

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 3

**Held on Tuesday, 10 July 2007 at 10.00 am in
Attleborough Town Hall, Church Street, Attleborough**

PRESENT

Mr R.G. Kybird (Chairman)	Mrs D.K.R. Irving
Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe (Vice-Chairman)	Mr B. Rose
Mr G.P. Balaam	Mr F.J. Sharpe
Mr P.J. Duigan	Mr M. Spencer

In Attendance

Anita Brennan	- Strategic Housing Manager
Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Sian Hall	- Senior Committee Officer
Stephen McGrath	- Principal Committee Officer
Gordon Partridge	- Principal Environmental Health Officer
Darryl Smith	- Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Enabling)

Action By

32/07 MINUTES

(a) Apologies (Minute 25/07 refers)

Mr Rose wished to note that he had sent apologies via e-mail for the meeting and the minutes would be amended to reflect this information.

(b) Adoption

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2007 were confirmed as a correct and signed as a correct record with the exception of the above amendment.

33/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Messrs R. Kemp and J. P. Labouchere.

34/07 ADDITIONAL HMO LICENCING

The Principal Environmental Health Officer submitted a report which summarised the progress of the proposed additional licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

It was hoped that a consultation document would be available to present to the Members but this would be circulated shortly and attached to the minutes as an appendices.

Action By

At present HMOs consisting of 3 or more stories and occupied by at least five persons in at least two households the licensing was mandatory. Section 56 of the Act allows for a Local Authority to designate all or part of its area as subject to an additional licensing scheme in relation to specified types of HMO. It was therefore proposed to designate the whole of Breckland's district for an additional HMO scheme. It was also proposed to specify all types of HMO (except those specifically exempted by legislation) for inclusion within the scheme. This was due to the finding of many different types of properties from bungalows to disused shops being used to house tenants, often migrant workers, in all parts of the district, both rural and urban.

The contents for the additional scheme would be exactly as those for the mandatory scheme covering management, provision of amenities, fire precautions and means of escape. The charge for the licence would also be the same at £250 per HMO.

All such schemes must be submitted to the appropriate national for approval before they can be implemented and as part of the condition for submission the Council must prove that they have consulted widely on the proposal with those likely to be affected including local residents, tenants, landlords, agents and member so of the business community. In additional consultation would also take place with the fire and police authorities.

In response to Members queries the Principal Environmental Health Officer gave the following advice:-

- Payment of Council Tax

The Payment of Council was sometimes the responsibility of the tenants and sometimes the landlord.

- Location of HMO

A district wide survey of the location of HMOs was undertaken two years ago. Complaints may be received from neighbours regarding an HMO in the area. Council Tax and Housing Benefit would contact the team if a large number of people were claiming from one property.

Once the scheme was implemented it would be a duty of the owner of the HMO to notify the Council of the property and pay the licence.

- Hot Beds

When a HMO was located the team would arrange for an inspection and there would be a limitation imposed on the number of people residing in the property according to the facilities and means of escape etc. However, action could still be taken under current legislation if it was found that a property was overcrowded.

Action By

- Timetable

It was hoped that following consultation Cabinet would be presented with a report in October. If that scheme was approved it would then go forward to the Secretary of State for consideration and approval. It was envisaged that the scheme would then come into force early in 2008.

- Staffing

Cabinet had agreed to fund an Administrative Assistant for the first year of the scheme to assist with the influx of applications and each licence would last for a period of five years.

Inspections of the properties would be undertaken as part of the day to day work of the team.

- Penalties for Non-Declaration of a HMO

If a landlord did not declare that his property was a HMO and was, therefore, not licensed they could be liable for a fine of up to £20,000.

Members wished to note the progress of the scheme and looked forward to receiving a copy of the consultation document.

RESOLVED that the progress of the proposed additional HMO Licensing Scheme be noted.

35/07 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY REVIEW ACTION PLAN - ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT

The Strategic Housing Manager submitted the annual review of the Homelessness Strategy Review Action Plan.

The recommendations contained in the Homelessness Strategy Review action plan annual review would be fed into and align with the Strategic Housing Service Team Plan and Annual Delivery Plan targets for 2007/08 and form the basis for the development and improvement of the Housing Advice and Homeless Service.

In response to Members queries the Principal Environmental Health Officer made the following main comments.

- Of the volume of calls received regarding homelessness enquiries the Council had a re-housing duty to 180.
- Re-housing was achieved through using social housing stock and through the private rented sector.

Action By

- Once a person or family was accepted as homeless they would be given priority on the housing list as legislation stated that reasonable preference had to be given to certain client groups which included the homeless.
- With regard to include housing provision in the Local Development Framework (LDF) for 16 and 17 year olds the LDF would include the needs of the housing market. There was a need for small units for 16 and 17 year olds and there was no provision of this type currently in Breckland. This age group had a number of different access issues around benefits and sometimes supported housing was the only way forward.

There had been 'wardened' single units in Thetford but this provision had ceased as a result of a number of different issues.

If a provision was built in Breckland the Housing Association would build the unit but there would be a need for specialist management control to assist this age group. There was a plan in place to build such a provision but there issue was how to gain funding as bidding for grants would be on a regional basis.

It was understood that the problems faced by 16 and 17 year olds was a national problem as a result of national legislation. The Housing Team were in dialogue with the Department for Communities and Local Government around this issue. Registered Social Landlords were reluctant to offer tenancies to young people and required rent guarantors. The Housing Team were investigating other options to tackle this problem and ensure that young people were housed.

Discussions were always taking place with Social Services who had a responsibility for this age group and some may have just come out of care and require housing. These were vulnerable young people and there needed to be a mechanism of transfer from Social Services to living independently. There were protocols in place but these needed to be built upon. Senior Officers from Social Services would be meeting Senior Officers from this Housing Team to discuss this issue and if it was felt that the issue was not resolved then a representative from Social Services would be invited to a Panel meeting. It was suggested that if a representative were to come they should be provided with a list of questions to enable them to answer the Panel queries fully.

- In the course of investigation it was found that some families were intentionally homeless as a result of an intentional act such as rent arrears or mortgage arrears. These would be offered as much advice as possible to enable them to either stay in their own home or find alternative forms of accommodation. There were also families who arrived in Breckland due to a local connection but had left homes from the area from which they had come. In certain cases Social Services would be informed of the family's situation as there were children involved.

Action By

- The two largest populations of migrant workers were the Portuguese and the Lithuanians, Latvians and Polish. Only a small proportion of social housing was granted to the migrant worker population. Both populations were culturally different; the Portuguese would often come with their wives and children and would stay in one area and the Lithuanians, Latvians and Polish would be single and were transient. It was often found that when a Portuguese family requested social housing this would not be offered as after investigations it would be found that they owned a house in Portugal.
- Temporary accommodation was a crucial tool in tackling homelessness. Although bed and breakfast accommodation was not ideal it was a vital part of avoiding homelessness. However, the Housing Team were making steps to change the nature of temporary accommodation by providing self contained units. Through working with the Peddars Way Housing Association there were 10 units at any one time spread across the district to house a homeless family until permanent residence could be found. John Room House would increase the number of good quality temporary accommodation units.
- A loan scheme for private rented accommodation had been introduced to help people access the private rented sector and this had been very successful. The scheme would be self funding with loans being paid back to the scheme.
- Each member of the Homeless Team Staff were given a budget of £200 which they could use to help pay for storage of furniture, rent arrears, bed and breakfast accommodation or anything which would help access housing.
- The Sanctuary Scheme had been successful in helping those who had been the victim of domestic violence to stay in their own homes by providing such things as re-enforced doors and alarm systems. It was presumed that this would be enacted once an injunction had been ordered against the perpetrator. It meant a family did not have to uproot to another area and gave peace of mind to the victim.
- Funding had been secured for the provision of a domestic violence refuge within Breckland. Although there were issues surrounding the planning application as the location of the refuge could not be divulged.
- The YMCA provided a furniture recycling scheme and were willing to pick-up furniture and re-distribute to those in need.
- A Youth Homelessness Prevention Forum had been established which had been successful. All partner agencies had been willing to participate in this forum.
- The text messaging service had been a great success and this was on-going and had now been expanded to text in different languages for the migrant population.

Action By

- The Housing Team were currently providing advice in Dereham and in Thetford and were investigating the possibility of expanding this service to the other market towns.
- A diversity strategy needed to be undertaken in relation to housing needs.
- Leeway were no longer undertaking the domestic violence monitoring and this was currently being undertaken on a county wide level. Leeway found it difficult to meet the demand that all agencies were placing on them for information.
- A re-structure in the Housing Team would be undertaken and a Principal Officer would be employed to assist the Homelessness Team to achieve their targets.
- There were three main budget which underpinned the Homelessness Strategy and these were the budget from Breckland, the budget from CLG and the Temporary Accommodation budget.

The Solo Lodgings Scheme was mainly for single men who did not fall into the vulnerable category and would be sleeping rough if a room could not be found for them. Although it was difficult to find people who were willing to provide a room in their houses.

The Housing Benefit Discretionary Fund was used when tenants were moving from one property to another and ensured that there was no rent arrears.

It was understood that Housing Benefit was allocated to Councils on the profile of the houses in the district and on what had been spent in the past. It was suggested that a member of staff from the Anglia Revenues Partnership Limited be invited to a future meeting to provide advice on housing benefit.

The Housing Team placed a bid for CLG funding this year and the amount received was based on which key indicators had been secured and how effective the Team had been. This year the funding had been increased by £10,000.

The Temporary Accommodation grant had been decreasing year on year as the Housing Team were placing more people in need in alternative temporary accommodation to bed and breakfast.

- With regard to Emergency Planning the financial responsibility for placing people in temporary accommodation following an event such as flooding would lie with the Emergency Planning Team. However, the Housing Team were available to provide any advice necessary.

Members suggested that with the recent flooding events in the country the state of Emergency Planning for Breckland should be a future item for discussion.

Action By

Members wished to thank the Strategic Housing Manager and the Housing Team for the report.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the annual review of the Homelessness Strategy Review action plan be noted.
- (2) a representative from the Anglia Revenues Partnership Limited be requested to attend a future meeting to discuss issues in relation to housing benefits.

36/07 WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer took Members through the work programme and meeting schedule, as detail in the report. The following changes to the work programme were noted:-

- PFI Review of the Leisure Centres – September 2007
- Impact of the Re-organisation on the new PCTs – September 2007

Members agreed that the Emergency Planning Team should be requested to present what plans were in place for emergencies such as flooding. It was suggested that the Scrutiny Commission may wish to discuss this issue although the Panel were willing to include this matter in their Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission be requested to add the issue of Emergency Planning either to their own Work Programme or to the Work Programme of Panel 3.

37/07 NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the future meetings of the Policy Development and Review Panel 3 would be as follows:-

Tuesday, 11 September 2007 at 10.00 am at Swaffham Assembly Rooms

Tuesday, 16 October 2007 at 9.30 am with a site visit to the Healthy Living Centre with the meeting commencing at 10.30 am at Town Council Chamber, Thetford

Tuesday, 28 November 2007 at 10.00 am at Elizabeth House, Dereham

The meeting closed at 12.05 pm

CHAIRMAN