



**Report to**

**Watton Annual Town Meeting 17<sup>h</sup> April 2018**

**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
- 3 Labour Councillors
- 1 Unionist Councillor
- 1 Independent Councillor

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 key achievements (2017/18)**

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:

### **"Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive"**

Developed our draft Local Plan, which has been through its final round of consultation and is now awaiting inspector feedback. We are currently expecting the Local Plan Examination Hearing sessions to be held in public between April and June.

Continued to work closely with Capita to deliver planning and building control functions. Having reviewed performance, we are currently working with our partner to further improve the service for the Council and our customers.

Procured consultancy to provide evidence for the expansion of the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor to support the delivery of business growth in the district, including at sites in Snetterton and Thetford.

Continued to work with partners on scoping a business case for enhancements to the A47, including backing calls for central government investment.

Developed a strategic health and wellbeing action plan and, in partnership with Public Health, identified Thetford as a priority area for investigation on health and wellbeing issues.

Declared an air quality management area to address levels of traffic-related nitrogen dioxide in an area of Swaffham. Organised a public consultation on potential measures to improve air quality in the town centre. Working with stakeholders to improve air quality in this area.

As part of Breckland Bridge property and development partnership, built and sold homes in Mileham - including some affordable housing.

Expanded housing development in Mileham to include an extra three homes as part of a second phase of construction.

Secured planning permission for new homes in Attleborough, as part of Breckland Bridge partnership.

## "Enabling stronger, more independent communities"

Launched our Market Town Initiative, which includes a range of collaborative projects that will ensure each market town is economically vibrant, achieves long-term sustainability, has a clear identity, is a popular destination, has an enhanced environment, and secures third-party investment.

Implemented new partnership with ShopAppy, which will give local independent businesses a central web presence and enable shoppers to make purchases online 24/7.

Implemented new Our Breckland Lottery, which will enable players to directly support local community groups through ticket sales. First draw is at the end of March.

In partnership with Norfolk Community Foundation, allocated £250,000+ of grants to projects in the district, including children's play area and outdoor sport provisions.

Commenced delivery of the 'Silver Social' project which is delivering workshops across the district to those who are at risk of being socially isolated.

Launched community fridges in the district's market towns, including the first in Norfolk.

Committed funding as part of budget setting to replace and/or repair footway lights in the district.

Committed to tackling the district's 'unsightly sites'.

Introduced Public Space Protection Orders within our towns, to help tackle anti-social behaviour.

Overseen the extension of the gym facilities at the leisure centre in Thetford, providing a new free weights area in the gym, which was provided at no cost to the council and with positive feedback from users.

Commenced promotion of a 'Smokefree Sidelines' project to help denormalise smoking. Received support from a number of local youth football clubs.

Continued to meet as part of the antisocial behaviour advisory group which brings together multiple agencies to share and support on cases, giving a co-ordinated approach to support and action against ASB.

RESPECT Zones continue in car parks across the district, helping to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour.

Organised an Easter and a summer holiday activity programme for children.

Investigated infectious disease and food poisoning outbreaks to ensure prevention and control.

Sampled food and water supplies/bathing water to prevent ill health and early intervention.

Continued to both proactively and reactively deal with dog fouling to ensure public spaces are cleaner for residents' use.

## **"Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth"**

Won the highly prestigious Municipal Journal (MJ) award for Commercialism in the Property estate.

Secured £10m Housing Investment Fund (HIF) central government funding to support infrastructure projects and delivery of new homes on the outskirts of Thetford.

Secured £2.65m from New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to upgrade Snetterton Heath's existing electricity supply and support substantial business growth.

Secured £300,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's Land Release Fund, which will support an infrastructure project to provide access onto Council-owned land in Shipdham and enable the development of housing in the future.

Completed a pilot business rates reduction scheme in Dereham, and announced roll-out of district-wide scheme from April 2018.

Developed our 'Open for Business' approach, ensuring support and advice is available for businesses of all sizes. Made regular visits to key businesses in the district to provide advice and assistance on the range of support services available from the council and partners.

Made referrals for business to the New Anglia LEP to facilitate and support grants for business growth in the district.

Supported the growth of Thetford and Attleborough by working with developers and providing planning advice.

Seen the opening of Grand Central, the first restaurant in the Thetford Riverside leisure complex. The council is in ongoing discussions with tenants who are potentially interested in opening at the leisure complex in the future.

At the request of town councils, agreed to implement pilot enforcement periods at some Swaffham and Attleborough car parks.

Influenced enhancements to digital broadband speeds with around 90% of the district now able to receive high speed broadband.

Worked with partners, including Department for Work and Pensions, to review and encourage work-placed training, as well as holding job fairs and engaging with schools in conjunction with job centre plus.

Provided Licensing pre-application advice to support and grow businesses.

Continued to work closely with colleagues in Food Standards Agency, Health and Safety Executive, Police, and Trading Standards, in order to prevent food fraud/crime and restrict the supply of illegal tobacco products in licensed premises.

## **"Providing the right services, at the right time and in the right way"**

Reviewed our services and how we operate commercially through the Moving Forward transformation programme.

Reduced waiting list for housing and increased speed of housing adaptations delivery.

Agreed investment strategy which will see around £1m used to provide new temporary accommodation to help meet the needs of those who experience homelessness in the district and keep families together.

Extended Human Resources services to receive additional income around £18,000 including payroll and learning and development courses.

Established a commercial trading arm of the Public Protection team, known as Environmental Health Training and Consultancy (EHT&C). Offering a wide range of advice and training to businesses, including expanding the current range of courses on offer to include online courses, bespoke and on-site training and consultancy.

Developed new digital services including a 'connect and serve' log-in for ARP customers to improve the customer experience and ability to access their benefit information

Created a co-located area at Breckland House in Thetford which is utilised by: Children's Services; Social Workers; Health Visitors; Flagship Homes; Norfolk Constabulary. Fortnightly 'referral' meetings have been established as well as monthly strategic boards. Discussions have been taking place with GPs to determine how they can link into the Help Hub.

Delivering project which will see Department for Work and Pensions collocate in Breckland House in Thetford, creating a services hub similar to established office in Dereham

Updated council website's design and functions, promoted new digital options for our services (including via Transforming Breckland residents' magazine), such as application forms and e-payments, which have made services more accessible while saving time and money.

Increased recycling rates - from 39.9% in 15/16 to 40.3% in 16/17.

Modernised the committee processes through greater utilisation of Mod.gov.

Worked with businesses around National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, making sure businesses are at least 'broadly compliant'. The number of 3, 4 and 5 rated premises in the district are at record levels.

Recruited a new legal team which will support services and ensure the council is legally compliant, assisting with legal matters throughout the council.

Expanded use of social media to include regular information about day-to-day service delivery (#ourbreckland) as well as short films discussing recent decisions made by the council. Increased social media followers to record levels.



