

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING, AND PLANNING POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities, Housing, and Planning Policy Development Panel of Broadland District Council, held at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich on Wednesday 2 November 2022 at 6pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: S Prutton (Chairman), R Foulger, N Harpley, E Laming, K Leggett, J Neesam, D Thomas and J Ward

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: N Brennan, A Crotch and M Murrell

Other Members present: Councillor: F Whymark (ex-officio)

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager (R Dunsire) and the Democratic Services Officer (J Hammond)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs N Brennan, A Crotch and M Murrell.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Wellbeing Policy Development Panel held on 27 April 2022, and Place Shaping Policy Development Panel held on 11 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Wellbeing Policy Development Panel

In reference to minute number 57, one member requested an update on the number of payments made under the discretionary fund scheme. The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families explained that scheme would conclude at the end of November, at which point he would be able to provide the Committee with figures on the number of applications received and grants

paid. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager added that the scheme had been very successful with an average of 18 discretionary applications per week. In response to further questions, he explained that in addition to a social media campaign, the Council had been utilising the Lift Scheme with a partner agency. The Lift Scheme could be used to pinpoint vulnerable residents within the district where a direct discretionary payment could be made.

In reference to minute number 58, the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager confirmed that the two new trained members of staff were now in place and had been providing a great service to the team and residents. They were now due to review the One Team's approach to dealing with domestic abuse.

4 BEST IN CLASS HOUSING – TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families presented the report which set out the expected future increase in demand for temporary accommodation, the associated significant increase in cost, and provided a plan to help address this.

The Council had a strong track record in delivering an effective housing service in the district. However, the Council was now facing a significant increase in the demand for temporary accommodation, due to a number of factors, including:

- The lasting legacy of Covid
- The cost-of-living crisis
- Reduced housing stock in both social housing and the private rented sector
- Ukraine asylum – a large number of placements coming to an end

Members were informed that under the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, the Council had a statutory obligation to deliver housing services. Although the Council no longer held its own general housing stock, it was still required to support residents at risk of homelessness or those who were already homeless, by working with the district's fourteen registered social landlords to ensure residents had access to the right social home.

Regarding the Council's current temporary accommodation, the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager explained that the Council owned two three-bedroomed properties, leased five units from Clarion Housing, as well as 24 properties of various sizes rented from private landlords. One member requested clarification on what constituted 'temporary accommodation'. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager explained that, in addition to Council owned and private sector leased properties, temporary accommodation could include rooms at Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs). For the property to be classed as temporary accommodation an individual stay should not surpass 6-12 months. He added that due to a lack of housing supply the Council currently had cases exceeding 9 months.

Discussion moved to the forecasted demand on temporary accommodation. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager advised the Committee that consultants Campbell Tickell had been commissioned to model the impact on temporary accommodation of an economic recession. This modelling had estimated that demand would increase significantly from 2023, before falling to pre-covid levels in 2026. In response to a query on the use of caravans as temporary accommodation, officers advised the Committee that whilst the use of caravans was legal, regulations were in place covering the size and standard of housing which would be difficult to meet, especially during the winter months. The issues of increased pollution and instances of anti-social behaviour at large caravan sites was also noted, along with the reputational risk to the Council of housing, often vulnerable, individuals in caravans.

Members further discussed the use of B&Bs as a source of temporary accommodation, where it was noted that this was a very costly approach to managing the increased demand for temporary accommodation. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager explained that were the Council to continue utilising B&Bs to meet the expected increased demand, the predicted revenue cost to the Council would be £4,894,000 over the next six financial years. It was noted that some B&Bs were seeing the rising demand for temporary accommodation as a business opportunity and had been increasing prices.

Members discussed the proposal to acquire a specialist resource to research properties and undertake the necessary work on behalf of the Council. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager explained that consultants were required as they had the specialised expertise needed to locate and assess properties, which was not available within the Council's current resource. The Assistant Director of Individuals and Families added that this resource would ensure that suitable properties could be located and purchased more quickly. One member queried whether the specialist would carry out any legal work required as part of property acquisition and the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families advised the Committee that all legal work would be carried out by the Council's contractor, NPLaw.

With regard to the long-term need for the properties if demand reduced, the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families explained that it would be unlikely to reduce significantly and that additional properties would provide greater resilience going forward. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager added that officers would closely monitor the demand projections and stays at the Council's current temporary accommodation.

In response to a question concerning the energy efficiency of the properties to be purchased, the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager informed members that energy efficiency measures such as solar panels would be added onto the temporary accommodation, if not already present. He added that this would not only offset any increase on the Council's carbon footprint, but also reduce the cost of utility bills.

After further discussion, it was unanimously

RESOLVED

To recommend to Cabinet that it recommends to Council to:

Capital Items

1. Create an additional capital budget of £1,356,000 to purchase additional temporary accommodation.
2. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Housing, and Planning Policy and the Portfolio Holder for Finance to purchase individual properties up to £750,000.
3. Increase the current allocated opportunities reserve from £900,000 to £1,000,000, to facilitate the purchase of a property and pay for the renovation works to make the property ready for use.

Revenue Items

4. Agree to the extension of contracts for temporary additional housing staff up to £266,200 per annum (funded BDC 45% / SNC 55%) to deal with additional demand on housing services.
5. Agree the recruitment of 1 x FTE officer for every additional purchase of 10 units of temporary accommodation, which will be paid for by the additional income received from those properties.
6. Prioritise allocations in temporary accommodation within its own stock, and in the event, that capacity cannot be found within its own stock, place in South Norfolk Council stock first.
7. Utilise capital reserves to pay for specialist support to speed up the purchase of properties.

(The meeting concluded at 7.00pm)

Chairman