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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

COUNCIL

Held on Thursday, 31 March 2016 at 10.00 am in the
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham

PRESENT

Mr T J Ashby	Mr K. Martin
Mr S.G. Bambridge (Chairman)	Mrs S.M. Matthews
Mrs E J Bishop	Mrs K. Millbank
Mr W.P. Borrett	Mr T F C Monument
Councillor C Bowes	Mr M J Nairn
Mr R F W Brame	Mr J Newton
Mr C G Carter	Mr J.W. Nunn
Mr T R Carter	Mr D R R Oliver
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen	Mr R. R. Richmond
Mr S H Chapman-Allen	Mr W. R. J. Richmond
Mr H E J Clarke	Mr M. S. Robinson
Mr P.D. Claussen	Mr J.D. Rogers
Mr J.P. Cowen	Mr F.J. Sharpe
Mr P R W Darby	Mr W.H.C. Smith
Mr P M M Dimoglou	Mr A.C. Stasiak
Mr P.J. Duigan	Mr M Taylor
Mr K.S. Gilbert	Mrs L.S. Turner
Councillor E. Gould	Mr M. A. Wassell
Mrs J Hollis	Mrs A M Webb
Mr T. J. Jermy	Mr N.C. Wilkin
Mr A.P. Joel	Mr P S Wilkinson

In Attendance

Anna Graves	- Chief Executive
Maxine O'Mahony	- Executive Director of Strategy & Governance
Rory Ringer	- Democratic Services Manager
Mark Stinson	- Executive Manager Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Helen McAleer	- Senior Democratic Services Officer

31/16 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

An addendum to Minute No 19/16 Leader's Announcements had been tabled.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

32/16 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Crawford, Duffield, Hewett, Jolly, L Monument and Sherwood.

Action By

33/16 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

Members were informed that Agenda Item 17 had been deferred. Written notification of amendments to the Constitution would be provided in future.

The Chairman's Appointments had been tabled and he referred in particular to the VC Reception at County Hall, the funeral of the Forest Heath District Council Chairman and the Lord Lieutenant's Awards ceremony.

The Chairman reminded Members of the Public Speaking training which would take place at 5.30pm in the Anglia Room.

34/16 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 6)

This item had been moved up the Agenda by the Chairman.

No declarations were made.

35/16 RESIGNATION & ELECTION OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL (AGENDA ITEM 4)

Councillor Michael Wassell had resigned as Leader. He gave the attached speech before stepping down.

The following Members then spoke about Councillor Wassell.

Councillor Gilbert thanked him for the way he had been as Leader. It was a hard and frustrating job and he had done it in an impartial and balanced way.

Councillor Cowen was grateful for his work on Devolution and thanked him for the way he had supported and informed the Scrutiny Commission.

Councillor Wilkin said it had been a challenging job and Councillor Wassell was a true statesman.

Councillor Brame thanked him for his help and advice and wished him all the best for the future.

Councillor Jermy as Leader of the Labour Group thanked him on behalf of Labour Members present and past. He had always been ready to hear opposing views and had kept all Members up to date.

Councillor Wilkinson thanked Councillor Wassell for having faith in him and making him an Executive Member.

Councillor Dimoglou thanked him for his support both personally and as a Member.

The Chairman then invited nominations for Leader of the Council.

Councillor Smith proposed Councillor William Nunn as Leader and Councillor Wilkinson seconded that proposal. No other nominations were made.

RESOLVED that William Nunn be appointed as Leader of the Council.

36/16 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

Councillor Nunn thanked Members for their nomination and confidence in appointing him Leader and said that he would do his best.

He appointed Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen as Deputy Leader but made no other immediate changes to Cabinet.

Devolution was the top topic and one of the reasons he had decided to come back to stand for Leader. Members had lots of concerns and he wanted to take the opportunity to make clear that he did not support the Elected Mayor proposals. He said that the Council would not accept a Mayor except under exceptional circumstances. He believed a combined authority was the right way forward. He wanted to make his position clear and hoped that the Council would support that view.

Councillor Cowen was delighted with the new Leader's position on the Mayoral situation. One individual taking responsibility for such a large geographical area worried him. He hoped other Members would also support that view.

Councillor Jermy congratulated the new Leader and Deputy Leader on their appointments. He noted that the previous Deputy Leader had been especially dedicated to her role.

He was reassured with the new Leader's views on the Mayoral position as he was against it himself, but he asked how the Council would ensure that their voice was listened to?

The Leader of the Council said that he hoped that what he had said publicly would ensure the Council's views were known. Cambridgeshire County Council had said the same. The Secretary of State had said he would not impose the model. Lots of meetings were being held but they were not well publicised – he would try to make them more public.

Councillor Smith still felt that the outcome was inevitable and it would lead to a Unitary authority. He felt Members should have followed the Act as it went through Parliament as there were lots of powers in it that the Secretary of State could exercise without consultation.

Councillor Nairn wholly endorsed the Leader's view. The inducements offered in terms of financial grants worked out at less than £1million per authority.

Councillor Claussen thought the whole Council completely supported the

Leader's view.

Councillor Borrett also thanked the previous Deputy Leader, Councillor Lynda Turner, for her hard work. He too supported the Leader's Mayoral position as he thought it would create a whole new level of authority and bureaucracy.

37/16 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 6 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Councillor Gilbert read out his Question on Notice to the Executive Member for Finance.

Councillor Dimoglou read out his response.

Councillor Gilbert thanked him for his answer and suggested that it might be an item for a future Scrutiny meeting.

A copy of the question and answer is attached and had been tabled for information.

38/16 QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 7 (AGENDA ITEM 8)

Councillor Jermy asked the Chairman about the stock of street lights which were old and frequently failed leading to concerns from residents. What standards did the Council have in place for the repair of streetlights?

The Chairman asked the Executive Member for Place to respond and Councillor T Carter advised that there was a study underway to clarify the situation as currently some street lights were owned by the Parish Councils, some by the District Council and some by the County Council. He acknowledged that maintenance was often slow. The whole situation was being looked at to make it more efficient.

Councillor Dimoglou noted that a similar question had been raised during the Budget Setting report. The Executive Director for Commercialisation had provided a detailed response at that time.

Councillor Taylor asked the new Leader if he would work on his public relations image regarding his views on Thetford as many residents did not like him.

Councillor Nunn responded that he had changed in the two and a half years he had been away. He had made mistakes with the way he had dealt with some things previously and he was sure he would get things wrong again, but he would rely on Members to guide him.

Councillor Robinson (speaking as a resident of Thetford) had an opposing view to Councillor Taylor's. He recalled that Councillor Nunn had been keen to kick start the regeneration of Thetford and he was not disliked by all residents.

39/16 MOTION RECEIVED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 8 (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Chairman read out the Motion submitted by Councillor Newton and then invited him to speak.

Councillor Newton moved the motion without further comment and Councillor Taylor seconded the motion.

Councillor Oliver proposed an amendment deleting parts 1a-f and part 2 of the motion and inserting: 'This Council welcomes the chance for every Breckland resident to participate in the referendum on whether Britain should remain a member of, or leave, the EU, secured as part of the Government's 2015 manifesto and supported by the UK Labour Party. The Council notes the views on both sides of the debate and encourages as many people as possible to participate in the democratic process.'

Councillor Cowen seconded that proposal.

Councillors Hollis, Newton and Taylor voted against the amendment. All other Members supported it.

The new substantive motion was then debated.

Councillor Clarke had been surprised by the original motion as the Council usually debated matters with all the facts before them, including details of risk. He did not believe that the original motion had been appropriate for the forum and he supported the amendment.

Councillor Smith strongly supported the amendment. In a normal election people voted for an individual but the EU referendum was different. The public would make the decision and would be directly accountable for that decision. The Council could not exercise that power on their behalf and he did not think it was right for Elected Members to usurp that power.

Councillor Jermy agreed, he was happy to support the amendment. He did not think it was the Council's position to influence the vote of residents. He encouraged everyone to research the facts and make up their own minds as he would do.

Councillor Taylor spoke against the amendment. People were fed up with the biased information provided by the media and wanted to know what their Councillors thought. It was something that should be debated by the Council.

Councillor Newton agreed. One of the reasons he had proposed the motion was because Breckland was Councillor led and the people of the District deserved to know what their Councillors were thinking.

RESOLVED that this Council welcomes the chance for every Breckland resident to participate in the referendum on whether Britain should remain a member of, or leave, the EU, secured as part of the Government's 2015 manifesto and supported by the UK Labour

Party. The Council notes the views on both sides of the debate and encourages as many people as possible to participate in the democratic process.

40/16 CABINET MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 10)

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15 March 2016 be adopted.

41/16 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION (AGENDA ITEM 11)

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 3 March 2016 be adopted.

42/16 PLANNING COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 12)

42 .a Confirmed minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 8 February 2016.

RESOLVED that the confirmed Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 8 February 2016 be adopted.

42 .b Unconfirmed Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 7 March 2016.

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 7 March 2016 be adopted.

43/16 APPEALS COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 13)

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Appeals Committee meeting held on 9 March 2016 be adopted.

44/16 AUDIT COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 14)

a) Treasury Management Policy & Strategy 2015-16 (Minute No 14/16)

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The Treasury Management Strategy 2016-17 to 2018-19 at Appendix A to the report be approved;
- 2) The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement contained within Appendix A to the report which sets out the Council's Policy on MRP be approved;
- 3) The Prudential Indicators and limits contained with Appendix A (Tables 1-10) of the report be approved;
- 4) The Investment Strategy 2016-17 (Appendix B to the report) and the detailed criteria included in Appendix B1 to the report be approved; and
- 5) The Treasury Management Policy at Appendix B2 to the report be approved.

b) Counter Fraud Corruption & Bribery Policy, Whistleblowing Policy and Money Laundering Policy (Minute No 15/16)

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The Counter Fraud Corruption & Bribery Policy be approved;
- 2) The Whistleblowing Policy be approved; and
- 3) The Money Laundering Policy be approved.

c) Adoption

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 19 February 2016 be adopted.

45/16 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2016/17 (AGENDA ITEM 15)

The Executive Director Strategy & Governance presented the report which the Council was required to produce annually and had to be approved by Council.

The statement was for the financial year and set out the Authority's policies relating to:

- The remuneration of Chief Officers
- The remuneration of the lowest paid employees
- The relationship between Chief Officers remuneration and that of other Officers.

The Statement was factual and correct at the time of writing.

In response to a question from Councillor Jermy it was confirmed that no directly employed staff were paid below the Living Wage.

RESOLVED that the Pay Policy Statement be approved.

46/16 NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE AND OTHER SEATS (AGENDA ITEM 16)

None.

47/16 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION (AGENDA ITEM 17)

This item had been deferred and would include written confirmation of any changes to the Constitution in future Agendas.

48/16 ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT (AGENDA ITEM 18)

None.

The meeting closed at 11.12 am

CHAIRMAN

Minute Item 35

Thank you Mr Chairman, and I can indeed confirm that it is my decision to stand down as Leader of this Council, for personal and private reasons.

My time as deputy leader and leader of Breckland Council have been enjoyable, challenging, rewarding and frustrating in equal measures. However I will take away some lasting memories both of places I have been to and people that I have had the pleasure of working with.

I want to thank all of the elected members who have supported and worked with me, I want to thank the cabinet members who I have worked with especially those that were involved with the Local Asset Backed Vehicle Process, which has resulted in the successful setting up of Breckland Bridge, as evidenced by the current Riverside development. Perhaps in a break with tradition I want to mention members of the opposition parties, I have enjoyed the debates that we have had in this council chamber, YOU have always been courteous and respectful to both myself and members of my cabinet, for which I thank you.

I believe that this council is now in a very strong position, we have a balanced budget, we are working towards removing our reliance on RSG, we now have an up to date corporate plan that reflects member's aspirations for the district that they serve, we are building both commercial property and also homes for our residents, we are building better relationships with our parishes and we have an emerging local plan that will ensure that we have a 5 year land supply, that could go a long way towards reducing the number of speculative planning applications we receive.

But none of this has happened without a great deal of work; that is a great deal of team work between Breckland members, Breckland's officers, and our partners. Breckland has what I would maintain is now the best group of officers of any council. I have had the honour of working closely with many officers at all levels of the council and I never fail to be impressed by their professionalism, integrity and desire to do the very best that they can, often under very trying circumstances. I want to particularly mention the Chief Executive and the 3 directors in all of whom I have the upmost confidence and respect and I want to thank them for the support that they have given to me. Truly I believe that the most valuable assets that Breckland has, are not the commercial buildings that we own, but the officers that work for the council and the members, across all parties who take an active, constructive and productive role in ensuring that they represent the residents that we all serve.

Thank you Mr Chairman, I look forward from this afternoon to getting my life back.

AGENDA ITEM 7 – Questions on Notice under Standing Order No 6.

Question from Councillor Keith Gilbert:

I would like to ask the Executive Member for Finance the following question on notice under standing order no 6 at the Full Council meeting on Thursday 31st March 2016.

Not long ago the Government gave us the good news that councils would be able to retain, if not all, then a large portion of the business rates they collect.

In the recent budget the Chancellor announced a big reduction, and in the case of some small businesses, especially small shops, an abolition of the business rate.

Therefore there is less business rates for councils to retain. It seems as though the Government has given us a box of chocolates, but when we opened it we found they had eaten most of them.

How does this impact on Breckland's budget and finances?

Answer from Councillor Pablo Dimoglou – Executive Member for Finance

I would like to thank the Councillor Gilbert for his question.

He is indeed correct when he says that Central Government did announce an intention for Councils to be able to retain 100% of their business rates.

We are still awaiting detail of the scheme, but in consideration of the information we already have, it would appear to be good news for Breckland Council.

There are always risks to any new initiatives, as Central Government is not renowned for wanting to give away money! With 100% retention of business rates comes 100% of the risks of funding appeals and suchlike - with reclaims sometimes being valid for 6 years.

Breckland is also part of the Norfolk Business Rate Pool which equalises business rates received. This does not mean all councils receive the same income from business rates but it does mean that better off councils have to subsidise others not doing so well.

Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) will apply to a greater number of businesses. There is currently Section 31 grant funding in place to cover this cost to the Council (c£600,000). This should be in place until 2020, but another risk is that it could be reduced or removed after 2021, as we have seen reductions in New Homes Bonus and The Revenue Support Grant.

As part of the initiative Central Government also plans to let Councils set their own levels of business rates, which I feel will also help Breckland Council as we have an entrepreneurial approach to business development.

The recent budget announcements will not affect Breckland Council's budget or medium term financial plan in the coming years. With permission of Members during budget setting we agreed a four year settlement with Central Government to give us stability moving forward.

In addition these changes will first be rolled out in London in 2017 and three years later (2020) around the rest of England.

So to summarise, this should have no effect on Breckland Council until 2020-21.