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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

CABINET

Held on Monday, 1 February 2021 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 M. S. Robinson
Mr P.D. Claussen (Vice- Chairman)	Mr I. Sherwood
Mr S.G. Bambridge	Mrs S. E. Suggitt
Mr J.P. Cowen	Mrs A. M. Webb
Mr P.J. Hewett	

Also Present

Mr R. Atterwill	Mr I. Martin
Mr T. Birt	Mr K. Martin
Miss H. Bushell	Mr P. Morton
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen	Mr S. Terry
Mrs H Crane	Mrs L.S. Turner
Mr T. J. Jermy	Mr D. Wickerson
Mr M. Kiddle-Morris	Mr P. S. Wilkinson

In Attendance

Alison Chubbock	- Chief Accountant (Deputy Section 151 Officer) (BDC)
Gill Duffy	- Housing Manager
Nathan Elvery	- Head of Paid Service
Stephen James	- Communities & Environmental Services Manager
Maxine O'Mahony	- Executive Director of Strategy & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Rory Ringer	- Democratic Services Manager
Rob Walker	- Executive Director Place
Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy	- Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer BDC)
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader

16/21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

17/21 APOLOGIES

None.

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18/21 URGENT BUSINESS

Nothing to report.

19/21 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

20/21 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING

The Chairman welcomed all non-Members present to the meeting.

21/21 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

The Chairman was pleased to announce that Attleborough would be the first vaccination centre to open within Breckland District, on 3 February 2021, with further vaccination centres opening across Norfolk and Waveney over the coming weeks.

He went onto mention that it was 'Childrens mental health week' this week, and wanted to raise awareness of the mental health provision in that there were many organisations available for support and that it was important to speak up and speak out.

22/21 BRECKLAND COMMUNITY FUNDING APPLICATIONS (STANDING ITEM)

The Executive Member for Community, Leisure & Culture was pleased that the Council were able to support the Dereham Foodbank with funding which helped to secure a new building for them within the Town to distribute food. He thanked Members for bringing the item forward for consideration and in particular thanked Councillor Webb who had supported the foodbank throughout the process.

He was aware that many Members supported charity projects and community groups across the District and informed that Breckland Council were hosting a session with the National Lottery Community Funds project whereby charities and project groups could book appointments to apply for funding of up to £10,000. Further details were available on the Community funding website.

Councillor Webb added that the £2,500 funding provided by Breckland Council for Dereham Foodbank was also matched by Dereham Town Council. The pandemic had seen the foodbank become overwhelmed and required a larger area for storage so the funding was extremely welcomed, and thanked the Council for their support.

23/21 UPDATE ON BRECKLAND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Customer Engagement and Member Champion for Breckland Sustainability was pleased to update Members on the continued progress of the Sustainability strategy and advised that over 200 responses had been received in response to the public consultation. As a result, the Strategy would be considered at the February Council meeting to enable Officers to analyse and incorporate the responses into the Strategy.

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He went onto say that details of the new Environment and Climate Change Officer had been circulated to all Members.

Councillor Birt said that he looked forward to the Sustainability Strategy being discussed in the coming weeks. He added that whilst there had been a good response from the consultation, he felt apprehensive about what the Council would learn from those responses, as no guidance had been set as to the value of the order of priorities given. He went onto ask if there could be an opportunity to view the webpages before they were made public.

The Executive Member felt that Members should not underestimate the concern the public had on climate change. He believed residents who were passionate about the subject had already carried out their research which was apparent in the responses received. He also informed Members that he would be meeting with each political group across the Council to provide an opportunity to discuss the programme, feedback received and the carbon audit report, before the full Council meeting.

Members noted the content of the report.

24/21 QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020-21

The Executive Member for Finance and Growth introduced the report that provided information on the forecast full year financial position of the Council as at 31 December 2020.

He explained to Members that as a consequence of the current climate the report recommended to full Council that funds should be carried forward into the next financial year, which was an unusual step.

Councillor Hewett felt that it was critical at this point in time for the Council to err on the side of caution and whilst it was unusual in accounting purposes to carry forward budgets agreed that it should happen at this stage. He also added his thanks to the Executive Member and the Finance team for reporting that the Council was in a robust position at the end of Quarter 3.

Councillor Birt added that whilst he fully recognised the difficult position for the Council to predict the future, he felt it should remain open and transparent as much as possible. He went onto ask how information on the variances could be made public as he was yet to receive information on the Worksmart 2020 programme. Councillor Hewett apologised and asked for Councillor Birt to send a request and would respond accordingly.

The Chairman added that it was important to clarify to members of the public, that Members set out projects with clear objectives and timescales to be achieved within the budget constraints. Members would then allow the Officers to deliver the requirements which had been set out within reports and agreed at committees. He felt it important to understand that it would take time and effort for everything to be open and transparent which would result in unnecessary reports to Members. He added that the Worksmart project had been set out in an open report in October 2019 and Councillors Hewett, Sherwood and Claussen were part of the Member board to over see the project being delivered.

Options

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- 1) That the report and appendix be noted and recommend to Full Council that:
 - a) The income received from the NNDR and Council Tax income compensation scheme be carried forward in reserve to cover the deficits recognised in future years (as detailed in paragraph 1.6); and
 - b) The NNDR S31 grant for expanded retail relief and nursery reliefs received in 2020-21 is carried forward in reserve to cover the deficits recognised in 2021-22 from the lost income as a result of these NNDR reliefs (as detailed in paragraph 1.6); and
 - c) The below budget NNDR levy payment at the end of the year is carried forward in reserve to cover the deficits recognised in future years from the lost income as a result of the pandemic (as detailed in paragraph 1.6).
- 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 and to smooth the effects on the unusual collection fund deficits.

It was **RESOLVED** that Cabinet noted the report and appendix; and,

Recommend to FULL COUNCIL:

- 1) That the income received from the NNDR and Council Tax income compensation scheme be carried forward in reserve to cover the deficits recognised in future years (as detailed in paragraph 1.6 of the report).
- 2) That the NNDR S31 grant for expanded retail relief and nursery reliefs received in 2020-21 be carried forward in reserve to cover the deficits recognised in 2021-22 from the lost income as a result of these NNDR reliefs (as detailed in paragraph 1.6 of the report).
- 3) That the below budget NNDR levy payment at the end of the year be carried forward in reserve to cover the deficits recognised in future years from the lost income as a result of the pandemic (as detailed in paragraph 1.6 of the report).

25/21 BUDGET, MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPITAL STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Finance and Growth presented the report that sought approval for the Capital and Revenue budget estimates, and the proposed Council Tax and the Financial Medium-Term Plan and Capital Strategy. He added that it was a proposed balanced budget going forward into 2021-2022 which had been a phenomenal achievement for any Council against the backdrop of what had been experienced across the Country during 2020.

He explained that within the budget it was proposed there would be an increase of the Council Tax by £4.95 for a band D property, although most people in the District would see a smaller rise. The draft budget had been set

Action By

based on principles set out within the report and in most cases front-line services had been enhanced and allowed for projects that would lead to future growth and investment across the District.

Whilst setting the budget, thought had been given to fixed-term temporary staff roles and in particular roles which may need to be continued to support the Council's priorities. It had been recognised that in order to continue with the digital programme, that the budget allowed for the two fixed-term posts to move to permanent roles.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission proposed to utilise part of the Government Local Council Tax Scheme (LCTS) one off grant for 2021-22 to create a S13A1c hardship fund for Council Tax to provide exceptional hardship payments (EHP). The budget included £65,000 that had been set aside to create the hardship fund and work was underway with Anglia Revenues Partnership to determine a policy which was fair and transparent, and targeted the affected working age of LCTS residents (which supports Government intentions) and would be workable to administer.

Councillor Hewett congratulated the Executive Member and the Finance team for producing a balanced and exceptional budget in exceptional times. He appreciated that there would be some residents who may find it difficult to meet the extra 10p per week increase in their Council Tax bills. He asked how the Council could support those that were most vulnerable at this time. The Executive Member explained that in the past a Council Tax relief scheme had been supported by Norfolk County Council, but that would not be the case going forward, and therefore Breckland Council had decided to see what support could be provided. The issue had been discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting and as a result work was underway with colleagues in Anglia Revenues Partnership to develop a most effective, efficient, and optimum way to support those in need at this time.

Councillor Jermy thanked the Executive Member for Finance and Growth for incorporating the recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny into the report. He went on to say that the financial impact of COVID varied for so many and he particularly liked that the hardship fund would be flexible in its approach. He noted that the report had stated that efficiency savings would be required in the following years and asked how this would be approached.

The Executive Member advised Members that efficiency savings would be required in the coming years. The Council would continue to look at the Digital journey across all services in order to make services available on the internet more efficient and user friendly which in turn would create further efficiency savings. In addition, the Worksmart 2020 programme would look to see changes at Elizabeth House, that would allow Officers to work together in a comprehensive and inclusive way and at the same time allowing space to become available to rent out. He also added that a large proportion of income would be generated from the Commercial Property portfolio and therefore create a maximum return.

Councillor Birt was also pleased to see that the proposal from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission had been included. He went on to say that he felt public could be confused by the Council Tax and wondered if the information available culminated in that and felt by having the parish precepts included would create a fairer picture.

Action By

The Executive Member informed that the chart compared the District Council Tax rates of Local Authorities across Norfolk and was a form that had been completed for many years. He would ask the Chief Accountant to provide Councillor Birt with additional information on this.

Options

- 1) That recommendations 1 to 8 above are approved.
- 2) That amendments are made before recommendations 1 to 8 above are approved.
- 3) That some of the recommendations 1 to 8 are approved.

Reasons for Recommendation

To comply with budgetary and policy framework and allow consultation with Members.

RESOLVED that CABINET Recommend to FULL COUNCIL:

- 1) That the Breckland revenue estimates and parish special expenses for 2021-22 and outlined position through to 2024-25 (as set out in Appendix B and E of the report) be approved.
- 2) That the capital estimates and associated funding for 2020-21 and 2021-22 and outline position through to 2024-25 (as set out in Appendix H of the report) be approved.
- 3) The fees and charges shown at Appendix D and D2 of the report, for adoption on 1 April 2021 be approved.
- 4) The Council Tax is set at £98.73 for a Band D property in 2021-22 (a £4.95 per annum increase on 2020-21 levels).
- 5) The financial Medium Term Plan and associated staffing full time equivalents at Appendix A of the report be approved.
- 6) The Capital Strategy at Appendix G be approved.
- 7) To increase the permanent establishment by 2 FTE for 2 Digital roles (front end developer and back end developer) to provide stability and consistency enabling us to deliver our digital roadmap (as detailed in paragraph 1.11 of the report).
- 8) To set aside £65,000 for a Council Tax (S13A1c) hardship fund for 2021-22 and delegate finalisation of the policy to the Executive Member Finance & Growth and S151 Officer in conjunction with ARP (as detailed in paragraph 1.12 of the report).

26/21 INTEGRATED SHARED MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE AND JOINT WORKING ARRANGEMENTS REVIEW – PREFERRED OPTION FOR BRECKLAND AND SOUTH HOLLAND DISTRICT COUNCILS.

The Head of Paid Service introduced the report and reminded Members that in October 2020, both Councils had commissioned a strategic review of the integrated shared management and joint working relationship between South Holland and Breckland District Councils and the report had set out

Action By

recommendations from the first stage of that review.

There would be three stages to the strategic review, with the first providing both Councils a signal of direction going forward through the preferred option. The second phase would see a separate set of decisions that would include a business case based on the preferred option. The third stage would be to implement of the preferred option.

Members were informed that since the publication of the report, a fourth recommendation had been circulated to Members as the report had continued to develop and adapt. The recommendations of the report had been unanimously agreed at the Cabinet meeting of South Holland on the 26 January.

Following a set of criteria as detailed within the report, the preferred option for both Councils was to form a Local Strategic Partnership within the Council's own County.

The Chairman added that since the pandemic both Councils' had operated within a place-based model which he felt was the right thing to do to respond to the emergency position. It had formed the catalyst for both Councils to consider what the best option would be going forward for the residents and businesses of Breckland. The partnership had, for over a decade been working well, and he reminded Members that we were the first in the Country to set up a Strategic Partnership expanding across two counties. Both Leaders had a mutual respect and trust for each Authority with a moral obligation to ensure that no single Authority would be left without being able to provide the ongoing services.

Councillor Sherwood thanked the Head of Paid Service for the detailed report. He went on to say that the partnership had worked, where many had failed, and that had been down to the trust of both Leaders, Officers and Members across the organisations. In addition, as a result of the partnership Breckland had been able to redirect the savings made to support the frontline services.

Councillor Hewett also added that it had provided an opportunity to allow the Council to adapt to the future needs of the residents and Businesses across Breckland.

Councillor Webb asked what the savings had been of the Partnership and if there would be an additional cost of the interim place-based structure. The Head of Paid Service reminded Members of the report in 2015 that saw savings across the Partnership of £4.4m with ongoing savings of £500k per year. Further savings could be made as new partnerships were created within Norfolk. He confirmed there would be no additional costs to the interim Structure, however the safe landing of Officers was still to be finalised. In addition, there had been an assumption that moving forward there would not be a Chief Executive appointed at this time.

Councillor Cowen added that an opportunity had been created due to a changed landscape to all the Council to operate differently. Breckland Council would be able to bring a significant knowledge base to share with a new partnership, and felt it would be an opportunity to form something better and stronger for residents across Norfolk.

Action By

Councillor Bambridge said it had been a unique relationship that had led many other Authorities to follow in a similar path. The arrangement had been extremely successful, and we would leave the partnership as good friends with South Holland District Council.

Councillor Claussen added that the partnership had succeeded due to having the right leaders in the right place and the right time. He felt that Breckland were equally fortunate at this time to be in a good place and had an opportunity to make a huge step in the Council's history.

Councillor Birt asked where the methodology for the assessment had derived from and felt the data and evidence to support the assessment had been omitted from the report. He felt that there was a substantial difference in the scoring scheme, and he wanted to know, based on the reporting, why the Council would be in a poor position under the 'as is' option. In addition, there had been no mention of who the new Local Strategic Partnership might be and was not clear on how that information could be scored. He also asked the Chairman if the Unitary proposal for Norfolk was under consideration as part of the new strategic partnership.

The Head of Paid Service said the methodology had been conducted using a combination of ambitions which had been set out within the organisations corporate plans; principles set during the review of the partnership in 2010 and again in 2015; and thirdly, issues that allowed the organisations to adapt to their environment such as the pandemic and response to the Local Government re-organisation.

The Chairman added that he was confident in the activity both Cabinets of both Councils had undertaken and felt the Organisations were in a strong position with the proposal to move forward as a Council. He went on to explain that prior the pandemic, everything had worked well with the shared arrangement and a 60/40 split albeit that Officers worked harder to make effective what was required in both localities. Throughout the pandemic, the place-based team had worked with local organisations at pace to deal with the National issues. He informed Members that the Local Government re-organisation was on hold, however, that did not stop those involved within Local Government to work collectively to provide efficiency savings across Norfolk.

Councillor Birt went on to request if additional information of evidence and data was available for it to be included when the report was published for the Overview and Scrutiny Agenda.

Councillor Wickerson asked if the scoring of the new Local Strategic Partnership had been influenced by any particular partnership within Norfolk. Members were informed that it had been scored objectively without being targeted to a specific partnership.

Councillor Morton welcomed the opportunity to consider the relationship with South Holland and in particular felt it would significantly reduce the amount of commuting that Officers would do. He asked how the effectiveness and efficiency had been judged and rated within the Appendices to the report. The Head of Paid Service explained that the 'As Is' option had been evaluated on what had already been achieved. To continue with the

Action By

partnership would result in achieving more effective and efficient ways that would require large changes to the existing operating model. However, by moving to a new Shared Local Partnership it would provide opportunity to set a new baseline to build on those partnerships.

RESOLVED to Recommend to FULL COUNCIL to:

- 1) approve the preferred option for the future of the integrated shared management structure and joint working arrangements between the two Councils as set out in paragraph 1.8 of the report;
- 2) activate clause 8 of the memorandum of agreement between Breckland District Council and South Holland District Council and authorise any extension or shortening of the timeframe set out in clause 8.6A by mutual agreement between the two parties, so far as may be considered appropriate by the Leaders, following consultation with their respective Cabinets; and
- 3) approve for consultation the interim structures to support and enable the achievement of the preferred option for both Councils.
- 4) subject to there being no material changes to the senior management structure following consultation with officers, delegated authority be given to the Head of Paid Service in consultation with the leader to implement the said structure.

27/21 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting on Monday 22 March at 9.30am were noted.

28/21 EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

29/21 HOUSING SERVICE REVIEW

The Executive Member for Health and Housing presented the report that asked Members to consider the details of the Housing Service Review and the presented recommendations for change to allow for improvements in the Housing Service.

RESOLVED that the Recommendations set out within the report be forwarded to FULL COUNCIL.

The meeting closed at 11.00 am

CHAIRMAN