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**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**Held on Wednesday, 22 March 2023 at 2.00 pm in  
The Anglia Room, The Conference Centre, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Cllr Lynda Turner (Chairman)	Cllr Susan Dowling
Cllr Tristan Ashby (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Phillip Duigan
Cllr Linda Monument	Cllr Taila Taylor (Substitute Member)

**Also Present**

Cllr Timothy Birt	Cllr Jane James
Cllr Paul Hewett	Cllr Philip Morton

**In Attendance**

Rob Walker	- Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer
Jason Cole	- Executive Director
Sarah Shipley	- Assistant Director Health & Housing
Ralph Burton	- Assistant Director Property and Infrastructure
Ben Meen	- ICT & Digital Manager
Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy	- Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer

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**24/23 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Members were informed that if any discussion was to be had in respect of the restricted Minutes under Agenda item 13, the exclusion of press and public would have to be agreed and the livestreaming would have to be stopped.

**25/23 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hambidge. Councillor Taylor was in attendance as his substitute.

**26/23 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

None declared.

**27/23 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 4)**

Agenda item 8 had been pulled.

**28/23 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

Councillors Birt, Hewett, James and Morton were in attendance.

Councillors Hewett and James were in attendance as the respective Portfolio Holders for Agenda items 9 and 12.

**29/23 MEMBER TRAINING (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

The Chairman advised that all training was being picked up via the forthcoming Member Induction process.

**30/23 NORFOLK HOUSING & INDEPENDENT LIVING MANAGER (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

Sarah Shipley, the Assistant Director for Health & Housing presented the report.

The purpose of the report was to gain approval for the externally funded role of Norfolk Housing & Independent Living Manager to be sited in Breckland Council, working on behalf of the 7 Norfolk district councils and being line managed by Breckland's Housing Manager.

Each of the Norfolk district councils have an Integrated Housing Adaptations Team (IHAT), made up of Breckland staff and Norfolk County Council Occupational Therapy staff. These teams managed the Disabled Facilities Grants work in their districts. The teams had been set up 10 years ago to improve the processes and experiences for the customers who needed adaptations to their homes, and this had been successful in reducing the timescales that it took from initial enquiry to completion of works. The districts and the county council were keen to learn from the experiences of the last 10 years and to continue to make improvements.

Previously, there had been a county wide post that had been responsible for co-ordinating the running of the IHATs but the postholder had retired in March 2022; hence why the Council found itself in this position.

Since then, the managers from the districts and County had reviewed the service and had decided that a programme manager was required and needed to be appointed.

The 0.6FTE role would be funded by all seven districts from their portion of the Better Care Fund. This was at no additional financial cost to the Council and would not reduce the amount of DFG funding Breckland Council had to spend.

The Chairman proposed the recommendation which was duly seconded.

Councillor Duigan referred to section 5.5 of the report and asked if Breckland Council would receive slightly more funding due to these elements.

Members were informed that this was correct and there was also additional funding to cover the line-management element as well.

Councillor Duigan asked if this covered redundancy costs too.

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The Assistant Director for Health & Housing informed Members that this information would be provided to the Committee in due course as she did not have that information to hand.

Under the reasons for the recommendation at 3.1, Councillor Dowling had noticed that the first sentence said, Breckland Council was unique in Norfolk in the situation of the disabled facilities grant not being adequate for the needs of the district's population, and asked how this had come about and why was Breckland Council different to everyone else.

The Assistant Director for Health & Housing believed that this point was in reference to the funding that this Council received in terms of the demand that was outstripping the funding, and due to the fact that this authority was getting the funding out there to those in need at a much faster rate than other authorities.

The Chairman agreed with the aforementioned point and informed Members that this matter had been discussed at length at the recent Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting. Breckland Council was good in the sense of it used every single penny of funding that it was allocated and there was not enough money available to cover the demand. She pointed out that the Cabinet Member and Officers were working very hard with other agencies to try and obtain further monies.

The Assistant Director for Health & Housing advised that this post would be working in partnership with other authorities to drive forward necessary improvements.

Councillor Birt agreed that Breckland Council was in a desperate situation in terms of the demand and lack of funding. He then referred to section 1.7 of the report and queried the sentence where it stated that this role would be funded by all seven districts from their portion of the Better Care Fund, which would be 'top sliced' before the DFG grant element was passed on. If this was the case, he asked if it would be better to fund this role from Breckland's General Reserves so that it would then receive a slight increase in the Disabled Facilities Grant funding which was so desperately needed.

The Assistant Director for Health & Housing advised that the decision to take from the Better Care Fund had been a decision taken by the Strategic Managers Group on how to fund the post going forward and that the decision to fund this role from the Council's Reserves was not a decision that she herself could make, as alluded to at other meetings in respect of the DFG funding.

It was noted that this was a situation that all districts found themselves in and this decision had been made by all the strategic managers involved.

Following a unanimous vote, it was:

**RESOLVED** that the recommendation be approved and the Norfolk Housing & Independent Living Manager post sits in the Housing Team and becomes part of the staff establishment.

**31/23 DOMESTIC ABUSE SUPPORT SPECIALIST (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

This item had been pulled from the agenda.

**32/23 CORPORATE PROJECTS SERVICE (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

Councillor Paul Hewett, the Executive Member for Property, Projects & Procurement presented the report.

The report before Members proposed a new function for the Council - to approve the creation of a separate corporate project service.

This Council had fundamentally changed in how it delivered services, how it ran and how it operated. Some of these changes had led to very quick wins and others had longer term aspirations moving forward. All of these changes reflected a shift in mindset, in terms of running the Council and changing the Council. This mindset required strong project management discipline, a clear understanding of time, resource and budget to continue to deliver services to residents. WorkSmart was a major element of these changes focusing on this Council to be fit for the future. Since, WorkSmart, Members, staff and Teams had got better at thinking projects through, employing project management principles and concepts. In part, this had been due to the Council employing specialist project management experts. Ellenor Fenn, Elm Road, Queen Mother's Garden, temporary accommodation projects, all of these projects had been delivered on time and in full were a testament to the application of project management skills and a stronger project management mindset.

This new corporate project service, would seek to manage, monitor and record the delivery of a number of projects that had been deemed as the most important to the Council where management and resource capacity were required to ensure that these projects were delivered as planned. By having some of the corporate projects centralised would allow senior management and the Cabinet Members to ensure delivery which in turn would ensure the Council met its Corporate Plan.

If approved, it would build on project management skills and would move the Council to the next stage to look at the most critical future projects, such as the ambitious 2035 targets, new housing initiatives, and the Serco contract etc.

This new service would also seek to standardise project management within the Council using a system that would be easily adopted and easily applied by everyone. It would also support other Teams to deliver skills and knowledge of good project management. The necessary budgets had been outlined in the Proforma B attached to the report on page 21 of the agenda pack.

Councillor Duigan seconded the proposal.

Councillor Ashby asked a question in regard to the 60% self-financing (see section 5.5.1 of the report).

Ralph Burton, the Assistant Director Property & Infrastructure explained that as could be seen from the report 40% of the funding was already in the existing budget, the 60% for the first 2 years would be funded initially from Reserves. However, from day one, what was being established as a principle for the

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service was that the projects that were commissioned to the service would be requested to provide funding for project management resources. The reason why this budget had been spread over two years was explained.

As a follow up to the above response, the Executive Member for Property, Projects & Procurement explained that not all projects would have financial outcomes but where there was, he believed that as part of the project management discipline, the project should be able to provide some financial input to the delivery of the benefits as a result.

Councillor Duigan welcomed this development as he felt that a more permanent staff structure in terms of long-term management was needed.

Councillor Ashby asked for the reasons behind the jump in costs from year two to three and three to four.

The Assistant Director Property & Infrastructure explained that there were two years spread across three financial periods.

Referring to page 20 of the agenda pack, Councillor Birt had noticed that there were six managers in this proposed structure and asked what they would all be doing and what qualifications they would have. He felt that it would be better to build a team specific to a project and considering the examples that had been given earlier he believed that a valuable asset in the team would be a qualified quantity surveyor and similarly architectural support. He also felt that the report had lots of words but lacked material detail.

Members were informed that project management was a discipline in its own right, similar to that of a quantity surveyor for example. The Council was looking to establish a set of generic project managers who could carry out a wide majority of projects, examples were provided and the process and approach was explained. Specialist resources would need to be procured depending on the project itself. In terms of what the team would be working on, this would vary as they would be picking up on various activities such as projects from the Council's Evolve Programme, or Leisure projects as an example. Project activity would be prioritised accordingly.

Councillor Morton asked who would be deciding on the choice of projects and the decision making involved with that.

Members were informed that the Programme Board, which was part of the internal governance structure would be looking at the total programme of work and prioritising resources according to what was most critical to be delivered. There would also be some performance indicators from the service that Members would be able to consider at various meetings of the Council.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded, and following a unanimous vote, it was:

**RESOLVED** that the establishment of the Corporate Projects Service along with the necessary budgets and staffing as required be approved; and delegated authority be given to the Assistant Director to implement as required.

**33/23 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on Thursday, 15 June 2023 at 10am were noted.

**34/23 EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

Prior to the vote being taken to exclude the press and the public, Councillor Birt queried why agenda item 12 should not be openly discussed as he believed the report to be similar to agenda items 7 and 8.

Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy, the Legal Services Manager explained that the reason that this was considered to be private & confidential was that the individual could be identified.

Ralph Burton, the Assistant Director of Property & Infrastructure agreed and explained that this was about one existing post in the establishment that could be identified.

Following a vote, it was:

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

**35/23 DIGITAL PROJECT MANAGER POST (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

Councillor Jane James, the Executive Member for Customer & Corporate Services presented the report.

Examples of the Council's processes that had been moved on-line were highlighted, all of which had made huge cost savings as well as savings in staff time.

The recommendation was read aloud and was duly seconded.

Following a unanimous vote, it was:

**RESOLVED** that Option 1 of the report be agreed and authorised.

**36/23 RESTRICTED MINUTES: 9 FEBRUARY 2023 (AGENDA ITEM 13)**

These Minutes were not discussed.

The meeting closed at 2.35 pm

CHAIRMAN