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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 3

Held on Tuesday, 16 October 2007 at 10.15 am in
Thetford Town Council, King Street, Thetford

PRESENT

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

In Attendance

Anita Brennan	- Strategic Housing Manager
Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Sian Harland	- Senior Committee Officer
Stephen McGrath	- Principal Committee Officer
Martin Seymour	- Health Improvement Officer

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44/07 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45/07 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Mr F.J. Sharpe.

46/07 IMPACT OF THE REORGANISATION ON THE NEW PRIMARY CARE TRUSTS

Tara-Studholme Lyons, Assistant Director, Norfolk Primary Care Trust was in attendance to give Members a presentation on the impact of the reorganisation on the new Primary Care Trusts.

The Norfolk Primary Care Trust (PCT) was an amalgam of five Primary Care Trust covering six local authority areas.

According to National Guidance the functions of a Primary Care Trust was to:-

- engage with the local population to improve health and well-being.
- commission a comprehensive and equitable range of high quality, responsive and efficient services, within allocated resources, across all service sectors.

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- directly provide high quality responsive and efficient services where this gives best-value.

The priorities for the NHS for 2007/2008 would be to:

- gain financial stability.
- achieve a maximum of an 18 week wait milestone.
- reduce rate of healthcare acquired infections.
- reduce health inequalities and promote health and well-being.

In the context of the Norfolk PCT the priorities for 2007/2008 would be firstly to become financially stable in order to gain a license to operate which would allow the PCT to commission its own services. Three out of the five PCTs had a deficit and this, in its entirety, amounted to £40 million which had to be re-paid. It was noted that the way in which the PCT was funded was complicated but it was moving towards getting a larger proportion of funding equal to its demography.

The PCT would re-invigorate Partnerships and Joint Working to improve health and well-being; develop services responsive to local need; consider "health" in its widest sense and offer opportunities for public/patient engagement.

Progress in implementing Practice Based Commissioning (PBC) would be accelerated and GP surgeries were fully engaged and were embracing the commissioning agenda.

Obviously, managing demand and increasing efficiency were areas which were constantly under review.

There was a Provider Section of the PCT and this was kept separate from the Commissioning Section. Although the Provider Section would be able to bid for contracts to provide services.

There were six Assistant Directors: four worked with locality briefs; one working with mental health, children and the elderly and one working with elective care.

With regard to engaging with local stakeholders Members suggested that the Norfolk PCT could use Breckland Voice to target Breckland residents. Ten issues were sent out each year to every household within the Breckland district.

In relation to commissioning service the Norfolk PCT would be looking towards private companies such as Boots and Lloyds. This would be to improve primary care; such as improving weekend access to services. However, it was made clear that what was national guidance was not always appropriate for local needs.

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With regard to ensuring that Members were kept up-to-date with issues facing the Board it was noted that the Norfolk PCT Board minutes were available on-line on the Norfolk PCT website. However, for information at grass roots level there was a Clinical Executive Committee and a Committee for Practice Based Commissioning. It was not clear whether these papers were in the public domain. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would investigate what minutes regarding the work of the Norfolk PCT were available in the public domain and, if so, where they could be found.

Members discussed consultation processes and it was noted that although Patient Participation meetings were set-up they may not be the best consultative group. Using Breckland Voice would target a whole community.

Traditionally the PCTs had not been good at consultation and by working in partnership with other organisations this would improve comprehensive engagement by working with neighbourhoods which provided a community focus. Although the PCTs had mainly focussed on reactive health services it would start to focus on providing proactive services to improve health and wellbeing to prevent people from becoming unwell.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the information be noted.
- (2) the Scrutiny Officer inform Members before the next meeting of Panel 3 which of the Norfolk PCT minutes are in the public domain and where they can be found.

**Mark
Broughton**

47/07 HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN – MONITORING

The Strategic Housing Manager presented progress against the delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan and requested that Members agree the recommendation for future reporting.

Breckland had been awarded the Homelessness Regional Champion status as a result of the huge improvement the Team had made in relation to this service area. The award meant that Breckland's Housing Team would peer review other local authorities for improvement.

As well as the above Breckland's approach to Black, Minority and Ethnic Groups had been seen as one of the leaders following the work commissioned in relation to these Groups.

Members were informed that progress against the targets contained within the plan had been consistent since its adoption despite pressure on the team to respond to other national and local targets not contained within the plan itself. The Team had responded well to the challenges and the majority of targets had been met. Several targets were still in progress and Members were informed of the progress as follows:-

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Migration of Housing Service into Customer Contact Centre

It was believed that this would happen in the future as part of the Strategic Alliance discussions and proposed increase in the capacity of the Contact Centre, however no date had yet been set for migration. The benefits of migrating the housing service were thought to be that better signposting of clients with generic housing enquiries could take place, freeing up the professional officer time. Enquiries relating to homelessness would however still need to be put straight through to the Housing Team due to the vulnerable nature of the client group. The Council would want to avoid inadvertently operating a 'gatekeeping' approach to telephone calls which could deter those that needed the help most from seeking guidance.

Diversity/BME Issues

Breckland had led a Norfolk and Waveney Wide consultation on BME issues with a concentration on migrant worker issues. The results of that consultation could be viewed at the next meeting of Panel 3. An Action Plan would be developed from the results of that consultation and to raise the profile of migrant workers.

It was hoped that the consultation would dispel myths around BME Groups within Norfolk; such as the perception that there was a high number of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants within Norfolk. However, it was noted that the Government was looking to disperse these Groups around Britain to avoid a concentration within urban areas.

Affordable Housing Policies/Approach

Within Breckland developers were requested to provide 30% of affordable homes within a development. Officers working on the Local Development Framework (LDF) were working towards the maximisation of affordable housing within the District and it was intended to increase that percentage.

The Housing Market Assessment from July 2004 stated that the need in Breckland for social rented and low cost home ownership units was 600 per year. That had now increased to 900 per year and the Council needed to have a realistic approach and investigate ways to improve delivery year on year to provide that housing need.

Breckland would be bidding for government funding and had been successful in the past. At present Breckland did not have any internal budgets set aside for additional affordable housing provision as per other local authorities. The Housing Team were seeking to rectify this position with a bid to Star Chamber. It was also suggested that the Breckland's Policy not to transfer land to Registered Social Landlord at nil cost should be reviewed.

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Members were informed that although developments, which included an element of affordable housing, were coming through Development Control Committee the Council could not dictate when those properties would be built. It was hoped that 100 units would be built this year which was an increase of 20 compared to the previous year.

In response to the proportion of housing being built in towns as opposed to rural sites the Strategic Housing Manager stated that it was mainly windfall sites in urban areas coming forward at the moment as they were awaiting the adoption of the new local plan, but that in future allocated sites contained within the LDF would facilitate a better spread across the District. There needed to be a more strategic approach to providing housing by taking the commuted sum provided by a developer and spending 80% of that sum on the site but investing 20% in the rural parishes.

As the issue of affordable housing would be discussed in conjunction with the LDF in the near future the Panel requested a Plan of the District showing the housing need within each area. This information was contained within the Housing Needs Assessment and this could be broken down into sub-areas which would include the towns and the rural areas.

The Strategic Housing Manager added that in parallel to the LDF and the Housing Needs Assessment there would be a review of the Allocations Policy. This would be open to a wide consultation and it was hoped that housing people with a local connection would be high on the agenda.

Norfolk Wide Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy

Members were advised that Supporting People was a Social Services Fund which supported people in their own homes; £17million was distributed per year. Breckland Council sat on the Commissioning Board which decided how that funding was split between all the councils within Norfolk. Floating Support provided assistance for people to remain in their own homes avoiding the need to enter a care home.

Supporting People improved the quality of care people received as it allowed the customer to choose that support.

One success story was the Domestic Violence Refuge which had been funded from a grant awarded at a regional level. Attracting such grant funding was an on-going task for the Team.

Strategic Approach to the Provisions of Temporary Accommodation

When the Audit Commission first assessed the Housing Team there were a number of families and young people being housed in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation in Great Yarmouth and other locations outside of the Breckland District. This was considered to be unacceptable. Since the inspection, Girling House had been re-developed to provide temporary accommodation and there were plans to re-develop John Roome House to provide this type of accommodation over the coming year. The Team had been working with Bed and Breakfast providers

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within Breckland to temporarily house people within the District. To house people in the District meant that they could stay within their community which would enable them to help themselves more by keeping their jobs and not uprooting children to a different school etc.

A scheme to mediate between families and young people had been established, to try to heal relationships and allow young people to stay at home, in some cases this had meant the Council making payments to parents to keep their children at home. If the child was still evicted this still represented a saving to Council budgets.

The hostel in Thetford housed young people on a temporary basis and recently this has led to a spate of anti-social behaviour. This had demonstrated that the staffing cover was at present inappropriate and needs to be addressed as part of the redevelopment. There also needed to be a protocol with Social Services to provide guidance on which duties each would provide a service. It was felt that 16/17 year olds were still vulnerable children and as such needed to be supported. Housing was not always the solution for young adults and this issue needed to be tackled.

Further to the above for young people entering the hostel, work was in progress to introduce a system whereby they would have to sign-up to a behavioural contract and if their behaviour had systematically been considered anti-social or they had been involved in criminal activity they would not be given any further support from Breckland Council.

There were further problems in providing housing for young adults and this included Registered Social Landlords being unwilling to provide them with a tenancy and Breckland would not act as a guarantor.

As a way forward the Housing Team were bidding for National Lottery funding in order to provide supported accommodation for young people which would provide housing, life skills, access to education and then hopefully access to work and ultimately independence.

Members queried the affect of the government's plans to extend compulsory full-time education to 18 years old. In response the Strategic Housing Manager stated that within some households 16 year olds were required to work in order to provide the household with additional income. There would still be expulsions and families requiring the Council re-home their children when they became 16. The Housing Team had started to talk to school pupils regarding the role of the Council and what they can and can't expect the Council to do in the event of them becoming homeless. Specialist mediation firms had been used to provide assistance to families with young adults, but attendance at such schemes was not compulsory. The Government's Policy for dealing with families with such issues was likely to change and that if a family did not engage with the Council the Housing Application for the young person would not be accepted.

Members suggested that information regarding the housing of young people could be put in Breckland Voice. The Strategic Housing Manager stated that this had been done in previous editions.

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Private Sector Housing Strategy

There was work being undertaken around Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) to improve the delivery of the Council services.

The Warm Front Scheme had been implemented to help families facing fuel poverty.

Further work would be undertaken with the private sector to reduce homelessness figures.

The Grants and Loans Scheme would be reviewed to consider introducing a scheme to release equity to owner occupiers to enable them to fund their own repair scheme. Assistance would be given to those people who wished to downsize to a smaller property thus releasing larger houses onto the housing market.

All of these schemes would be collated into one document to provide easy access to information regarding private sector housing.

Further to the above the Strategic Housing Manager added that new legislation had been introduced on 1 April 2007 regarding deposits paid to Landlords by Tenants. Any deposits received must be paid to an Independent Body who would keep that deposit until the Tenant wished to vacate the property. If the Tenant had kept to the tenancy agreement the Landlord would then request that the deposit be released. If, however, the Landlord did not follow this protocol they would be taken to court to request release of the deposit.

Members stated that sometimes there was a problem with the tenancy agreement whereby the Tenant may not have kept the property in good order. In response the Strategic Housing Manager informed the Panel that as well as a Landlords' Pack the Team were working towards producing a Tenants' Pack.

RESOLVED that

- (1) progress against the Housing Improvement Plan and the matters arising be noted;
- (2) progress be reviewed against any outstanding items in April 2008; and
- (3) the Strategic Housing Manager provide all Members with a map showing the areas of housing need in accordance with the Housing Needs Assessment, preferably by 22 October 2007;
- (4) progress on young people's hostels and partnership working be made available;
- (5) progress on the Young Persons Homelessness Forum be made available; and

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- (6) priority be given to work being undertaken in relation to Section 106 agreements and how commuted sums could be spent in the future.

48/07 THETFORD HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE

Members had been given the opportunity to visit the Healthy Living Centre, Thetford. Whilst discussing the issues with their guide, Marilyn Boulton, they came to the following conclusions:

- The person responsible for the Travel Plan had only just been made aware that this Plan formed part of their duties. This person was the Business and Performance Manager and Members agreed that they should be invited to attend a meeting of the Panel, in 3 months, to provide further information regarding the monitoring of the Travel Plan.
- There was an urgent need for an ambulance turning bay to ensure that the Centre was being used to its optimum level. At present ambulances could not pick-up or drop-off as there was no safe access or egress for an ambulance.
- There was a need to provide local signage to the Centre and this needed to be subject to an urgent review as it was not clear to those visiting the Centre where it was situated. Members were informed that patients were coming in from well outside the district as Papworth Hospital held clinics at the Centre.

RECOMMEND that

- (1) the Overview and Scrutiny Commission support the need for a turning bay for ambulances at the Health Living Centre, Thetford; and
- (2) the Overview and Scrutiny Commission support the need to provide adequate signage on the highway for the Healthy Living Centre, Thetford.

49/07 WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer circulated the latest Work Programme for Policy Development and Review Panel 3.

The Panel considered dates of future meetings and agreed that the principle of rotating Panel meetings around the district continue. In relation to a meeting in January 2008 it was

RESOLVED that a meeting of Panel 3 be held on 11 January 2008 at 10.00 am in the Norfolk Room, Elizabeth House, Dereham.

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50/07 NEXT MEETING

That the next meeting of the Policy Development and Review Panel 3 be held on Tuesday, 27 November 2007 at 10.00 am in the Norfolk Room, Elizabeth House, Dereham.

The meeting closed at 12.45 pm

CHAIRMAN