

November 2024 District Councillors' report

As autumn unfolds Breckland Council has commenced the budget setting process for the year 2025-26 and this time we are facing unprecedented financial pressures. At the last Cabinet meeting we learned that the 2024 Quarter 1 figures showed a potential year end overspend of £826,000. Cabinet next week will learn that in Quarter 2 this overspend has reduced to £481,000 helped in no small measure by the income we receive from investments and cash generated through loans, but the underlying trend is for costs, over which we have no control, rising. These factors outside of the council's control include:

- a significant fall off in planning income (£417k)
- increased costs around housing and temporary accommodation (£500+k)
- increased costs from NCC closing Shipdham waste transfer site and additional recycling costs (£600k)

However, we are able to mitigate for this year some of these cost pressures by redirecting cash from the general fund, but this still leaves the remainder of the year with uncertainty around such costs and income and we must maintain a balance in the general fund sufficient to meet unknown demands.

In addition, the budget announcements will have an impact on us at District Council level and we are awaiting the detail behind some of the headline announcements specifically around what the financial settlement will be, what proportion of some of the additional monies announced, for example, for disabled facilities grants and homelessness will fall to us at district level.

It is against this background that Breckland Council is looking at both income and expenditure streams within the council to ensure that our core priorities for the provision of both statutory and discretionary services can be maintained, particularly for those who are most vulnerable in our society. In the meantime, we are reviewing our budget proposals that will be sent out for consultation in December 2024.

We have today published our public consultation questionnaire that is available by following the banner and links at <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/>

Year on year our car parks cost the council some £450,000 to run and maintain and that cost is met by every council tax payer irrespective of whether they are a user of our car parks or not. Views of residents and businesses alike are being sought to assist us in making an informed decision on for example, the most appropriate charging regime. This will assist us in directing resources and funding to support those vital non statutory services that are essential for so many of our residents and communities.

Much has been discussed around the local plan review that was on track to meet the project programme but the government has introduced a revised National Planning Policy Framework that was consulted upon through August and September. The implications of the proposals contained therein coupled with the new policy of

mandatory and increased housing targets (in Breckland an increase of 39%, or from 661 to 918 houses per year) has meant that most of the evidence used to formulate the local plan thus far is no longer valid. Consequently, Cabinet agreed to pause the process and await clarity from Westminster. We are advised that the result of the NPPF consultation will be available by the end of the calendar year and that legislation will follow during the first quarter of 2025. Until such time as there is clarity regarding the legislative framework and the NPPF we are unable to rely on our current local plan.

Councillors Sarah Suggitt and Philip Cowen