

## **People and Communities Policy Committee**

**Minutes of a remote meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee of South Norfolk Council held on Thursday 8 October 2020 at 10.00 am.**

**Committee Members Present:** Councillors: D Bills (Chairman), V Clifford-Jackson, J Easter, F Ellis and J Wilby

**Apologies:** Councillors: S Blundell, J Hornby and N Legg

**Substitute:** S Nuri-Nixon (for S Blundell)  
**Cabinet Member Present:** Councillor: Y Bendle

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillors: D Bills, J Easter and T Laidlaw

**Officers in Attendance:** The Director of People and Communities (J Sutterby), the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse), the Communities Senior Manager (K Gallagher), the Housing Standards Senior Manager (K Philcox), the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager (R Dunsire) and the Policy and Partnerships Officer (V Parsons)

### **15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr V Clifford-Jackson declared an 'other' interest by virtue of being a trustee of Voluntary Norfolk.

### **16 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee held on 6 August 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

### **17 HOUSING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

The Housing Standards Senior Manager outlined the report, which presented the new Housing Standards Enforcement Policy, for recommendation to Cabinet. He highlighted the importance of the Council having a legally compliant and legislatively up-to-date Enforcement Policy in place.

Members noted that the Policy was based on existing and new legislation, used to assist the Council in working with tenants, Housing Associations, and landlords, to improve the standard of homes.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, commended the report to the Committee, advising members that the issues around dealing with housing standards were often complex, and that setting out the relevant legislation and procedures in to one single document was helpful for all involved.

In response to a query, the Housing Standards Senior Manager explained that the proposed Policy would not directly increase officers' workloads as inspections were a statutory duty and were already taking place. However, it was planned to present members later in the year, with a wider policy, which would look at providing a more proactive service with discretionary procedures, and if approved, this could impact on officer workloads.

Concern was raised on how the Council could help people caught up in enforcement issues during the current Covid-19 pandemic, and protect those with mental health, illiteracy or other disadvantages. The Housing Standards Senior Manager advised that the majority of communications and contact was with the landlords of properties, and not those living in the properties, and he assured members that if the team come across vulnerable residents, or those that were experiencing issues with communication such as language barriers, then all necessary resources were used to support them.

The Committee was concerned that some tenants might not report issues with properties for fear that they would lose their home as a result. The Housing Standards Senior Manager advised that there was legislation and processes in place to protect tenants from eviction for a period of six months, following a complaint.

The Committee and the Portfolio Holder commended officers on their hard work and thanked the Housing Standards Senior Manager for his work in putting the Policy together.

A roll call vote was undertaken, and it was unanimously

**RESOLVED:**           **TO RECOMMEND THAT CABINET** approves the Council's new Housing Standards Enforcement Policy.

## **18     FUTURE OF COMMUNITY GRANTS**

Members considered the report of the Communities Senior Manager, which provided a review of the Council's Community Grants and suggested future changes.

The Communities Senior Manager presented her report and outlined the proposed changes to the member-led funding and Community Action Fund (CAF) schemes. She explained that the aim of the proposals was to make funding streams more accessible to those that needed it the most.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle advised that the grants scheme supported a wide range of communities across the District, and she welcomed any suggestions on how the current schemes could be improved. She stressed that this was a "scoping

exercise” and member feedback would be taken into consideration, before any ideas were progressed.

In response to a query, the Communities Senior Manager explained that any budget underspend over £10k, arising from member-led grants, was currently allocated to the CAF, to support other projects, however, any underspends that totalled less than £10k, would be absorbed into Council reserves. Officers were confident that the proposed changes would significantly reduce any future underspends.

Discussion followed regarding the proposed jointly populated online forms, and the Communities Senior Manager advised that she hoped that this would allow community groups to become more proactive, and help members to feel more prepared, before conversations progressed. Some members did express concerns that this might dilute the need for members to connect with their local communities and community groups, however, officers hoped that the proposals would help to enhance the current scheme, whilst maintaining the need for member involvement.

Officers also referred to the opportunities for joint member grant applications, and suggested that the new on-line form proposals, would simplify this process.

Concern was raised that the grant application forms were, in part, not in plain English, and were not easy to understand, and that some groups might struggle if they had to complete them online without support. The Communities Senior Manager welcomed any feedback or comments from members on how the current forms could be improved.

One member suggested a points-based scoring system for the consideration of CAF applications, and officers agreed to look into this further, and concurred that it would be helpful for future applications, if the reasons why some applications failed, were made clear to all. Officers also suggested that the process would be improved by having quarterly CAF meetings, as opposed to one very long meeting, where a very high number of applications required consideration.

Members referred to the proposals for greater emphasis on utilising the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and one member queried whether this might be affected in light of possible changes to the planning system, which could include changes to CIL. The Communities Senior Manager explained that she would be liaising with planning officers to explore the options further and to discuss any possible future changes, but the initial response from the planning team had been positive.

Turning to the recommendations of the report, Cllrs F Ellis and J Wilby did express their support to further consider the proposals, however, they stressed that they felt more consideration was required on the approach to member-led grants.

A roll call vote was undertaken, and it was unanimously

## **RESOLVED:**

To endorse officers to take proposals to Cabinet on a new approach to community grants, to include:

- Changes to the member-led Ward grant system
- Changes to the Community Action Fund
- Development of a whole council approach to community funding

## 19 THE VISION FOR A BEST IN CLASS HOUSING OFFER AND DRAFT ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

Members considered the report of the Housing and Wellbeing Senior Manager and the Policy and Partnerships Officer, which presented the findings of the work towards a Best in Class Housing Model, proposed an overall direction for the new housing service, and also recommended adoption of a revised Allocations Scheme.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer then provided an overview of her report, explaining that the vision sought to deliver a truly innovative and preventative service for residents, enabling the Council to provide the support needed to the more vulnerable residents.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer gave particular mention to the proposed Accommodation Pathway model, which would provide a universal service open to all those with a housing need, through the provision of a one-stop housing advice platform, and she outlined its four stages ; Market Place, Prevention, Stabilisation and Resolution. The Assistant Director Individuals and Families stressed the importance of the Stabilisation stage where the Council would work with and support individuals to ensure that there was no reoccurrence of rent arrears and/or anti-social behaviour.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer then drew attention to the proposed Allocations Scheme, outlining the aims of the Scheme, and how it would work. Members noted that this included a move to a four banded system and that there would be a single point of access across the two districts.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Y Bendle, commended the report to members, and she thanked officers for their hard work, also referring to the valued input from the consultants, Campbell Tickell, and colleagues at Broadland District Council. She referred to the implementation of a joint IT system with Broadland, explaining that it was hoped that this would be up and running by the Spring.

Members agreed that this was an excellent example of where the 'two Councils one team' approach was successful in making efficiencies whilst maintaining two autonomous councils.

The Committee expressed support for the proposals and thanked officers for their excellent and comprehensive work.

A roll call vote was undertaken, and it was unanimously

**RESOLVED:** To

1. Note the findings of the report produced by Campbell Tickell and **RECOMMEND THAT CABINET** endorse the Best in Class Housing Offer.
2. Note the draft Allocations Scheme prior to public consultation.

(The meeting concluded at 11.23am)

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Chairman