



People and Communities Policy Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Wednesday 3 July 2019 at 10.00am

Committee Members Present: Councillors: D Bills (Chairman), S Blundell, V Clifford-Jackson, N Legg and J Wilby

Apologies: Councillors: F Ellis, J Hornby, T Holden and J Worley

Substitute Members: Councillors: R Elliott for J Worley
T Spruce for T Holden

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: Y Bendle

Officers in Attendance: The Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Housing & Benefits Manager (R Dunsire), the Housing Standards & Community Protection Manager (T Cooke) and the Housing Enabling & Strategy Officer (K Mitchell)

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the final meeting of the Housing, Wellbeing, Leisure and Early Intervention Policy Committee held on 28 November 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION / SUPPORT SCHEME

Following a brief introduction by Cllr Bendle, the Housing and Benefits Manager presented his report which sought to advise members of the options available to the Council for the mitigation of the impact of an increase in zero hours contracts, the Gig economy and Universal Credit on Council Tax Support.

Members were provided with an overview of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit and advised of the issues surrounding both systems, as detailed in the report. The Committee noted that the roll-out of Universal Credit was causing a severe administrative burden on the Council's current Council Tax Support Scheme and that a review of the Scheme was necessary.

The Housing and Benefits Manager explained the four options available to members, as detailed in his report; a Discount Scheme, a Banded Scheme, a Variance Scheme and an option to keep the existing arrangements. He stressed that while it would be desirable for any scheme to be fair, cheap and simple, in reality it was only possible for two of these elements to be present. In summarising, officers proposed that members consider each of the options but advised that the Variance Scheme would be their preferred option, for the reasons described in the report. The Committee was advised that work had been undertaken collaboratively with Broadland District Council who was also embarking upon the same process. It was noted that, if the Council was minded to recommend any changes, a public consultation would be required.

In response to a member's question regarding the complexities of setting variance levels for newly-employed residents and seasonal workers, officers reassured the Committee that South Norfolk Council operated a scheme which provided claimants with a protected 13-week period for Council Tax Support, to allow sufficient time for an assessment to be undertaken. Members were also pleased to learn that the Council administered a hardship fund which could be called upon for residents who needed assistance with Council Tax. The Committee discussed the need to reach and help those residents who required the most support. Officers confirmed that the Council offered help and advice to many residents through the Help Hub and that Community Connectors reached out to residents through their regular presence at job centres throughout the District.

Following a brief discussion, during which members expressed their preference for the Variance Scheme approach, it was:

RESOLVED: To recommend that Cabinet agree to commence a 12-week public consultation regarding the amendment of the Council Tax Support Scheme to move to a Variance Scheme for those receiving the Housing Element of Universal Credit and to incorporate operational changes already enacted within the Housing Benefit system.

3 AFFORDABLE HOME OWNERSHIP IN BROADLAND AND SOUTH NORFOLK

Cllr Bendle introduced the report, explaining that although there were no major changes proposed for South Norfolk, the adoption of a common approach to tenures and qualification for affordable home ownership across South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils could benefit the residents of both Districts.

The Housing Enabling and Strategy Officer presented his report and provided members with an outline of the three most common tenures of affordable home ownership, as detailed in the report. The Committee was advised that the supply of affordable homes throughout both Districts was sufficient to meet the needs of residents without the need to restrict the purchase of these to residents with a local connection. The Director of People and Communities stressed the wider economic benefits of offering choice and attracting residents into the area in order to afford the care needs of the aging population in Norfolk.

During discussion, it was suggested that more work should be undertaken to raise awareness of the various options for affordable housing in the District and it was then;

RESOLVED: To recommend to Cabinet that:

1. ordinarily, there will be no local connection priority for people wishing to purchase affordable home ownership, other than homes built to meet local connection needs under the exceptions policy, but that authority be delegated to the Director of Place to agree to a local connection priority when necessary on the basis of supply and demand;
2. all applicants for affordable home ownership must register with the regional Help to Buy agency (or any successor body); and
3. South Norfolk Council's policy on affordable home ownership be amended to incorporate the changes detailed within the report.

4 AMENITY AND FACILITY STANDARDS FOR LICENSED HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION

The Housing Standards & Community Protection Manager presented his report which sought to gain the approval of the Committee to recommend that Cabinet adopt the 'South Norfolk HMO Licensing – Amenity and Facility Standards for Licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation 2019'. Members were advised that adoption of the Standards was not intended to change the Council's policy but to be an addition to support its Housing Strategy to ensure that rented houses of multiply occupancy met a high standard. It was noted that failure to obtain multiple occupation premises licence carried a civil penalty of up to £30,000.

In response to a member's question regarding the methods used by the Council to detect rented houses of multiple occupation, officers advised that, in addition to a national campaign to identify such premises, South Norfolk Council officers frequently reviewed adverts for shared housing and rental properties to pinpoint where these might be being occupied by multiple families. Members also heard that the Council had liaised with estate and letting agents in the past to ascertain when landlords rented out properties and it was suggested that officers continue with this practice and that other avenues be explored in order to identify where unlicensed premises might be in operation.

Following a brief discussion, it was:

RESOLVED: To recommend that Cabinet adopt the "South Norfolk HMO Licensing – Amenity and Facility Standards for Licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation 2019".

5 REVISION OF THE NORFOLK PROTOCOL FOR MANAGING UN-AUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS

The Housing Standards & Community Protection Manager presented his report which sought to update members on the review of the Council's protocol currently being undertaken and to seek their comments and recommendations.

The Committee was pleased to note that since the transit site had opened in the Costessey area in 2015, there had been a significant reduction in unauthorised encampments in the vicinity. However, officers advised that, as maintenance of the site was costly to South Norfolk Council, it could only be used with the Council's permission. Members were in agreement that other partners who benefitted from the transit site should be prepared to contribute towards its upkeep.

The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families advised the Committee that the Council was working with Children's Services and, although long-standing traditions remained, they had seen a move towards travelling families sending their children to local schools and leading a more settled lifestyle while their children were of school age.

In response to a member's request, officers agreed to email the Committee with a note of the final changes proposed to the Protocol and details of the Needs Summary undertaken in the previous year. It was then:

RESOLVED: To note the proposed redraft of the Norfolk Protocol for Managing Unauthorised Encampments.

6. PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES POLICY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of People and Communities advised of items for consideration at future meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee:

- Temporary Accommodation;
- Our Locality Offer;
- The Inclusive Growth Strategy; and
- The Wellbeing Framework.

The Committee noted that the date for the next meeting would be communicated to members in due course.

(The meeting concluded at 12.00pm)

Chairman