

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

COUNCIL

**Held on Thursday, 7 July 2022 at 10.00 am in the
The Breckland Conference Centre, Anglia Room, Elizabeth House, Walpole Loke,
Dereham, NR19 1EE**

PRESENT

Cllr Mike Nairn (Chairman)	Cllr Keith Gilbert
Cllr Peter Wilkinson (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Robert Hambidge
Cllr Tristan Ashby	Cllr Chris Harvey
Cllr Stephen Askew	Cllr Paul Hewett
Cllr Gordon Bambridge	Cllr Jane James
Cllr Timothy Birt	Cllr Terry Jermy
Cllr Bill Borrett	Cllr Tina Kiddell
Cllr Roy Brame	Cllr Robert Kybird
Cllr Hilary Bushell	Cllr Keith Martin
Cllr Marion Chapman-Allen	Cllr Philip Morton
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen	Cllr William Nunn
Cllr Ed Colman	Cllr Paul Plummer
Cllr Paul Claussen	Cllr Sarah Suggitt
Cllr Philip Cowen	Cllr Stuart Terry
Cllr Helen Crane	Cllr Lynda Turner
Cllr Richard Duffield	Cllr Alison Webb
Cllr Phillip Duigan	Cllr Nigel Wilkin

In Attendance

Maxine O'Mahony	- Chief Executive & Head of Paid Service
Michael Horn	- Solicitor to the Council
Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy	- Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader

68/22 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Atterwill, Bowes, Brindle, Clarke, Dale, Dowling, Eagle, Grey, Kiddle-Morris, Monument, Oliver, Sherwood, Taylor and Wickerson.

69/22 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th May were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

70/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None declared.

71/22 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman informed Members that during his year in office he had chosen to

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support the charities of Papyrus and Mind. He welcomed Mr Tim Owen, from 3-Dads-Walking who alongside two other gentleman, Mike Palmer and Andy Airey fundraise for Papyrus, a UK charity dedicated to the prevention of suicide and the promotion of positive mental health and emotional wellbeing in young people.

Mr Owen spoke about the tragedy of losing his daughter, and why he raised money for the Papyrus charity.

The Chairman informed Members that immediately following the meeting there would be a presentation from Norfolk Museums Service regarding an environmental project that had been set up at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum.

He went on to thank Thetford Town Council for the presentation of a new football shirt which had been adopted by Thetford football team.

72/22 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader referred to the inspirational and personal story given by Mr Owen and how Breckland Council Inspiring Community programme linked with supporting organisations across Norfolk in relation to suicide prevention and awareness.

The Leader was pleased that the Council acted as an ambassador by working in partnership with organisations such as Breckland Youth Advisory Board to bring these issues to the forefront. He also thanked Thetford Town Football Club for the presentation of the Women's football shirt that had been sponsored by the Daisy Programme, which again highlighted the importance of partnership working.

He thanked Members who were involved and engaged in the recent Local Government Association Peer Review. The team visited a number of locations and were impressed with enthusiastic engagement. It had been an exciting period of change and a positive process, and a report would be presented to full Council in due course.

The Leader said that in February 2020, Breckland Council ranked 344 out of 400 for the accessibility on the digital platform with the residents. He was proud that as of July 2022, the Council now ranked within the top 9 of Councils across the whole of the Country for how the digital platform allowed residents to interact with the Council.

73/22 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 6

Questions on Notice received, together with responses had been published prior to the meeting.

74/22 QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 7

Councillor Jermy, Leader of the Labour Group directed his question to the Leader. He confirmed that the Department of Transport had recently released information relating to isolated neighbourhoods and access to key services. He highlighted that isolation remained a major issue and asked if Breckland Council was doing enough to tackle the issue.

The Leader had been aware of the challenges with transport across the District and that the Peer Team had also highlighted the geography and scale of the District. There had recently been funding received from the Department of Transport for

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community support within Swaffham and would continue to work in partnership with Norfolk County Council on what could be achieved.

Councillor Gilbert complimented the Council on supporting the green canopy initiative during the Queens Platinum Jubilee year and was pleased to see the wooded area planted within Watton. However, he said that some of the trees planted had already died due to planting at the wrong time of the year and asked the Leader what maintenance had been put in place to support the trees.

The Leader had visited the site along with the contractors and a steer had been taken from the Woodland Trust. He was confident that the current maintenance programme was fit for purpose and was committed to support the sustainability initiative. Councillor Gilbert was informed that Watton Town Council had been made aware of these issues.

Councillor Gilbert said he had not received the information from Watton Town Council and asked if the dead trees would be replaced. The Leader said they would be replaced if that was the advice from the Woodland Trust.

Councillor Birt said he had asked a question at the previous meeting regarding a Council asset without naming it, but the question was blocked. He informed the Council that the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) said the Council had breached regulations on Freedom of Information and the decision should be published in the public domain.

The Legal Services Manager, Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy advised that was a set period of time to respond to the ICO decision and Counsel's advice was currently being sought it was not appropriate to discuss this at this meeting.

Councillor Birt asked a second question relating to the exclusion of press and public at committee meetings, where he had objected every time, and the Information Commissioner had found the Council had applied general exceptions of withholding information. He asked if the Council would publish the information for all committees that had been withheld.

The Legal Services Manager again advised that the report from the ICO related to one matter and was not appropriate to reconsider each decision made under the exclusion of press and public provisions and Counsel opinion was currently being sought on the matter as previously explained.

The Leader of the Council added that he was not able to comment on the ICO report.

Councillor Wilkinson asked the Executive Member for Strategic and Operational Planning if there had been a good response on the call for sites as part of the Local Plan. Councillor Suggitt said over 360 responses had been received which included a mixture of green space, residential and employment land.

Councillor Turner applauded the service of the Food Bus and shared a story of a young man who had used the service and said if the service had not been provided, he would not be here. She asked the Executive Member for Health and Communities if the service could be guaranteed to continue once the pilot had finished.

Councillor Webb said that Kick Start were running the service which had been funded by Breckland Council. It had been a flagship project and was proving to be

successful and had received positive feedback. It was an important service supporting residents across the District where 206 households had already subscribed.

Councillor Crane asked the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue and Benefits for an update on the administration of the Energy Payments. Councillor Cowen was delighted to inform Members that the Anglia Revenue Partnership had paid out £6.9m to 46k households. There were 7,000 residents who had not been able to claim in which case the £150 had been credited to their Council Tax account. He thanked the Anglia Revenues Partnership and the Finance team for delivering the result ahead of the required deadline.

Councillor Hambidge asked the Executive Member for Health and Housing how many applications had been received for the Match Funding scheme. Councillor Webb informed Members that nine applications had been reviewed and results would be known in the coming weeks. The next round of the scheme would open on the 16 September and details could be found on the Norfolk Community Foundation Scheme website.

Councillor Kybird asked the Executive Member for Finance, Revenues and Benefits what progress had been made with the Council Tax discretionary support scheme. Councillor Cowen said that the Anglia Revenues Partnership worked in partnership with Capita who provided the software for the benefits service. The information to date suggested that the process would run smoothly and the scheme would begin to issue automatic allocations from week commencing 18 July. Forms would be available from week commencing the 25 July to allow more residents to access the support scheme.

Councillor Marion Chapman-Allen asked the Executive Member for Health and Housing how many applications had been received to access the bursary scheme. Members heard that a bursary of £1000 had been made available to those who were applying to access further education. A total of 14 applications had been received, of which 9 had not met the criteria, and individuals would be contacted in due course.

Councillor Duigan asked the Executive Member for Property, Projects and Procurement if the lease to the Benjamin Foundation at 31 High Street Dereham, included the buildings behind the shop. Councillor Hewett said that the building was being put to good use and looked forward to working with the charity over the coming 7-year lease.

Councillor Borrett asked if the Leader agreed that the decision to ask Peers to review Breckland Council processes was something that the Council did not have to do but continued to strive to be the best organisation it could be, and he looked forward to receiving a full report at a future meeting. The Leader said the process had been voluntary and an important activity that reinforced that Breckland remained an open Council that would continue to adapt and transform and allow businesses to thrive.

Councillor Terry asked the Leader of the Council if he would support the introduction of a price cap for heating oil. The Leader said that he had already written to the Chancellor to raise rural issues and the oil provision within the District and was waiting for a response.

Councillor Jermy said that the Norwich Western Link Road was due to cost £251m and whilst the Council supported the project initially suggested that it was now time

to withdraw. The Leader said it was a vital piece of road and that the Norfolk County Council had made the decision to continue with the Link Road and it was not appropriate for him to tell the County Council what it should or should not do.

Councillor Birt followed up on Councillor Gilbert's question and asked for an evaluation report on the carbon impact of planting trees within Breckland District. The Leader said that he sought his advice from the Woodland Trust and would ask Officers to raise the question with the Trust.

75/22 MINUTES (FOR INFORMATION ONLY)

Councillor Birt raised a point of order under Standing Order No.5, Order of Business, specifically 5.1.k stated that 'on reports of the Cabinet or Committees, a Member of the Council may ask the Leader or any Cabinet Member any question without notice'.

The Legal Services Manager responded that the correct forum to raise questions was to the committee where the minute had come from.

75 .a Cabinet: 6 June 2022

The unconfirmed minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 6 June 2022 were noted.

75 .b Overview & Scrutiny Commission: 26 May 2022

The unconfirmed minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 26 May 2022 were noted.

75 .c Planning Committee: 10 May 2022 and 7 June 2022

The confirmed minutes of the Planning Committee held on 10 May 2022 were noted.

The unconfirmed minutes of the Planning Committee held on 7 June 2022 were noted.

76/22 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE TREASURY MANAGEMENT SERVICE AND ACTUAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2021-22

Councillor Philip Cowen, Executive Member for Finance, Revenue and Benefits to present the report that had been recently considered at the Governance and Audit Committee on 23 June where the recommendations to full council were agreed.

Councillor Birt reinforced that he would like to see a cross check which had been offered at the Governance and Audit meeting, rather than relying on a link asset report.

Councillor Cowen agreed that it had been discussed and would be added for future reports.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The Actual 2021/22 prudential indicators within the report be approved;
- 2) The Treasury Management annual report for 2021/22 at Appendix B and C of the report be noted.

77/22 QUARTER 4 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021-22

Councillor Philip Cowen, Executive Member for Finance, Revenue and Benefits presented the report that had also been considered at Cabinet on 6 June 2022 where the recommendations to Full Council were agreed.

The report provided information on the actual full year financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2022. He was proud that the Council had achieved a balance budget and was a testament to what team Breckland had achieved.

Councillor Jermy asked for the reason the Council needed to spend a lot of money on marketing and communications and the reason for the variance. Members heard that the variance was due to the additional version of the Transforming Breckland magazine which had been an important communication tool to the residents of Breckland.

Councillor Birt said he had previously raised his concern on the shortfall that had been created by inflation and had asked for a risk assessment and felt that in future, if issues had been raised on a report at committee meetings that supplementary information be added when the final report was presented to help inform decisions.

He also added that the report stipulated 'that achieving efficiencies had been strong' and yet half of the target had been achieved and 25% of the prospect of savings had been abandoned. A key part of a balance budget was to save millions within the Evolve programme, and he asked if millions that had to be saved was realistic.

Councillor Cowen reminded Members that the Quarter 4 performance report had been based on the past 12 months and that inflation had been accounted for at the time when the budget had been set and was therefore a statement of fact at the end of Quarter 4. Looking ahead, the Council would have to consider all factors when putting forward proposals.

In response to the comment of achieving 54% efficiency, during the last 12 months the efficiency programme had to change and was therefore in line with best practice. Hence, the Worksmart programme had been introduced and had delivered what it had set out to achieve; a building fit for purpose for years to come and a work force who found the place of work to be significantly better than it had been in the past. As a result, the efficiency programme was on track and continued to plan to make savings over the coming 12 months.

Councillor Hewett congratulated the team on the performance data and how the performance of the Council had been managed over what had been remarkable economic circumstances to a tight conclusion as at the end of March 2022.

He added that he was delighted that Councillor Birt had picked up on the fact that the cash return was so low and therefore presumably implied the need to do more with the commercial property portfolio to make sure that producing the revenues that the tax-payers wanted during these difficult economic circumstances.

It was RESOLVED that:

- 1) the capital budgets (& associated funding sources) of £1,932,375 be carried forward into 2022-23 to support projects in progress be approved.

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- 2) the revised capital budget and associated funding for the 2022-23 capital programme as detailed in appendix B of the report be approved.
- 3) the final capital out-turn and funding for 2021-22 as detailed in appendix C of the report be approved.

78/22 NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE AND OTHER SEATS

The following nominations were received:

Committees

- Councillor Paul Plummer to replace Councillor Hilary Bushell on the Planning Committee, as substitute member.
- Councillor Paul Plummer to replace Councillor Hilary Bushell on the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

Outside Bodies:

- Norfolk strategic Flood Alliance
Cllr Gordon Bambridge was appointed as the Breckland Council representative and Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen as substitute.
- Norfolk Rivers Internal Drainage Board
There had been a decrease of membership due to a reconstitution, and therefore Cllr Gordon Bambridge was appointed as the Breckland Council representative and Councillor Borrett as substitute.

79/22 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION (IF ANY)

None.

80/22 ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

The meeting closed at 11.13 am

CHAIRMAN