried out and how these would be quantified in future budgets.

In response, the Chief Accountant explained that it was going to be challenge setting the budget for next year, but Breckland Council was fortunate that the demand for commercial properties had remained high. In these unprecedented times, lessons had been learnt and would be built upon and would be applied in the projections going forward in any future budget.

The Executive Member for Finance & Growth reminded Councillor Birt that this report highlighted the end of the first quarter, and it was the best guess that the Council had based on all the information that had been provided. This authority was fortunate to be in a strong financial position and it would be able to pull back some of the overspends and the one-offs were just that, one-offs. With some of the planning applications coming forward, Members could be assured that Breckland was a place where people wished to carry out and base their business.

Options

- 1) That the report and appendix be noted.
- 2) Do nothing.

Reasons for Recommendation

To provide timely information to Members on the overall financial position of the Council, enabling resource re-allocation to priorities where necessary.

The report and appendix were otherwise noted.

**58/20 BRECKLAND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

Councillor Ian Sherwood, Executive Member for Customer Engagement & Member Champion for Breckland Sustainability Strategy reported on the following three areas:

- the Carbon Audit,
- the development of a Carbon Literacy toolkit; and
- the LGA's Net Zero Innovation programme.

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Prior to that he commented on Councillor Morton's point made earlier in the meeting and he was pleased to inform Members that the Council had applied for the Warm Housing Grant – Councillor Alison Webb, Executive Member for Health & Housing and her Team had submitted the application and a press release including all the details about the Grant was due out soon. If further detail was required Councillor Morton was asked to contact him via email.

Carbon Audit

Members' were reminded that the Council had been looking to procure a carbon audit. All Councils across the country were all looking at climate change and sustainability programmes and many of the bigger carbon audit organisations were unfortunately booked for the foreseeable future. Subsequently, Officers had been asked to look for other available reputable companies or to find out if there were other ways to measure and reduce the Council's carbon footprint. Further ideas would be forthcoming.

Development of a Carbon Literacy toolkit

The intern had been working very hard with Breckland Training Services to develop a Carbon Literacy Toolkit. Councillor Sherwood had carried out his own carbon audit and had been shocked with the results at how big his carbon footprint actually was. The Carbon Literacy Toolkit would help individuals, businesses and organisations to understand the cause and how to reduce it and stop creating carbon that was damaging the environment. This toolkit would first be tested with a small group of Members and Officers ahead of a wide roll out in November/December 2020.

The LGA's Net Zero Innovation programme

This was a new programme that the LGA had introduced for Climate Change Officers from Councils across all regions in England for an initial period of 12 months. Breckland Council would be applying for this grant funding, if successful, it would allow the Council to work with organisations and universities across the country to help achieve their local carbon reduction goals and possible solutions to local challenges. The LGA would grant fund successful Councils on the programme directly with up to £18k towards the cost of the project.

Councillor Atterwill asked if it would be possible to have a written report in future possibly to Full Council to enable Members to monitor progress. In response, Councillor Sherwood agreed to provide more written detail in future.

**59/20 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on Monday, 19 October 2020 at 9.30am were noted.

The meeting closed at 10.15 am

CHAIRMAN