

Agenda Item: 4

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee of South Norfolk District Council held on Thursday 7 October 2021 at 10.00am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: D Bills (Chairman), S Blundell, M Dewsbury, J Easter, T Holden, N Legg, S Nuri-Nixon and V Thomson

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: J Hornby and J Wilby (with Cllr V Thomson appointed substitute)

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse) the Housing Standards Senior Manager (K Philcox) and the Housing and Health Manager (L Simmonds)

29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made

30 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee held on 22 June 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

31 SOUTH NORFOLK COUNCIL MOBILE HOME FEES POLICY

Members considered the report of the Housing Standards Senior Manager which provided background and procedures to implement the new regulations alongside recovering costs. The Mobile Homes (Requirement for Manager of the Site to be Fit and Proper Person) (England) Regulations 2020, introduced an offence for protected sites to operate unless the Council was satisfied that the occupier or the appointed site manager was a 'Fit and Proper Person' to manage the site.

The New regulations provided the opportunity for local authorities to recover costs of the new procedure using a fee structure detailed in the MHCLG

document 'Mobile Homes: a guide for local authorities on setting fees for fit and proper'.

Members noted that applications had already been received and would be approved once Cabinet had agreed the new policy. Once approved, a public register would be produced as part of the new policy requirements. The Housing Standards Senior Manager stated that there was also the potential to charge an annual fee through the new regulations. Officers confirmed that this was not currently being considered as it had already been incorporated under the existing 2013 Mobile Home Act. Officers further explained that an annual inspection of each site would take place to make sure conditions were upheld and would be covered by the original fee application charges.

In response to a question regarding the procedures in place if an application was rejected, it was noted that there were other options for the site owner to consider, including nominating a site manager to make an application. Officers further explained that if an application was rejected or approved with conditions, the applicant would have 28 days to make representations. The application would then escalate to the Assistant Director for review. If the original recommendation was upheld, the applicant could then go through a formal appeal which would be held as a property tribunal through the Government.

One member queried the process of a site assessment and what it entailed. Officers explained that the assessment would include health and safety procedures and other legal regulations.

A member questioned if the owner was appointed as the representative in most cases or could someone else be nominated. Officers explained that within the larger sites an area manager was sometimes used. A further question was raised concerning whether the appointed person needed to be on-site and, officers confirmed that they would need to be accessible but did not need to be on-site at all times.

During discussion, one member queried the process of the Fit and Proper Person. It was noted that the Government guidelines were comprehensive, and officers were currently working through the document to create a model to use. A member stressed the need for the identification documents to be checked accurately when reviewing applications. Officers explained that several documents were needed when submitting an application including; deeds, bank statements and other formal identification documents.

In response to a query, officers explained that the fees had been set out in accordance with the size of the sites and baseline costs had been comprised to cover site visit costs. Several members expressed concerns about fees being passed onto the residents. The Committee noted that this could

happen, but the businesses were held by competitive market prices. Officers further explained that the policy was moving costs from local authorities onto the business owners.

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

RESOLVED

To recommend to Cabinet

- A. The inclusion of the enforcement of new regulations as part of the Housing Standards responsibility;
- B. The approval of the fee structure detailed in the revised Mobile Homes Fees Policy;
- C. To delegate authority to the Senior Housing Standards Manager to approve Fit and Proper Person applications.

32 INDEPENDENT LIVING ASSISTANCE POLICY

The Committee considered the report of the Housing and Health Manager which set out proposals on how the Integrated Housing Adaptations Team could assist vulnerable residents of all ages throughout the South Norfolk District. The new approach would create new ways of helping people and use funding efficiently.

Officers explained that the collaboration of South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils had allowed the opportunity to review practices from both organisations and create a new best practice.

Members noted that all grants were underpinned by statutory regulations governed by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act of 1996. These included providing grant aid to elderly, disabled and vulnerable residents for adaptations to their homes.

Officers gave further background details explaining that, since the 1996 Act, the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance England and Wales) Order 2002 (RRO) had been introduced to enable Councils to provide a wide variety of discretionary assistance to residents. The RRO was used to create simplified assistance schemes to avoid the complex DFG process, reducing the demand for valuable Occupational Therapist resources.

When presenting the report, the Housing and Health Manager summarised the proposed actions of the report:

- The implication of the 'Independent Living Assistance Policy' which included the existing Independent Living Assistance Policy with refinements and the introduction of the new assistance packages detailed in appendix one and two of the report.
- To set the fee at 15 percent for Care and Repair Service involvement regardless of the property tenure creating consistency for all Housing Associations. The additional income will enable the team to continue to protect services and fund additional discretionary assistance.
- To introduce a land charge procedure of up to £10,000 for all DFG's and Gaining Independence Grant where the grant exceeded £5,000. If the property was sold or disposed of in 10 years of the completion of the adaptations, this fee would become due for payment.

Members noted that officers had consulted with Norfolk County Council on the new approach and officers were pleased to inform members that Norfolk County Council confirmed the new proposed policy was a Best Practice model.

In response to a query from a member, officers explained that the Council would fund up to six months' rent if an adapted home was vacant. During this time officers would work with housing solutions to find a suitable occupier instead of making unnecessary adaptations to the property.

A member raised concerns around the shortages of Occupational Therapists and the impact on the Council's operations. The Committee noted that officers were looking at increasing training of the Care and Repair team to allow them to take on more assessments within homes. The service had seen an increase due to the COVID19 pandemic and the longest wait for an assessment from an Occupational Therapist was eight months. Officers stressed the importance that residents were not left waiting on the list with no help, with officers looking for other ways to help in the meantime. Within the new proposed structure, the range of grants would help with individual cases while reducing the pressure on County Council resources.

In response to a request from a member, officers confirmed that they would include further breakdowns of eligibility within the different grant areas in appendix three of the report.

After several members indicated their support for the proposals laid out in the report, a question was asked about how the council could promote the service further in the district. Officers confirmed that residents could access the forms through webforms, GPs and by calling the Help Hub. The Chairman added

that promotion through Parish Councils, community groups and social media engagement could also help spread awareness.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report adding that the newly formed list of the grant areas would improve the service the Council could provide for residences. Officers confirmed that a full list would be circulated with all members once approved at Cabinet. It was then;

RESOLVED

To recommend to Cabinet

1. The proposed 'Independent Living Assistance Policy';
2. The revised Care and Repair fees procedure;
3. Options for the revised Land Charges procedure.

33 WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director for Individuals and Families took members through the work programme highlighting key areas.

(The meeting concluded at 11.26 am)

Chairman