

District Councillor report May 2021

This has been a very challenging year for all of us, residents, businesses and council officers and many of us have lost loved ones as a consequence of the pandemic. However, here in Breckland we have risen to the challenges set and as a result we have achieved much whilst continuing to provide an unbroken service to all.

Some highlights for the past year include:

Breckland Economy

We have now provided around £50m of direct financial support to Breckland businesses since the start of the pandemic and continue to process tens of thousands of pounds of payments every week, to help Breckland's businesses continue through the difficult trading conditions. The message remains that any business in Breckland, in need of financial support, should be eligible for a grant under our schemes. Any business can apply via a single form:

<https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

Spring Back Campaign

Breckland businesses are now able to access a further £2m of support which includes:

- Shop Front Improvement Scheme – investing in the biggest ever “Spring Clean” across the District. Any businesses based in Breckland's primary shopping areas, or any customer facing business, will be able to get financial support for improvements and enhancements to their shop frontage – from a lick of paint through to a replacement frontage.
- Covid Safe and Adaptions Grants – helping businesses shoulder the burden of trading in a Covid-safe way and meet the challenges of serving under restrictions. Grants of up to £5k will be available to invest in safety; or change business practices. From extra PPE and screens, through to a new marquee or outdoor seating.
- Covid Safe Scheme – helping customers easily see the efforts businesses are making to ensure Covid safety, with a simple accreditation scheme delivered by Breckland Public Protection
- Continued Investment in Shopper Safety – with new and replacement hand sanitiser stations in all busy shopping areas, and friendly Covid Support Officers helping assure safety 6 days a week
- Expanded Enjoy Discover Explore Campaign – promoting and highlighting the local shopping and leisure offer across Breckland, with branding now bespoke to each Market Town
- Digital Breckland – building on the highly successful scheme – Breckland Digital High Streets – enabling any Breckland-based business to get support for their digital offer, with grants towards making key digital changes from a new payment system, through to search engine optimisation.
- Expanded enterprise and start-up scheme – having already created 10 new businesses since Christmas, we are looking to grow the pipeline of new innovative businesses further. With finance and advice for new entrepreneurs looking to start-up locally.

- Support grants for businesses outside of national schemes –As part of commitment that no business in need goes unsupported, Breckland’s discretionary scheme extends grants to any Breckland-based-business ineligible under national schemes – including self-employed, market traders and mobile traders.
- We have already supported around 200 businesses through these programmes since the national roadmap was announced, with several hundred further in the pipeline for support. Information and applications can be found at – <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/businesssupport>

In addition we have continued to undertake the ‘day job’ and further increased the range of services that we provide such as:

- New Waste/Trade Waste service where we have joined forces with North Norfolk and Kings Lynn to provide amore efficient, more economical and broader service than hitherto
- Increased our staff resources focussed on dealing with
 - Fly tipping
 - Business support
 - Covid compliance and support
 - Animal welfare
- We have honoured our commitments to our climate change programme
- We have broadened and enhanced the vulnerability programmes

In March 2020, the Council donated £10,000 to Thetford foodbank, which serves Thetford, Attleborough and Watton, and the Mid-Norfolk foodbank, which serves Swaffham and Dereham, to help them buy essential food items and supplies for local residents.

In January 2021, a further decision was taken to award Mid -Norfolk Foodbank an additional £2,500 towards the costs of moving to a new home after its current warehouse reached capacity.

At the beginning of April, Thetford Foodbank, which has supported thousands of vulnerable people over lockdown, was awarded £12,500 by Breckland Council to help the group purchase a new and permanent home.

As you can see it has not been a normal year yet despite this all of the services and facilities noted above have been delivered with staff working in an unprecedented environment. Further I am delighted to report that not only is the district council tax level amongst, if not the lowest in the country, Breckland Council has delivered a balanced budget and provides a stable platform on which we can continue to deliver our services in the year ahead.