

ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Excellence Policy Development Panel of Broadland District Council, held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on Thursday 14 April 2022 at 6.00pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: K S Kelly (Chairman), N J Brennan, D J Britcher, A D Crotch, J Davis, N J Harpley, K E Lawrence, S M Prutton and J M Ward

Cabinet Member Present: Councillor: J Leggett

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director Community Services (S Phelan), the Housing Standards Service Manager (K Philcox), the War Homes Programme Manager (K Strandoo) and the Democratic Services Officer (DM)

29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J F Fisher and G K Nurden.

30 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from the minutes, the Assistant Director Community Services updated members on the following:

- Electrical, battery and textile collection service – this weekly collection service had been launched on 1 April 2022 and 110 small electrical items, 5 bins of batteries and 2 large containers of textiles had been collected.
- The food waste service would be rolled out across the whole district in October 2022 with publicity starting in August. Food waste bags were now fully compostable.
- Work had started on a joint project with other councils to explore the possibility of a coffee pod collection service.

- Discussions were ongoing with Veolia and DEFRA regarding the new duties likely to be placed on local authorities. A decision had been taken to push back the provision of 180ltr bins to new households pending the outcome of the new legislation.
- Quarterly recycling rates – the latest recycling rate was approximately 54%.

31 WARM HOMES PROGRAMME – UPDATE

Members considered the report of the Warm Homes Programme Manager which gave an overview of activities and outputs delivered by the Norfolk Warm Homes Programme working in partnership with Norfolk Authorities, Clarion Housing and Saffron Housing Trust and provided an outline of future projects for the coming year. The Warm Homes Programme Manager took members through the report. She drew attention to the funding provided by National Grid which had enabled grants for first time heating for the private sector and social housing but had also enabled a package of wrap-around support to be developed which had been very successful in providing additional help and advice and had led to the establishment of a network of contacts. This funding stream had seen over £4m invested in central heating; the scheme would finish at the end of May.

A subsequent funding application had been successful in securing government funds to deliver insulation and renewable heating systems with a focus on improving the energy efficiency of homes, reducing fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions. The scheme was aimed at low income households with low energy performance ratings. Members noted the delivery outcomes to date of the latest funding scheme. Looking ahead, the recently awarded further government funding under the Sustainable Warmth Completion Scheme would be delivered over the coming year to target those most in need.

The Chairman congratulated officers on the work undertaken. In response to questions, officers confirmed that the limited availability of installers had caused issues but that a procurement exercise had been undertaken to increase the supply of suitably qualified installers. The government were aware of the issues and were exploring options to resolve this, including working with the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to upskill and increase the number of local regional companies certified to deliver government grant schemes. The LEPs were also establishing regional procurement frameworks.

In response to a question regarding the extent of the issue of fuel poverty in the district, officers confirmed that it was difficult to fully understand the extent of the problem but circa 6500 households were likely to be in fuel poverty. It was unclear how many of these households were rented accommodation and there was a need to capture landlords as well as home owners. The government funding schemes to date had seen up to 45 homes in Broadland improved which meant there was still much work to be done. There would also be a need to be mindful that the installation of new low energy renewable heating units could lead to higher running costs which needed to be addressed with occupants.

A question was raised as to how people became aware of the funding available and officers commented that social media was increasingly being used to reach out to residents. Connections with other agencies and housing stock data also helped the council to proactively approach suitable households.

Officers confirmed that the type of insulation installed as part of the grant schemes was fibre based, non-flammable and regulations ensured that the insulation installed allowed for the building to breath.

In answer to a question as to what help was available to people in difficulty because of the cost of existing central heating, officers confirmed that there was currently little help available other than the government's current Energy Bills Rebate providing £200 discount on energy bills to be paid back over the next five years and a £150 non repayable council tax rebate. The team were receiving an increase in calls from residents concerned about their rising energy bills and the Warm Homes website was being updated with energy saving advice and information about where to seek further financial support. Reference was made to the particular issue facing those fleeing domestic abuse who were already in hardship. Officers commented that the Council was, via the help hub, looking to develop a hardship package of support to reach vulnerable people.

The Portfolio Holder congratulated the team on its work and asked for a further update in 6 months' time.

RESOLVED

To note and support the ongoing activities of the Norfolk Warm Homes Programme with the aim of supporting residents living in fuel poverty through grant assisted improvements to increase thermal efficiency and provide renewable heating solutions to homes.

(The meeting concluded at 6:40pm)

Chairman