

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

COUNCIL

**Held on Thursday, 21 September 2017 at 10.00 am in the
Anglia Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

PRESENT

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

In Attendance

Mark Stinson	- Executive Manager Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Maxine O'Mahony	- Executive Director of Strategy & Governance
Ross Bangs	- Housing Manager
Vicky Lowry	- Interim HR Manager
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer

129/17 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ashby, Bowes, P Hewett, Kybird, Oliver, Taylor, Turner and Webb.

130/17 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

131/17 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None.

Action By

132/17 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

The Chairman was delighted to see Councillor Marion Chapman-Allen at the meeting. Members applauded her return.

The Chairman had been very busy since the last Full Council meeting and mentioned a number of enjoyable events including the tour of Thetford, dinner on the North Norfolk Railway, the opening of the Snetterton Renewable Energy Plant and dinner with the High Sheriff of Norfolk in Kings Lynn just last week. She conveyed her thanks to Councillor Crawford for organising the tour of Thetford and now realised that the town had much more to offer than first thought.

The Chairman also mentioned her Charity Winter/Wonderland Ball on 17 November 2017 – tickets were now on sale. Her secretary, Alex Elliott had sent an email to all Members with booking form and invitation attached. She hoped to see many Councillors there in support of her charity.

The Chairman reminded Members of the Strategy & Governance Directorate presentation at the end of the meeting.

133/17 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The Leader reported on the following matters:

- The Strategic Economic Plan for Norfolk had been announced and released. The Council recognised that it needed more engagement with its businesses and its Business Forums and the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive had already been tasked to meet with the largest companies in the District to realise their concerns. This had already flagged up issues such as recruitment retention and the lack of support in relation to skills and apprenticeships. At some point in the future, a Business Forum would be arranged where those businesses could attend and facilitate that discussion and the implications of Brexit.
- The East Harling Incident - The Leader and the Senior Investigating Officers had been very impressed by the help and assistance provided by Riana Rudland, Sarah Simpson and Matt Barnard in what had been a very difficult time. Members applauded the Officers concerned.
- Market Town Initiative – work was already underway. Included on the Council agenda was the extension to the discretionary rate relief pilot scheme which, if approved, would be rolled out to all market towns.

A meeting had been held with Attleborough and Swaffham Town Councils with a view to resolving the towns' car parking issues.

Work had already started with Thetford Town Council in relation to a major Heritage Lottery Bid which hopefully would be successful.

In Watton, some work on targeted 'hot spots' intervention work by Breckland Council's Environmental Services and Communities Team was underway.

Grant funding had been awarded to Wayland Partnership for a two year

project on tourism.

Breckland Council was supporting its market towns and would be working in partnership with each of them thus making any funding available go further.

- Budget preparation – the Officers had been tasked to take £1.8m out of the budget.

The Leader felt that the New Homes Bonus should not all be used as core funding for the Council but should be given back to the communities that had agreed to take the additional housing in their areas. The numbers would be reported back to O&SC and then onto Full Council in due course.

Councillor Duigan referred to the Strategic Economic Plan for Norfolk – he had seen sight of the draft and had felt that it was very weak in respect of the Breckland area particularly in relation to what the Council was trying to do for the market towns. He also felt that it was very weak in terms of future improvements to the A47. Dereham had not been mentioned in the document and he felt that the town should be considered as a strategic site for industry and he hoped that in any future conversations that more focus would be given to Breckland's priorities as it should not all be about the A11. In response, the Leader explained that it was quite difficult to deal with any Plan that involved every Council across Norfolk; however, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was the main driver of this project and a report would be presented to Cabinet in October where all Members would have the opportunity to voice their concerns and have some input into the Plan.

Councillor Clarke had been very pleased with the Cabinet's recommendation to Council in relation to the approval of the business rates scheme but raised concern about high rents in the area and asked if the Council had any influence with the Landlords. In response, the Leader explained that many properties in the District were owned by national companies/landlords and were held for capital gain and was unsure what influence the Council would have.

Councillor Wassell referred to the budget and suggested that rather than tinkering around the edges with the current budget the Council, although a much longer process, should adopt a zero budget and start again. The Leader advised that he had asked Officers to provide the Cabinet with exactly that. The Executive Members had met and had been through the items rather than the budgetary lines to understand what the implications would be and the complications with discretionary and statutory services. Conversations were still on-going.

Councillor Jermy said that he was being given a 'hard time' by the Residents Association in Thetford in relation to the empty units on Riverside. Councillor Stasiak pointed out that he had received written questions from Councillor Jermy and the responses had been included later on in the agenda.

Referring to the budget again, Councillor Wassell mentioned that the Opposition could have input into the agenda and actually put together their own budget. The Leader said that he would be very happy with that.

134/17 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 6 (AGENDA ITEM 6)

Councillor Stasiak, the Executive Member for Growth & Commercialisation had received three questions of which he had the answers and asked the Chairman if she was happy for these to be read out. Following advice from the Executive Manager for Governance, the Chairman accepted the questions.

It was noted that all three questions were from the Labour Group.

Q. When will the remainder of Riverside be let?

A. Marketing was taking place and there had been strong interest but the details, at the moment, were strictly private & confidential.

Q. Had the Council considered purchasing storage containers?

A. This was not something that the Council would consider as there were other service providers.

Q. Why was the target always set at 90% for Commercial return?

A. The Team aimed for 100%; however, 90% was a fair target; Breckland Council still had the lowest Council Tax in the Country.

Councillor Jermy believed that the questions had been submitted by the official opposition, UKIP, not from the Labour Members.

It was agreed that the questions and answers would be circulated accordingly.

135/17 QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 7 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Councillor Newton asked the Leader a question about evasive plant species in Thetford and wanted to know what the Council's obligations were to remove them. The Leader had no idea but he was sure some Officer within the Council would know although it would depend on whether such species were on Council owned land.

Councillor Smith advised that there was such a case going through the Court of Appeal on this very issue on whether it should be the land owner's responsibility – the decision was still awaited. Councillor Bambridge, the Executive Member for Growth pointed out that it was dependent on the species as to whether it was the landowner's responsibility.

Councillor Jermy directed his question to Councillor Robinson, the Executive Member for Governance as he was concerned about the many residents that had contacted him about the Electoral Role and he wanted to know what actually happened, the extent of the problem and whether it was a District wide matter and any costs incurred. The Executive Member for Governance said that he had been a victim of this concern but assured Members that this error had simply been down to a software glitch at a small cost to the Council but had been dealt with very swiftly.

136/17 CABINET MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 8)

- a) Business Rates for the Dereham Pilot Scheme (Minute No. 90/17)

RESOLVED that the discretionary retail rate relief scheme within the five market towns of Breckland, as detailed in the report, be adopted.

- b) Adoption

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 5 September 2017 be adopted.

Councillor Borrett felt that Members had agreed a very important matter in relation to the Business Rates Scheme and he congratulated the Council for the approval and the Cabinet for bringing the report forward.

137/17 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION (AGENDA ITEM 9)

RESOLVED that the confirmed Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 6 July 2017 be adopted.

138/17 PLANNING COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 10)

(a) 31 July 2017

RESOLVED that the confirmed Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 31 July 2017 be adopted.

(b) 29 August 2017

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 31 July 2017 be adopted.

139/17 GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 11)

RESOLVED that the unconfirmed Minutes of the Governance & Audit Committee meeting held on 28 July 2017 be adopted.

140/17 FLEXIBLE HOUSING SUPPORT GRANT (AGENDA ITEM 12)

Councillor Bambridge, the Executive Member for Growth presented the report that asked Members to agree to the release of the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant.

This grant had been described as a radical replacement of the tightly controlled funding currently provided to source and manage temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and their families. The new grant would allow more freedom to support the full range of homelessness services that could include employing a homelessness prevention or tenancy support officer to work closely with people who were at risk of losing their homes and allow them to remain in their homes.

The Council was being asked to for approval to release the funding.

Councillor Jermy had been very encouraged to see sight of this report as homelessness was an increasing problem in the District. It was often the people who lived in privately rented accommodation who were affected as they found themselves with limited options. He had spoken to the Housing Manager about the current support provider, Access Community Trust, based at John Room House, which he had heard of but knew very little about and hoped that, given the sums of money involved, a little more detail would be provided.

The Executive Member for Growth explained that the Access Community Trust was the only organisation that fully complied with the Council's aims and had been chosen as it was felt that they could provide the best possible service. The Housing Manager had admitted that the report was not as explicit as it should have been.

Councillor Crawford, the Leader of the Opposition wanted to know, in practical terms, how this funding would help those people who were going to be made homeless.

The Housing Manager explained that the funding would look at how homelessness

could be prevented and would be a short intervention to maintain their current status; with private landlords there was more work involved.

Councillor Borrett supported the recommendation and congratulated the Team for being awarded the grant.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the funds to the value of £167,123.39 provided under the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant be accepted and released; and
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member of Growth, to commit and agree to the spend in accordance with the conditions of the Flexible Homelessness Grant.

141/17 OFFICERS CODE OF CONDUCT (AGENDA ITEM 13)

Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen, the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Strategy, Governance & Transformation presented the report. It was noted that the Officer Code of Conduct was last refreshed in 2012 and would apply to all employees of both South Holland District Council and Breckland District Council.

Members were informed that two questions had been received and a number of grammatical errors had been highlighted which the Deputy Leader would respond to and correct after the meeting.

Councillor Monument said that she would be having a conversation with the HR Manager after the meeting as although it was a very good document in some respects it was unclear that it applied to both Councils

RESOLVED that the Code of Conduct be approved and be implemented in line with changes highlighted at section 2 of the report and subject to the aforementioned amendments.

142/17 NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE AND OTHER SEATS (AGENDA ITEM 14)

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- 1) Councillor Shirley Matthews be appointed as a Member of the Licensing Committee/Committee of the Licensing Authority;
- 2) Councillor Turner be appointed as a Member of the Member Development Panel; and
- 3) the appointment for a substitute on the Governance & Audit Committee remained vacant.

143/17 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION (AGENDA ITEM 15)

None.

**144/17 ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT
(AGENDA ITEM 16)**

Action By

None.

The meeting closed at 10.45 am

CHAIRMAN