

Minutes of a meeting of the **Wellbeing Panel** held via video link on **Wednesday 5 August 2020** at **6pm**.

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

Cllr F Whymark – Chairman

Cllr A D Crotch

Cllr J A Neeson

Cllr L A Starling

Cllr N J Harpley

Cllr N C Shaw

Cllr K Kelly, Cllr J Leggett and Cllr D Roper were also present.

In attendance were the Director of People and Communities, the Assistant Director Individuals and Families, the Policy and Partnerships Officer and the Committee Officer (DM).

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8

| Member | Minute No & Heading | Nature of Interest |
|----------------|--|--|
| Cllr D Roper | 17 – GREATER NORWICH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2020-2025 SOUTH NORFOLK AND BROADLAND ROUGH SLEEPER STATEMENT | Contributor to the Greater Norwich Criminal Justice Homelessness Prevention Protocol referred to in the report - Non-disclosable non-pecuniary interest. |
| Cllr J Leggett | 2020-2022 | Trustee of Leeway - non-pecuniary interest. |

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R R Foulger, Cllr S M Prutton and Cllr D M Thomas.

20 MINUTES

The minutes of the Wellbeing Panel meeting held on 8 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

21 MATTERS ARISING

None raised.

22 GREATER NORWICH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2020-2025 SOUTH NORFOLK AND BROADLAND ROUGH SLEEPER STATEMENT 2020-2022

The Panel considered the report inviting them to comment on the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025 and the South Norfolk and Broadland Rough Sleeper Statement 2020-2022 and to recommend to Cabinet the adoption of the Strategy and Statement. The Chairman commended the Policy and Partnerships Officer on the co-production of a very well researched and referenced report.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer introduced the strategy which had previously been to the Panel and had now been subject to consultation. A small number of responses had been received which were broadly supportive and made reference to the involvement of people with lived experience, realistic housing options for young people and implementation of the mental health discharge and homelessness protocol. The priorities identified in the strategy were developed using an evidence and data based approach in consultation with partners. There was a desire to look to alleviate the drivers of homelessness i.e. low income, skills training and accessing affordable housing. The Covid-19 pandemic had delayed progress with development of the strategy but had provided an opportunity to review the priorities to see if they were still relevant and had concluded that they were even more important post Covid. Calls regarding domestic abuse had increased exponentially during lockdown and it was vital that the strategy included actions around suitable accommodation and well-resourced local services to meet individual needs. The skills and training agenda remained important particularly now as the economic recovery could take some time.

With regard to rough sleeping, at the beginning of lockdown, the Council had been able to offer accommodation to all rough sleepers in district as per the government request. There was a desire to continue this good work to ensure those accommodated could continue to be supported and secure accommodation suitable to their needs. There was also an aim to support those moving towards rough sleeping to help try and prevent this happening. The strategy and statement aimed to further develop the existing joined up working with partners on homelessness and rough sleeping which fed into the work underway to redesign the housing offer across Broadland and South Norfolk to take a person centred approach to increasing resilience and offering background support. This also fed into recovery planning post Covid and the strategic housing work being undertaken at a county level.

The proposed rough sleeper statement would run initially for 2 years from 2020-2022 which would then enable it to be aligned with the Norwich City Statement which was due for review in 2022.

Members then discussed the strategy and statement and welcomed the documents, the need for which was even greater following the Covid pandemic.

Members made the following observations:

- Single females now made up a surprisingly high percentage of the people presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- Domestic abuse was acknowledged as a huge issue particularly following lockdown and the data in the strategy should include ONS figures for domestic abuse against men as well as women. This would likely still demonstrate that abuse was overwhelming an offence by men against women but should nonetheless be recorded. There was also concern about the hidden element of domestic abuse against women who were not able to come forward as was being demonstrated by the increase in number of single women presenting as homeless and likely not declaring the cause as domestic abuse. Reference was made to the age profile of female victims and that there was an increase in older victims coming forward. Reference was also made to the growing issue, again worsened by the Covid pandemic, of abuse to parents/adults by children.

There was a lack of measures to deal with perpetrators including the criminal process and a lack of funding for perpetrator programmes to help break cycles of abuse. It was also noted that the domestic abuse bill had recently been passed to strengthen legislation surrounding domestic abuse and offer better support to victims/survivors including children.

There was an increase in easy access to extreme porn and a range of consequences attributed to this in terms of domestic abuse and the normalisation of extreme behaviour. There was a need to address this growing concern. Perpetrators also appeared to be getting younger. Officers commented that the strategy included reference to the need to develop programmes aimed at young people to help them to recognise what was acceptable behaviour.

- Life expectancy – rough sleeping had a significant impact on life expectancy and efforts to support this service could make a real difference. The report should include data on the average life expectancy (80 for men, 83 for women) compared to that of people rough sleeping (43 for men and 47 for women) to highlight the impact.
- Availability of accommodation – there was likely to be an inevitable impact from Covid-19 on future provision/ availability of social housing in the longer term and a need for measures to be in place to deal with the impact of this in the short term. There was scope to seek Government funding for temporary accommodation and the council was working with housing associations to try and free up properties for this purpose. Work on the redesign of the housing service would also examine what temporary accommodation was available and how to best use this. The stock of temporary accommodation had been fully utilised during

lockdown and the challenge was to now try and free up this accommodation and move people into more appropriate sustainable accommodation. There was potential for increased demand for accommodation following the effects of Covid and officers commented that the two councils had been able to respond very flexibly across the two districts to the increased demands for accommodation during this time and had been well prepared to deal with the emergency, including using facilities at Coltishall and, where necessary using hotel/bed and breakfast accommodation. This was now being scaled down with a reduction of demand for this type of accommodation. The capacity remained if there was a further spike in Covid cases.

The profile of those presenting as homeless in South Norfolk and Broadland was such that a large percentage of people presenting tended to be those on the edge of homelessness or suffering temporary homelessness as opposed to the longer term complex homelessness cases.

Members were advised about the First Step service implemented a year ago following a successful bid for government funding which had enabled two staff members to be seconded to rough sleeper coordinator posts and had provided funding for quick access short term accommodation. Funding had also been made available for interim accommodation for up to 8 weeks to allow for the coordinators to work with the rough sleepers to assess their needs with a view to achieving longer term sustainable accommodation. In year 2 of the initiative, funding would be used for a resettlement officer to work with rough sleepers to support them with their transition from rough sleeping into accommodation. Efforts were ongoing in relation to early identification to help avoid homelessness.

In response to a concern about apparent referral of presenting homelessness persons to Norwich rather than being dealt with by Broadland as there was access to more accommodation, officers undertook to investigate this matter as this was not the approach endorsed by the council.

With regard to the alignment of this strategy with other strategies including the Pathways work in Norwich, it was noted that there were strong links with the Pathway scheme in Norwich and the Joint strategy reflected the close working of the three councils and the movement of people across district boundaries. One of the challenges was identifying how to help the 60% of the districts rough sleepers in more rural areas where facilities were a lot harder to access and to ensure that there was a continued focus on dealing with the causes of homelessness and not just the immediate issues identified when presenting as homeless. Unseen homelessness also needed to be addressed.

In response to a comment about security issues as Coltishall, officers assured members that the initial difficulties arising following the placement of a number of asylum seekers at the site had now been overcome and appropriate security was in place. Subject to the comments above, it was

RESOLVED to recommend Cabinet

to adopt the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025 and the South Norfolk and Broadland Rough Sleeper Statement 2020-2022.

The meeting closed at 7.06pm