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**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**CABINET**

**Held on Monday, 13 July 2020 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 P.D. Claussen (Vice-  
Chairman)  
Mr S.G. Bambridge  
Mr J.P. Cowen  
Mr P.J. Hewett

Mr M. S. Robinson  
Mr I. Sherwood  
Mrs S. E. Suggitt  
Mrs A. M. Webb

**Also Present**

Mr R. Atterwill  
Mr T. Birt  
Miss H. Bushell  
Councillor M. Chapman-Allen  
Mr H. E. J. Clarke  
Mrs H Crane

Mr P.J. Duigan  
Mr F. Eagle  
Mr T. J. Jermy  
Mr M. Kiddle-Morris  
Mr P. Morton  
Mr S. Terry

**In Attendance**

Anna Graves  
Maxine O'Mahony

Rob Walker  
Alison Chubbock

Stephen Scowen  
Julie Britton  
Teresa Smith

- Chief Executive
- Executive Director of Strategy & Governance  
(Monitoring Officer)
- Executive Director Place
- Chief Accountant (Deputy Section 151 Officer)  
(BDC)
- Major Projects Delivery Manager
- Democratic Services Officer
- Democratic Services Team Leader

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**37/20 MINUTES**

It was noted that Councillor Terry had been omitted as being present at the meeting.

Subject to this amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

**38/20 APOLOGIES**

None.

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**39/20 URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**40/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

**41/20 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

Councillors Atterwill, Birt, Bushell, M Chapman-Allen, Clarke, Crane, Duigan, Eagle, Jermy, Kiddle-Morris, Morton, Terry.

**42/20 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)**

None.

**43/20 BRECKLAND COMMUNITY FUNDING APPLICATIONS (STANDING ITEM)**

Nothing to report.

**44/20 BRECKLAND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY (STANDING ITEM)**

The Executive Member for Customer Engagement presented highlights to Members on some initiatives that had been announced by the Chancellor recently. Whilst more information would follow, he had tasked Officers to consider how Breckland could benefit and feature as part of the climate action. The Schemes included:

- £2 billion Green Homes Grant,
- £1 billion over the coming year for a Public sector decarbonisation scheme,
- £40 million in a Green Jobs Challenge Fund
- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund

At a local level, Breckland Council had been taking steps to create more bee friendly habitats across the district by leaving some verges and land to grow wild, where safe to do so, allowing population of bees and other insects to boost their numbers.

As part of the Council's new Local Plan policies advice for developers included the use of bird boxes and bee or swift bricks into housing plans to boost the districts biodiversity.

The Executive Member had attended a positive meeting with the Woodland Trust and had learnt about canopy cover. Canopy Cover looked at what was already within the District, which was built into a sustainable future by caring for what was already in the District.

The Council was currently requesting quotes from organisations to undertake a carbon audit of the organisation to help develop a carbon management plan that would help to reduce the carbon footprint as an organisation, and understand how the Council could encourage residents and businesses to improve their carbon footprint too.

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The Executive Member was pleased to announce that Breckland Council would also be making a switch to green energy that would significantly reduce the organisational carbon footprint and would come into effect from the 1 October 2020.

The Executive Member for Contracts and Assets had already tasked the commercial team where they could add to the environmental initiatives that had been announced by the Chancellor and would work closely with Councillor Sherwood to do everything it could to encourage the commercial portfolio to be as environmentally friendly as they could be.

Councillor Atterwill welcomed what the Executive Member had said regarding the nest boxes and the initiative to help the bees and asked the Executive Member for Planning that when planning conditions were granted through the permission given if the conditions would be monitored to ensure the developers complied with the conditions.

The Executive Member for Planning confirmed that he would arrange for a written response to be sent to Councillor Atterwill.

Councillor Eagle asked that since Breckland had such a diverse area, including some rare species he would like to see other Councils follow Breckland's lead on the sustainability strategy. The Executive Member for Customer Engagement agreed and also felt it important that the Council got the policy right which was why the audit was taking place that included speaking to the experts to ensure it had a full picture of the diverse area that Breckland covered.

Councillor Morton was pleased to note that a carbon audit would be undertaken and looked forward to the information being shared. He felt disappointed that a year had passed since the Council declared a climate emergency but had only just changed to green energy, which he commended the Council for but felt this could have been done sooner. The Executive Member for Customer Engagement responded stating that he was aware how passionate Councillor Morton was about the green agenda and explained that the electricity could only be changed once the yearly tariff was due which fell in October. Three months' notice had to be given, which was why a decision had been made in June to change to green electric.

Councillor Clarke was supportive of what had been announced as part of the green agenda, and said that during the COVID-19 pandemic there had been less travel, and was aware that pollution levels had fallen. He asked what the Council was doing with regard to information that was received as part of air quality and whether it highlighted where the Council would need to put in additional monitoring. He gave an example where it would be useful when purchasing a property to show the pollution levels, especially with those who had respiratory conditions. Councillor Clarke said he would be happy for a written response to this question. The Executive Member for Customer Engagement said he along with the Executive Member for Environmental and Public Protection would provide a written response.

**45/20 2019-20 FULL YEAR FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE**

The Executive Member for Finance and Growth presented the report that provided information on the Council's actual full year financial position as at 31 March 2020.

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He thanked the Finance team for the work put in to deliver the report, especially during the period between March to the end of June where Officers had been redeployed to support the businesses of Breckland.

The Executive Member highlighted whilst the Council had an overspend of £224k, it was in a fortunate position to be able to use reserves to mitigate some of those costs which were explained in the report.

The report explained that due to the high overspend, the gain from the National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) pilot of £559k had been utilised to cover that overspend, and therefore due to the scale of the figure it would have to go to Full Council to be approved.

Whilst the Council had a reserve fund of just under £7m that was unallocated, the Council's general fund was already at the minimum of £2,500k which he did not want to see drop below that figure.

The actual Capital out-turn showed a spend of 71% against budget which meant the Council had not used all the capital that had been set aside in the financial year to deal with various programmes and projects that were ongoing.

The Executive Member for Contracts and Assets said it was a delicate balancing act, and within his portfolio economic growth would allow the businesses within Breckland to thrive as the country started to emerge out of the COVID19 crisis. At the same time COVID19 has had a global impact and the District would not be immune to that impact. He was in agreement with the recommendations and believed it was the correct approach for the Council to follow.

Councillor Birt considered the significant variances and highlighted the Legal Services overspend and was concerned that there were issues with commercial property and asked how, as a Member, he could understand the detail of that overspend and what the issues were, as there could be scrutiny issues to consider.

In addition, in respect of the capital that had not been spent, he noted that the report was dated to 31 March, and therefore the COVID19 crisis did not apply and he was concerned that if the Council was not spending capital that had been allocated during normal times what would happen in extra-ordinary times such as the Council found itself in now.

Councillor Jermy was concerned about the level of overspend and in particular the expenditure of the temporary housing accommodation. In addition, he raised apprehension that the new property currently being refurbished would do little to reduce costs as it would not be able to take the numbers that the Council would require. He went onto ask the Cabinet for their plans to address the increased housing costs, given that they were a significant amount.

The Executive Member for Finance and Growth responded to Councillor Birt that he too had also raised a question in respect of the Legal Services budget, and informed Members that it was not a service that could be clear about their costs at the beginning of the financial year. There had been some significant changes with regard to the commercial property deals that had

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required the support of Legal Services, of which the Executive Member for Contracts and Assets would be able to provide more detail if required. The Executive Member was keen to look at all the variances as it was important to understand what was happening within each service area.

In terms of the Capital spend, the Executive Member provided reassurance of the way in which the Council managed its finances. The capital projects were grant funded, and spending the funding required the assurance that the right contract was in place.

The Executive Director of Place advised that the level of demand for temporary housing accommodation was unprecedented and that had been reflected in the financial figures. During the pandemic there had been a nationwide instruction to house the rough sleepers within the District. There had also been a rise in emergency accommodation requirements and movements between registered providers were not allowed during the crisis which had resulted in a rise in the figures again. The property at Elm Road formed one important part of a more complicated solution. Numbers within other Local Authorities were similar and therefore a countywide response was being considered and Breckland were actively part of that. In addition, Breckland were actively working with Saffron Housing and Flagship to match voids within the system and having looked at the figures there was resource to house some of those within temporary accommodation.

Councillor Atterwill asked the Executive Member for Finance and Growth for clarity on the Development Control costs highlighted within the appendices of the report, that referred to a loss of a court case. He went onto ask the Executive Member for Planning to provide in writing a summary of what that court case was. The Executive Member for Finance and Growth confirmed that the court case costs were approximately £35,000 of the £72,431 costs highlighted.

**Options**

- 1) That the report and appendices be noted and recommend to Full Council
  - That capital budgets (& associated funding sources) of £2,194,668 be carried forward into 2020-21 to support projects in progress.
  - That the final capital out-turn and funding for 2019-20 as detailed in appendix B be approved.
  - That the revised capital budget and associated funding for the 2020-21 capital programme as detailed in appendix C be approved.
  - That the NNDR Pilot gain is utilised to cover the over spend and that £214,489 is contributed from the Organisational Development Reserve and a further contribution is made from the Revenues and Benefits Reserve to cover the remaining over spend.
  
- 2) That the report and appendices be noted and changes are made to the recommendations to Full Council.

**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 protecting the General fund balance.

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To enable approved capital projects to continue to deliver in the new financial year.

**RESOLVED** that the report and appendix be noted; and

**CABINET Recommend to FULL COUNCIL:**

- 1) That capital budgets (& associated funding sources) of £2,194,668 be carried forward into 2020-21 to support projects in progress.
- 2) That the final capital out-turn and funding for 2019-20 as detailed in appendix B be approved.
- 3) That the revised capital budget and associated funding for the 2020-21 capital programme as detailed in appendix C be approved.
- 4) That the NNDR Pilot gain is utilised to cover the over spend and that £214,489 is contributed from the Organisational Development Reserve and a further contribution is made from the Revenues and Benefits Reserve to cover the remaining over spend.

**46/20 INNOVATIVE PROJECTS FUND - ACCEPTANCE AND SPEND OF GRANT, AND ASSOCIATED MATCH FUNDING.**

The Executive Member for Finance and Growth presented the report that sought the recommendation to Council to accept and spend a grant award from the Innovative Projects Fund along with associated match funding, on behalf of the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor (CNTC) for carrying out an exercise aimed at supporting and growing the manufacturing and engineering industry within the area.

It was important that the Council worked with all businesses within the District to drive forward the economy in a direction that would see an improvement in the standard of living of residents throughout the county, but more importantly given the tech corridor runs through our District.

Reasons for recommendation:

Acceptance of the grant funding would enable the completion of the project in line with the application submitted and the conditions of the funding awarded. Doing this at the earliest opportunity would enable the project to proceed as quickly as possible and thus maximise the benefits that were anticipated to be delivered.

Delaying the decision, or not accepting the grant funding on behalf of the CNTC, would result in a significant adverse impact upon the delivery of the project and therefore all of the manufacturing businesses throughout the region.

Options

Option 1 – Accept and spend the IPF grant, and associated match funding, on behalf of the CNTC (Recommended). Under this option, the authority will accept and spend £180,700 of IPF grant from NALEP, £10,000 match funding from Norfolk County Council (NCC) and £9,500 match funding from the University of East Anglia (UEA), on behalf of the CNTC in order that the

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project can proceed.

Option 2 – Do not accept the IPF grant, and associated match funding, on behalf of the CNTC (Not recommended). Under this option, the project would not proceed. The Council is the Accountable Body for the CNTC and therefore it is only the council that could accept the funding on behalf of the CNTC.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to FULL COUNCIL:**

- 1) To approve acceptance and spending of an Innovative Projects Fund grant to the value of £180,700, and associated financial contributions of £19,500, in order to support the delivery of an exercise aimed at growing the manufacturing industry in the area, as set out within this report.
- 2) Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to sign the grant offer letters in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Growth.

**47/20 NEXT MEETING**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 7 September at 9.30am were noted.

The meeting closed at 10:30am

CHAIRMAN