

Agenda Item: X

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee of South Norfolk District Council held on Thursday 31 March 2022 at 11.00am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: D Bills (Chairman), S Blundell, J Easter T Holden, and S Nuri-Nixon

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: M Dewsbury, J Hornby, N Legg and J Wilby

Substitutes: Councillors: F Ellis (for J Wilby) and T Spruce (for J Hornby)

Ex-Officio Councillor: A Thomas

Officers in Attendance: The Assistant Director Individuals and Families (M Pursehouse).

40 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the People and Communities Policy Committee held on 17 February 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

41 SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES – IN YEAR OPPORTUNITIES

The Assistant Director for Individuals and Families introduced the report which outlined the proposed approach to utilising in-year savings in 2021-22, to support communities and residents in the next financial year.

Members' attention was drawn to Appendix 1 of the report, which outlined the proposed approach across three themes:

- Focusing on building resilience in communities
- Improving the Council's temporary accommodation
- Supporting residents through the cost-of-living rise to households

Referring to the proposals to support residents through the cost of living rises, the Assistant Director explained that the suggested approach was to focus support via three areas:

- Crisis minimisation, providing an immediate response to emerging hardship, for example through direct funding or fuel relief.
- Recovery, providing for example support on budgeting, wellbeing and mental health.
- Crisis Prevention, which would include support to families in reducing costs and increasing income, for example, improving energy efficiency, and reducing food waste.

Members noted that this approach would utilise £200,000 from in year savings and would be supplemented by remaining COMF spend. It would include the provision of a Triage and Assessment Officer and a Debt and Welfare Officer, for a period of three years, and £10,000 set aside for a Fuel Poverty Grant. A further more detailed report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee, should the proposals be agreed.

In response to queries, the Assistant Director explained that the funding would cover the two proposed posts for a period of 3 years, which although not permanent, would help to attract good quality staff. He confirmed that these posts would not be purely office based and that they would be visiting residents in the community where needed.

One member raised a query regarding means testing, and the Assistant Director explained that each case would be considered separately. Support would not be strictly means tested, for example help with managing budgets would be provided if needed to people whatever their circumstances. He expected that many residents who had not needed help before would find themselves needing to access support.

One member suggested that some residents needed assistance in how to cook low-cost healthy meals, and the Assistant Director confirmed that the Council would be looking at ways of addressing this issue with partners, and through schools. Discussion turned to food waste and what individuals and community/ volunteer groups could do to help provide cheap and healthy meals.

The Committee suggested that social media could assist in certain circumstances and one member explained that an application called “Too Good to Go” was available to download and provided information on nearby shops and restaurants that were selling food at very low prices, that would be otherwise be wasted. Another member referred to a group that regularly posted on social media details of how to cook low-cost healthy meals from scratch.

The Committee agreed that there was also a need to reach out to those individuals who did not have access to social media or were too proud to ask for help, especially the elderly. The Assistant Director agreed and explained

that he was looking into examples from other councils in tackling this issue. He suggested that many people did not access the benefits to which they were entitled, and also highlighted the need to target 40-60 year olds, who were often looking after both children and elderly parents. The Committee agreed that different cohorts would require different approaches.

The Chairman referred to charity and parish council funds that might be underused or even forgotten and the Assistant Director stressed the need to determine what funding was available and where. Members noted that many of the old fuel poverty funds had ceased to exist or changed direction.

Turning to the proposals to upgrade the Council's temporary accommodation, the Assistant Director explained that the accommodation had been in constant use over the last few years and was in need of upgrading. He believed that having good quality temporary accommodation helped tenants settle and recover quickly, so that they could move on faster. Members noted that the proposals would cost £950,000, and that much of the scoping for the required work had already been agreed. A further, more detailed report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee, should the proposals be agreed.

Regarding the proposal to increase the Community Action Fund to £150,000 for 2022/23 (using £100,000 of in year savings), the Assistant Director explained that year on year, the fund was oversubscribed. Members suggested that the amount of CIL money available to parishes for projects should be taken into account and the Assistant Director confirmed that the CAF Panel would be made aware of levels of CIL in each parish, and he was looking at ways of building the use of CIL into the application process. Members also expressed concerns regarding the uneven playing field for smaller parishes, with small precepts, and only part time clerks. Many of the larger parishes were sitting on large reserves and had full time clerks who were experienced at completing funding applications, and knew where to look for other avenues of funding.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director for his comprehensive report, and it was

RESOLVED

TO RECOMMEND THAT CABINET approves the proposed spending of in-year savings to support communities and residents.

(The meeting concluded at 11.42 am)

Chairman