

# WELLBEING POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Wellbeing Policy Development Panel of Broadland District Council, held on Wednesday 27 April 2022 at 6pm at Thorpe Lodge, 1 Yarmouth Road, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich.

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: S Prutton (Chairman), A Crotch, R Foulger, E Laming, M Murrell, J Neesam and N Shaw

**Apologies:** Councillors: R Foulger and L Starling

**Substitute:** Councillor: D Roper

**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), the Housing and Benefits Manager (L Sayer), the Domestic Abuse Support Specialist (G Bloomfield) and the Democratic Services Officer (J Hammond)

## 54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE NO 8

No declarations of interest were made.

## 55 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Starling (with D Roper appointed substitute) and R Foulger.

## 56 MINUTES

The minutes of the Wellbeing Panel meeting held on 2 February 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

In reference to minute number 52, the Chairman sought clarification on

whether the Council had been successful in its bid to secure funding for the Rough Sleeper Team. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager informed the Committee that no decision had been made to date, and assured members that he would update them once the outcome of the bid had been announced.

## **57 ENERGY REBATE SCHEME**

The Housing and Benefits Manager presented the report which outlined the details of the £150 Energy Rebate Scheme which was to be administered by Council Tax billing authorities, and sought approval for the Discretionary Payment Scheme.

Members were reminded that on 3 February 2022 the Government announced a package of support for the rising energy costs, which included a £150 non-repayable rebate to all households who permanently resided in a property in Council Tax bands A-D. A discretionary fund was also available for households who were either ineligible under the main scheme or who required additional support.

Officers explained that the Council was working with an external company to make the process easy and quick when sending out payments to residents. In terms of how the payment would be made, members were advised that customers who paid their Council Tax bill by Direct Debit would receive a payment directly into their bank account once verification checks had been made. Where bank account details were not held, the customer would be contacted by letter and advised how to apply for the payment.

Members queried whether the Council ran the risk of exceeding its budget for the discretionary fund. Officers explained that the discretionary fund would allow for up to 1000 additional payments to be made and that the Council has determined local criteria which aimed to focus on households most likely to face financial hardship and/or fuel poverty. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager further explained that officers would also look into other funding available to provide longer-term support to residents.

In response to a query regarding second homes, the Housing and Benefits Manager confirmed that second homes and empty homes were marked on Council Tax records which had been extracted to ensure payments could not be claimed on these properties. This applied to payments for both the main and discretionary schemes.

Discussion turned to the recommendation to approve delegated powers for future discretionary schemes fully funded by Government. It was noted that the Government approach was to provide small allocations of money to deal with specific issues and that delegation of the discretionary criteria to the appropriate Assistant Director and Section 151 Officer in consultation with the

Portfolio Holder would allow for increased flexibility and mitigate the risk of delaying the distribution of future discretionary funds. In response to a query the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families clarified that the criteria for each discretionary fund would be assessed and adapted to best meet the needs of the most vulnerable residents.

The Chairman thanked officers for their report, and it was then unanimously,

**RESOLVED To recommend to Cabinet**

To delegate permission for future discretionary schemes to be determined by the appropriate Assistant Director and the Section 151 Officer in collaboration with the Portfolio Holder.

**58 THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE**

The Domestic Abuse Support Specialist introduced the report which provided members with an overview of the Council's work in tackling domestic abuse. The Committee heard that a change had been seen in 2021 regarding the Domestic Abuse Act and saw it become law. There were two key areas of statutory responsibility for tier two local authorities:

- Under Part IV of the act, tier 1 local authorities must provide support within safe accommodation, such as refuge to victims of domestic abuse. Tier 2 authorities must support and cooperate with tier 1 authorities to achieve this. And;
- All eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance

Following this, a requirement for two new trained members staff was needed to provide help and support with accommodation matters. Members noted that the New Burdens Funding would help achieve this for the Council. The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation linked with the two posts would enhance the One Team's approach to domestic abuse by strengthening procedures and policies. This would also enable the Council to provide a high quality of service to customers and staff.

One member queried whether a scheme was in place for a handy person service in situations where an abuser damages the property the victim had been rehoused in. The Domestic Abuse Support Specialist explained that the Norfolk Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (NDAPB), of which Broadland Council was a member, was working to develop a handy person scheme. He added that some discretionary funding was available from the Council on a needs-by-needs basis. Members noted that Broadland Council currently had a handy person scheme and requested that officers looked to expand the scheme in the short-term until the NDAPB's scheme was in place.

In response to a query on the aftercare the Council offered domestic abuse victims, officers confirmed that a support worker would work with individuals for six weeks. Following this, the Community Connectors would then continue to work with individuals and offer support. Support workers would provide welcome packs which would detail numbers and points of contact for individuals.

The Domestic Abuse Support Specialist outlined the support and training provided to officers, which included Domestic Abuse safeguarding training for all officers and councillors as well as additional training for officers in contact with victims, including the Housing and Help Hub Teams. He further added that the Council appointed Domestic Abuse Champions to support and advise officers. It was noted that the DAHA Accreditation would improve the support provided to officers across the Council.

In response to a query regarding out-of-hours emergency housing support, the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager explained that out-of-hours calls were taken by NORSE who had been advised to provide overnight emergency housing without question, he added that managers were available 24/7 if further advice or support was needed.

One member noted that the individuals taking Domestic Violence related calls could be perpetrators themselves and queried how the Council worked to prevent this. The Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager advised the Committee that all officers who worked with vulnerable people were DBS checked, additionally the Council had a robust and thorough application process in order to appoint the right fit for each role.

The Chairman thanked officers for their report and it was

## **RESOLVED**

To note the report and comments reflected above.

(The meeting concluded at 6:47pm)

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Chairman