

## **BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Councillor Sam Chapman-Allen - Annual Report 2016**

Like many councils, we have been affected by public sector funding reductions, all time low returns on cash deposits and changes to the way councils are funded. But despite these challenges the council's prudent financial management and innovative approach to income generation means that we have a balanced budget for 2016/17 and are able to protect frontline services. Breckland has continued to deliver fantastic value for money and still boasts being the lowest council tax in the country.

A small snap shot of some of our success stories are;

**Recycling revolution:** launched Norfolk wide. In Breckland we have worked to promote the benefits of recycling to communities, eg cost reduction to council, black bins not overflowing. This has led to a reduction of contamination from 17 to 12 percent. We are targeting problem areas rather than a blanket approach. Parishes have been really helpful in promoting of recycling, please continue.

**Green waste:** Breckland has launched its "on line book and pay" via the website...to make it easier for residents to buy or renew a green waste bin. Take up has been really good, 200 transaction in first 10 days. Benefits include cost reduction again to the council, we get recycling credits on compostable materials and it reduces the need to travel to household centers, whose operational hours and locations are being reduced by NCC.

**Community Grants:** Breckland provides match funding and smaller grants schemes across the district and these continue to be popular with the community. Grants for 2015/2016 totaled £133,000 paid in match funding. The council has provided match funded to a range of projects from play areas to dementia cafes.

**Early help hubs:** Collection of public agencies including councils, children services, police, fire service, housing associations...working together aimed at all residents to support and provide expert advice in times of need. The benefit is to help prevent minor issues escalating to major intervention by public services. This provides better outcomes for families and better outcomes for public services with costs reduced. The first one will be in Thetford which is currently in progress with a second in Dereham autumn 2016.

**Our approach to supporting Dementia within the Community:** Breckland is a dementia friendly council as accredited by Norfolk Age UK, which means that our staff, councilors and contractors are trained to identify the signs of dementia and support residents accordingly in accessing our services. Our facilities eg leisure centres and council offices have made physical improvements to help those with dementia. We also deliver "our day out" programme, for those with dementia and their carers, and have held events in supporting dementia awareness in Attleborough, Dereham and Watton

**Leisure Centres:** Participation in our leisure centres has reached an all time high, over 1000 members at Thetford and Dereham, and on average 30,000 visits per month to our centres. This provides access for the community to enable them to take part in activities which benefit their health and wellbeing. We also provide discounts for carers and the cared for at our leisure centres. Carers are some of the most important volunteers in the community and the council acknowledges that the valuable work they do can mean that looking after themselves is sometimes difficult. We are the only council to have done so far.

**Health:** Delivering the Breckland Fit Families project in Primary schools to encourage activity and healthy eating for children and parents - Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board has funded a Breckland Council project targeting 'healthy behaviour change' in families from 5 Breckland Areas highlighted by the National Child Measurement Program as having a high prevalence of Reception age children at risk of development 'Weight Related Illness' in later life. A total of 400 families have taken part in one

of five 8 week programmes that were carried out in the following primary schools: Westfield Infants (Watton), Carbrooke Primary, Watton Sure Start, Swaffham Infants, Raleigh Infants (Thetford).

**CCTV:** system continues to work in all our market towns, operated by a partnership with Kings Lynn. This delivers helps in prosecutions and it's deemed as an effective deterrent.

**Operational partnership:** Working with the Police and our anti-social behaviour team we have seen a reduction of ASB across the district of 10.1% reduction compared to same period last year. This partnership support victims of crime and ASB as well as practice prevention through street briefings at hotspot areas engaging with communities and trouble shooting.

**Customer Portal for Choice based lettings and housing options:** Working with Home Connections we have to deliver an operational website, providing residents with information on housing options as well as an online service to register for services, process changes and a list of available properties. The portal enables residents to access this critical council service at any time, making it more convenient for those who cannot contact the authority during office hours

**Building stronger relationships with the Department of Work and Pensions by having members of the team co-located in Elizabeth House** – The preparations for shared office space have been completed and the DWP centre is now operational. Working relationships between DWP and Breckland staff are developing and options for working across related services (such as housing/homelessness or revenues and benefits) are being explored. Ultimately, information and process sharing will result in a more seamless and simplified experience for residents.

**Breckland Bridge:** is a joint venture with an expert developer LandGroup, set up to deliver projects that make best use of the Council's existing assets to drive growth and regeneration for everyone's benefits within the district, keeping council tax requirements low through the income it generates. Breckland Bridge is currently working on Thetford Riverside, an £8m regeneration scheme, that include 3 screen cinema, 62 bed hotel restaurants and food outlets, all on programme to deliver by end of 2016.

**Anglia Revenues Partnership:** a group of 7 local councils, formed in 2003 provides significant improvements in services and financial savings, with a focus on the billing and collection of council tax and non domestic rates, the assessment and award of housing benefits, delivery of local council tax reduction schemes and fraud investigations. The speed of services such as process of housing benefit and council tax benefit and changes to circumstance is excellent and amongst the best in the country, this performance supports residents to get back on their feet and into work more quickly. The partnership has adopted high ethical standards in regard to enforcement and investigations; we recognize the difference between those who can't pay and those who won't pay. Financially the partnership enables Breckland to provide high quality services that is value for money.

**Local Plan Consultation:** The Council is in the process of producing a new Local Plan, which will replace the Core Strategy. The Local Plan sets the strategic direction and context for development in the district, governing the decisions made on planning applications and what types of development are suitable for each areas. It's a key document that guides development over the next 20 years. There has been a good start to the consultation responses, a significant response rate to the consultation, and much interest in the sites and ideas. Local roadshows have been well attended and well received, with 9 consultation events across the district and further drop in briefings for parish councils. Further consultation will happen later on Sites Allocation(June July) and again pre submission (Oct/Nov) with parishes.

**Neighbourhood Planning :** Council has put in resources to fund an additional officer, dedicated to working with parishes to support their development of their Neighbourhood plans. There are currently

10 Neighbourhood Plan areas formally confirmed and have plans in preparation. We are likely to see our first referendum on a Plan end of 2016.

**Growth of the District** Two major growth allocations are progressing well. Both have local partnership arrangements aimed at delivery co-ordinated and integrated delivery of housing and associated infrastructure. Greater Thetford Development Partnership is working through the delivery of the sustainable urban extension which will see 5000 additional homes for the Greater Thetford areas. The opportunities of this growth need to be harnessed for all the communities both new and existing. Outline planning permission has been granted for 5000. The Attleborough Development partnership is likely to have an application by end of calendar for 4000 homes.

**Engaging with partners to enhance the digital broadband speeds and connectivity through our financial contribution to influence Better Broadband for Norfolk** BDC has coordinated responses from the district's businesses and worked with NCC to inform their roll-out. Breckland Council has provided £950,000 in contribution towards the cost of the infrastructure but is not a directing partner in the project, its role in coordinating the responses has been more advisory.

**Encouraging local suppliers to provide goods and services to the council including holding a 'Meet the Buyer' event** – first Meet the Buyer event held September 2015, further events under discussion. The event introduced local businesses to the council's procurement process and encouraged more to consider applying to provide services to the authority. These events are designed to make the procurement process more transparent and to increase competitiveness – helping the authority make savings and promote local business.

**Creating a discretionary business rate relief scheme aimed at reducing the number of empty shops and encouraging a wider variety of retail offering (to be piloted in Dereham from April 2016)** – The planned scheme allows new independent small businesses to apply for up to 80% business rate relief in the centre of Dereham with the aim of filling vacant shops with a mix of enterprising businesses. The council believes that making improvements in the retail options in the market towns is key to strengthening the local economy. A budget of £10,000 has been allocated to the Dereham trial scheme and if successful Breckland will look to introduce it to the other market towns across the district.

And finally, we have a new Leader and Deputy Leader of Breckland District Council. Following the previous Leader Michael Wassell stepping down last month, William Nunn was elected as the new Leader of Breckland District Council and me as the new Deputy Leader.