

Council Size Submission - Breckland Council

**December 2023**

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## How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template. Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.

The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20- page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

## About You

The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, a resident group, or an individual.

This is a submission made by Breckland Council and was approved for submission at the full Council meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023. The proposal received unanimous support.

## Breckland Council

The last Electoral review of Breckland Council was completed in 2014, as a result of which council numbers were reduced from 54 to 49. This review has been triggered because ten of the Council's current 27 wards (37%) have a variance of more than 10% on average; and the Forest Ward has a variance of over 40%. The Council recognises the importance of electoral equality for a fair democratic process by ensuring that each vote carries the same value as close as possible, whilst at the same time it must ensure that governance of the Council is maintained at a level which can best serve the electorate.

The aim of Phase 1 of the electoral review is to determine the total number of councillors to be elected to the Council from the next elections in 2027. The figure will be determined after considering the governance arrangements of the Council, its scrutiny function, and the representational role of councillors in the local community, and consideration of the total number of councillors needed to most effectively take decisions, hold decision makers to account, discharge responsibilities and effectively represent local groups and people.

The Council's submission has been developed by a cross-party steering group consisting of three executive and three non-executive Members. The Council's submission addresses the key points raised in the LGBCE's technical guidance which emphasises the importance of submitting 'well-reasoned proposals that are based on the individual characteristics and needs of each local authority area and its communities'.

The analysis, summarised in this submission, concludes that the number of councillors adopted for Breckland should be increased from 49 to 51. In arriving at that conclusion, a number of factors have been considered that include any future potential changes in governance arrangements; local policy developments; and the representational role of elected members, consideration has also been given to population trends, any potential increase in electoral numbers through housing and other forms of growth and development.

The aim is to reach a member : electorate ratio that will deliver the most effective and efficient Council for the benefit of residents and communities. An increase to 51 Members would keep pace with the population growth, in what is one of the faster growing areas of the country and where population has recently grown faster than previous ONS projections. Taking into account ratios in both CIPFA equivalent areas, and other Norfolk authorities, this proposal would see Breckland maintaining a comparative ratio of members: electorate through to 2030.

The main national policy trend impacting our submission is the Government's commitment to a "devolution revolution" through the Levelling Up White Paper, which set outs plans for the "largest devolution of power from Whitehall to local leaders across England in modern times". The direct consequence of this is a greater emphasis on local decision making, local influence over a much broader set of government functions (skills, transport, infrastructure etc.), and more resources and tools being made available to local members to define. This is considered a significant positive for the District, but also has a direct impact and additional call on elected members time.

More locally, the key policy trend impacting our submission is our current adopted Corporate Plan, and in particular its commitment to partnership and engagement. The Council has a clear vision for the area, which is making Breckland a district in which everyone who lives, works or visits is able to flourish. A key tenet of this is the role of local partnerships, and local members in helping reinforce and drive local partnership and engagement. For example, in recent years through our Local Plan, and our adopted 'Future Breckland: Town Delivery Plans', the Council has conducted extensive and in-depth engagement and consultation in order to drive new policy ideas. This ongoing commitment to greater and more ongoing work locally with partners is considered a significant positive for the District, but also has direct implications for calls on elected members.

### **Local Authority Profile**

- *Please provide a description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover the following:*
- *Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?*
- *Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?*
- *Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?*
- *Community characteristics – is there presence of "hidden" or otherwise complex deprivation?*
- *Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?*

Breckland Council is a non-metropolitan district council operating as part of a 2-tier administrative structure, whereby Norfolk County Council is responsible for social services, education, and highways, it covers an area of approximately 500 square miles and is one of the largest rural districts in England. Covering much of the south, west and central parts of Norfolk. Breckland is centred around the five market towns of Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton, the largest of which is Thetford. In total Breckland District covers approximately 25% of the total area of Norfolk.

Breckland has 94 Town/Parish Councils represented by over 700 parish councillors, and more than two-thirds of these have fewer than 500 residents.

The area is one of the most rurally sparse in the country which sets challenges in terms of service delivery and demands on resources, this also presents a challenge for elected councillors who can have up to fifteen parish councils in the current larger multi member wards.

Breckland has a population of 141,476 (Census 2021 figures), an increase of 11000 from the 2011 census figure (130,491) which equates to an 8.5% increase.

The population has a lower proportion of people aged 16-64 compared to England (59.4% compared to 64.2%), but there are significantly more people aged 65 and over in Breckland compared to the national average (25% compared to a national average of 18.4%) and this growth is projected to continue. The number of residents over the age of 90 in Breckland is again higher than the national average, with currently just under 1.9% of the population compared to a national average of 1.6%

Due to the rural nature of the District, Breckland's connectivity and transport infrastructure is limited. Two major roads run through Breckland, with the A11 connecting our towns of Thetford & Attleborough to Norwich to the northeast, and Cambridge and London to the south. The A47 runs along the north of Breckland, connecting Swaffham and Dereham to Norwich to the east, whilst linking to King's Lynn and further into the Midlands to the west. Breckland contains two train stations at Thetford & Attleborough with regular services to Norwich & Cambridge, however the rest of our market towns do not have a station. The limited access to public transport, and the rurality of the District, means that many Breckland residents still rely on driving cars - 59.7% of our residents drive a car to work, compared to 45.1% of the national average.

A lack of digital connectivity combined with poorer than average public transport options result in many Breckland residents living in 'transport deserts'. Transport East's Transport Strategy found that two thirds of the East's rural residents live in a 'transport desert', where there is no realistic alternative to a private car, with the accompanying map highlighting how many of these areas are located in Breckland, with a great deal of these flagged as areas where they also have a large proportion of premises that do not meet the Broadband Universal Service Obligation (see pg76 of the Strategy). Breckland's rurality, combined with its ageing population, can lead to increasing isolation for residents, this will therefore make it harder, yet even more important, for elected members to provide outreach, ensuring that members of their community are supported.

Breckland's towns of Thetford and Attleborough are due to grow over the coming years due to their respective Strategic Urban Extensions (SUE). These are large scale housing developments that are currently being delivered for each town and are due to deliver a significant number of new homes, with 4,000 in Attleborough, and 5,000 in Thetford still to come. This will help to deliver housing that is in demand and will lead to increases in population for both towns over the coming decades.

Since the last review in 2013, there have been 6,386 new dwellings completed in Breckland, and Breckland Council has been very proactive in recent years in approving new sites for housing development. This is in line with both the Government's aim of boosting the supply of housing in the Country and the Council's own priority of providing housing to meet identified local needs and Local Plan targets.

In March 2023 there were extant planning permissions for 11,483 dwellings on major sites (including 2 sustainable urban extensions) and 610 dwellings on minor sites.

Major developments have been focused in and around the 5 Market Towns within the District. The latest 5 Year Housing Land Supply Report sets out the areas where new development is committed. In particular the following areas are worth highlighting:

- Attleborough - 538 dwellings committed (delivery estimated at 100 dwellings per annum)  
4,000 dwellings committed (expected to begin in 2025/26 at 100 dwellings per annum thereafter)
- Dereham - 4 major sites totalling 328 dwellings. All expected to be completed within the next 5 years
- Swaffham - 4 major sites totalling 236 dwellings. All expected to be completed within the next 5 years
- Thetford - Thetford Sustainable Extension: 4,879 dwellings remaining of a total of 5,000 (currently 3 outlets averaging some 130 completions per year)
- Watton - 4 major sites totalling 240 dwellings. All expected to be completed within the next 5 years

The Council is also currently reviewing its Local Plan for the period up to 2046. A key consideration of this will be the overall scale of development required for housing. Currently, the overall scale of development required within Breckland based on the Standard Method figure is 661 dwellings per annum. This would mean a total housing requirement over the plan period of 16,525 dwellings (661 \* 25).

The District has several key employment sites, with the fastest growing site located at Snetterton, which is strategically located on the A11 between Attleborough and Thetford. Trends observed from the 2021 Census data show that Breckland has an overrepresentation of people working in industries such as crop and animal production as well as the manufacturing of food, machinery, and equipment, when compared to the national averages. Breckland hope to build on these specialisations and place the District at the forefront of growing sectors such as in Agri-Tech and advanced manufacturing.

Breckland faces certain complex challenges around deprivation and skills. The IMD 2019 data ranks Breckland as the 127th most deprived district, when compared to the other 317. Census data also points to pockets of high deprivation within our largest towns, specifically within Thetford. Breckland's level of deprivation is especially high when looking through the IMD lens at education, skills, and training, with the district being ranked 19th most deprived in this category. This highlights the challenge that our residents face regarding education/skills and subsequently impacts their life chances. With this in mind, the Census data shows that Breckland have a higher percentage of residents with no qualifications, or Level 1 & Level 2, than the national average; with only 23.1% having Level 4 or above (national average 33.8%).

Breckland has a large armed forces community within the District, largely due to Robertson Barracks being situated in our village of Swanton Morley, and RAF Marham and RAF Honington situated on Breckland's border. Thanks to the newly published dataset around armed forces veterans, we now know that Breckland has the 19th highest percentage of population that has previously served in the armed forces. Breckland Council has signed its own Armed Forces Covenant pledge and is acutely aware of the additional barriers that the community faces. This will inevitably have an impact on the casework of councillors who may need to lend more support to serving members of the armed forces, their families, as well as veterans and reservists.

## Council Size

The Commission believes that councilors have three broad aspects to their role.

These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.**

Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

## Strategic Leadership

Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified.

Topic		
	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Governance Model</b>	Analysis	<p>The Governance arrangements for Breckland largely remain unchanged from the last review, other than the re-introduction of the General Purposes Committee in 2022, and changes to the structure of the Licensing Committees following legislative changes in 2017.</p> <p>Breckland Council operates a strong Leader Cabinet Model; the Council's 'Executive' for the purpose of the Local Government Act 2000. These arrangements are reflected with in the Council's constitution (<u>Part 3</u>)</p> <p>The Council elects a Leader for a four-year term who then appoints Members to form the Cabinet. Under the Constitution, the Cabinet may consist of up to 10 members, including a Leader and Deputy Leader.</p> <p>The Leader may designate a Councillor to be an Executive Support Member who is not a Cabinet Member, and does not participate in Executive Decision making, but works closely with a Cabinet Member.</p> <p>The current Leader has appointed 8 Members to serve on the Cabinet, each with a portfolio. In addition, there is one Executive Support Member in place supporting Planning Policy. Following the recent elections in May 2023, and a subsequent Cabinet reshuffle 2 new members were appointed to the Cabinet.</p> <p>Executive Decisions are carried out by the Leader, unless delegated to Cabinet, a sub-committee of Cabinet, individual Cabinet Members or Officers. Breckland has extensive executive delegation arrangements, (which together with the Non-Executive functions which are carried out by full Council or delegated to a Committee Sub-Committee or Officer,) are listed in the Council's constitution (<u>Part 3</u>).</p> <p>There are approximately 9 formal meetings of the Cabinet per year, and regular informal executive briefings,</p>

		<p>and to add, in the last 18 months over 80 formal decisions have also been made by Executive Members in line with the Councils scheme of delegations.</p> <p>Members attendance levels at all Council meetings is generally high and shows an average in excess of 80% over the last 2 years.</p>
<b>Portfolios</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>Cabinet portfolio holders are responsible for making the day-to-day executive decisions concerning the strategy of the Council (within the overall policy and budgetary framework agreed by Council) as set out in <u>(Part 3)</u> of the Constitution.</p> <p>These Councillors manage their positions in conjunction with external employment and have sometimes also been elected as County Councillors or Parish Councillors.</p> <p>A breakdown of the 8 service areas, together with the breakdown for each Cabinet Member, can be found in the Council's Constitution. <u>(Part 3)</u></p> <p>Full Terms of reference can also be found in the Council's Constitution <u>(Part 3)</u></p> <p>Executive Members are also appointed to other appropriate committees including the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee and the Appointments and Disciplinary Appeals committee.</p> <p>They are also members of external partnerships, outside bodies and informal meetings representing the Council. For example, the Leader of the Council is currently Chairman of the District Councils Network (DCN), as well as the Conservative Councillors Association (CCA), and a lead Member Peer for the Local Government Association – Conservative Group. Many also represent the Council on Outside bodies.</p> <p>Councillors on the Executive cannot be Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission or the Governance &amp; Audit Committee but are often required to attend OSC meetings in particular, in their roles as portfolio holders.</p> <p>The Leader also attends bi-monthly meetings with other Norfolk Leaders and Chief Executives to shape and deliver the shared ambition for Norfolk. In addition the Leader also raises the profile of the Council throughout the district through holding media interviews; engagement with local businesses, MPs and Stakeholders; promoting Armed Forces and sitting on local boards.</p>

<b>Delegated Responsibilities</b>	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many councilors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	The specific responsibilities of Officers, together with the Terms of Reference of each of the Council's Committee are set out in <u>(Part 3)</u> of the Constitution.

### Accountability

Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role.

Topic	
<b>Internal Scrutiny</b>	<i>The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.</i>
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How will decision makers be held to account?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How many members will be required to fulfil these positions?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority.</i></li> </ul>
Analysis	<p>Breckland operates its Scrutiny function primarily through its Overview and Scrutiny Commission, (OSC) which consists of 12 members on a politically balanced basis.</p> <p>The Chair of the commission is currently a member of the Council's main opposition party, and at the time of the last boundary review in 2013 the Council employed a dedicated Scrutiny Officer (0.5fte), support to the commission is now provided by the Democratic Services Staff.</p> <p>The Commission meets no more than every 6 weeks, at the main council offices in Dereham, agreeing a planned workload at the beginning of the municipal cycle and a rolling work programme which is reviewed at each meeting.</p> <p>The Overview &amp; Scrutiny Commission undertakes all work relating to its 6 core Scrutiny functions, which are:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold the Executive to Account by monitoring decisions that they make, checking whether they are successfully implemented, and exercising the right to 'call in' a decision which they consider needs to be reviewed.</li> <li>• Performance Management by monitoring council achievement of priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan &amp; Performance Indicators</li> <li>• Policy Development &amp; Review by reviewing/scrutinizing existing policies of the Council and suggesting any necessary changes.</li> <li>• Internal Scrutiny of council functions</li> <li>• External Scrutiny of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the councils partners</li> <li>- other agencies &amp; organisations</li> <li>- other local authorities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Issues affecting the communities of the district.</li> </ul> <p>Scrutiny Task &amp; Finish Groups are set up as required to manage specific scrutiny projects and comprise up to 10 members of the Council who are appointed by OSC. These groups do not have decision making powers but have the authority to make recommendations to OSC.</p> <p>Whilst Executive Members cannot be members of the Commission, all members are encouraged to attend meetings and contribute to the Scrutiny process, and Commission meetings are always well attended.</p> <p>The number of members on the Commission has remained at 12 for many years and it is an effective and productive committee and there are no current plans to review or change these arrangements.</p>				
<b>Statutory Function</b>	<p><i>This includes planning, licensing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?</i></p>				
<b>Planning</b>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="347 1114 539 1326">Key lines of explanation</td> <td data-bbox="539 1114 2038 1326"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="347 1326 539 1428">Analysis</td> <td data-bbox="539 1326 2038 1428"> <p>The Planning Committee currently has 12 Members plus 7 substitutes, it meets during the day every 4 weeks, and operates as a single council-wide committee.</p> </td> </tr> </table>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i></li> </ul>	Analysis	<p>The Planning Committee currently has 12 Members plus 7 substitutes, it meets during the day every 4 weeks, and operates as a single council-wide committee.</p>
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Analysis	<p>The Planning Committee currently has 12 Members plus 7 substitutes, it meets during the day every 4 weeks, and operates as a single council-wide committee.</p>				

On average each Planning Committee lasts 3-4 hours, but some can take a full day. With background papers and officers reports to read in advance, potentially taking up to another day per month, plus any required site visits, it is a significant time commitment from the planning committee members.

96% of applications are delegated to Officers, leaving around 4% determined by Planning Committee.

All Planning Committee members are expected to attend annual training sessions and failure to attend suitable training could lead to members being replaced on the Committee.

The attendance levels of Planning Committee is very good, as it is seen as one of the senior committees of the Council.

There are currently no executive members on the Planning Committee.

The Council also operates a 'Chairman's Panel' which meets on average every 4 weeks and consists of the Chairman of the Planning Committee plus two other Planning Committee members on a rotational basis. The Panel is not a decision-making body, but it provides a view as to whether applications that are considered by the panel should be referred to the Planning Committee or whether they should be dealt with under officer delegated powers. It will recommend to the Executive Director if an application is of such significance it needs to be considered by the Planning Committee or can be determined by officers.

On average each Chairman's Panel meeting lasts approximately 2 hours and considers 5-8 applications each time.

Councillors are sent a weekly list and have 23 days to take a view as to whether or not it is appropriate to refer the application to the Chairmans Panel. This includes liaising with the local town/parish council and also understanding the views of residents directly affected by proposed development. Breckland receives circa 1800 applications a year.

### **Plan Making**

The Council is currently undergoing its Local Plan Review which is due to be submitted for examination around the end of 2024. Members are an integral part of the plan making process in terms of representing a growing population and their aspiration and issues around development within the district.

The Council is required to carry out formal consultation but is also committed to as full an engagement with local residents, business and key stakeholders as it is able to do.

Councillors are an integral part of that process liaising with 94 town and parish councils and representing their

		views through the process.  Councillors also provide the challenge to officers throughout the process but also the decision making throughout the process.
<b>Licensing</b>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How many licensing panels will the council have in the average year?</li> <li>➤ And what will be the time commitment for members?</li> <li>➤ Will there be standing licensing panels, or will they be ad-hoc?</li> <li>➤ Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?</li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>The Council operates with 2 Licensing Committees and 2 Panels, the Committees are made up of 15 members and the Panels have 3 members.</p> <p>The <b>Licensing Committee</b> deals with all Policy Matters relating to <b>non-Licensing Act 2003</b> and <b>Gambling Act 2005</b> Licensing matters and meets at least 4 times per year.</p> <p><b>Licensing Hearing Panels</b> comprise 3 members drawn from the wider committee and meets as necessary to deal with applications. There have been 4 meetings of this panel in 2023 so far.</p> <p>The <b>Committee of the Licensing Authority (COLA)</b> deals with all Policy Matters relating to <b>Licensing Act 2003</b> and <b>Gambling Act 2005</b> Licensing matters and meets at least 4 times per year.</p> <p><b>Licensing Panels</b> comprise 3 members drawn from the wider committee and meet as necessary to deal with applications. There have been 3 meetings of this panel in 2023 so far.</p> <p>Both the Hearing and Licensing panels require a substantial commitment from panel members as hearings can often last several hours and require background reading and often additional training before the hearing.</p> <p>Licensing Committee meetings and panels are well attended, and all Licensing Committee members are required to complete training before sitting on either the Licensing Committee or COLA, and additional training is provided for those sitting on panels. Initial training is usually over 2 days, and specialist panel training is provided on an ad-hoc basis as and when required.</p>
<b>Other Regulatory Bodies</b>	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What will they be, and how many members will they require?</li> <li>➤ Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory</li> <li>➤ Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p><b>Governance &amp; Audit Committee</b> currently has 6 members and meets on average 4-5 times per year and deals with 5 main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal Audit</li> </ul>

- External Audit
- Accounts/Finance
- Risk Management
- Governance (including Standards) – Following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, the authority took the decision to remove the Standards Committee, with the functions of this committee transferred to the Audit Committee.

**General Purposes Committee** also has 6 members and meets at least 4 times per year and deals with a number of issues that have been delegated to it from Council, this includes amongst others, matters relating to:

- Health & Safety
- Member Training & Development
- Electoral Matters
- Community Governance
- Staffing matters
- Byelaws

**Appointments & Disciplinary (& Appeals) Committees** consist of 4 members and meet on an ad-hoc basis and deal with appointment and disciplinary matters relating to the Councils most senior staff.

#### **Anglia Revenue Partnership**

The Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP) was established by Breckland Council and Forest Heath District Council to jointly manage the delivery of revenue services in partnership to give advantages and economies of scale and provide a robust flexible service. The Partnership has been expanded over the years and now has 5 partner authorities (Breckland, East Cambridgeshire, East Suffolk, Fenland and West Suffolk Councils). The partnership is the largest revenue partnership in England, and has the 3rd largest caseload in the country, only exceeded by the large urban authorities of Birmingham & Leeds.

The ARP joint committee is made of one member from each of the partner organisations and they meet on average 4 times per year, although additional meetings can be called.

#### **Breckland Area Museums**

This committee advises the Norfolk Joint Museums Committee on museums issues within their area and includes.

- To agree and review on a regular basis a museums' strategy for their area to be consistent with and complementary to all other relevant strategies, e.g., heritage, leisure, tourism, arts, economic development.
- To advise on the terms of any service level agreement with the Norfolk Museums Service for the provision of

		<p>museums services within their area.</p> <p>The membership of the committee is 10 members of which 5 are Breckland members and 5 are Norfolk County Council members and meets at least 4 times per year and is chaired by a Breckland member.</p>
<b>External Partnerships</b>	<p><i>Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.</i></p>	
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p><i>Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>How many councilors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What other external bodies will members be involved in?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>And what is the anticipated workload?</i></li> </ul>	
Analysis	<p>The Council is involved with a variety of partnerships that have developed over the years and a partnership register is held on the Council’s performance system which includes public partners and organisations we work with. To ensure that governance and risk management arrangements are effective, significant partnerships are continually reviewed through the performance system and risks are included within this review. A partnership framework has been adopted to ensure that we maintain a consistent approach when entering into any new partnerships.</p> <p>Examples of our public partners and organisations which all involve member participation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Norfolk Climate Change Partnership</b> is a Norfolk wide partnership to help develop Norfolk into an exemplar in tackling climate change and protecting and enhancing its natural environment.</li> <li>○ The <b>Greater Thetford Development Partnership</b> and the <b>Attleborough Development Partnership</b> are bodies which influence growth in and around the respective towns ensuring that houses, roads, schools, healthcare, and other resources are available at the right time.</li> <li>○ The <b>New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership</b> (NALEP) is intended to build growth and skills to the workforce through training and gives support to new businesses through providing infrastructure for growth.</li> <li>○ <b>Capita Planning Services</b> currently provide a Planning Service on behalf of the Council (Although this will be coming back in house in 2024)</li> <li>○ In April 2015 the Council formed a company, <b>Breckland Bridge Limited</b>, with a private sector partner, Land Group LLP. The vision of the Company is to “use Breckland Council’s property and land assets to make a positive contribution to the regeneration and economic development of the Breckland District”. The authority has a 50% shareholding in this company and control is shared on a 50/50 basis.</li> </ul> <p>Some examples of our operational partnership arrangements for service delivery are:</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The <b>Norfolk Waste Partnership</b> works to encourage more people to reduce, reuse, recycle, and compost rubbish, working together to move away from the dependence on landfill towards more sustainable waste management.</li> <li>○ The <b>Anglia Revenues and Benefits Partnership (ARP)</b> is governed by a Joint Committee and is underpinned by a formal legal agreement. The partnership consists of Breckland, East Cambridgeshire, East Suffolk, Fenland and West Suffolk district councils. The partnership delivers council tax, business rates, housing benefit, fraud, and enforcement services for the five councils.</li> <li>○ The <b>Norfolk Internal Audit Consortium</b> co-ordinates internal audit provision across 6 local authorities with a shared Head of Internal Audit, aiming to provide an efficient and cost-effective service.</li> <li>○ Our <b>procurement partnership</b> shares procurement services with South Norfolk, Broadland, South Holland and Great Yarmouth Councils, building a knowledgeable and resilient procurement team and aggregating spend to achieve savings.</li> </ul>
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## Community Leadership

The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation.

Topic		Description
	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be</i></li> <li>➤ <i>improved to enhance decision-making? How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in- depth approach to resolving issues?</i></li> </ul>

<b>Community Leadership</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users’</i></li> <li>➤ <i>engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></li> </ul>
	Analysis	<p>Breckland Councillors are actively involved within their wards and most consider themselves to play a pro-active part in the communities they represent. The level and methods of community engagement and leadership undertaken are at the discretion of each Councillor and varies from Councillor to Councillor. The approach taken also varies from Councillor to Councillor, but all are involved in some or all of the following as part of their engagement with constituents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending Town and Parish Council meetings.</li> <li>• Articles for parish/village magazines and newsletters, blogs and/or websites and social media.</li> <li>• Holding surgeries – dealing with queries, providing advice and engaging with constituents face-to-face.</li> <li>• Constituency matters – emails, written, telephone responses and visits to constituents.</li> <li>• Community / Resident meetings.</li> <li>• Working with and / or offering support to community groups and local organisations.</li> <li>• Contact and liaise with parish/town councils.</li> </ul> <p>Several district councillors are also elected as Parish and/or County Councillors. The Council does not have any member case management software and members manage their own casework and arrange their own surgeries if required. The Democratic Services Team provides advice wherever possible and signpost members to relevant external organisations (LGA, LGIU) for additional information and support, as well as providing support directly to members wherever possible.</p> <p><i>One newly elected member has commented that “It is incredibly difficult to do the Councillor job as well as work full time and have a family. 6 months in and am starting to feel more like it is possible as have a greater understanding of what to prioritise and have organised my diary. I was already a Town Councillor, parent Governor and Workplace Unite rep. Fortunately, I have a supportive manager and a relatively empathetic employer but without that I don’t even know how it would be possible. The few do much of the work for the many and then there isn’t the time to encourage more to get involved so the few don’t have to do so much! I do really like being a part of the local community and want to be able to make it so residents feel more like they can “get involved” and know who to approach about what and when. “</i></p> <p>The widespread use of ICT and other channels of communication have reduced the need for residents to rely on Councillors for information about council services – for example, residents no longer need to contact their Councillor to find out about meetings as minutes and agendas are published online. Information about council services is available 24/7 through the Council’s website and the public can contact Breckland Council online, through social media or face to face at the Customer Service Centre’s. In May 2023, 13 new District Councillors</p>

were elected to Breckland and together with the re-elected Councillors are provided with support to assist them with their role:

- All new and returning councillors are encouraged to undertake a full induction programme after each district election. The recent 2023 Member Induction comprised of 20 or so sessions designed to support Members in their role and covered amongst other things,
- Full Induction Day including 'Meet the Managers' event (attended by 37 members)
- IT Sessions
- Health & Safety, Lone Working & Personal Safety
- Introduction to Local Government Finance
- Media Training
- Emergency Planning
- Scrutiny Skills
- Constitution & Code of Conduct
- Safeguarding/Data Protection/GDPR
- 'LGA & EELGA Regional Induction Event '

The Council has a strong culture of learning and development to support Councillors in their roles and to ensure efficient and effective systems across the council. The Council continues to ensure that the principles and ethos contained within the Councillor Development Charter are applied to the Breckland Learning and Development support for Members. The Council's General Purposes Committee oversee the development and implementation of a continuous Councillor Learning and Development Programme.

The Democratic Services Team provides a first point of contact for Member enquiries, signposting guidance on the Member constituency role, particularly aimed at new Members. Technical and professional support is available from relevant officers.

Technology, primarily in the form of iPads and laptops, has been incorporated into the Councillor role to enable a more mobile, responsive, and interactive service as well as reduce unnecessary paper consumption. All Councillors are issued a Breckland iPad and mobile phone to use for district council business. All meeting agendas, minutes and communications are available through the Council's 'Modern.Gov' software and are also sent electronically and members are expected to work in a paperless form in relation to meetings.

Wherever possible all information and documentation from Officers is sent to Councillors electronically. The iPads also allow more flexibility in timing for Members when conducting councillor related matters.

**Member Briefings** on new legislation or changes in services are also delivered regularly to ensure Members are kept up to date on topics such as Universal Credit, Planning, Finances etc.

Councillors have access to a Members section of the Council's Intranet which is maintained by the Democratic Services Team, with the aim of keeping members up to date with news about council services, forthcoming events, partner service updates etc.

**Representation on Outside Bodies**

Elected Members of Breckland Council can be appointed to sit on and liaise with outside bodies. These, in the main, tend to be charitable and / or community organisations who support the Council's work, usually through the priorities of the Corporate Plan, but also include organisations such as Internal Drainage Boards, Norfolk Waste Partnership, Police & Crime Panels as well as Youth Advisory Groups which are part of the Breckland Youth Advisory Board.

The Breckland Youth Advisory Board is an independent body that aims to promote youth engagement in local communities, holding about 11 meetings across the district each year. Breckland Council have representatives on the Youth Advisory Board, as well as on the regional sub-groups based within our five market towns.

Breckland also has official councillor representation on Hamond's Educational Charity, which promotes educational opportunities for young people from lower income families from the Swaffham area, as well as the Hingham Education Trust, which gives grants for further education to students going to University or Easton and Norwich City colleges.

As of July 2023, there are 39 outside bodies in total, and 67 "appointments" in total across the 39 Outside Bodies.

All outside Bodies appointments are reviewed annually by Council and the outside bodies are regularly contacted to review the relevance and usefulness of the organisation to the work of the Council.

## Other Issues to Note:

The number of directly elected representatives has an impact on the Council's budgets for Councillor allowances and elections. The financial impact, of both an increase or decrease in Councillor numbers, has been considered and assessed in the broader context of the resulting impact on governance arrangements, workload of Councillors, community engagement and demands on officer time.

## Financial forecast

The Council has an excellent record of financial management and is proud to have effectively maintained the high levels of service provision despite an environment of challenging financial circumstances for all local authorities. The budgets for 2023-24 and 2024-25 are balanced subject to achieving our efficiencies targets. Changes to the way Breckland works and economic changes have led to a revised efficiency requirement to balance the budget in future years. Many efficiencies are well underway and form part of the budget, and the Council is continuing with its Evolve Programme to deliver future targets. Breckland continues to have the lowest district council tax in England with the Band D Council Tax level currently at £108.64 per year.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy provides the funding framework within which the Council will achieve its aspirations. As a consequence of the constraints on resources, a balance has to be struck between the pace of improvement and the affordability of proposals that deliver the desired outcomes and fulfil the Council's community leadership responsibilities. The Council has embraced the modernisation agenda and is committed to achieving continuous improvement and innovation in service delivery. It is also committed to working with partners to improve the quality of life for residents and businesses in Breckland.

## Summary

In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future. Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

The Council has carefully considered the question of the Council's future size and wish to propose a **Council size of 51 (an increase of 2 members)**.

Since the last- review in 2014, Breckland Council has operated with 49 Councillors elected to 27 wards across Breckland. In the last 9 years the Council has evidenced it is a high performing council with a strong reputation for quality service provision and financial management. There has been a consistently high standard of service from Breckland Councillors in delivering effective strategic leadership, accountability and community leadership.

During the course of the deliberations the implications of changing the number of Councillors were considered. A reduction of any number of Councillors was not considered acceptable and would not allow the Council to continue to provide the present level of representation and service to residents. Given the Council's responsibilities it is considered that an increase to 51 Councillors will give the Council sufficient capacity to effectively operate its governance and decision-making arrangements. An increase to 51 Members would keep pace with the population growth, in what is one of the faster growing areas of the country and where population has recently grown faster than previous ONS projections. Taking into account ratios in both CIPFA

equivalent areas, and other Norfolk authorities, this proposal would see Breckland maintaining a comparative ratio of members: electorate through to 2030.

This number allows sufficient Member numbers to ensure the proper and timely consideration and making of decisions as well as guarantee sufficient representation on Committees and Sub-Committees to ensure that any debate is informed by a range of views and opinions. The membership of 51 Councillors also ensures there is sufficient capacity to ensure that absences or unavailability could reasonably be accommodated without significant detrimental impact.