

Minutes of a meeting of the **Wellbeing Panel** held via video link on **Wednesday 7 October 2020** at **6pm**.

A roll call was taken and the following members were present:

Cllr F Whymark – Chairman

Cllr A D Crotch  
Cllr R R Foulger,  
Cllr S Lawn

Cllr M Murrell  
Cllr J A Neeson

Cllr S M Prutton  
Cllr N C Shaw

In attendance were the Director of People and Communities, the Assistant Director Individuals and Families, the Housing Standards Senior Manager, the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager, the Policy and Partnerships Officer and the Committee Officers (DM and LA).

### **23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Minute No &amp; Heading</b>	<b>Nature of Interest</b>
Cllr Crotch	27 – Housing Standards Enforcement Policy	Owner of a rental property – other interest

### **24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr N J Harpley and Cllr L A Starling.

### **25 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Wellbeing Panel meeting held on 5 August 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **26 MATTERS ARISING**

None raised.

### **27 HOUSING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

The Panel considered the report inviting them to make recommendations to Cabinet regarding the adoption of the Council's new Housing Standards

### Enforcement Policy.

The Housing Standards Senior Manager outlined the background to the report pointing out that the current Housing Standards Enforcement Policy was out of date and needed refreshing to ensure the Council remained compliant with the latest housing enforcement legislation and regulations. Particular changes to the policy were needed in respect of new Electrical Safety Standards and inclusion of a new council Banning Order Policy developed in accordance with MHCLG Guidance. On the whole, the remainder of the document was consistent with the Council's previous approach and did not detail any further enforcement procedural changes.

In response to questions from members, the Housing Standards Senior Manager confirmed that there was no formal register of rented property in the district and the enforcement role was largely reactive. When notified of an issue regarding a property, the Council would undertake a full evaluation of the issue and the property as a whole. To date, the Council had been involved in one civil penalty decision process. With regard to carbon monoxide detectors, the Housing Standards Senior Manager confirmed that carbon monoxide alarms were required to be fitted to any habited room which contained a solid fuel burning combustion appliance. With regard to the issue of houseboats, it was noted that this was a difficult area in terms of legislation and complaints had to be assessed under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and if the problems were prejudicial to health. There were challenges in relation to the moorings at Thorpe St Andrew in terms of clarity of the responsible authority for taking action and this was still being resolved with the Council's legal advisors with a view to ensuring officers had dual authority with the City Council.

Members welcomed the updated Housing Standards Enforcement Policy and it was, by a show of hands,

### **RESOLVED to recommend Cabinet**

to consider and approve the Council's new Housing Standards Enforcement Policy.

## **28 THE VISION FOR A BEST IN CLASS HOUSING OFFER AND DRAFT ALLOCATIONS SCHEME**

Members considered the report, together with the addendum circulated and published.

The report had been drawn up following a number of workshops and considerable work to review the policies of both Councils and bring together a proposal based on a one-team approach. The review had been undertaken

before and during the COVID-pandemic which had created an opportunity to be mindful of the likely demand on the service from the crisis.

Following a successful bid to the LGA housing advisor programme, officers had been working in conjunction with external consultants Campbell Tickell and had developed a “best in class housing offer”. A fundamental part of the offer was the proposed allocations scheme and a four-stage accommodation model which sought to provide a universal service open to all with a housing need and which included a range of housing solutions.

The current banding system was being changed from 3 bands to 4 to allow for a band to accommodate those in most urgent need. A process of stabilisation was also being introduced to allow for suspended bidding to provide opportunity to help bidders manage and resolve issues affecting their ability to sustain accommodation. In response to a question regarding the high numbers of people in the low band and the likelihood of them ever being offered accommodation, officers commented that a reassessment of those in the low band had taken place and was ongoing, to ascertain if they still wished to remain and this had reduced numbers significantly. Over the proposed 4 bands there was likely to be approximately 1000 people registered for accommodation. Whilst those in high bands were more likely to be allocated a property, difficult to let properties and Section 106 restrictions on the allocation of properties offered to those with a local connection helped to secure offers to those in lower bands. A willingness to move outside a specific area was also an option to help increase the likelihood of securing a property. It was noted that, whilst the numbers of those on the register within the 4 bands within South Norfolk was lower than in Broadland, the South Norfolk register had undergone a thorough review and the proportion of those registered within each band was common across both councils.

With regard to temporary accommodation and the high costs associated with this, it was noted that efforts were continuing to secure a range of options for offering temporary accommodation including the current private sector leasing and houses in multiple occupation. The potential for purchasing properties for this purpose was also being explored. The aim was to secure options which were financially more viable and more akin to the LHA rent levels and which offered the right accommodation with the right support for the vulnerable clients. Reference was made to discussions taking place with a housing association regarding the allocation of a number of managed properties with coordinated support for those in need of temporary accommodation.

It was noted that, in addition to the online registration process, other options to assist with bidding would be available to support those unable to access services online.

In response to a comment about the high cost of software for the new system, officers pointed out that the current software was due to be replaced in 2021 and that the proposal for replacement of the current 2 systems with a single

common system would result in a £70k saving for Broadland over a 4 year period.

The new combined system would allow for a single point of access to bid for properties across both Councils with properties being allocated to those residents within the district where the property was located in the first instance, but ultimately offered to a bidder in the other district if the property was not taken, thereby helping to reduce the incidence of empty properties and facilitating mobility. The bidding process would be explicit about priority being given to the allocation of properties to bidders within the same district as the property.

In response to a question about the number of people in rent arrears following COVID, officers commented that, whilst this data had not been collected, some modelling of the potential numbers of such cases had been done as part of the review to ensure the service was best placed to try and respond to the likely increase in demand for help and guidance. It was anticipated there would be a peak in demand over the next 6-12 months with an ongoing impact for the next 2-3 years whilst arrears were repaid.

Members then made the following comments/amendments in relation to the Allocation Scheme:

- Paragraph 3.4 (f) on page 182 of the papers (page 18 of the Scheme) – reassess and if necessary amend the period of rent arrears applicable to the disqualification for an allocation – shown as 14 weeks for weekly paid rent and 4 months for monthly paid rent to see if these should align;
- Paragraph 5.2.3 on page 203 of the papers (page 39 of the Scheme) - amend the reference to “Thursday” to “Tuesday”;
- Prevention table on page 213 of the report (page 49 of the Scheme) - amend reference to “high” priority;
- Paragraph(e) of appendix 3 on page 223 (page 59 of the Scheme) - amend to include reference to requests and appeals being received by other means including telephone calls as well as submitted by email.

It was noted that the consultation on the proposals would commence on Friday 9 October and would be circulated widely.

Subject to the comments and amendments above, members welcomed the comprehensive report and supported the proposals contained therein. They thanked officers for their hard work in reviewing the existing arrangements and preparing the proposals.

### **RESOLVED to recommend Cabinet**

to endorse that officers work towards the Best in Class Housing model and support the draft allocations scheme as presented prior to public consultation.

### **29 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

With regard to concerns raised about the impact of COVID on mental health of residents of Broadland and employees of the Council, members were advised that the next meeting of the Panel would be considering a report on the review of Health and Wellbeing which would include mental wellbeing. Whilst this was not a function of the Council, the organisation was well placed to support and influence others in this vital area of work. Members noted some of the measures being put into place to support staff at this time including the training of members of staff as mental health first aiders. Members agreed it would be helpful to include reference to this in the Members Bulletin and to consider including reference to their status as a trained mental health first aider within the email signatures of those staff to help raise awareness of the support available.

The Chairman advised that he had invited representative of the YAB to join a meeting of the Panel in the future (provisionally December 2020) to help inform the Council's policies.

*The meeting closed at 7.20pm*