



People and Communities Policy Committee

Minutes of a remote meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee of South Norfolk Council held on Thursday 6 August 2020 at 10.00 am.

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

Apologies: Councillor: J Hornby

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) and the Policy and Partnerships Officer (V Parsons)

13 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee held on 9 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

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

Members considered the report of the Policy and Partnerships Officer which presented the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy 2020-25 and the South Norfolk Broadland Rougher Sleeper Statement 2020-2022, for recommendation to Cabinet.

The Committee noted that that the Council had a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to publish the Homelessness Strategy at least once every five years, and this was the fourth time the Council had collaborated with both Broadland and Norwich on the production of the Strategy. It was now a requirement for the Strategy to also include a specific focus on rough sleeping, and South Norfolk and Broadland had produced a separate Rough Sleeper Statement. The intention was that the three councils would produce an aligned Greater Norwich Rough Sleeper Strategy from 2022.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer explained that the responses to the Housing Strategy consultation had been broadly supportive of the Strategy and its priorities, which had been identified using an evidence-based approach, in consultation with partner agencies. The priorities fed in to work already underway to redesign the housing offer across South Norfolk and Broadland, taking a person-centred approach

to increase resilience where needed and offer additional support when required. The Strategy also fed into the Council's recovery planning and strategic housing partnership work being undertaken at County level. Members noted that the priorities had been reviewed in light of Covid, and were found to be more relevant than ever.

Turning to rough sleeping, the Policy and Partnerships officer advised that the Council had been able to offer accommodation to all rough sleepers at the beginning of lockdown, and that this process had uncovered a considerable level of "hidden homelessness" cases, where arrangements were untenable during the Covid-19 lockdown. Members' attention was drawn to the graph at paragraph 3.20 of the report, which illustrated this increase in demand for temporary accommodation.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, commended both documents to members. She referred to the excellent response from officers to Covid-19 and the impact it had had on the service. She also drew attention to the "Best in Class Housing Offer" project, which would undertake a radical reimagining of how the Council would deliver the housing and homelessness service. Members noted that consultants were assisting this process and were appointed through a formal procurement process based on their knowledge and innovation.

Discussion followed and officers responded to a number of queries from the Committee. One member queried the ongoing support available for people once they had been permanently housed and the Policy and Partnerships Officer explained that this support was vital to ensure sustainable tenancies, and would be provided through Assessment and Resettlement Officers and Housing Benefits Officers, linking in with the Help Hub and other services.

Concern was expressed with regard to mental health and the need to interact with mental health providers. Officers explained that a conscious decision had been made to not make mental health a specific priority in the Strategy, as it was theme across all of the existing priorities. The Council had a commitment under the Mental Health Discharge and Homelessness Prevention protocol, along with its partners, to ensure that those people in a mental health ward that may be facing homelessness on discharge, could access accommodation that was quicker and was appropriate to their needs. Work was also being undertaken at County level and within the Help Hub, to provide support to people with mental health needs.

The importance of partnership working was discussed, and the need to provide a "one stop" service, and concerns were raised that some charities might not survive Covid. Cllr Bendle explained that the Help Hub worked with many different partners and that the Community Connectors played a vital role in ensuring that people were able to access the appropriate support. Officers assured member that the Council would do everything it could to ensure that support continued to be delivered in a cohesive manner, to benefit those requiring assistance. They also believed that building community resilience at a local level, was key in helping people endure the current crisis.

Members queried whether the Government's target to end rough sleeping by 2027 was achievable. Officers agreed that this was an ambitious target but felt that it was achievable across both South Norfolk and Broadland, for those people not wishing to live on the streets.

The Committee was pleased to note that the Council had been able to accommodate all rough sleepers during lockdown and officers explained that this was because the Council's First Steps Rough Sleeper Service was well established, allowing the Council to act quickly and effectively. Through this service, the Council was able to provide "rapid access accommodation" where people were allowed to stay for 72 hours. Funding was also secured to provide further interim accommodation for up to eight weeks, which provided a temporary home for people whilst officers assessed their future needs. The Committee noted that both South Norfolk and Broadland had rented rooms at the old RAF site in Coltishall to be used for this purpose. Some temporary accommodation had also been utilised across the South Norfolk District.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer explained that the Council was looking to apply for funding to support those homeless people with more complex needs and that officers were working with Housing Associations to try to provide them with properties to move in to permanently. Members were also reminded that a policy had also been approved at Cabinet to temporarily change the allocations process, so that more people in temporary accommodation could move into permanent accommodation more quickly. Officers stressed the importance of ensuring that accommodation was suitable and that this sometimes meant that allocations needed to be made over a wider footprint across the county.

Some discussion followed regarding the proposed changes in planning laws outlined in the recently published White Paper, and how this could impact on affordable housing. Members agreed that more details were required before this could be fully assessed.

The Committee expressed its support for the Strategy and the Rough Sleeper Statement and thanked the Policy and Partnerships Officer for a well written and comprehensive piece of work.

It was unanimously

RESOLVED: To

1. Note the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025 and the South Norfolk and Broadland Rough Sleeper Statement 2020-2022.
2. Recommend that Cabinet adopts the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy 2020-2025 and the South Norfolk and Broadland Rough Sleeper Statement 2020-2022

(The meeting concluded at 11.00am)

Chairman