



**Report to**

**Watton Annual Town Meeting 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

**Presented by**

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## Overview of Breckland Council

Breckland Council is composed of 49 councillors elected every four years. Councillors are democratically accountable to the residents of their ward.

Currently the political makeup of the council is;

- 40 Conservative Councillors
- 4 UKIP Councillors
- 2 Labour Councillors
- 1 Unionist Councillor
- 1 Independent Councillor
- 1 Ward Currently Vacant (Harling & Heathlands - Election on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2017)

Therefore Breckland Council is led by Conservative Councillors, with a Conservative Leader of the Council and Conservative Cabinet Members, each of the committees is led by a Conservative Chairman

All councillors meet together as the Council. Meetings of the Council are normally open to the public. Here councillors decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year. The Council hold to account the Executive and committees.

At the Annual Meeting of the Council in May a new Chairman of the Council is elected.

Breckland Council is a District Council.

Districts tend to have responsibility for a number of areas, including:

- Tax collection (Council Tax & Non-Domestic Rates)
- Leisure Services
- Refuse collection
- Housing
- Planning
- Arts & Entertainment
- Environmental Health

### Decision Making (Council)

The Executive is the part of the Council which is responsible for most day-to-day decisions. The Executive is made up of the Leader and a Cabinet of councillors whom he/she appoints. When decisions are to be discussed or made, these are published in the Key Decision Plan in so far as they can be anticipated. If these decisions are to be discussed with council officers at a meeting of the Executive, this will generally be open for the public to attend except where personal or confidential matters are being discussed. The Executive has to make decisions which are in line with the Council's overall policies and budget. If it wishes to make a decision which is outside the budget or policy framework, this must be referred to the Council as a whole to decide.

## Key Decision Plan

The Key Decision Plan is a record of all key decisions the Council and Executive expects to make in the next twelve months and is updated and published monthly.

The purpose of the Key Decision Plan is to give advance notice of the key decisions that the Council is likely to make in the future.

The Government introduced the requirement for councils to produce Plans, with the aim of making local decision making more open and transparent for the public, and making the decision makers more accountable to the public.

The information that is recorded about each decision includes a brief description of the

- Matter on which the decision will be made
- Decision that will be taken by the Council
- Date or period in which the decision is likely to be made
- Consultation with groups of people and/or other organisations that will be carried out before the decision will be taken
- Background documents available to the person or Committee making the decision (this will also show if these background papers are confidential)
- Person or Committee making the decision, i.e. the Cabinet, an Executive Member alone or an officer under Delegated Powers

## What are key decisions?

A key decision is a decision that

1. Approves or recommends to full Council any matters relating to a Policy or Strategic Plan;
2. Is made in connection with setting the Council Tax;
3. Involves expenditure or savings that exceed 25% of the budget sum approved for a service or function (this level has been set at the Council's discretion);  
And/Or
4. A decision which significantly affects the community in two or more wards (or electoral divisions).

Breckland Council's vision is to make Breckland 'a place where people and business can thrive'. This is underpinned by four priorities, outlined in the Corporate Plan:

- Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive
- Providing the right services at the right time and in the right way
- Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth
- Enabling stronger, more independent communities

Examples of how a number of projects have contributed to the priorities/vision are below:

- ***Providing the right services at the right time and in the right way***

#### **Website Review**

Website has been relaunched and new design and format is accessible on a tablet or phone, as well as a pc or laptop. It offers ability to report issues via a form, make payments online, and submit applications eg. for licences – making key council functions available 24/7.

#### **One number for Breckland**

New single phone number for the council has been adopted, with touchtone options for callers to select the department they need. Call waiting times are down and most people can be helped by the first person they speak to.

#### **Garden Waste collection service**

The council launched the new option to pay online in April 2016. This has had a good take up. We can now accept payment via credit card, as well as debit card. Online forms and renewal letters have been reviewed to improve customer experience. Around 21k subscribers are now signed up to the Garden Waste service.

#### **Creating 'one stop shops'**

We have been developing opportunities to co-locate public sector organisations to deliver a 'one stop shop' for customers and ensuring value for money is achieved for residents and the wider public purse.

This has included the Department of Work and Pensions, based in Dereham, co-locating in Elizabeth House with shared reception. We have also worked with partners to establish an Early Help Hub in Thetford, providing early interventions to ensure a better quality of service for children and families. Partners include Children's Services, Norfolk Constabulary and Flagship Housing. Work has commenced on a second Hub which will be located in Dereham.

#### **ARP Enforcement Agency**

Since July 2015, the ARP Enforcement Agency has collected over £1.1m of council tax arrears. This has reduced the need to use private bailiffs, costs for which were previously passed on to debtors. Enforcement Agency has been now expanded to include South Norfolk District Council (a non-ARP member).

### **Digital Passport**

A Digital Passport training programme has been developed and launched to ensure the council's staff are able to deliver services in a modern, digital way.

- ***Enabling stronger, more independent communities***

### **Our Day Out Programme**

We created this programme, which is aimed at supporting people with early to mid-stage dementia and their carers. It offers opportunities to engage in arts and cultural activities in a safe and understanding environment. As a result of the success of the programme and the feedback received, Creative Arts East (our partner, now delivering the programme) has secured around £230k national funding to continue initiative for a further three years.

### **Breckland Fit Families**

Facilitating healthy behaviour change in Reception-aged children and their families in areas of Breckland identified as having high levels of children at risk of developing weight-related conditions in later life. The UEA undertook an evaluation of the project and found significant positive impact on health behaviours of both children and parents.

### **Reducing Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)**

Reducing Crime and ASB is about helping communities to feel safe in the district. The Breckland Operational Partnership Team (BOPT) has been successful in reducing anti-social behaviour year on year, resulting in reported instances reducing by over a half since 2010.

### **Increase in Leisure Participation**

Overall participation in activities at leisure centres is up by around 6% compared to last year. Dereham Leisure Centre will shortly celebrate its 10 year anniversary. Parkwood Leisure provides sport centres on our behalf in Dereham, Thetford, Attleborough and Swaffham. We have been in discussions with the independent sports centre in Watton about available support.

### **Housing and Homelessness**

At least 100 affordable homes are in the pipeline resulting from direct investment from the Council. The Council is continuing work with Registered Providers to attract further funding into the district.

### **Unsightly Sites**

We've launched a new initiative to tackle unsightly and derelict buildings. Neglected sites can be a blight on communities and attract anti-social behaviour. Our councillors will be working with residents to draw up a list of sites suffering from serious long-term neglect, are unsafe, or in disrepair. Where necessary, we'll seek to use our legislative powers to require landowners to take action and help improve the appearance of the sites.

- *Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive, and*
- *Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth*

### **Commercial Property**

Breckland Council continues to set the lowest district council tax in the country. This is achievable in part thanks to our successful commercial investment strategy. Our commercial properties are 99% let and these investments bring in around £2.4m per year, around the same amount as is raised through council tax. Our commercial income helps us to keep the financial burden off residents and businesses.

### **Local Plan**

Breckland Council's Local Plan sets out our vision for how the district is expected to grow over the coming 20 years. We have further refined the plans following meetings with parish councils and feedback from residents. The plan is due to be discussed by councillors again over the spring (likely May) and will then be made available for residents to view. Following this, it will be submitted to a Government Planning Inspector for scrutiny. If approved, we will adopt the Local Plan and use it to inform planning decisions in the district to ensure development and growth supports a vibrant economy that provides homes and jobs for local people.

### **Thetford Riverside**

The Breckland Bridge partnership – involving Breckland Council and The Land Group – completed the Thetford Riverside development on time and within budget. It is a major regeneration site which will drive growth in the town and district. The Council invested £8m in the development of the site which includes five food and retail units, 62 hotel bedrooms, 3 cinema screens and at least 75 new jobs. The hotel and cinema have already opened and welcomed thousands of visitors. The first restaurant will open soon. Significant interest in remaining units, with announcements expected in due course.

### **Mileham housing**

The Breckland Bridge partnership has built 11 new homes in Mileham, near Dereham. The project is the first time for considerable years that the council has been involved in house building on its land – utilising the previously underused asset. This project includes some 'affordable housing' and will help to meet local housing demand.

### **Cambridge Norwich Technology Corridor**

Alongside partners from Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, we have been working to establish a Cambridge Norwich Technology Corridor. Capitalising on the existing reputation of Cambridge as a centre for innovation and technology, Norwich's reputation for research, the dualled A11, and improving infrastructure, we're working with our partners to create opportunities for businesses to set up within the corridor, which will bring more and higher paying jobs to our area, as well as new homes.

### **Thetford Enterprise Park (TEP)**

The Council is working with partners to progress delivery of the Thetford Enterprise Park. A successful £1.8m funding bid to the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will help pay for a roundabout to provide access to the TEP. This will unlock the site and bring new jobs to the district.

### **Snetterton Heath Employment Site**

New Anglia LEP has approved funding to support a project to upgrade the electricity supply to Snetterton Heath employment sites. With private and public sector investment, this will enable the expansion of industrial activity and attract new business and new jobs to the sites.

### **Upgrading the A47**

We've been working with our partners to lobby for improvements to be made to the A47. Highways England has announced its proposed options for six planned A47 improvement schemes which form the Road Investment Strategy, including dualling between North Tuddenham and Easton.

### **Market Towns Initiative**

We are considering how we can best support our market towns to enable them to flourish and develop. We previously allocated around £25k to help deliver town council-led ideas to encourage visitors and new businesses to the towns. The authors of this report have recently met with the Leader of Breckland Council, Executive Members and senior Council officers to discuss how the Market Town Initiative could apply to Watton. Although this is a long term initiative, as a result of our meeting the newly appointed Breckland Council enforcement officer has been tasked to take immediate action with regard to the littering in town, and also other elements of Anti Social behaviour. We will continue to work with local government partners on initiatives which will support the town and surrounding areas.



