

People and Communities Policy Committee

Agenda

Members of the People and Communities Committee:

Cllr D Bills (Chairman)
Cllr S Blundell
Cllr M Dewsbury
Cllr J Easter
Cllr T Holden

Cllr J Hornby (Vice Chairman)
Cllr N Legg
Cllr S Nuri Nixon
Cllr J Wilby

Date & Time:

Thursday 21 April 2022
10:00 am

Place:

Council Chamber, South Norfolk House, Cygnet Court, Long Stratton, Norwich, NR15 2XE

Contact:

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PUBLIC ATTENDANCE:

If a member of the public would like to observe the meeting, or speak on an agenda item, please email your request to committee.snc@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk, no later than 5.00pm on Tuesday 19 April 2022. Please see further guidance on attending meetings at page 2 of this agenda

Large print version can be made available

If you have any special requirements in order to attend this meeting, please let us know in advance.

Public Speaking and Attendance at Meetings

All public wishing to attend to observe, or speak at a meeting, are required to register a request by the date / time stipulated on the relevant agenda. Requests should be sent to: committee.snc@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk

Public speaking can take place:

- Through a written representation
- In person at the Council offices

AGENDA

1. To report apologies for absence and to identify substitute members;
2. Any items of business which the Chairman decides should be considered as a matter of urgency pursuant to section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act, 1972. Urgent business may only be taken if, “by reason of special circumstances” (which will be recorded in the minutes), the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion that the item should be considered as a matter of urgency
3. To receive Declarations of Interest from Members
(Please see guidance form and flow chart attached – page 4)
4. Minutes of the meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee held
31 March 2022
(attached – page 6)
5. Energy Rebate Scheme;
(attached – page 9)
6. The Council’s response to Domestic Abuse;
(attached – page 20)

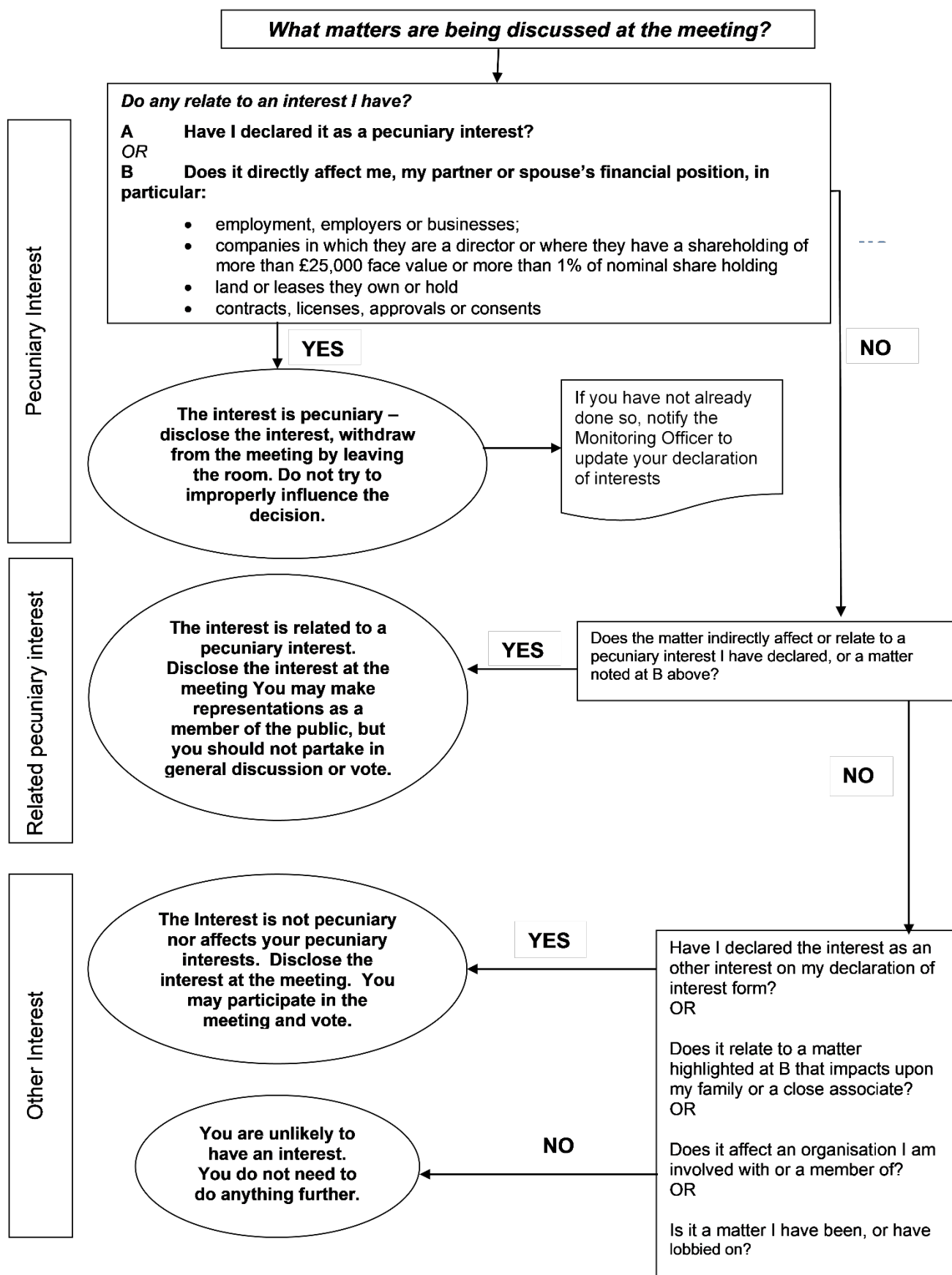
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AT MEETINGS

When declaring an interest at a meeting Members are asked to indicate whether their interest in the matter is pecuniary, or if the matter relates to, or affects a pecuniary interest they have, or if it is another type of interest. Members are required to identify the nature of the interest and the agenda item to which it relates. In the case of other interests, the member may speak and vote. If it is a pecuniary interest, the member must withdraw from the meeting when it is discussed. If it affects or relates to a pecuniary interest the member has, they have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public but must then withdraw from the meeting. Members are also requested when appropriate to make any declarations under the Code of Practice on Planning and Judicial matters.

Have you declared the interest in the register of interests as a pecuniary interest? If Yes, you will need to withdraw from the room when it is discussed.
Does the interest directly: 1. affect yours, or your spouse / partner's financial position? 2. relate to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to you or your spouse / partner? 3. Relate to a contract you, or your spouse / partner have with the Council 4. Affect land you or your spouse / partner own 5. Affect a company that you or your partner own, or have a shareholding in If the answer is "yes" to any of the above, it is likely to be pecuniary. Please refer to the guidance given on declaring pecuniary interests in the register of interest forms. If you have a pecuniary interest, you will need to inform the meeting and then withdraw from the room when it is discussed. If it has not been previously declared, you will also need to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days.
Does the interest indirectly affect or relate any pecuniary interest you have already declared, or an interest you have identified at 1-5 above? If yes, you need to inform the meeting. When it is discussed, you will have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public, but you should not partake in general discussion or vote.
Is the interest not related to any of the above? If so, it is likely to be an other interest. You will need to declare the interest, but may participate in discussion and voting on the item.
Have you made any statements or undertaken any actions that would indicate that you have a closed mind on a matter under discussion? If so, you may be predetermined on the issue; you will need to inform the meeting, and when it is discussed, you will have the right to make representations to the meeting as a member of the public, but must then withdraw from the meeting.

**FOR GUIDANCE REFER TO THE FLOWCHART OVERLEAF.
PLEASE REFER ANY QUERIES TO THE MONITORING OFFICER IN THE FIRST
INSTANCE**

DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF



Agenda Item: 4

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee of South Norfolk District Council held on Thursday 31 March 2022 at 11.00am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: D Bills (Chairman), S Blundell, J Easter T Holden, and S Nuri-Nixon

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: M Dewsbury, J Hornby, N Legg and J Wilby

Substitutes: Councillors: F Ellis (for J Wilby) and T Spruce (for J Hornby)

Ex-Officio Councillor: A Thomas

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse).

40 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee held on 17 February 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

41 SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES – IN YEAR OPPORTUNITIES

The Assistant Director for Individuals and Families introduced the report which outlined the proposed approach to utilising in-year savings in 2021-22, to support communities and residents in the next financial year.

Members' attention was drawn to Appendix 1 of the report, which outlined the proposed approach across three themes:

- Focusing on building resilience in communities
- Improving the Council's temporary accommodation
- Supporting residents through the cost-of-living rise to households

Referring to the proposals to support residents through the cost of living rises, the Assistant Director explained that the suggested approach was to focus support via three areas:

- Crisis minimisation, providing an immediate response to emerging hardship, for example through direct funding or fuel relief.
- Recovery, providing for example support on budgeting, wellbeing and mental health.
- Crisis Prevention, which would include support to families in reducing costs and increasing income, for example, improving energy efficiency, and reducing food waste.

Members noted that this approach would utilise £200,000 from in year savings and would be supplemented by remaining COMF spend. It would include the provision of a Triage and Assessment Officer and a Debt and Welfare Officer, for a period of three years, and £10,000 set aside for a Fuel Poverty Grant. A further more detailed report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee, should the proposals be agreed.

In response to queries, the Assistant Director explained that the funding would cover the two proposed posts for a period of 3 years, which although not permanent, would help to attract good quality staff. He confirmed that these posts would not be purely office based and that they would be visiting residents in the community where needed.

One member raised a query regarding means testing, and the Assistant Director explained that each case would be considered separately. Support would not be strictly means tested, for example help with managing budgets would be provided if needed to people whatever their circumstances. He expected that many residents who had not needed help before would find themselves needing to access support.

One member suggested that some residents needed assistance in how to cook low-cost healthy meals, and the Assistant Director confirmed that the Council would be looking at ways of addressing this issue with partners, and through schools. Discussion turned to food waste and what individuals and community/ volunteer groups could do to help provide cheap and healthy meals.

The Committee suggested that social media could assist in certain circumstances and one member explained that an application called “Too Good to Go” was available to download and provided information on nearby shops and restaurants that were selling food at very low prices, that would be otherwise be wasted. Another member referred to a group that regularly posted on social media details of how to cook low-cost healthy meals from scratch.

The Committee agreed that there was also a need to reach out to those individuals who did not have access to social media or were too proud to ask for help, especially the elderly. The Assistant Director agreed and explained

that he was looking into examples from other councils in tackling this issue. He suggested that many people did not access the benefits to which they were entitled, and also highlighted the need to target 40-60 year olds, who were often looking after both children and elderly parents. The Committee agreed that different cohorts would require different approaches.

The Chairman referred to charity and parish council funds that might be underused or even forgotten and the Assistant Director stressed the need to determine what funding was available and where. Members noted that many of the old fuel poverty funds had ceased to exist or changed direction.

Turning to the proposals to upgrade the Council's temporary accommodation, the Assistant Director explained that the accommodation had been in constant use over the last few years and was in need of upgrading. He believed that having good quality temporary accommodation helped tenants settle and recover quickly, so that they could move on faster. Members noted that the proposals would cost £950,000, and that much of the scoping for the required work had already been agreed. A further, more detailed report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee, should the proposals be agreed.

Regarding the proposal to increase the Community Action Fund to £150,000 for 2022/23 (using £100,000 of in year savings), the Assistant Director explained that year on year, the fund was oversubscribed. Members suggested that the amount of CIL money available to parishes for projects should be taken into account and the Assistant Director confirmed that the CAF Panel would be made aware of levels of CIL in each parish, and he was looking at ways of building the use of CIL into the application process. Members also expressed concerns regarding the uneven playing field for smaller parishes, with small precepts, and only part time clerks. Many of the larger parishes were sitting on large reserves and had full time clerks who were experienced at completing funding applications, and knew where to look for other avenues of funding.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director for his comprehensive report, and it was

RESOLVED

TO RECOMMEND THAT CABINET approves the proposed spending of in-year savings to support communities and residents.

(The meeting concluded at 11.42 am)

Chairman



Agenda Item: 5
People and Communities Policy Committee
21 April 2022

Energy Rebate Scheme

Report Author(s): Lindsay Sayer
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Portfolio: Better Lives

Ward(s) Affected: All wards

Purpose of the Report:

To outline the detail of the £150 Energy Rebate Scheme which is to be administered by Council tax billing authorities and seek approval for the Discretionary Payment Scheme

Recommendations:

That Cabinet grant permission for the discretionary scheme to be delivered in accordance with the proposed policy

To grant delegated powers for future discretionary schemes which are fully funded by government

1. Summary

- 1.1 On 3rd February the government announced a package of support for rising energy costs. Part of this is a £150 non-repayable rebate to households in Council Tax bands A-D, to be administered by Local Authorities.
- 1.2 There will also be a discretionary fund available for households who are not eligible under the main scheme criteria, for example those who live in houses of multiple occupation or are resident in properties banded E-H.
- 1.3 Guidance on how Local Authorities should administer this scheme was issued by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to billing authorities on 23rd February 2022.¹
- 1.4 The government guidance terms the scheme as the 'Council Tax Rebate Scheme 2022-23', however as this is independent of any other Council Tax rebates, to avoid confusion all external and internal communications will refer to it as the 'Energy Rebate Scheme'.

2. Background

- 2.1 The guidance issued by the government states the eligibility should be determined on the position at the end of the day on 1 April 2022. If the customer is the resident of an eligible household on this date, then they will be eligible.
- 2.2 All payments for the main scheme will need to be made by 30 September 2022
- 2.3 The guidance has stipulated that £150 should be paid to all households who permanently reside in a property in Council Tax Bands A-D. This includes properties in band E but has a disabled band reduction to band D
- 2.4 For customers who are paying their Council Tax bill by Direct Debit, the Council will endeavour to make a payment directly into their bank account once we have verified that it is a live account in the customer's name. A payment will be made as soon as possible after the first direct debit payment of the year has been collected. This is the most efficient way of verifying the bank account details held are for a live account.
- 2.5 Where we do not hold customers' bank account details, the customer will be contacted by letter advising them how they can apply for the payment.

¹ The published guidance can be found here
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-council-tax-rebate-2022-23-billing-authority-guidance>

- 2.6 For those not on Direct Debit the customer will have the option of receiving their payment into their bank account, or as a credit on their Council Tax Bill. If we do not have any contact from a customer in this category an automatic credit of £150 will be made to their Council Tax account. This will ensure that all vulnerable residents will receive this financial help.
- 2.7 The Council has also received a fund for discretionary payments for those households who are not eligible under the main scheme. Any household who has already received a payment but who is in hardship can also apply for a top-up payment from the discretionary fund
- 2.8 New Burdens funding will be provided to South Norfolk Council in respect of administering this fund, however the amount of this is not yet known

3. Current position/findings

- 3.1 In partnership with The One Team will be working in collaboration with Ascendant Solutions to deliver both the main and the discretionary scheme. This will mitigate the significant administrative burden on the Council Tax and Benefit Teams that this scheme could potentially impose. The cost of this to South Norfolk Council will be approximately £11,500 – there will be a slight variation depending on the exact number of application processed.
- 3.2 The main element of the scheme, including processing applications by customers who do not have a direct debit set up to pay their Council Tax, will be administered mainly by the Council Tax Team, in conjunction with Ascendant Solutions who will host the application form and undertake the required pre-payment fraud checks.
- 3.3 For the main scheme, South Norfolk Council currently has 51,845 occupied properties in bands A-D. The Government has allocated £7,595,250 of funding for delivery of the main scheme
- 3.4 40,753 of these households are currently paying by direct debit. This equates to approximately 79%
- 3.5 11,092 households are not currently paying pay direct debit and will need to be contacted directly to advise them how they can claim their payment.
- 3.6 For the discretionary payments, South Norfolk Council has been allocated £185,100. The administration of this fund, and the assessment of the applications, will be undertaken by the Benefit team. Ascendant Solutions will host the application forms and undertake the required pre-payment fraud checks.
- 3.7 Discretionary payments will typically be £150, therefore this funding allocation will allow the Council to make 1,234 discretionary payments. These payments must be made by 30th November 2022

- 3.8 There are currently 12,179 occupied properties in band E-H, therefore the discretionary allocation will allow us to provide assistance to approximately 10% of these households
- 3.9 The discretionary scheme can also be used to provide a top-up payment to households who have already received a payment of £150, if it is considered that these customers are deemed to be vulnerable. This decision will be made by a Benefit officer who is experienced in making similar discretionary decisions.
- 3.10 Guidance issued by the government advises that Councils can decide locally how best to spend the discretionary fund.
- 3.11 South Norfolk Council have determined the local criteria with an aim to focus on those who are most likely to be in financial hardship or fuel poverty. By keeping this as the focus of the discretionary scheme, we can ensure that the limited fund will reach our most vulnerable residents.
- 3.12 Full criteria of the discretionary fund, and how this will be administered can be seen in Appendix 1

4. **Proposed action**

- 4.1 The non-discretionary element of the scheme is prescriptive in legislation therefore no governance process is required to allow immediate payment, as per government guidance.
- 4.2 The discretionary system will require member oversight. The timeframe that the governance process involves would mean that were we to wait for this, there is the strong possibility that payments would not be able to be made until May or June which is an unacceptable delay given the increasing cost of living.
- 4.3 Consequently, the eligibility for the discretionary scheme has been designed, in consultation with portfolio holders, and we are retrospectively going through the governance process, which will allow us to deliver the scheme in a timely manner, when customers are likely to need this the most.
- 4.4 We have recently received a number of funds, similar in nature to the Energy Rebate Scheme, and due to this it has become evident that the government prefers small allocations of money to deal with the specific issue of the moment. This has been the case throughout COVID and it is anticipated this approach will continue as strains upon the economy continue.
- 4.5 We are, therefore, requesting that Cabinet grant appropriate delegated permission to allow the eligibility of this, and all future, discretionary funds to be passed to the appropriate Assistant Director and the Section 151 officer, in consultation with the portfolio holder where the scheme is funded by government

5. Other options

- 5.1 Not grant delegated permissions and request that all discretionary criteria go through the full governance process.
- 5.2 If this option is taken, however, there is a risk of delay to any future funds that needs to be distributed to our most vulnerable resident.

6. Issues and risks

6.1 Resource Implications –

This scheme will require significant additional work for our teams as there will be a large amount of Rebate claim processing and enquiries from customers. South Norfolk Council will be working in partnership with Ascendant Solutions to deliver both the main and discretionary payments. This will reduce some of the administrative burden on the Council Tax and Benefit teams. We will however need to allocate members of staff from each team to undertake this work.

To mitigate this, we are increasing our staffing establishment temporarily to meet the needs of the scheme.

- 6.2 **Legal Implications –** Guidance for the administration of the scheme was published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 23rd February 2022. It is for the billing authority to determine eligibility, the government does not have a role in disputes, these will be resolved through the Council's usual complaints process. Any disputes about the council tax banding should be referred to the Valuation Office Agency

- 6.3 **Equality Implications –** There are no equality implications with the proposal.

- 6.4 **Environmental Impact –**n/a

- 6.5 **Crime and Disorder –** n/a

- 6.6 **Risks -** It is anticipated that the cost of the increase in our staffing establishment can be met in part by the New Burdens Funding, however, unfortunately, the amount of this funding have not yet been published yet

If Cabinet does not grant delegated permission to determine the eligibility of future discretionary schemes there is a risk of a delay in getting the funds to vulnerable households.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 By administering the main and discretionary elements in the Energy Rebate Scheme the Council is providing assistance to our residents at a time of increased Energy Costs.
- 7.2 Delegated permission is requested to allow the appropriate Assistant Director and the Section 151 officer to determine this, and future, discretionary criteria in collaboration with the portfolio holder to ensure funds for vulnerable residents can be administered in a timely manner, without having to go through the formal governance process.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 We recommend that Cabinet agree to delegate permission for future discretionary schemes to be determined by the appropriate Assistant Director and the Section 151 officer in collaboration with the Portfolio Holder

APPENDIX 1



POLICY DOCUMENT

Policy Name: **£150 Energy Rebate –
Discretionary Scheme**

Date: 24 March 2022

1.0 Background

- 1.1 On 3rd February 2022 the government announced a package of support for rising energy costs. Part of this is a £150 non repayable rebate to households in Council Tax bands A-D, to be administered by Local Authorities.
- 1.2 A discretionary fund is available for households who are not covered by the main scheme.
- 1.3 Councils can determine locally how best to spend this fund.
- 1.4 All payments must be made by 30th November 2022

2.0 Purpose of this policy

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to specify how South Norfolk Council will administer the Discretionary Fund. It details the application process and indicates the factors that will be considered when deciding if a Discretionary Payment can be made.

3.0 Discretionary Criteria

- 3.1 South Norfolk Council will consider awarding a Discretionary Payment of no more than £150 to applicants who:
 - a) Are not eligible for a payment under the Energy rebate scheme and
 - b) have not already received a payment from the discretionary energy rebate scheme, and
 - c) can fulfil the criteria of one of the following categories:

Category 1

If the customer can satisfy the Council that they fulfil the following criteria, there will be no further assessment required:

1. They are in receipt of an income related benefit:
 - a. all income related benefit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions,
 - b. Housing Benefit
 - c. Council Tax Assistance
2. They are a care leaver
3. They are a Veteran
4. They are on the Council held list for 'Warm Homes' assistance

Category 2

If the customer can satisfy the Council they have gross household earnings of less than The Minimum Income Standards earnings level, as per the Joseph Rowntree Trust report

- a. £34,800 for a family
- b. £27,400 for a couple with no children
- c. £20,400 for a single person

This will normally be assessed on the customer's most recent payslip(s), which will be multiplied to ascertain an annual income.

Gross earnings means the total amount of earnings after work expenses have been deducted but before any deductions by the employer for tax, national insurance or pensions.

Category 3

If the customer can satisfy the Council they have current or imminent fuel hardship.

A more thorough investigation by the officer will be required in these circumstances

When making their decision the officer may consider:

- the official guidance notes
- any steps taken by the applicant to alleviate their hardship
- the financial and medical circumstances of the applicant, their partner and any dependants and any other occupants of the applicant's home
- the income and expenditure of the applicant, their partner and any dependants or other occupants of the applicant's home
- any savings or capital that might be held by the applicant or their family
- the level of indebtedness of the applicant and their family
- the exceptional nature of the applicant and their family's circumstances

The list is not exhaustive and any other relevant factors or special circumstances will be considered.

- 3.2 If the customer has already received a payment under either the main or discretionary Energy Rebate scheme, the council will consider an additional payment if they consider the applicant to be under current or imminent serious fuel hardship. The amount of this award will be at the officer's discretion and the officer will consider all points as details in Category 3, above.

4.0 Treatment of applications

- 4.1 Each application will be considered on its merits and all applicants treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered. South Norfolk Council are committed to working inter-departmentally and collaborating with external organisations in order to maximise applicants' entitlement to all benefits and discounts.

5.0 Applying for a Discretionary Payment

- 5.1 A claim may be made by any customer who is an energy bill payer
- 5.2 Claims will not be accepted from a corporate body or other body such as a housing association, the government or governmental body. This list is not exhaustive and we may exclude other organisations
- 5.2 A Discretionary payment will not be made to occupants in Council Tax exemption Class O, where the Ministry of Defence will provide cost of living support.
- 5.3 An application for a Discretionary Payment must be made to South Norfolk Council through our online form which will be hosted by Ascendant Solutions. If a customer is not able to complete the online form, the Councils will provide a paper application form for this purpose.
- 5.4 Any reasonable evidence in support of an application for a discretionary payment will be requested. If the evidence is not provided with the claim form, the applicant will be asked to provide the evidence within a calendar month of such a request although this will be extended in appropriate circumstances
- 5.5 If the applicant is unable to, or does not provide the required evidence, the application will still be considered and will in any event take into account any other available evidence held by the Council.
- 5.6 The Council reserves the right to verify any information or evidence provided by the applicant in appropriate circumstances.

6.0 Awarding a Discretionary Payment

- 6.1 An officer within the Housing and Benefits department will decide if a Discretionary Payment will be awarded.
- 6.2 This award will initially be no more than £150 for each household

- 6.6 All decisions will be fully documented by Ascendant Solutions on behalf of South Norfolk Council

7.0 Payment of an Award

- 7.1 Payment of an award will be made to the bank account nominated by the applicant, providing the account belongs to a member of the household.
- 7.2 The customer will also have the option of requesting a reduction in their Council Tax bill in lieu of a BACS payment.

8.0 Disputes

- 8.1 If the applicant is not satisfied with any decision in respect of their Discretionary Payment they have the right to request a review.
- 8.2 Any request for a review must be made to the Council, in writing, within one calendar month of the date of the notification letter issued detailing the original decision.
- 8.3 A senior officer, who was not involved in the original decision making process, will look at the decision again. The applicant will be notified in writing, setting out the decision and associated reasons within 10 working days from receipt of the request or as soon as practicably possible.

9.0 Overpayments of Discretionary Housing Payment

- 9.1 The Council will seek to recover any discretionary payments that have been fraudulently claimed, or incorrectly paid.
- 9.2 Incorrectly paid, or fraudulently claimed Discretionary Payments will mainly be recovered by issuing an invoice to the applicant or the person to whom the award was paid.

THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

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Portfolio: Better Lives

Ward(s) Affected: ALL

Purpose of the Report:

To provide an overview of the Council's work in tackling Domestic Abuse.

Recommendations:

1. Committee to note and comment on the report.

1. Summary

- 1.1 2021 saw a great deal of change in the Norfolk response to domestic abuse. For example, the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and the commissioning of the Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS).

- 1.2 Following a series of member briefings in September 2021, officers were asked to report on progress in spring 2022.
- 1.3 This report highlights current demand on services as a result of domestic abuse and provides a summary of work to tackle the issue and support victim-survivors, both internally and with our partners. It also outlines future work towards achieving Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation.

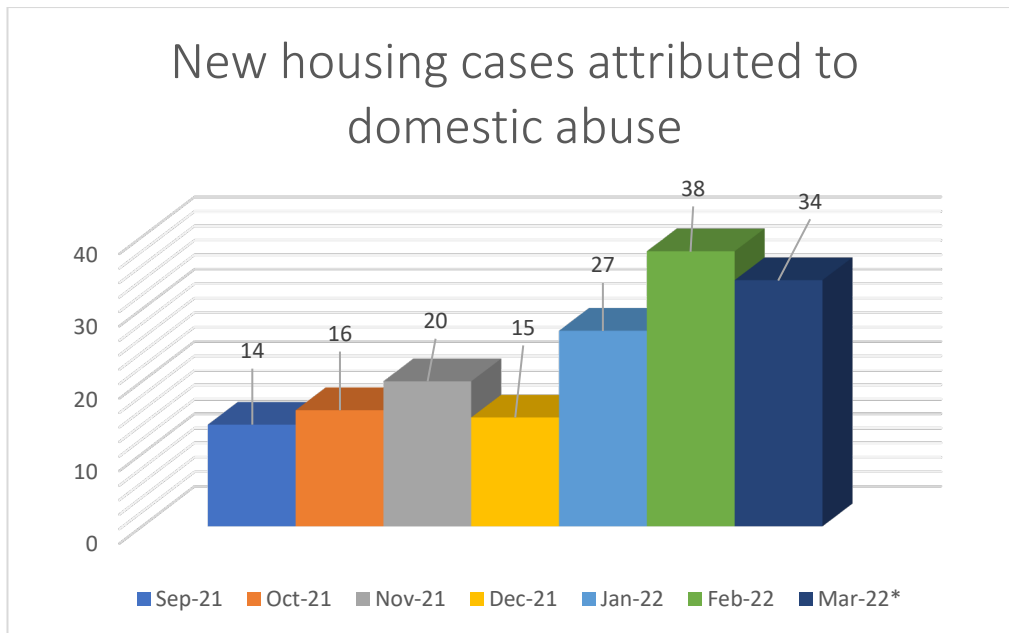
2. Background

- 2.1 The Domestic Abuse Act became law in April 2021 and there are two key areas of statutory responsibility for tier 2 local authorities:
- Under Part IV of the act, tier 1 local authorities must provide support within safe accommodation, such as refuge to victims of domestic abuse. Tier 2 authorities must support and cooperate with tier 1 authorities to achieve this.
 - All eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance
- 2.2 New Burdens Funding (NBF) was provided by central Government to local authorities in order to support them to fulfil their new duties.

Organisation	2021/22 £ (Part IV)	2022/23 £ (Part IV)	2022/23 £ Priority need*
Broadland District Council	33,077	33,104	5,966
South Norfolk Council	33,335	33,363	6,587
Norfolk County Council	1,806,177	1,811,177	-

*NBF for priority need not provided in 2021/22

- 2.3 Domestic Abuse is a key driver of demand in our frontline services. The diagram below shows the number of housing cases for both South Norfolk and Broadland opened in the housing team since the beginning of September 2021. Excluding December, case numbers have risen rapidly and it should also be noted that data for March is incomplete (up to 18th) and so is expected to exceed February.



- 2.4 Within the Help Hub, 325 requests for support (RFS) identifying domestic abuse have been received over the last 6 months. This is for both South Norfolk and Broadland and equates to around 8% of RFS overall. However, as with housing case numbers above, it is expected that this is underrepresented and cases may have been categorised under other presenting needs.
- 2.5 Causes of domestic abuse, such as male privilege and entitlement are complex, and reasons for the increase in numbers could be down to the continuing impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in addition to the cost of living crisis.
- 2.6 It could also be considered that there is greater public awareness of domestic abuse, the signs are recognised and people feel that leaving an abusive relationship is possible. This can be viewed as a positive step forward and it is vital that the Council is well placed to work with and support customers.
- 2.7 Returning to a national perspective, the government published their Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan in March 2022. The plan sets out 4 priority pillars:
1. **Prioritising Prevention:** Reduce the amount of domestic abuse, domestic homicide, and suicides linked to domestic abuse, by stopping people from becoming perpetrators and victims to begin with.
 2. **Supporting Victims:** Help all victims and survivors who have escaped from domestic abuse feel that they can get back to life as normal, with support for their health, emotional, economic, and social needs.
 3. **Pursuing Perpetrators:** Reduce the amount of people who are repeat offenders and make sure that those who commit this crime feel the full force of the law.
 4. **A Stronger System:** Improve the systems and processes that underpin the response to domestic abuse across society'
- 2.8 The plan also details commitments and funding provision to tackle these areas and although there are no specific actions for local authorities, there will be a role

for the Council to work with partners to inform and influence workstreams as they progress.

3. Current position

- 3.1 The Council is currently working with the other Tier 2 Authorities in Norfolk and Norfolk County Council in shaping our offer to tackle domestic abuse. This includes being key members of the Norfolk Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (NDAPB) working towards the Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy, the Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service board and the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Group (DASVG). Other areas of work are outlined below.

4. Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS)

- 4.1 In January 2022 the Council entered into new arrangements for domestic abuse outreach services as part of a joint commissioning process with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk (OPCCN) and other districts. This created the Norfolk Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS) which will provide a consistent community based offer across Norfolk for those experiencing domestic abuse.
- 4.2 The service includes:
- Single point of contact website and telephone/text numbers
 - Support for medium and high risk victims – integrated with Multi-agency Support Hub (MASH)
 - Whole family support
 - Management of domestic abuse champions
 - Management of high-risk victim Sanctuary scheme to enable victims to remain in their own homes
 - Training offer
 - Specialist support for Men, LGBTQ+, Ethnic Minorities, Disability, Older Adults (65+)
 - Victim Forum – Voice/Service development
- 4.3 As a funding partner the service offer for the district is enhanced with additional staffing capacity which includes a presence within the Help Hub, linking to Community Connectors and training and support for Council officers.
- 4.4 In addition, across the Individuals and Families sub-directorate officers will be working closely with the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Partnership Approach (DAPPA) team managed by Norfolk Police. This programme offers a multi-agency approach working with perpetrators of domestic abuse aimed at diverting them from committing further domestic abuse related incidents.

5. Domestic Abuse Housing Protocol

- 5.1 This is a draft Norfolk-wide agreement between the County Council and local housing authorities, registered providers and domestic abuse service providers in order to support those accessing housing services as a result of domestic abuse.

This includes at the point of seeking support, fleeing a relationship or when moving on from safe accommodation.

- 5.2 The protocol sets out a series of commitments from signatory organisations with the aim to:
- Be person centred and survivor focussed
 - Ensure consistency in approach by services and providers
 - Provide flexible safe accommodation that is efficiently used
 - Work in partnership to tackle domestic abuse
- 5.3 The document is being finalised and is expected to complete in May 2022.

6. South Norfolk and Broadland offer

- 6.1 An internal leads group has been formed to drive forward our domestic abuse service offer chaired by the Help Hub and Communities Senior Manager and comprising; AD Individuals and Families; Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager; Prevention and Advice Manager, Domestic Abuse Support Specialist; Housing and Benefits Manager; Corporate Programmes Lead and; Policy and Partnerships Officer. The group meets regularly and provides strategic oversight on the number of different workstreams and partnership arrangements.
- 6.2 Within the Housing team work is ongoing to provide the best possible service to those at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse including amendments to our case management system and prioritising domestic abuse casework.
- 6.3 We are also conscious of the findings of the needs assessment undertaken by the County Council that found there is not enough safe accommodation provision in the county. To that end, the Council is also establishing bespoke domestic abuse emergency accommodation.
- 6.4 This will be through three properties owned by South Norfolk and Broadland Councils and a pilot scheme with Saffron Housing Trust, to lease two further taking our own safe accommodation bed space to 10/11. The properties will be subjected to target hardening by Safe Partnership and let under licence. Use of these properties means we can take a flexible approach to meet different needs, such as families, single men and women and for people who need level access.
- 6.5 A two year pilot has been agreed, funded by the county council for two specialist support workers. They will provide day to day intensive support, addressing emotional and practical needs, assist with form filling, claiming benefits, budgeting, housing applications, and linking to the housing team and help hub.
- 6.6 Daily support is essential to victim survivors of domestic abuse because the period they initially leave the home is when they are most vulnerable and likely to return to the perpetrator. Providing two full time support workers will afford space for each officer to dedicate sufficient time to meet the emotional needs of each resident. Providing this intense support will help us make sure the resilience and

resolve required by the victim survivor remains in place, removing the prospect of them putting themselves at further risk.

- 6.7 The Council is also using new burdens funding to increase capacity through Housing and Benefits advisors who will support with additional demand.
- 6.8 Procurement for a support provider to fulfil these roles is underway and is expected to be completed by summer 2022.
- 6.9 The new burdens funding allocated directly to the councils has been used to support our work, particularly in the recruitment of a Domestic Abuse Support Specialist. The post sits within the Housing and Benefits team with strong links into the Help Hubs and Community Outreach provision. The officer works with a wide range of partner organisations providing advice and working proactively in the pursuit of supportive and safe solutions for residents experiencing domestic abuse.
- 6.10 They form a link point with the work undertaken by the County Council, the OPCCN and other organisations and act as a critical friend within the Council to ensure that statutory duties are being met, services adhere to best practice and are appropriate to maximize protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults. Crucially, the DA support specialist is leading on the Council's work to achieve DAHA accreditation.
- 6.11 Domestic abuse is also included in the programme of mandatory safeguarding training for staff. This training aims to challenge some of the myths around domestic abuse, enable staff to recognise the signs and how to access advice and support.
- 6.12 Due to their close links with their local communities, safeguarding training is available and strongly recommended for all elected members.

7. Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance Accreditation

- 7.1 The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) are a national partnership between three agencies: housing associations Peabody (London) and Gentoo (Sunderland), and London-based charity Standing Together Against Domestic Violence. Their mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process.
- 7.2 Accreditation by DAHA will enhance the One Team's approach to domestic abuse by strengthening our procedures and policies which will provide a better quality of service to our customers and staff.
- 7.3 To provide an example, the Office for National Statistics estimates that one in four women experience domestic abuse during their lifetime. With an employee base of 770, of which 431 are woman we could have 107 females who are, or have experienced domestic abuse. The ONS also show approximately one in six men

will be victims of domestic abuse in their lifetime. With 339 males employed by the One Team we could have 56 men who are, or have experienced domestic abuse. It is therefore essential we support our team through this distressing situation.

- 7.4 We currently have an existing domestic abuse policy for staff, however DAHA accreditation would provide the expertise and oversight to ensure existing policies are brought up to date and are fit for purpose. Much of this activity is already planned and DAHA accreditation will provide a means to ensure consistency in this work.
- 7.5 Both South Norfolk and Broadland are seeking separate accreditation, however it is part of a county wide effort comprising all local housing authorities and a number of registered providers.
- 7.6 In addition, becoming a DAHA member means we can:
- Reduce the human cost of domestic abuse by supporting our work to enable the Council to deliver safe and effective interventions in domestic abuse.
 - Access a wealth of DAHA best practice resources and expert advice through toolkits and newsletters, and member only webinars and events.
 - Get discounts on DAHA training
 - Influence national policy and share best practice at DAHA regional groups and Member's forums, to ensure that every home provides "safety, security and dignity"
 - Do the right thing- the Council has a moral and legal duty to support victims of domestic abuse. Working to achieve the DAHA Accreditation will enhance our service to customers and staff

8. Action to achieve DAHA accreditation

- 8.1 DAHA will support the Council with getting started to ensure our accreditation structure is correct. An action plan will be implemented to allow us to work on the eight priority areas:
- Policies and procedures
 - Publicity and awareness
 - Partnerships and collaboration
 - Safety led case management
 - Survivor led support
 - Intersectional and anti-racist practice
 - Perpetrator accountability
 - Staff development and support
- 8.2 An internal delivery group will review, assess, and implement changes to the priority areas. Diverse members of the organisation will form the delivery group, anticipated to be 5-6 members of staff, to allow workstreams on the priority areas to be carried out by subject experts. This process will be monitored and guided by DAHA. In addition, the internal leads group will oversee the accreditation process.
- 8.3 The accreditation will be achieved by 31st March 2024.

9. Issues and risks

- 9.1 **Resource implications** - As has been noted above, demand on services is growing, this has impacts on staff within the housing and benefits, help hub and environmental protection teams mainly, although any staff member could connect with a victim-survivor or perpetrator of abuse. The Council is utilising new burdens funding to mitigate against impact on resource.
- 9.2 In terms of the DAHA accreditation, it is estimated that 2-3 days of organisational time per week will be required to achieve the accreditation. Of this, 1.5 days per week will be fulfilled by our Domestic Abuse Support Specialist. The remaining 1-1.5 days per week will be fulfilled by a range of officers from across the organisation who will form members of the above mentioned DAHA accreditation delivery group (8.2).
- 9.3 Whilst there is a demand for officer time it is anticipated that the work they are undertaking, as part of the accreditation process, is work that would be undertaken regardless of our DAHA involvement, such as the reviewing and updating of policies and systems and our work to ensure compliance with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- 9.4 **Cost implications** – The cost of DAHA Accreditation for both South and Broadland together is £6,600 (£3,300 each) which is being grant funded by Norfolk County Council.
- 9.5 **Legal Implications** – This work helps us to meet our duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002 (as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) and safeguarding duties for adults and children.
- 9.6 **Equality Implications** – We recognise that domestic abuse is mainly a gendered crime and seek to support women and children victim-survivors of domestic abuse. However, the work detailed above also aims to remove barriers and enable accessibility for others who are impacted by domestic abuse such as such as men, those who identify as LGBTQ+, people from a minority ethnic background and those who have a long-term health condition or disability
- 9.7 **Environmental Impact** – There are no known environmental impacts.
- 9.8 **Crime and Disorder** – The report details work we undertake to support victim-survivors of domestic abuse and to prevent re-victimisation. We also recognise that addressing perpetrator behaviour is a vital element to reducing incidences of abuse. We have outlined the DAPPA approach above (4.4) and will also seek to refer perpetrators to recognised programmes offered within the County where appropriate.
- 9.9 **Risks** – There are no other risks associated with these proposals.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 Demand on domestic abuse services is growing and it is a sad reflection on a belief system of entitlement and control by the perpetrators and the impact of the last two years of the pandemic. However, there is a small positive in the data that services are more visible and that more victim-survivors are leaving relationships and seeking support.
- 10.2 This report highlights the different approaches the Council is undertaking to support victim-survivors of domestic abuse with a key aspect being DAHA accreditation. The Council is working toward this accreditation not because other authorities are doing so, but because it is the right thing to do. Achieving the accreditation will improve the service we provide to our customers and staff alike. It will also show organisational commitment to helping people recover and move on from domestic abuse.

11. Recommendations

- 11.1 Committee to note and comment on the report

Background papers

Norfolk Support in Safe Accommodation Strategy