

Minutes of a meeting of the **Place Shaping Panel** held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on **Tuesday 13 March 2018** at **6.00pm** when there were present:

Mr S A Vincent – Chairman

Mr R R Foulger

Mrs J Leggett

Mr F O'Neill

Mr S Riley

Mr G Nurden also attended the meeting for its duration.

Also in attendance were the Private Sector Housing Manager and Committee Officer (JO).

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8

The Chairman advised the meeting that through his consultancy Abzag, he was promoting, on behalf of the landowner, a site for residential development in Colney through the Greater Norwich Local Plan. When this site was under consideration he would declare a disclosable pecuniary interest and shall vacate the chair and leave the room.

In the interests of transparency, he also brought to the Board's attention, that his father, Malcolm Vincent, through his company Vincent Howes, was promoting, on behalf of the landowners, a site for residential development in Costessey/Bawburgh through the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP).

In this case under the provisions of the Code of Conduct, there was no interest to declare which would prevent him from participating in the debate and chairing the meeting.

He added that he would be declaring the same interests when as a Member of Cabinet and Council, GNLP matters were considered.

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Everett, Mr Graham, Mrs Hemsall and Mr Moncur.

22 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS PROCEDURE

The report requested the Panel's views on some proposed options for the use of additional external funding to support vulnerable residents in Broadland.

The Council was responsible for the delivery of mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs). The contribution received by the Council to fund DFGs through the Better Care Fund had recently risen and last year £766,000 had been received, against an actual budget set at £750,000. It was not expected that the Council would commit or spend the complete allocation this year and next year the allocation could rise by up to nine percent.

The Council had also received £74,395 of additional resource for DFGs or other initiatives to be spent in the current financial year. To utilise this funding a special project to deliver efficient heating systems to residents with health difficulties, aligned to a modified means tested approach, had been introduced.

As there was a possibility that the Government might require the return of any unspent money from the Better Care Fund a number of options were proposed to help residents with health difficulties beyond the scope of the mandatory DFG procedure.

The proposals for utilising the additional funding were:

- A refinement of the Heating System Project to allow the upgrade of heating systems at residential properties to continue using a tightened health and financial criteria.
- The introduction of an architect fee grant to a maximum of £4,500 for complex cases where structural works were required.
- A top up grant or loan of up to £15,000 where works were required to adapt the property beyond the current DFG cap of £30,000.
- To increase the Handyperson+ current low level adaption grant to £750, to allow the Handyperson to work beyond the current £500 limit to his time on site.
- A 'Get You Home Grant' of up to £1,000 to pay for essential maintenance works at residents' properties identified through the District Direct Service.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that 138 DFGs were provided by the Council last year. The grants averaged £5,500 and were means tested.

It was noted that the current £30,000 cap on DFGs could easily be reached if major adaptations were required to a dwelling. Members were also advised that DFG adaptations could be made to a rented dwelling with the permission of a landlord, however they were not always considered desirable as they could be a hindrance to a future letting. It was also confirmed that architect drawings were an essential part of the procedure for major adaptations that required structural works.

Members were advised that the Council publicised the assistance it could provide for residents by publishing leaflets that were distributed throughout the District and through the Home Improvement Agency Service, which targeted vulnerable residents.

In answer to a query, it was confirmed that the grant processing and implementation procedure was carried out rapidly and verified by an independent officer when it was completed.

The majority of Members considered that, although loans could be recycled to provide continued funding, grants were preferable for works to adapt homes beyond the £30,000 DFG cap.

In response to a request, the Private Sector Housing Manager confirmed that he would forward details of the DFGs approved last year to Members of the Panel.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) to refine and continue the current Heating System Service;
- (2) to provide an Architect Fee Grant of up to £4,500 for adaptations that involved structural works and thus required detailed drawing beyond the schedule process initiated by the Council's technical officers;
- (3) to provide a top up grant for the DFG service of up to £15,000, beyond the maximum grant of £30,000;
- (4) to increase the Handyperson+ Low Level Grants cap to £750;
- (5) to provide a grant of up to £1,000 to assist the District Direct Scheme and therefore help hospital patients return to and remain safely in their homes;
- (6) to subject all new services to availability of funds in the relevant financial year and for a monitoring procedure to be initiated.

A report on the proposed changes would be considered at the 10 April 2018 meeting of Cabinet.

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm