

BRECKLAND AND SOUTH HOLLAND DISTRICT COUNCILS

Report of: Nathan Elvery, Head of Paid Service and Strategic Advisor

To: Full Council

Author: Rob Walker, Executive Director Place

Subject: Update on the place-based management of the COVID19 pandemic at Breckland and South Holland district councils.

Purpose: To update Members at both councils on the current place-based management arrangements and to agree a number of changes following the retirement of the Chief Executive and the appointment of a Head of Paid Service/Strategic Advisor to undertake a review of the strategic relationship between Breckland and South Holland.

Recommendation(s):

That Breckland and South Holland District Councils: -

- Note the contents of this report;
- Support the extension of the current place-based management arrangements at both councils until the conclusion of the strategic review in March 2021 and the preferred option has been approved by both councils;

That South Holland District Council: -

1. Notes Rob Walker's (Executive Director) resignation as a Company Director of PSPS and agrees to the appointment of Richard Hodgson (Executive Manager) as a replacement;

That Breckland Council: -

2. Notes Christine Marshall's (Executive Director) resignation as Company Director of ARP Trading Ltd and agrees to the appointment of Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy as a replacement.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At the outset of the COVID19 pandemic Breckland and South Holland district councils triggered their emergency planning and business continuity procedures, which resulted in place-based management arrangements commencing in both authorities.
- 1.2 These arrangements remain in place and the management teams at Breckland and South Holland operate largely independently of each other although there is shared CMT oversight and sharing amongst some corporate services, e.g. Contracts and Procurement.
- 1.3 The post of Chief Executive, prior to the retirement of Anna Graves, also operated in a shared manner throughout the COVID19 response. The Head of Paid Service and Strategic Advisor continues to operate in support of both councils.

- 1.4 This place-based arrangement was standard operating procedure and reflected that most emergencies [that are planned for] tend to have a geographic dimension, e.g. adverse weather, flooding, etc. In hindsight, whilst it has made sense for senior officers to focus on one place or other for capacity reasons, the allocation of staff in this instance (COVID19 response), didn't need to be done on the basis of where they live and their geographic proximity to one council or the other.
- 1.5 As the Council's moved from the initial response phase to recovery the agreed intention was to re-share senior management resource as demonstrated at Appendix A. This was recommended on the best information available at the time. It is clear, given the recent announcement of further national lockdown measures, that this position remains fluid and should be regularly reviewed. It is therefore prudent to reassess these intentions.
- 1.6 At present the placed-based arrangements are working well and are able to balance both the emergency responsiveness required for the on-going management of COVID-19 whilst continuing to deliver services to our local communities and places. This is only achievable because of the continued dedication, commitment and effective working relationships of Members and Officers on behalf of the communities they serve.
- 1.7 Following the retirement of the Chief Executive, Nathan Elvery has been appointed on a six-month contract as Head of Paid Service and Strategic Advisor. Nathan has been commissioned to review the strategic relationship between Breckland and South Holland councils and make recommendations for the future direction of the strategic relationship.
- 1.8 The review has been organised into three distinctive stages to align to the key decisions which will need to be taken at each stage as set out in the *Table 1* below before the next stage will commence.

Table 1 - Strategic review of partnership relationship – outline timetable

Stages	Strategic Review	Decision Timeline
One – Future Option Appraisal	Preferred option identified	January 2021
Two – Future Option Development	Preferred option for implementation	February/March 2021
Three – Future Option Implementation	Preferred option implemented	TBA

- 1.9 It is anticipated that Stage 1 will be completed and a preferred option recommendation made in January 2021.
- 1.10 It is anticipated that the strategic review will be completed (Stage 2) by the end of this financial year (31 March 2021). For the purposes of this report, no assumptions are made at this point regarding the COVID19 pandemic other than it remains highly likely that both councils will continue in response mode through the Winter and early Spring 2021.
- 1.11 Given the challenges facing both councils at the current time it is practical and pragmatic to retain a placed-based focus until the conclusion and recommendations are made for the future direction of the strategic partnership relationship. This will provide greater clarity for both organisations and ensure the fluidity of the COVID-19 responsiveness is considered at the time of the implementation of any preferred option, should this option be different from the current partnership arrangements.

- 1.12 Furthermore, this will ensure that there can be a continued focus and support to all Members and Officers in the placed-based arrangements to ensure the local responsiveness to COVID-19 and effective service deliver and provide some certainty, in uncertain times, to the timescales associated with partnership arrangements for both councils.
- 1.13 The initial review of the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service roles and responsibilities has been carried out, and all relevant appointments have been confirmed by the council. All appropriate delegations are currently in place.
- 1.14 The current place-based management arrangements for both authorities are detailed at Appendix B.

2.0 OPTIONS

- 2.1 In short, the councils have two main options: -
- a. To continue to re-share senior management resource as demonstrated at Appendix A;
 - b. To pause the re-sharing of senior management resource and retain place-based management as demonstrated at Appendix C.
- 2.2 This report recommends the latter of these two options (Option 2).
- 2.3 It is the opinion of the report author that it makes sense to pause any re-sharing of resource whilst the future of the strategic relationship between Breckland and South Holland is reviewed. The allocation of the senior management resource can then be fully informed by the outcomes of the strategic review and provide some certainty to both councils in the current challenging climate.
- 2.4 Furthermore, whilst both councils have undertaken recovery operations following the initial COVID19 pandemic response all Reasonable Worst Case Scenario predications suggest that we will remain in response phase through a challenging Autumn, Winter and early Spring and this response will require a focused senior management response that could be hampered by any significant organisational change.
- 2.5 A diagram highlighting what the retention of place-based management would look like is included at Appendix C to compare to the current planned approach.
- 2.6 Whilst the main recommendation is to retain place-based management through to 31 March 2021 and the culmination of the strategic review, it would be prudent to undertake some minor matters of housekeeping.
- 2.7 Due to the location in which they find themselves it is difficult for Rob Walker (Executive Director) and Christine Marshall (Executive Director) to discharge [as effectively as they would like] their responsibilities as company directors of PSPS and ARP Trading Ltd respectively. Members are, therefore, asked to note their intention to resign as company directors and the recommendation of Richard Hodgson (for PSPS) and Sarah Wolstenholme-Smy (for ARP Trading Ltd) as their suitable replacements.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 The recommendations are put forward for the following key reasons: -

- To await the outcome of the strategic review and not premeditate its findings and recommendations;
- To give senior management certainty over the next six-month period pending the outcome of the strategic review;
- To allow senior management resource to focus on each council's response to the COVID19 pandemic without unnecessary distraction or change at a challenging time;
- To address some minor issues of governance to enable the continuance of effective service delivery and representation;
- To reflect that the place-based managements have been effective in managing each council's response to the COVID19 pandemic.

4.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

- 4.1 That Breckland and South Holland district councils can continue to respond effectively to the COVID19 pandemic;
- 4.2 That Breckland and South Holland district councils are well placed to implement the findings of the strategic review when it is concluded in March 2021.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues

- 5.1.1 The extension of place based management arrangements would see a continued reduction in travel (and therefore impact) but this is already affected – in general terms – by the COVID19 pandemic and mitigation measures, such as video conferencing.

5.2 Constitution & Legal

- 5.2.1 It is the opinion of the report author that there are no implications. There are no changes proposed to terms and conditions and the appointment/resignations of Company Directors is a matter for the companies.

5.2.1 Contracts

- 5.3.1 It is the opinion of the report author that there are no implications.

5.3 Corporate Priorities

- 5.4.1 The proposals will benefit all corporate priorities at both councils.

5.5 Crime and Disorder

- 5.5.1 It is the opinion of the report author that there are no implications.

5.6 Data Protection

- 5.6.1 It is the opinion of the report author that there are no implications.

5.7 Equality and Diversity / Human Rights

- 5.7.1 It is the opinion of the report author that there are no implications.

5.8 Financial

5.8.1 It is the opinion of the report author that there are no implications.

5.9 Health & Wellbeing

5.9.1 The continuance of place based management areas whilst both councils are heavily occupied in responding to the COVID19 pandemic will make managing the demands on senior council officers more straight forward and give them some certainty over the next 6-month period.

5.10 Reputation

5.10.1 It is the opinion of the report author that there are no direct implications.

5.10.1 Risk Management

5.11.1 Risks are being actively managed as part of the strategic review process.

5.10.2 Safeguarding

5.12.1 It is the opinion of the report author that there are no implications.

5.11 Staffing

5.11.1 As detailed in the body of the report.

5.14 Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales

5.14.1 The timetable was outlined in the body of the report at Table 1. All Senior Managers and staff will be informed of any decision taken but there is no requirement for formal consultation at this stage.

6.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

6.1 All Wards directly or indirectly.

7.0 ACRONYMS

7.1 Not applicable.

Background papers: -

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Key Decision: Yes / No

Exempt Decision: Yes / No

This report refers to a [REDACTED] Discretionary Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A

Path to Recovery

Appendix B

Place Based Management Structures (Breckland and South Holland)

Appendix C

Path to Recovery Updated