

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

COUNCIL

**Held on Wednesday, 22 February 2023 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 Robert Hambidge
Cllr Peter Wilkinson (Vice-Chairman)	Cllr Jane James
Cllr Tristan Ashby	Cllr Terry Jermy
Cllr Stephen Askew	Cllr Tina Kiddell
Cllr Roger Atterwill	Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr Gordon Bambridge	Cllr Robert Kybird
Cllr Timothy Birt	Cllr Terry Land
Cllr Bill Borrett	Cllr Keith Martin
Cllr Claire Bowes	Cllr Linda Monument
Cllr Mike Brindle	Cllr Philip Morton
Cllr Hilary Bushell	Cllr William Nunn
Cllr Marion Chapman-Allen	Cllr Paul Plummer
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen	Cllr Ian Sherwood
Cllr Harry Clarke	Cllr Sarah Suggitt
Cllr Paul Claussen	Cllr Taila Taylor
Cllr Philip Cowen	Cllr Stuart Terry
Cllr Helen Crane	Cllr Lynda Turner
Cllr Vera Dale	Cllr Alison Webb
Cllr Susan Dowling	Cllr David Wickerson
Cllr Richard Duffield	Cllr Nigel Wilkin
Cllr Phillip Duigan	

In Attendance

Maxine O'Mahony	- Chief Executive & Head of Paid Service
Rob Walker	- Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer
Alison Chubbock	- Section 151 Officer & Assistant Director Finance
Stephen James	- Executive Director
Rory Ringer	- Democratic Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy	- Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Teresa Smith	- Democratic Services Team Leader
Julie Britton	- Democratic Services Officer

Point of Order

Once the meeting had started, Councillor Birt raised a Point of Order. He stated that the Monitoring Officer had received his complaint in terms of the correct procedure not being followed in calling this meeting. He had not received a summons and an agenda pack within the time scale specified in Schedule 12A Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972. An exception was specified in the Act but did not apply in this case.

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The Monitoring Officer had stated in his response, that the Council's Solicitor had found that there was nothing in the complaint that would render this meeting invalid, but no explanation had been provided.

Councillor Birt asked the Monitoring Officer to explain the reasons why this meeting should continue and why Part 1 of the Act did not apply.

Rob Walker, the Council's Monitoring Officer, stated that a formal complaint had been received from Councillor Birt the day before this meeting which would go through the formal complaints process. He explained that he had taken advice from the Council's Solicitor who had advised, ahead of this meeting, that nothing raised in the complaint submitted by Councillor Birt would render this meeting invalid or any of the resolutions made. He did not propose to go into the detail, as the advice from the Solicitor had been clear and the complaint would be fully investigated accordingly.

1/23 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brame, Gilbert and Harvey.

2/23 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

The Chairman abstained from voting on the Minutes as he had not been present at this meeting and had sent his apologies.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Wilkinson.

3/23 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)

None Declared.

4/23 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 4)

Firstly, February was an important month for the Pride of Breckland Cares Campaign. The LGBT community sought to raise further awareness of prejudice experienced by the LGBT community and specifically the history of the movement and some of the key events in the history that led to greater acceptance, rights and inclusion.

It was being celebrated to coincide with when the first LGBT history month was celebrated in February 2005, and followed a key point in history in 2003 when the Government removed Section 28 of the Local Government Act. Prior to its removal that Section of the Act prohibited local authorities mainly in educational premises from intentionally promoting homosexuality and the teaching about the acceptability of homosexuality.

Breckland staff had several activities to promote LGBT History month during February as well as the main Pride Campaign later this year. This authority had already created greater awareness and started conversations both in and outside the Council and was indeed an inclusive employer.

Earlier this month the Chairman had the pleasure of awarding four residents with special recognition. Sue Gattuso from Swaffham who had taken over the running of the Museum and had promoted Swaffham heritage and had also introduced the

tribute to Howard Carter on the centenary of his discovery of Tutankhamun. The Museum was well worth a visit.

Susan Douglas and Anne Harrison, both of whom had served their respective communities in Longham and Gressenhall for a very long time and had made really worthwhile contributions to their local communities, and finally, Mr Graham Jacobs, who had been running Studio Five in Thetford for 70 years. The Chairman said that he had started to buy his films and cameras from this shop in the 1970s, and the changes that Mr Jacobs had seen and had adapted to had been phenomenal. There had been a tremendous response in respect of the award for Mr Jacobs, but all four had been truly deserving, and Members were thanked for their nominations.

Councillor Atterwill wanted his thanks to the Chairman to be placed on record for what he had done for the unsung hero's awards. He felt that this was a great initiative, and he knew that Sue Douglas and Ann Harrison both of whom were in his Ward had greatly appreciated the Chairman presenting their awards, and he hoped that more Members would look to do the same in their communities.

Members were reminded of the Briefing that would take place immediately after the Full Council meeting.

5/23 LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (AGENDA ITEM 5)

The Leader, Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen, made the following announcements:

Watton Skate Park

The Leader was sure that a number of Members had been watching the amazing achievements of Sky Brown, the new World Skate-boarding champion at just 14 years of age.

Not only had Sky won the world championships, but she was Great Britain's youngest Olympic medal winner of all time after winning bronze at the Tokyo 2020 Games.

He was therefore delighted to announce that Breckland Council's latest community investment of £107,000 would fund a new skatepark in Watton that had been warmly received by the community.

This was just the latest investment in the communities made by this Council that would mean a new generation of Breckland skateboarders could enjoy the positive physical, wellbeing and social effects associated with skating and skateboarding, whilst also potentially enabling them to follow in Sky's footsteps and possibly even bringing back gold to Breckland from a future Olympics!

The Leader acknowledged all the hard work in bringing this project to fruition, including the support of the local Watton Ward Members. He knew that Councillor Kiddell in particular had been very passionate about making this project happen for the community for a number of years and Councillor Wilkinson for his work with Breckland Youth Advisory Board (YAB) who had helped develop this project.

Barnham Broom

As Member's were aware, this Council had faced repeated calls for information relating to one of its proposed commercial transactions to be made public, that had

been resisted.

Not, as some had regrettably suggested, to stop a full examination of this investment.

Rather, in dealing with this matter appropriately and confidentially, all this Council had sought to do, was to protect the sensitive commercial interests of a third-party business operating in Norfolk.

It was, therefore, unfortunate that a Member of this Council felt it necessary to challenge this stance through the Information Commissioner's Office.

It was also unfortunate that a significant amount of Officer time and resource had been taken away from the important work of the Council to deal with this matter, and more unfortunate that this Council had incurred over £15,000 in legal costs. Money that could have been better spent elsewhere in further supporting local businesses.

It was regrettable that Breckland Council had found itself in this position, fighting to protect the interests of a local business.

The Leader was pleased to inform Members however, that following a first-tier tribunal in the General Regulatory Chamber, the Council's stance had been fully scrutinised and found to be correct.

A quote directly from the findings was read aloud, the "tribunal had been persuaded without reservation" that the Council had acted appropriately.

The Leader was pleased that the Council's stance had been declared sound, and he hoped that this now drew a line beneath this issue, and that it provided residents with reassurance that this Council continued to operate appropriately, as well as providing reassurance to the tenants and organisations with whom this authority worked with.

Royal visit

The Leader was aware that the Chairman had already notified all Members that Breckland Council would be shortly hosting a royal visit to Breckland, and he wanted to take this opportunity to record why he felt that this was such an important occasion for this Council and the district.

When Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal visits the Elm House site in Thetford, she would be able to witness first-hand the difference Breckland Council was making to the lives of its residents.

The £1.8 redevelopment project had seen a disused community building turned into much-needed temporary accommodation for people who were homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.

The Royal visit, at the end of March would allow Princess Anne to see how this authority's further investment of £1.2m had seen the terrace of brand-new temporary homes constructed on the same site.

This visit demonstrated once again that Breckland Council was a district council that delivered. It continued to invest in services that makes a real difference to its

residents, including those who were at a particularly vulnerable moment in their lives.

The Leader was confident that The Princess Royal would leave Breckland impressed that it was a district that cared.

Debt advisors

The strong partnership with Citizens Advice had been further enhanced.

Breckland Council had invested an additional £85,000 per year, on top of the £50,000 already provided annually, that would enable Debt Advisors delivering integrated support from the council offices in Dereham and also in Thetford, working side by side with the Council's own front-line services.

These expert advisors would help identify debt and welfare issues earlier, providing advice and support, and avoid Breckland residents transitioning into crisis due to their financial situation.

Ukraine

As a Council, it stood side by side with its residents, and on Friday, 24 February 2023, solidarity with Ukraine would be reaffirmed, and with its unwavering support for the people of Ukraine, including those who had fled to the Breckland district from their home country due to the ongoing war.

As a nation, all wanted to send a clear signal of its enduring support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression, and as a mark of respect for the bravery and sacrifice of the Ukrainian people.

Here in Breckland, 143 Ukrainian's who had fled the aggression, including 54 children, were being helped. The Leader had met many of these Ukrainian guests over the festive period and had heard heart-breaking stories of what had happened to their homeland.

He was immensely proud of the support shown by Breckland Council, local guest sponsors and the wider Breckland community and he thanked everyone for the support and community spirit they had all shown.

Breckland Council would be joining others across the UK in coming together at 11.00 am for a national moment of silence to mark one year since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This occasion would be marked by raising the flag of Ukraine at Elizabeth House and highlighting the anniversary via its own digital channels and all invite ala Members were invited to attend this flag raising event and participate in the moment of silence.

LGC award

Finally, looking further ahead, the Leader was delighted to share that this Council's Inspiring Communities programme had been shortlisted in the prestigious LGC Awards 2023.

This was the second time in two years that its innovative £1m programme had been named a finalist in these esteemed national awards, which was a testament

to the excellent and innovative support provided locally by this Council.

This year it was running for the Health and Social Care category, recognising the impact of this programme and particularly our its partnerships with the NHS and others to deliver holistic care for Breckland residents.

Health and social care was not traditionally a space that district councils operated in, therefore, to be recognised for the excellent work that this Council had done and the benefits to the NHS on the national stage was a magnificent achievement. The Leader then thanked all the Members and Officers who had gone above and beyond to make this programme such a success. Breckland Council was up against tough opposition, and he asked Members to join him in congratulating the team behind the programme for their achievements to date and to keep their fingers crossed when the winners were announced in June.

6/23 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 6 (AGENDA ITEM 6)

The questions on notice including the responses had been published prior to this meeting. No further questions could be asked under this item.

7/23 QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE UNDER STANDING ORDER NO 7 (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Councillor Jermy, the Leader of the Labour Group, asked the Leader a question about Devolution. He had been interested to notice in the local newspaper that Breckland Council would be joining the pre-action protocol to potentially legally challenge the Devolution proposals. He was aware that according to Cabinet procedures, all Members did not have to be consulted but he hoped that the Leader had consulted with the Conservative Group Members before any decision had been made. He was interested to hear, given the Leader's previous comments and his reluctance to spend money on legal costs, how much money had been set aside by this Council to support such costs in relation to challenging Devolution.

The Leader stated that to date this Council had incurred no costs in the pre-action protocol but as Members could ascertain from the emerging budget there were existing allocations for legal fees and if this Council was minded taking anyone to judicial review, this would be a Council decision and the budget allocations for such a matter would be included in the report.

Councillor Atterwill, the Leader of the Independent Group, directed his question to Councillor Crane, the Executive Member for Environmental Health, Licensing & Sustainability. He had noticed that it had been reported in the local newspaper that Serco employees had voted for strike action and asked what contingencies Breckland Council had put in place to mitigate any disruption for residents.

Councillor Crane stated that the Council's priority was to maintain the service for residents, and she hoped that such industrial action could be avoided. However, in case the strike did go ahead, the contractor had contingency plans in place to help to mitigate the impact including drafting in staff from other Serco services.

Councillor Birt, the Leader of the Green Party, directed his question to the Leader but framed his question first.

He stated that previously he had dared to claim that certain activities and actions made by this Council had been mediocre which had resulted in a standards complaint being raised against him. He had been lied to by the previous Chief

Action By

Executive, he had documented evidence of false statements made by other Senior Officers, and his microphone had been stopped multiple times in meetings, despite not breaking any rules and having a constitutional right to speak. He had been repeatedly denied asking any questions when committee minutes were presented; this had been formally investigated twice where on both occasions it had been found that the Constitution had been breached by not allowing questions. Councillor Birt said that he had a very long list of other examples, but it seemed that his questions should not be heard. He had recently been reading part of the Daniel Morgan public inquiry and the problem had been defined as 'placing the protection of reputation above fidelity to the truth', especially in public bodies.

Councillor Birt then asked the Leader why his experiences fitted in so well with the inquiry's definition of institutional corruption.

The Leader was not prepared to respond to the aforementioned comments and question as he believed he had provided fulsome answers in response to Councillor Birt's questions on notice and to the accusations that had been made. This Council had very clear processes and procedures in place and Councillor Birt was advised that if he did have any evidence of any Officer or Member breaching those standards then there were clear processes to follow.

Councillor Clarke directed his questions to Councillor Jane James, the Executive Member for Customer & Corporate Services.

Firstly, he was sure that Councillor James was aware of the low uptake for the voter ID certificate which he believed would be of a particular concern to residents in the local Elections. He felt that this was not just going to affect young people but also older people who did not necessarily have a driving licence or passport. Secondly, he asked what Breckland Council was doing to promote the update, and would any data be collected and was the Democratic Services Team adequately resourced. Finally, the staff manning the polling stations on Elections Day could end up having to deal with some very frustrated people who had been turned away due to them not having adequate ID and felt that staff should have some protection or adequate training to address such matters.

In response, Councillor James thanked Councillor Clarke for his questions but asked for clarification on what he meant by collecting data as she was not sure what data he was specifically referring to.

Councillor Clarke said he was referring to national data targeting specific age groups that would ultimately put extra burden on Democratic Services.

Councillor James mentioned the comms effort that the Team had been undertaking in terms of the national programme with the Electoral Commission. Details had also been included in the Breckland magazine that was delivered to all households in the district. The Team was also speaking to Town & Parish Councils, to ensure all messages/advice was getting out into the public arena, and there would be an A4 double-sided leaflet going out with all Council Tax bills. In terms of staffing, the Team was being supported plus there was a great deal of training taking place. The uptake was in line with National and County and nothing unusual was being seen as far as Breckland was concerned. Councillor James then asked all Members to continue to have those conversations with their residents about photo ID so that everyone was well informed.

Councillor Clarke thanked the Executive Member for her response and was pleased to note that people applying for postal votes did not have to provide the

photo ID certificate.

Councillor Turner asked Councillor Webb, the Executive Member for Health & Communities to provide an update on the Mobile Food Bus.

Members were informed that the Food Bus service would resume next week on Tuesday, 28 February. The Food Bus did not just sell reasonably priced food but also provided many other services such as debt advice etc; however, the problem had been the lack of private space. Councillor Webb was pleased to announce that Breckland Council had gained the use of 9 village halls with suitable rooms where such matters could be discussed in private. She then explained how the new service would work.

Councillor Wilkinson also directed his question to Councillor Webb. He asked how the applications were progressing in terms of funding being provided for the King's Coronation.

Councillor Webb explained that there were two funding programmes running at the moment. The Celebratory Grants Scheme where organisations could apply for a grant up to £500 – this scheme would close on Friday, 24 February. Forty applications had been received thus far and had proved to be very popular. Then there was The Flagpole Match Funding Award Scheme, that was also supposed to finish on 24 February, but this had been extended for a further week to allow more time for Town & Parish Councils who wanted a new flagpole in their village or town to apply.

In response to a question and statement made by Councillor Marion Chapman-Allen about Councillor Birt, the Leader stated that some of his earlier responses highlighted his frustrations and disappointments.

Councillor Hambidge directed his question to Councillor Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits. In the written responses in terms of the Questions on Notice under Agenda item 6, Councillor Birt had raised the topic of defaults or arrears on Council Tax payments and asked if this could be further explained.

Councillor Cowen advised that there were some arrears but the important question that should be asked was in respect of write-offs. Breckland Council's figure for write-offs as a percentage of the total Council Tax taken was under 0.0001%. He then explained that every single resident including Members of this Council, were probably in arrears due to paying their Council Tax by monthly direct debit, and until the last debit payment was collected, the account overall was in arrears, and this was the figure that was shown in the response to Councillor Birt's question on notice. This was not unusual, it was a statement of fact, and last year, as again could be seen in the written response, the amount that was finally written off in the year 2022/23 was £6,080.00, a very small percentage, bearing in mind that this Council collected around £90m of Council Tax on behalf of the District, Norfolk County Council, the Police & Crime Commissioner and for Town & Parish Councils. Councillor Cowen was therefore very pleased that this Council was able to demonstrate that it did its job effectively and efficiently, that its arrears were de minimis and this was all credit to the Anglia Revenues Partnership Team in Thetford, an organisation that he was very proud to state that this Council set up with other authorities.

Listening to the response from Councillor Cowen, Councillor Borrett asked the Leader if he would agree with him that it had been very disappointing that this

Council have had to spend £15,000 defending itself against an incorrect challenge from a member that was literally twice the amount of the total Council Tax arrears.

The Leader explained that this Council had to defend itself and Officers advice had been sought and had been provided and the right decision had been made. Members had to work in partnership with everyone in the community including Officers in a mutual trust and in a respectful way and he trusted the Officers judgement and respected their advice when it was offered and this was the reason why Council and Cabinet, other Committees and the Commission recommended those decisions along with the advice provided; however, he was immensely frustrated and disappointed that this Council had wasted £15,000 on legal fees, double the amount that had to be written off in arrears.

Councillor Jermy directed his question to the Leader. He said that, yet again, Dereham and Thetford had been overlooked by the Government's Levelling- up Grant scheme with the Council's funding bids being rejected for a second time. Councillor Jermy had noted in the press that the Conservative Mayor in the West Midlands had called for an end to the 'begging bowl' culture and given the levelling up process was clearly not working for the Breckland District under the Conservative Government, he asked the Leader if he would continue to support the levelling up policy.

The Leader stated that he did support the levelling up agenda in its wider sense as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund all formed part of that. There were millions of pounds coming to Breckland of which Members were able to dictate where this money should be spent, he did agree however, with the Mayor of West Midlands, Andy Street and Councillor Jermy about the process used to determine where the allocations went. Further work was definitely needed on the processes currently used and he and other colleagues had already written to the Secretary of State and would continue to do so, and he hoped whatever Government was in power in the coming years would continue with the levelling up framework for the good of regeneration, creating jobs, education and growth.

Councillor Atterwill asked the Leader about a report he had seen in the local newspaper that said Breckland Council had been awarded £1.6m of Government funding. This was very good news for the district but one business in his Ward had made recent enquiries about applying for skills funding but had been disappointed to be told that such funding was not going to be available until April 2024. He asked the Deputy Leader if this date applied to the whole £1.6m or was it just the skills funding element of it.

In response, the Leader informed Members that he did not have the detail of the timeline to hand, but the funding would be drawn down on a phased approach, year on year. He would, after this meeting speak to Officers about reaching out to businesses and informing them of what other funding was available.

As Councillor Paul Hewett, the Executive Member for Property, Projects & Procurement was not in attendance, Councillor Birt directed his question to the Leader. He had noted that it had been previously stated that the income from the sale of the Green Britain Centre in Swaffham would be invested in the town, specifically in a leisure centre facility. Such monies had been allocated as detailed in the budget papers; however, the figure stated was just £700k that begged the question what happened to the millions of pounds that had originally been invested.

The Leader said that this question was getting rather repetitive as the same question had been raised by Councillor Birt some 14 months ago, but he would ask

Action By

the Democratic Services Officers to search for the previous responses provided. If not content with those he asked Councillor Birt to direct any further questions that he may have to Councillor Hewett or the Director/Assistant Director accordingly.

Councillor Jermy was unsure of who to direct his question to, Councillor Crane or Councillor Suggitt, the Executive Member for Strategic & Operational Planning. He had received a number of complaints from residents recently about Serco and the way they were cutting back trees. Breckland Council had a very good policy about planting new trees, but he was very concerned about the lack of care in respect of the existing trees that were far more beneficial to the environment than saplings and felt that there should be a policy on how to safeguard and maintain them in the best way possible, and not cut them back to bare stumps as had been the case in Thetford.

In response, Councillor Crane advised that there was a policy in place, the Council was also looking at a local policy to replace trees, particularly if they were deemed unsafe. She was aware that Councillor Land had previously mentioned the problems in Thetford which had since been resolved.

Councillor Atterwill had been alerted recently by a resident that Breckland Council had applied for £60k of Government funding under the Changing Places Scheme, to help refurbish, rebuild public toilets. He had asked to see the bid but had been surprised that the funding was for Banham Zoo. He did not have a problem with that but looking at the funding available this Council could have applied for 3 lots of £60k and wondered if any of the Town Councils had been contacted, as he continually received complaints about the state of the toilets in Dereham.

The Leader did not have the detail to hand in respect of the Changing Places bid. He believed all Members were aware that Banham Zoo operated as a charity, and he was pleased that Breckland Council had supported this charity doing some incredible work for animal welfare. The Council had secured this funding from Defra to ensure that charity had longevity and the monies were being used to upgrade the disabled facilities on site. He was not aware whether the Town Councils had been contacted but he would look into this and follow it up with a response.

Councillor Birt referred to the Questions on Notice and the response provided around the figures for optimum air quality. He asked where these figures had been derived from as the academic expert seemed to suggest differently.

The Leader pointed out that the response was contained under question 5 and if Councillor Birt had any concerns about the monitoring he would raise the question with the relevant agency as it was not in his area of expertise.

Councillor Jermy directed his question to Councillor Cowen. He had noticed on Twitter recently, that the Conservatives had reselected Liz Truss for the next General Election, and given that news, he asked Councillor Cowen if he would be revising the estimates for inflation in next year's budget.

Councillor Cowen had not seen that Twitter announcement but the answer to the question was no.

8/23 MOTION RECEIVED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 8 (AGENDA ITEM 8)

In accordance with the Constitution, Councillor Morton was given the opportunity to explain the reasoning behind his Notice of Motion.

Firstly, Councillor Morton thanked the Officers who helped prepare what was a modified but hopefully practical version of the Fair Tax declaration. Paying tax was often presented as a burden but should not be especially by recipients of public funding. Tax helped pay for a huge array of critical public services such as policing, defence, education, health, social care and much more. The fair tax mark provides a way to demonstrate good tax conduct to residents and inform suppliers of the standards that were expected from them.

He proposed that Full Council noted that around 17.5% of public contracts in the UK had been won by companies with links to tax havens and losses from multi-international profit shifting could be costing the UK in the region of £7billion per annum in lost revenue. This Fair Tax mark then offered the means for businesses to demonstrate good tax conduct and had been secured by organisations with a combined annual income of £50billion and more than 6,500 outlets.

He felt that the proposal should really be that Full Council resolves to approve the Council's Fair Tax declaration, to lead by example and demonstrate good practice in its tax conduct across all activities and ensure that contractors implement an IR35 robustly to pay a fair share of employment taxes.

Also, he felt that this Council should not use offshore vehicles for the purchase of land and property particularly where this leads to reduced payments of stamp duty, and undertake due diligence to ensure that not for profits structures were not being used inappropriately.

This Council should demand clarity on ultimate beneficial ownership of suppliers and their consolidated profit and loss position and promote Fair Tax mark for any business that this Council had any significant stake and where corporation tax was due. Also, calls for urgent reform should be supported to enable local authorities to better penalise poor tax conduct and reward good tax conduct through its procurement policies.

This would go towards demonstrating to residents the equality and fairness of the system that he felt was vital to the Council's democratic structures.

Councillor Dowling seconded the proposal. She stated that the size of the global economy had quadrupled over the past 30 years, yet the gap between rich and poor was getting wider with a massive increase in wealth at the top, whilst the total wealth owned by those at the bottom was falling. Since 2015, the richest 1% have more wealth than the rest of the world combined, and such extreme economic inequality was fuelled by an epidemic of tax evasion and avoidance that had reached an unprecedented scale. Whilst millions across the world lived in poverty, rich individuals and companies exploiting the secrecy in terms of tax havens continued to avoid paying their taxes preventing better services being provided.

Since 2014, a large number of documents have been leaked unveiling how tax evasion and avoidance have become standard business practice across the globe. Through a complex and usually regulated tax system multi-national companies and rich individuals actively seek to increase their profits by storing them offshore and avoid

paying taxes in their countries. Tax havens were the heart of this system, they allowed massive amounts of wealth to flow untaxed and in secret. Those who should be paying the most tax instead maximise their profits in part by paying as little tax as possible. Tax evasions deprived governments with the money they needed to provide vital public services and infrastructure. Governments have to

cut back on these services or make up the shortfall by collecting higher taxes from everyone else - both options saw the poorest people lose out and the inequality gap continued to grow. Inequality needs to end, and world leaders, governments and councils needed to be called upon to end the era of tax havens. Councillor Dowling urged Members to support this Motion for Fair Tax declaration.

Councillor Atterwill stated that whilst he supported the principle of this Motion, the third resolution and the way it had been worded was a concern and he asked Councillor Morton how the Council could ensure that contractors implemented IR35 and paid their fair share of employment taxes, and what was considered fair. He felt that this proposed recommendation should be worded differently by removing the words 'fair share' and replacing with 'and pay legally obligated employment taxes'. He felt that 'fair' was a subjective term and would be interested to hear the Council's Solicitor thoughts on this matter and whether this stood up on any contract that the Council awarded to third parties.

Rob Walker, the Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer appreciated what Councillor Atterwill had asked Councillor Morton but under the Constitution it stated that Councillor Morton could only speak again on the Motion as a right to reply at the end of the debate. He would be happy to offer discretion if Members of this Council saw fit whereby Councillor Morton was able to take a series of questions or have more of a debate.

Councillor Atterwill still wanted to hear the Council's Solicitor's opinion.

Councillor Borrett stated that these papers had been made available to Members beforehand where any questions of a technical nature could have been satisfied prior to this meeting. This was in fact a debate to the merits of this Motion and therefore he suggested that Members should adhere to the Constitution, and if there was a proposal to alter the Motion in any way then Councillor Atterwill had every right to make such a proposal that would have to be seconded and voted upon.

In response, the Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer explained that it was clear in the Constitution that the proposer of the Motion had a right of reply at the end of the debate. However, during previous meetings there had been a frustration with this element of the Constitution as it prohibited debate.

Councillor Cowen stated that as a Council it did lobby through the Local Government Association, Central Government and HMRC and other agencies to ensure that all companies, particularly those who the Council undertook business with, complied in full with the requirements of the law of this land. It could look at the Fair Tax mark but the advice received was as follows; that this Council could probably receive challenges because suppliers could easily argue that they did comply with the law, tax avoidance was not illegal but tax evasion however, was a fundamentally different topic and this Council would look very carefully at those who fell under that equation but the Council could not compel or require people with whom it did business to work other than within the law of this country. The Council did have a right to include social, environmental and ethical considerations in its procurement strategy and it did, but he asked Members to remember that the Fair Tax Mark scheme was a voluntary scheme and suppliers of all sizes had no legal obligation to comply with this voluntary scheme although many already did.

Councillor Cowen felt it important to recognise that should this Council incorporate this Fair Tax scheme; it would potentially lead to fewer suppliers submitting bids particularly if it was made a mandatory requirement. In conclusion, this Council

Action By

had a duty to residents that value for money was provided at all levels at all times for the services that this Council supplied to them. Councillor Cowen then suggested to Councillor Morton that no changes should be made to the Council's activities.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer reminded Members that according to the Constitution Members were only allowed to speak once apart from the mover of the Motion.

The Leader had a number of questions for the proposer and the seconder of this Motion. Firstly, did they both seek advice from Officers of this Council around the legality of this Motion and whether this Council was able to implement it. Secondly, had advice been sought from Senior Officers of this Council around the existing processes in respect of contracts. Also, had they understood the ability and extra resource it would take to enable this form of policy within the Council and whether advice had been sought as to what other councils did and whether they had been able to implement this successfully bearing in mind that this Fair Tax scheme came into effect in 2014.

Councillor Jermy stated that Councillor Cowen and the Leader had referred to the advice that had been received and asked if it could be confirmed as to whether such advice had been provided to the Conservative Group and if it had it was a constitutional requirement for such information to be provided to the other remaining Groups.

Councillor Cowen advised that the advice received had been provided to him alone in response to his enquiries.

This was a debate on a Motion and Councillor Borrett had listened to Councillor Dowling quite impassioned speech and accepted where she was coming from; however, he could not support all what had been contained in the Motion and would be voting against it one of which was the extra burden that would be put on this Council. He had noted that Councillor Dowling had said in her speech that companies were dodging taxes without breaking any laws and he believed it was not the business of Breckland to be policing peoples' tax, this was for national government and HMRC. If this Council was to step outside the normal procurement process, the only outcome for that would be increased expense for the residents of Breckland and would lead to ordinary citizens footing the bill and that would happen. It would also probably lead to less tenders for work and a huge amount of work and staff would be necessary to investigate fully every single company that this Council had dealings with. All of which would have to be paid by the tax payer. He accepted the total integrity of this matter but felt that it would be unworkable and unfair to increase the Council Tax for policing something that was already being done elsewhere.

Councillor Land asked if the Council's solicitors had looked into this issue and provided advice, and if so, could Members be informed of their opinion.

Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy, the Council's Legal Services Manager, said that she had not been involved in the discussions in respect of this Motion.

Councillor Birt felt that it was being portrayed as being difficult for this Council to pursue, but this was not the case, all that was being put forward was that companies that subscribed to this scheme would be preferred. There could be fewer tenders but that could mean that such companies did not actively want to subscribe to this scheme. He felt it was important not to penalise good law-abiding

businesses who took their morale obligations seriously, and this Motion was an ideal way to show them that they had the Council's support.

From a Point of Order, the Leader from the Council's position, was concerned that the Member in question had just insinuated that providers of the Council's services to residents and businesses were undertaking illegal activity and as had already been mentioned, tax avoidance was not illegal, tax evasion was. He asked for advice from the Solicitor about the accusations made to this Council and acting illegally.

The Legal Services Manager did not consider that an accusation had been made, she believed it to be just a comment.

The Leader raised another Point of Order and wanted clarity that all services provided to residents and businesses across the district were contracts that were procured legally within the law.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer did not believe that the comments made by Councillor Birt were accusing the Council of any wrongdoing, all had been recorded and he asked for the matter to be moved on.

Councillor Morton then provided responses to the many questions that had been asked but still agreed with the Motion and recommendations that had he had put forward.

A vote on the Motion was then taken.

The Motion was lost by 30 votes against and 8 votes in favour, plus 2 abstentions.

Councillor Birt asked for his vote in support of the Motion to be recorded.

9/23 MINUTES (FOR INFORMATION ONLY) (AGENDA ITEM 9)

9 .a Cabinet: 9 January 2023

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 9 January 2023 were noted.

9 .b Cabinet: 6 February 2023

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 6 February 2023 were noted.

The recommendations under Minute No. 24/23 would be discussed under agenda item 12.

9 .c Overview and Scrutiny Commission: 1 December 2022

Councillor Atterwill drew attention to the extensive discussions that had taken place by the Overview & Scrutiny Commission at that meeting in respect of fuel poverty and credit unions. There was a whole list of items on page 43 of the agenda pack that were recommended to Cabinet and asked for an update on these matters as he had not seen any responses as yet.

In response the Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer said that his understanding was that these matters were due to be heard at the next Cabinet meeting in March.

Action By

The Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 1 December 2022 were noted.

9 .d Overview & Scrutiny Commission: 26 January 2023

The Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 26 January 2023 were noted.

9 .e Planning Committee: 29 November 2022

The Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 29 November 2022 were noted.

9 .f Planning Committee: 13 December 2022

The Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 13 December 2022 were noted.

9 .g Planning Committee: 17 January 2023

The Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 17 January 2023 were noted.

9 .h General Purposes Committee: 24 November 2022

The Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 24 November 2022 were noted.

9 .i General Purposes Committee: 12 January 2023

The Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 12 January 2023 were noted.

9 .j Governance & Audit Committee: 2 February 2023

Councillor Birt referred to the CO2 reduction plan that only achieved half of the Council's objectives (see page 102 of the agenda pack) and yet the risk of failure had not changed since established. It had been claimed that this was a long-term risk until 2035 but until the assessment had been made, the time scale was unknown. He asked how and when the risk of failure of the Council's pledge on climate emergency be made.

Stephen James, the Executive Director, explained that there were a number of actions confirmed within the Sustainability Plan and agreed that there was a gap, but Officers continued to assess new ways to fill that gap as new technology came on board. He confirmed that the risk assessments were constantly being reviewed and refreshed.

The Minutes of the Governance & Audit Committee meeting held on 2 February 2023 were noted.

The recommendations under Minute No. 11/23 would be discussed under agenda item 11 and the recommendations under Minute No. 15/23 would be discussed under agenda item 14.

9 .k Committee of the Licensing Authority: 11 January 2023

The Minutes of the Committee of the Licensing Authority meeting held on 11 January 2023 were noted.

9 .l Licensing Committee: 11 January 2023

The Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 11 January 2023 were noted

10/23 LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND (AGENDA ITEM 10)

Councillor Gordon Bambridge, the Executive Member for Housing & Homelessness presented the report. Members were being asked to agree Breckland Council's approach to the 2023 Local Authority Housing Fund and the recommendations were highlighted and explained.

Councillor Bambridge then proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Borrett.

Councillor Atterwill referred to the second recommendation. He felt that it was absolutely imperative that this Council did what it could in supporting Ukrainian residents and those that were coming from Afghanistan. It was being suggested that available S106 funding should be allocated towards this effort and asked Councillor Bambridge if he had any idea how much of this S106 money would be allocated as the residents of Breckland would probably have a different opinion and put towards affordable housing. He also asked if such monies were being taken from one pot to be put in another.

Councillor Bambridge explained that this Council had a legal duty to provide housing for displaced persons living in the district, should they become homeless. This requirement was already in place. The Government had recognised that a burden would be placed on local authorities, and the money that was spent on this project could well be from S106 monies but the amount, at this moment in time, was unknown.

Councillor Borrett whole heartedly supported the recommendations. Breckland Council had been allocated £1,274,000 from Central Government and therefore felt that Breckland Council should accept that as it was about providing homes for people who otherwise would not have one.

Following a vote it was,

RESOLVED that:

1. the Council accepts and spends all funding available through the Local Authority Housing Fund 2023, in order to continue to provide housing support to vulnerable groups.
2. the Council releases the required match funding, and any S106 available funding for affordable housing, and adds this to the capital programme.
3. the Council delegates to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Homelessness, the development of the approach and the acquisition of the required properties.

11/23 TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY 2023-24 (AGENDA ITEM 11)

Councillor Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits presented the report.

The Council was obliged to review and agree its Treasury Management Strategy each year and reflect any changes that might be required as a consequence of guidance received from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA). He advised that the CIPFA guidance was not actually 'guidance' but a requirement placed upon authorities.

The report outlined the Council's Prudential Indicators for 2023-24 to 2025-26 and set out the expected treasury operations for this period and approval was being requested for the Treasury Management Policy, Strategy and Prudential Indicators for 2023-24 to 2025-26.

Councillor Birt asked if the low cost of the funding provided by the Public Loans Works Board (PLWB) could be investigated further to assist with the Council's carbon reduction plans. He pointed out that the charges on these loans were lower than inflation and such loans could help to assist with the Council's vision to be carbon neutral by 2035.

Councillor Cowen understood exactly what Councillor Birt was saying but Alison Chubbock, the Assistant Director of Finance & S151 Officer would, if asked, advise Members of the rules and regulations of local authority borrowing.

Councillor Kybird pointed out that this matter had been discussed at the Governance & Audit Committee meeting and in regard to PLWB, this Council did not have a need for external funding as the net borrowing requirement could be met through its own resources.

Councillor Cowen then read aloud and proposed the four recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Kybird.

Following a vote which was unanimous, it was:

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Treasury Management Strategy 2023-24 to 2025-26 at Appendix A be approved;
- 2) the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement contained within Appendix A which sets out the Council's policy on MRP be approved;
- 3) the Prudential & Local Indicators and limits contained within Appendix A (Tables 1-11) be approved;
- 4) the Investment Strategy 2023-24 (Appendix B) and the detailed criteria included in Appendix B1 be approved; and
- 5) the Treasury Management Policy at Appendix B2 be approved.

Statement

The Chairman read aloud the following statements that applied to both the Budget report at Agenda item 12 and the Council Tax report at Agenda item 13:

In accordance with The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote is now required at budget meetings.

Members are reminded that if they are two months or more in arrears, they must disclose the fact and not vote on any item to set tax or any decision which may affect its calculation.

12/23 BUDGET, MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023-24 (AGENDA ITEM 12)

Councillor Cowen the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits presented the report.

The papers set out before Members contained this Council's proposals for the Budget, Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy for the financial year 2023-2024. This was the culmination of a process and had been reviewed in accordance with the standing orders of the Council. Following that review, the final proposals had been tabled at the Cabinet meeting on 6 February 2023.

The proposals had been consulted upon, had been debated and discussed at both Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and during this rigorous and transparent process no amendments had been forthcoming.

As a result, the proposals had been unchanged from those that had been drafted at the end of 2022 with the exception of changes to Settlement and Business Rates income as previously reported.

Budgeting was an exercise in balancing known and assumed, or sometimes unknown or anticipated, variables against a set of choices that this Council made. It was the 'choices' element within the equation over which this Council had discretionary control and that, in turn, sets it on a course of action to establish the balanced budget.

Breckland Council had established key overriding priorities (choices) in addition to statutory services, against which its budget must provide funding. These were:

- Inspiring communities
- Thriving places
- Breckland 2035
- Working smarter
- Breckland cares

Many authorities around the country had found themselves in challenging positions, and, in some cases, their finances had been compromised but as a result of the detailed work undertaken by Team Breckland, this Council, could propose a balanced budget that allowed it to support both the statutory services that it was tasked with and provide the discretionary services that it had determined as essential for the residents and businesses who lived and worked in Breckland . This budget was not only balanced for the year ahead but also for the following

year and was an achievement of which all Members could be proud of.

The details of how this budget had been established were explained.

This was a positive budget statement and placed Breckland Council in an enviable position. The budget proposed that the band D tax level increased to £108.63 per year (just over £2 per week) but some 76% of Breckland homes were within bands A-C and thus the majority of Breckland households who paid the full amount of Council Tax would pay less than £1.86 per week for the statutory services and importantly, the discretionary services that this Council provided.

Councillor Cowen pointed out that when he addressed the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 26 January to present the draft budget, he had advised that additional Business Rates funding to the value of 500k would be received in the coming year and £1m in the following year 2024-2025. This Council faced significant risks to its budget as a result of the likely business rates reset and the fair funding review but this additional funding had been confirmed after the statutory consultation period closed on January 22nd and therefore, it had been determined, that the most prudent course of action in relation to this announcement was to post this additional income to reserves thereby allowing time to determine how best to utilise such a windfall for the benefit of Breckland residents in the coming years.

Councillor Cowen was indebted to the hard work of Team Breckland who had worked together to drive this draft budget. The fact that a balanced budget could be delivered in these difficult times whilst providing all the core services to which residents and businesses were entitled and, at the same time, providing a wide range of discretionary services designed to help and support the most vulnerable in Breckland, was testament to the prudent fiscal policies that this Council followed.

Councillor Cowen then commended the budget to Members.

A series of budget amendments were then put forward by opposition councillors, and all were displayed on screen.

The first amendment was proposed by Councillor Jermy and seconded by Councillor Terry and was about investing in Breckland's town centres.

All had seen the decline in the high streets, both locally and nationally and therefore it was important that all recognised the value of these spaces both economically, culturally, and recreationally. Breckland Council needed to invest in its town centres, making them places that people wanted to visit and spend money.

It was proposed to allocate £1m of anticipated capital receipts into a new fund to purchase small shop units in Breckland's town centres that would be made available at fair rents for small traders and local entrepreneurs. These new units would help secure jobs but also provide a revenue return for the Council, estimated to be at least in line with the return from cash investments on interest rates (circa 4% currently).

The Town Centre fund could also be utilised to support improving amenities in town centres that were important to improve footfall and the visitor experience. An example was provided such as improvements to public toilet provision in Dereham and Swaffham. It was hoped that this new Town Centre fund would be supported by match funding contributions from Town Councils.

Councillor Jermy then explained the reason behind his Motion.

Councillor Wilkinson asked Councillor Jermy a question.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer advised that in accordance with the Constitution, Councillor Jermy only had a right of reply at the end of the debate.

Councillor Borrett said that this seemed a good idea, but he was not sure if this stood up to scrutiny. This Council did have a plan for capital receipts, and a policy in respect of the allocation, therefore, for Full Council to make a decision without going through the proper processes and looking at what else the capital receipts could be used for would be irresponsible.

The Leader thanked Councillor Jermy for his proposed amendment but, as alluded to earlier, the UK Shared Prosperity Funding that this Council had was already doing this, by having £250k to tackle this very issue. It was about working with landlords and businesses to enable much better opportunities, providing assistance to purchase such units and making them sustainable themselves. Members were informed that the scheme started in October 2022 and currently 37 expressions of interest had been received and 4 had already received funding. The budget should remain as presented and such activities should be reviewed moving forward, and if suitable to do so, continue to work with those businesses and if successful, to look at further ways to help to ensure that the market towns continue to thrive.

Councillor Cowen agreed with the aforementioned comments. In the presentation that he, himself had provided earlier, he had specifically said that the most appropriate form to use this windfall was to post it to reserves. Then it would be for the Council going forward to review these reserves and look at the priorities that needed to be addressed to determine where the best value could be obtained. Therefore, at this moment in time, he could not support Councillor Jermy's amendment.

Councillor Atterwill supported the amendment. The reason he supported it was that he had asked Officers to provide him with details of the levelling up bids, where he had found a great deal of evidence from the consultants, as part of the Market Town Initiatives, that there was a high vacancy rate in the market towns that put off residents from visiting the town centres and moving to the district. It was a question of priorities, and it had now got to the stage where residents wanted this Council to do something more tangible that was going to help the High Streets and felt that this funding could do just that. He also felt that all of the Town Councils could help out as well by drawing down match funding. He supported the Market Town initiative but felt that this would go further and if this Council purchased some retail units it would still own the asset, much the same as Barnham Broom, and could be actioned through the existing budget.

Councillor Clarke also supported the amendment and concurred with the remarks made by Councillor Atterwill.

Councillor Wilkinson, had noted that the amendment mentioned the improvement to public toilets and reminded Members that there had been a Public Toilet/Lavatory Bill put through Parliament by Elizabeth Truss MP, removing the business rates from such buildings owned by Town & Parish Councils, and this Council should put pressure on them to make sure the toilets in the towns were acceptable for the public to use.

Action By

Councillor Atterwill was looking to speak again but the Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer advised that a member was only allowed to speak once to an amendment or a Motion. If there were no further questions, Councillor Terry was able to speak at this point as seconder of the amendment, then back to Councillor Jermy for the final right of reply.

Councillor Terry stated that since the 2011 Portis review, much activity had been centred on facilities management but was unable to tackle underlying structural problems in town centres. Chronic vacancies could still be seen, poor quality occupiers, tired environments, and overall poor customer experience. This made it impossible to attract the necessary investment for improvements. Some of the town centres were caught in a vicious cycle of boarded up shops, declining attractiveness and falling footfall. Regeneration was a major challenge, but he believed there were innovative ways to tackle such problems with the right investment in town centres that could be simultaneously revigorated and made more resilient over the long term.

Councillor Jermy was then given the opportunity to respond.

He fully appreciated that he did not expect to come along to a Full Council budget meeting and table an amendment that would be accepted but he did like to propose ideas which could make other Members ponder and possibly come back at a future date having looked into it. He then addressed some of the points previously raised.

As far as Councillor Cowen's point was concerned, this was not a proposal to use the windfall of business rates or revenue money, this was the windfall of the asset sale using capital money, so it would be part of the Capital Programme, that had been checked by Officers of this Council. In answer to Councillor Borrett's point, it was entirely affordable with the current plans, and it was something that could be decided at this meeting although he did appreciate that others might want to take more time to consider it. As far as he knew, as a Council, it was paying the rents to trade, what it was not doing was securing those assets and pinning them to the local community by investing in them and buying the assets, this was the key difference to this programme. Why were these places empty and why were such corporations content to leave units empty for long periods of time. He believed that Breckland Council knew its district and town centres best and knew what might be achievable in terms of a fair and reasonable rent. It was already engaging with potential businesses as prospective occupiers were already applying for money for rent; therefore, this Council should be taking the next step and buy these assets for businesses to rent which he felt was a logical next step.

A recorded vote was then taken.

MEMBER	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
CLLR ASHBY		X	
CLLR ASKEW		X	
CLLR ATTERWILL	X		
CLLR BAMBRIDGE		X	
CLLR BIRT	X		
CLLR BORRETT		X	

Action By

CLLR BOWES		X	
CLLR BRAME	APOLOGIES		
CLLR BRINDLE	X		
CLLR BUSHELL		X	
CLLR MARION CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR SAM CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR CLARKE	X		
CLLR CLAUSSEN		X	
CLLR COWEN		X	
CLLR CRANE		X	
CLLR DALE		X	
CLLR DOWLING	X		
CLLR DUFFIELD		X	
CLLR DUIGAN		X	
CLLR EAGLE			
CLLR GILBERT	APOLOGIES		
CLLR GREY			
CLLR HAMBIDGE			
CLLR HARVEY	APOLOGIES		
CLLR HEWETT			
CLLR JAMES		X	
CLLR JERMY	X		
CLLR KIDDELL		X	
CLLR KIDDLE-MORRIS			
CLLR KYBIRD		X	
CLLR LAND	X		
CLLR MARTIN		X	
CLLR MONUMENT		X	
CLLR MORTON	X		
CLLR NAIRN		X	
CLLR NUNN		X	
CLLR OLIVER			
CLLR PLUMMER		X	

Action By

CLLR SHERWOOD		X	
CLLR SUGGITT		X	
CLLR TAYLOR		X	
CLLR TERRY	X		
CLLR TURNER		X	
CLLR WEBB		x	
CLLR WICKERSON	X		
CLLR WILKIN		X	
CLLR WILKINSON		X	
TOTAL:	10	29	0

The amendment was lost by 10 votes in favour and 29 against, there were no abstentions.

Prior to going back to the substantive recommendations, a second amendment was put forward by Councillor Land, seconded by Councillor Wickerson.

The budget proposed for Disabled Facilities Grants was evidently not sufficient as a significant backlog remained. This proposal was to allocate a further £200,000 in 2023/24 to ensure that all applicants that had been assessed and costed were implemented in the next financial year.

This additional funding would be taken from the New Homes Bonus allocation for 2023-24 which would otherwise be contributed into the Inclusive Growth.

Councillor Bambridge explained how the disabled facilities grant worked. This Council like all other district councils administered the disabled facilities grant on behalf of the Government. The money was Central Government money and allocations were made. This Council, due to its efficiencies, had managed to spend it all and had spent it rather early. He along with Officers of this Council and other Cabinet Members including the Leader, had been in contact, for several months now, with Ministers of the Crown in Westminster using MP's and direct contacts to try and achieve greater funding for such matters from Central Government. He looked to Members to put pressure on Ministers and on the local MP to attempt to get more money for this Council.

Councillor Atterwill thanked Councillor Bambridge for his comments, but the fact was, that this Council had spent all the money, but it did not have enough to carry out the work that was required. Clearly, if the money had been spent, there was a need, and the need was outstripping the funds that the Council had in the pot to carry out the work. Whilst every pressure was being put on Government, there was a situation that this £200k could make a very big difference very quickly to some very vulnerable residents who needed assistance. Looking at the budget he felt that £200k could easily be found and whole heartedly supported this amendment.

The Leader confirmed that this budget, if voted for approval, would come into force on 1 April 2023 and as of the 1 April this year a new allocation would come from Central Government, and he was hopeful that it would be more than the previous year. He acknowledged that £200k would go some way to deal with such matters.

Councillor Jermy disagreed with the comments made by Councillor Bambridge. He agreed that it was the Government's responsibility to provide such funding but this Council had an allocation for the next financial year of £1.3m but the costed figure of implementing everyone who had been assessed and accepted was £1.5m so this meant that this Council was adopting a budget that would not meet the need that existed, and this Council was purely hoping that the Government would provide the rest at a future date. In addition to this £1.5m, it still had 300 people who had not even been assessed and had no chance in the next financial year of having their adaptations implemented. Therefore, he was not prepared to vote for this budget.

From her past experience as the Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor Webb totally understood the pressures that Councillor Bambridge and the Team were under. The Team had been very efficient with the occupational health service, and she along with the Leader and Councillor Bambridge had been pushing the Government to get more money. She was also aware that the Team had kept some monies back, nearly £200k for priority one cases that required urgent adaptations. The Handyman Scheme had provided great help in installing grab rails etc in peoples' homes. Councillor Webb also mentioned that she along with others, including the Leader, would be attending a meeting very soon to try and get this allowance increased, as they knew there was an issue, and all was being done to address this.

Councillor Borrett supported the effort being made by Councillor Webb and Councillor Bambridge as such matters should not be funded by Council Tax. The Government had given this Council a direct grant for this piece of work and Breckland Council was an agent of the Government delivering this service. He then provided some examples of other services out of the Council's control that needed additional funding, such as the ambulance service, but was not this authority's responsibility as it rested elsewhere. He did believe however, that there was a compelling case for the Government to be more clearly appraised as to the need of this particular service which he felt was excellent as it was a vital part of the Council's overall responsibilities to the Government generally and was being pursued.

As the seconder of this Motion, Councillor Wickerson was then given the opportunity to speak.

There was no guarantee that the Government would come to the Council's rescue, he had seen the figures, and therefore the residents in his Ward would not be receiving the help they required. He referred to the Leader's announcements where he had highlighted this Council's commitment to those in need, this proposed amendment was a further opportunity to demonstrate that commitment. The essential need for this service would not only assist the individual residents to return to their homes to live independently but the wider picture was the much-needed hospital beds.

The pressures on the Council's Housing Team were ever increasing with 176 grants completed in 2021/22 and 214 already completed in the first three quarters of 2022/23. Current enquiries were averaging 15 a week and the average the cost of each grant had risen from £7k to £9k, and with only £197k remaining in the budget for 2022/23, the Team was now only being able to consider priority one cases for those who had been waiting longest or those who had the highest need. There were also an additional 302 applicants waiting for occupational health assessments of which results were awaited on 60 of those assessments. It was

therefore clear that the current figure of £1.3m in the 2023/24 budget was seriously underfunded. Members were urged to agree to the proposed amendment and provide the Housing Team with the necessary resources required now.

Councillor Land as the proposer of this Motion was then given the opportunity to speak.

Firstly, in response to the point raised by Councillor Borrett, the Council was not asking for money to support the ambulance service, it was asking for additional help for a service that this Council already provided. He supported Councillor Bambridge's efforts in trying to get more funding from Government but if this did not come to fruition this Council should release the money that was already available.

A recorded vote was taken on this amendment.

MEMBER	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
CLLR ASHBY		X	
CLLR ASKEW		X	
CLLR ATTERWILL	X		
CLLR BAMBRIDGE		X	
CLLR BIRT	X		
CLLR BORRETT		X	
CLLR BOWES		X	
CLLR BRAME	APOLOGIES		
CLLR BRINDLE	X		
CLLR BUSHELL		X	
CLLR MARION CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR SAM CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR CLARKE	X		
CLLR CLAUSSEN		X	
CLLR COWEN		X	
CLLR CRANE		X	
CLLR DALE		X	
CLLR DOWLING	X		
CLLR DUFFIELD		X	
CLLR DUIGAN		X	
CLLR EAGLE			
CLLR GILBERT	APOLOGIES		

Action By

CLLR GREY			
CLLR HAMBIDGE			
CLLR HARVEY	APOLOGIES		
CLLR HEWETT			
CLLR JAMES		X	
CLLR JERMY	X		
CLLR KIDDELL		X	
CLLR KIDDLE-MORRIS			
CLLR KYBIRD		X	
CLLR LAND	X		
CLLR MARTIN		X	
CLLR MONUMENT		X	
CLLR MORTON	X		
CLLR NAIRN		X	
CLLR NUNN		X	
CLLR OLIVER			
CLLR PLUMMER		X	
CLLR SHERWOOD		X	
CLLR SUGGITT		X	
CLLR TAYLOR		X	
CLLR TERRY	X		
CLLR TURNER		X	
CLLR WEBB		x	
CLLR WICKERSON	X		
CLLR WILKIN		X	
CLLR WILKINSON		X	
TOTAL:	10	29	0

The amendment was lost by 10 votes in favour and 29 against, there were no abstentions.

Again prior to voting on the substantive recommendations, a third amendment was then proposed by Councillor Clarke and seconded by Councillor Brindle.

It was proposed to pause the Breckland Bridge small sites proposals for 2023/24 to allow for greater level of consultation with Ward Members, Parish Councils and local residents.

Action By

The current proposals were being rushed with inadequate levels of consultation. The Council risked forever losing much-valued pieces of community space and 'green lungs'. Sites that improved biodiversity, supported physical and mental health and areas where there was shortage of green space. Once these sites were sold, they would be gone for good.

The financial impact of this pause would be negligible in the 23/24 financial year with the predicted income of £166,667 moved into future financial years.

Councillor Clarke then explained his reasons behind the amendment.

The Leader confirmed that what was being proposed as an amendment to the budget, was in relation to a decision that had been made in October 2022 of which all Members had voted in favour of, and nobody had abstained or voted against it. The Portfolio Holder had also shared with all members that every site for small disposals would be considered on a case-by-case basis, the £166k was a target, and every time a piece of land came forward for disposal a piece of work was then undertaken with the local Ward Member and Parish Councils to get a full understanding prior to any decision being formally made. This proposed amendment was not well timed because if any Councils had a concern about a piece of land in his Ward, a process was already in place that should be followed to get the best outcome, and therefore he would not be supporting the amendment as proposed.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer stated that this was an amendment to the budget to pause expenditure and mitigate loss of income, and subsequent decisions to enable this could be necessary.

Councillor Wilkinson referred to the first paragraph of Councillor Clarke's amendment – consultation with Ward Members and Town/Parish Councillors. This was happening as had done on various pieces of land in his Ward one of which had gone through the Planning Committee process recently.

As a point of clarification, Councillor Cowen stated that not only was he the Portfolio Holder for Finance Revenues & Benefits, but he was also a Director of Breckland Bridge and asked for guidance on whether he was allowed to take part in the vote.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer stated that the safest option was to abstain from voting on this amendment.

Whilst she appreciated Councillor Clarke's concerns about the small green areas that had been added to this list, Councillor Monument was not actually convinced that the proposal that was being put forward was not an amendment to the budget and believed that this was a completely separate proposal to stop the actual process itself.

The Deputy Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer understood the aforementioned points, but he believed that the amendment tabled did focus on the financial aspects, that would have an effect on the budget.

Councillor Webb totally understood the issues and the fact that people in Dereham felt that green spaces were needed but as mentioned before, there was a process that allowed for consultation and Ward Members should be putting forward any objections received from residents.

Action By

Councillor Jermy said that he would be supporting this amendment as he did not have the faith as Councillor Webb had in the process. As a County Councillor in Thetford, a Town Councillor and a neighbouring Ward Councillor, he had not been consulted on any pieces of land that had been sold. He was aware that there were a significant number of residents in Glebe Close/Vicarage Road in Thetford who were vehemently against the Breckland Bridge proposal to build on a very small piece of green land. The Ward Members and the community were against it, but the process still continued and planning permission had been sought once more. This Council was making a mistake and was rushing to sell off these pieces of land, and as Councillor Clarke had said, once these sites were sold, they would be gone for good, and including a budget allocation for this was wrong.

Councillor Plummer drew Members' attention to page 78 of the agenda pack, the Planning Minutes and pointed out that Breckland Bridge had wanted to build 2 dwellings in Thompson which was refused by the Planning Committee against the Officers recommendation of approval. He mentioned the two pieces of land in his Ward which had been offered to the Parish Council to retain as green open space.

As a Ward Member for Thetford, Councillor Kybird mentioned the land at Glebe Close/Vicarage Road which had not been included on the list and the relevant Ward Members had not put that site forward under the Green Spaces consultation.

Councillor Atterwill was a Member of the Planning Committee and was of the view that this site should not have got to that point in the first place even though it had been refused as it had been very clear from the very strong local opposition that this piece of green space should be retained. He did query the consultation that had been carried out with this particular Parish Council and whether the Ward Member had been consulted as clearly money had been spent on a planning application for what he felt was an appalling proposal that local residents did not support.

Councillor Borrett had listened to all points made but had found it interesting in what Councillor Jermy had said in terms of not wanting to stop the process but to pause it yet had said that he had no faith in the process. This Motion therefore was not going to change anything. Councillor Borrett then pointed out that this process was not being rushed, it took a very long time to get to the final stage and had been going on for years and pushing it back to 2024 was not going to make any difference. He would not be supporting this Motion.

Councillor Bambridge agreed that this process had been going on for a number of years, and there were 1000s of small pieces of Breckland-owned land all over the district and it was only right that this Council should sort out whether they could be developed or not or whether they should remain as green open space or even advantage a neighbour, and therefore would not be supporting this Motion.

Councillor Nunn believed that he was either the Portfolio Holder or possibly the Leader at the time this process was put in place. The Council at that time owned 1000s of small pieces of land, some were community interest pieces, and some were definitely redundant pieces of land which had been built on over the years with no objections. Each time the Ward Member and local communities had been engaged and sometimes the Council had deemed to gift the land to the community or had sold it to them to get best value for the Council. Such land needed to be constantly reviewed and rationalised and therefore he would not be supporting this Motion.

Councillor Dowling stated that whilst she agreed that all pieces of land had to be

Action By

looked at for its individual merits but something that was not around all those years ago was the importance of preserving these green spaces and felt that this had been lost in the argument. It was not just about what the land was worth it was about what the land meant to the community.

Councillor Duffield pointed out that all Parish Councils were contacted and kept informed.

As the seconder of this Motion, Councillor Brindle was then given the opportunity to speak.

He felt that one or two wider issues had been raised to discredit this Motion, no-one was against reviewing the land, the question was whether to pause meant stop. What was being asked for in this amendment was for the most thorough consultation possible that gave people a chance to reflect on the long-term value of losing the land forever as opinions did change over time. The layout of Glebe Close in Thetford was explained, the land in question was a great place for children to play and all that was being asked was to pause this process so that further consultation could take place and be incredibly cautious about giving up these green spaces.

Councillor Clarke thanked his colleagues for their contributions. He was a great believer in talking and listening to people but for the sites in his Ward he had gone door to door to get peoples' opinions and the main opinion was that it should be retained as public open space. He then responded to the many earlier points raised.

A recorded vote was then taken.

MEMBER	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
CLLR ASHBY		X	
CLLR ASKEW		X	
CLLR ATTERWILL	X		
CLLR BAMBRIDGE		X	
CLLR BIRT	X		
CLLR BORRETT		X	
CLLR BOWES		X	
CLLR BRAME	APOLOGIES		
CLLR BRINDLE	X		
CLLR BUSHELL		X	
CLLR MARION CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR SAM CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR CLARKE	X		
CLLR CLAUSSEN		X	
CLLR COWEN			X

Action By

CLLR CRANE		X	
CLLR DALE		X	
CLLR DOWLING	X		
CLLR DUFFIELD		X	
CLLR DUIGAN		X	
CLLR EAGLE			
CLLR GILBERT	APOLOGIES		
CLLR GREY			
CLLR HAMBIDGE			
CLLR HARVEY	APOLOGIES		
CLLR HEWETT			
CLLR JAMES		X	
CLLR JERMY	X		
CLLR KIDDELL		X	
CLLR KIDDLE-MORRIS			
CLLR KYBIRD		X	
CLLR LAND	X		
CLLR MARTIN		X	
CLLR MONUMENT		X	
CLLR MORTON	X		
CLLR NAIRN		X	
CLLR NUNN		X	
CLLR OLIVER			
CLLR PLUMMER		X	
CLLR SHERWOOD		X	
CLLR SUGGITT		X	
CLLR TAYLOR		X	
CLLR TERRY	X		
CLLR TURNER		X	
CLLR WEBB		x	
CLLR WICKERSON	X		
CLLR WILKIN		X	
CLLR WILKINSON		X	

TOTAL:	10	28	1
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The amendment was lost by 10 votes in favour and 28 against, plus 1 abstention.

A fourth amendment was proposed by Councillor Morton and seconded by Councillor Atterwill.

The use of temporary and emergency accommodation represented a significant cost for the Council with no signs of demand decreasing. Some of the anticipated capital receipts for the Council in the next financial year should be put towards the purchase and operation of additional Council owned units to help decrease revenue costs in future years.

It was proposed that £1m of anticipated capital receipts was budgeted to facilitate this service. These new units would provide revenue funds in the future through rents leading to a nil overall cost position, and the reduction in revenue costs for temporary accommodation was likely to be around £16,000 per person per year (circa £80,000 to £100,000 per year).

Councillor Morton then put forward his reasons behind his amendment.

Councillor Birt had noted that this was a neutral overall cost position so he could not see how anyone could vote against it. It was providing services and was not going to cost the council anything in the long term and therefore he would be supporting this amendment.

Councillor Jermy had tabled a very similar Motion many years ago and back then he could not understand why, as a district, it did not have a more active role in housing. It had been a huge cost for this Council over the last few years and was likely to increase even further. He felt that there was a great deal of sense in this proposal as it would help with the housing waiting lists and reduce the cost to the Council from a revenue point of view, whilst still owning the capital asset. The capital was available in this next financial year so why not spend it on something that would provide a significant difference to many residents in the district by providing good quality homes.

Councillor Bambridge found it interesting in the fact that this had come up as an amendment to the budget as this was a policy that this Council already pursued such as Elm Road in Thetford and Quarry Court in Dereham so he would not be supporting this amendment.

As the seconder of this amendment, Councillor Atterwill referred to the recent levelling up bid and read aloud the disparaging comments made by the consultants who had submitted the bid. He had heard what Councillor Bambridge had said about Elm Road, and fully supported this project but would probably only help about 35 people. This district had a very significant problem and was grateful to offer his thanks who had provided him with the figures for this current financial year, which again he read aloud. The problem was getting worse in comparison to previous years and there were funds available especially from the sale of a very significant asset, and he looked forward to the Executive Member coming to this chamber and confirming to him that this Council had maximised its money from that asset through that capital receipt and put that money into projects such as this. There was already money in the budget for this project and it was affordable, and he applauded what this Council was already doing but it was simply not enough.

Councillor Morton felt that all agreed with the policy but differed on the urgency but as it was cost neutral all Members should be behind in adopting this Motion.

A recorded vote was then taken.

MEMBER	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
CLLR ASHBY (left the meeting before this vote was taken)			
CLLR ASKEW		X	
CLLR ATTERWILL	X		
CLLR BAMBRIDGE		X	
CLLR BIRT	X		
CLLR BORRETT		X	
CLLR BOWES		X	
CLLR BRAME	APOLOGIES		
CLLR BRINDLE	X		
CLLR BUSHELL		X	
CLLR MARION CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR SAM CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR CLARKE	X		
CLLR CLAUSSEN		X	
CLLR COWEN		X	
CLLR CRANE		X	
CLLR DALE		X	
CLLR DOWLING	X		
CLLR DUFFIELD		X	
CLLR DUIGAN		X	
CLLR EAGLE			
CLLR GILBERT	APOLOGIES		
CLLR GREY			
CLLR HAMBIDGE			
CLLR HARVEY	APOLOGIES		
CLLR HEWETT			
CLLR JAMES		X	
CLLR JERMY	X		

Action By

CLLR KIDDELL		X	
CLLR KIDDLE MORRIS			
CLLR KYBIRD		X	
CLLR LAND	X		
CLLR MARTIN		X	
CLLR MONUMENT		X	
CLLR MORTON	X		
CLLR NAIRN		X	
CLLR NUNN		X	
CLLR OLIVER			
CLLR PLUMMER		X	
CLLR SHERWOOD		X	
CLLR SUGGITT		X	
CLLR TAYLOR (left the meeting before this vote was taken)			
CLLR TERRY	X		
CLLR TURNER		X	
CLLR WEBB		x	
CLLR WICKERSON	X		
CLLR WILKIN		X	
CLLR WILKINSON		X	
TOTAL:	10	27	0

The amendment was lost by 10 votes in favour and 27 against, no abstentions.

A fifth amendment was proposed by Councillor Birt and seconded by Councillor Jermy.

With the cost-of-living crisis continuing to hit many Breckland residents it was proposed that some of the windfall income be used from a change in the amount of business rates passed to this Council in order to set a zero Council Tax rise for the coming year.

The cost of this would be just £227k, which was less than half of the windfall income that this Council was due to receive. The windfall income increases by around another £1m the following year so there was no risk to any Breckland plans or projects.

Councillor Birt was then afforded the opportunity to explain the reasoning behind his amendment.

Councillor Jermy, as the seconder of this amendment, stated that Breckland

Action By

Council was in a relatively strong financial position, and he commended everyone who had helped to achieve this. This Council had received various monies deemed as windfalls, but he had seen over the course of this meeting, opportunities to address such serious issues in the district, being voted against. What this Council was now left with was a budget that puts significant sums of money into reserves rather than dealing with the challenges this district faced. At this moment in time, there was no need for the Council Tax to be increased, just half of the windfall that this Council was expecting in the new financial year would enable a zero Council Tax increase.

The Leader was concerned that the figures shown on the screen were misleading. If this Council was to go ahead with a Council Tax freeze this year, it would amount to a loss year on year and highlighted what it would mean to this Council if this amendment was approved. He acknowledged all proposals made but felt that all were inappropriate and therefore could not support this amendment.

Councillor Atterwill was confused as the money was already in the budget from the sale of the said asset and therefore it was appropriate as Opposition Members to table amendments to spend some of the proceeds.

Alison Chubbock, the Assistant Director of Finance and S151 Officer explained that the capital receipt was in the programme, and everything approved to be spent against that had a mitigation should that receipt not be received. Therefore, it would not be wise to approve anything without that mitigation in place.

In the spirit of brevity, all Councillor Birt said was that this Council could afford it and it would help and commended his amendment to Members.

A recorded vote was then taken.

MEMBER	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
CLLR ASHBY (left the meeting before this vote was taken)			
CLLR ASKEW		X	
CLLR ATTERWILL	X		
CLLR BAMBRIDGE		X	
CLLR BIRT	X		
CLLR BORRETT		X	
CLLR BOWES		X	
CLLR BRAME	APOLOGIES		
CLLR BRINDLE	X		
CLLR BUSHELL		X	
CLLR MARION CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR SAM CHAPMAN-ALLEN		X	
CLLR CLARKE	X		

Action By

CLLR CLAUSSEN		X	
CLLR COWEN		X	
CLLR CRANE		X	
CLLR DALE		X	
CLLR DOWLING	X		
CLLR DUFFIELD		X	
CLLR DUIGAN		X	
CLLR EAGLE			
CLLR GILBERT	APOLOGIES		
CLLR GREY			
CLLR HAMBIDGE			
CLLR HARVEY	APOLOGIES		
CLLR HEWETT			
CLLR JAMES		X	
CLLR JERMY	X		
CLLR KIDDELL		X	
CLLR KIDDLE-MORRIS			
CLLR KYBIRD		X	
CLLR LAND	X		
CLLR MARTIN		X	
CLLR MONUMENT		X	
CLLR MORTON	X		
CLLR NAIRN		X	
CLLR NUNN		X	
CLLR OLIVER			
CLLR PLUMMER		X	
CLLR SHERWOOD		X	
CLLR SUGGITT		X	
CLLR TAYLOR (left the meeting before this vote was taken)			
CLLR TERRY	X		
CLLR TURNER		X	
CLLR WEBB		x	
CLLR WICKERSON	X		

Action By

CLLR WILKIN		X	
CLLR WILKINSON		X	
TOTAL:	10	27	0

This amendment was also lost by 10 votes in favour and 27 against, no abstentions.

A recorded enbloc vote was then taken on all the substantive recommendations.

MEMBER	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
CLLR ASHBY (LEFT THE MEETING BEFORE THE FINAL VOTE WAS TAKEN)			
CLLR ASKEW	X		
CLLR ATTERWILL		X	
CLLR BAMBRIDGE	X		
CLLR BIRT		X	
CLLR BORRETT	X		
CLLR BOWES	X		
CLLR BRAME	APOLOGIES		
CLLR BRINDLE		X	
CLLR BUSHELL	X		
CLLR MARION CHAPMAN-ALLEN	X		
CLLR SAM CHAPMAN-ALLEN	X		
CLLR CLARKE		X	
CLLR CLAUSSEN	X		
CLLR COWEN	X		
CLLR CRANE	X		
CLLR DALE	X		
CLLR DOWLING		X	
CLLR DUFFIELD	X		
CLLR DUIGAN	X		
CLLR EAGLE			
CLLR GILBERT	APOLOGIES		
CLLR GREY			
CLLR HAMBIDGE			

Action By

CLLR HARVEY	APOLOGIES		
CLLR HEWETT			
CLLR JAMES	X		
CLLR JERMY		X	
CLLR KIDDELL	X		
CLLR KIDDLE MORRIS			
CLLR KYBIRD	X		
CLLR LAND		X	
CLLR MARTIN	X		
CLLR MONUMENT	X		
CLLR MORTON		X	
CLLR NAIRN	X		
CLLR NUNN	X		
CLLR OLIVER			
CLLR PLUMMER	X		
CLLR SHERWOOD	X		
CLLR SUGGITT	X		
CLLR TAYLOR (LEFT THE MEETING BEFORE THE FINAL VOTE WAS TAKEN)			
CLLR TERRY		X	
CLLR TURNER	X		
CLLR WEBB	X		
CLLR WICKERSON		X	
CLLR WILKIN	X		
CLLR WILKINSON	X		
TOTAL:	27	10	0

Subject to 27 votes in favour and 10 votes against all recommendations, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. the Breckland revenue estimates and parish special expenses for 2023 -24 and outlined position through to 2026-27 (as set out in Appendix B and E) be approved.
2. the capital estimates and associated funding for 2023-24 and outline position through to 2032-33 (as set out in Appendix H) be approved.
3. the fees and charges shown at Appendix D and D2, for adoption on 1 April

Action By

- 2023 be approved.
4. the Council Tax be set at £108.63 for a Band D property in 2023-24 (a £4.95 per annum increase on 2022-23 levels).
 5. the Medium-Term Financial Plan at Appendix A of the report be approved.
 6. the Capital Strategy at Appendix G of the report be approved.
 7. with effect from 1 April 2024 (subject to the necessary legislation receiving Royal Assent in time) the Long-Term empty property premium for Council Tax be applied after 1 year and the Second Homes Council Tax premium of 100% be applied
 8. the Retail Hospitality & Leisure (RHL) NNDR relief and the Supporting Small Business (SSB) NNDR relief be approved for 2023-24 in line with Government guidelines and criteria.
 9. that the following approach be adopted for the Council Tax Support Fund:
 - a. To apply the required reductions of up to £25 to all current LCTS claimants to their 2023-24 Council Tax bills in line with scheme guidance
 - b. To maximise the use of the fund by providing an additional top up payment of £12 to all current LCTS claimants to their 2023-24 Council Tax bills
 - c. To retain sufficient funding to provide additional S13A(1)(c) Exceptional Hardship Payment (EHP) funding and use this throughout 2023-24 to support new LCTS claimants with the same ONE-OFF reduction to their 2023-24 Council Tax bills.

13/23 COUNCIL TAX 2023-24 (AGENDA ITEM 13)

Councillor Cowen, the Executive Member for Finance, Revenue & Benefits presented the report.

The report reflected on the decisions reached by the Police and Crime Commissioner and Norfolk County Council in setting their precept and council tax level respectively and Breckland Cabinet’s resolution at the 6 February Cabinet meeting.

In addition, the commentary sets out the special expenses and the resolutions that were utilised in the various calculations behind the council tax setting process. The Appendices to the report were highlighted and the recommendations were read aloud.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Kybird.

Councillor Birt stated that he would be voting against these recommendations.

MEMBER	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
CLLR ASHBY (LEFT THE MEETING BEFORE THE FINAL VOTE WAS			

Action By

TAKEN)			
CLLR ASKEW	X		
CLLR ATTERWILL		X	
CLLR BAMBRIDGE	X		
CLLR BIRT		X	
CLLR BORRETT	X		
CLLR BOWES	X		
CLLR BRAME	APOLOGIES		
CLLR BRINDLE		X	
CLLR BUSHELL	X		
CLLR MARION CHAPMAN-ALLEN	X		
CLLR SAM CHAPMAN-ALLEN	X		
CLLR CLARKE		X	
CLLR CLAUSSEN	X		
CLLR COWEN	X		
CLLR CRANE	X		
CLLR DALE	X		
CLLR DOWLING		X	
CLLR DUFFIELD	X		
CLLR DUIGAN	X		
CLLR EAGLE			
CLLR GILBERT	APOLOGIES		
CLLR GREY			
CLLR HAMBIDGE			
CLLR HARVEY	APOLOGIES		
CLLR HEWETT			
CLLR JAMES	X		
CLLR JERMY		X	
CLLR KIDDELL	X		
CLLR KIDDLE MORRIS			
CLLR KYBIRD	X		
CLLR LAND		X	
CLLR MARTIN	X		

Action By

CLLR MONUMENT	X		
CLLR MORTON		X	
CLLR NAIRN	X		
CLLR NUNN (LEFT THE MEETING BEFORE THE FINAL VOTE WAS TAKEN)			
CLLR OLIVER			
CLLR PLUMMER	X		
CLLR SHERWOOD	X		
CLLR SUGGITT	X		
CLLR TAYLOR (LEFT THE MEETING BEFORE THE FINAL VOTE WAS TAKEN)			
CLLR TERRY		X	
CLLR TURNER	X		
CLLR WEBB	X		
CLLR WICKERSON		X	
CLLR WILKIN	X		
CLLR WILKINSON	X		
TOTAL:	26	10	0

Subject to 26 votes in favour, 10 against and no abstentions, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. the special expenses for 2023-24 (at paragraph 1.3 of the report) be approved; and
 2. the formal Council Tax resolutions for 2023-24 (at paragraph 1.4.1 to 1.4.5 of the report as set out below) be approved.
- 1.4.1 It is to be noted that on 22 February 2023 the Council has calculated: -
- a) the Council Tax Base 2023-24 for the whole Council area as 45,925.2 (item T in the regulations made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended) and
 - b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish precept relates as in the attached Appendix A of the report.
- 1.4.2 Calculate that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2023-24 (excluding Parish precepts and special expenses) is £4,988,887.
- 1.4.3 That the following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2023-24 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance

Act 1992 as amended (the Act):-

- a) £78,057,150.94 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the expenditure items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act;
- b) £68,007,219.00 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the income items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act;
- c) £10,049,931.94 being the amount by which the aggregate at 1.4.3(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.4.3(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year;
- d) £218.83 being the amount at 1.4.3(c) above, divided by the amount at 1.4.1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts);
- e) £5,061,044.94 being the aggregate amount of all special items (including Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act (as per the attached **Appendix A** of the report);
- f) £108.63 being the amount at 1.4.3(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 1.4.3(e) above by the amount at 1.4.1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its areas to which no special item relates;
- g) The figures shown in **Appendix B** of the report, being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 1.4.3(f) above the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the amount at 1.4.1(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate;
- h) The figures shown in **Appendix C** of the report, being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at 1.4.3(f) and 1.4.3(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act as the amounts to be taken into

account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

- 1.4.4 That it be noted that for the year 2023-24 the Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Police & Crime Commissioner have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

	Band	Band	Band	Band
	A	B	C	D
NCC	£1,061.76	£1,238.72	£1,415.68	£1,592.64
NPCC	£201.96	£235.62	£269.28	£302.94
	Band	Band	Band	Band
	E	F	G	H
NCC	£1,946.56	£2,300.48	£2,654.40	£3,185.28
NPCC	£370.26	£437.58	£504.90	£605.88

- 1.4.5 That having calculated the aggregate in each case the amounts at 1.4.3(h) and 1.4.4 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts shown in **Appendix D** of the report as the amount of Council Tax for 2023-24 of the categories of dwellings shown.

14/23 STANDARDS - REVIEW OF CODE OF CONDUCT (AGENDA ITEM 14)

Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy, the Legal Services Manager presented the report.

The report had been discussed at the Governance & Audit Committee meeting on 8 February 2023 and recommended to Full Council accordingly.

The Council's current Code of Conduct had been in place since March 2017, and it was being proposed to adopt the Local Government Associations Model Code of Conduct. This had been based on a number of reasons as it was well set out, was reasonably straight forward, easier to follow and put this Council in line with other authorities in Norfolk.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor James and seconded by Councillor Borrett.

Councillor Birt felt that this Code was not perfect but supported it as it was far better than the existing one and should be approved and adopted into the Council's Constitution forthwith.

Following a unanimous vote, it was:

RESOLVED that:

1. the new/revised Code of Conduct be adopted;
2. the new Code of Conduct to come into effect from 9 May 2023; and
3. the Council's Constitution be amended accordingly from 9 May 2023.

15/23 NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE AND OTHER SEATS (AGENDA ITEM 15)

The Deputy Leader, Councillor Claussen announced the following changes to the membership of the General Purposes Committee.

Councillor Tristan Ashby – Vice-Chairman
Councillor Duigan – Member
Councillor Taila Taylor – Substitute Member

There were no further nominations.

16/23 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION (IF ANY) (AGENDA ITEM 16)

None.

17/23 ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT (AGENDA ITEM 17)

None.

18/23 EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 18)

Not required.

19/23 RESTRICTED MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 19)

The following Minutes were not discussed.

19 .a Overview and Scrutiny Commission: 1 December 2022

Not discussed.

19 .b General Purposes Committee: 12 January 2023

Not discussed.

The meeting closed at 1.50 pm

CHAIRMAN