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## BRECKLAND COUNCIL

### At a Meeting of the

### POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 3

Held on Tuesday, 27 November 2007 at 10.00 am in  
Norfolk Room, The Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham

#### 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 F.J. Sharpe
Mr P.J. Duigan	Mr M. Spencer
Mrs D.K.R. Irving	

#### In Attendance

Sian Harland	- Senior Committee Officer
Martin Seymour	- Health Improvement Officer
Darryl Smith	- Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Enabling)
Mike Wheatley	- Environmental Health Manager

#### Action By

#### **51/07 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **52/07 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

An apology for absence was received by Mr B. Rose.

#### **53/07 DRUG AND ALCOHOL ACTION TEAM (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Mr D. Harry of the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (NDAAT) was in attendance to present his report and answer Members' questions.

NDAAT was created in 1995 to tackle substance misuse within Norfolk and covered four key areas which were treatment, young people, availability and communities and criminal justice.

The National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy was re-focussed in 2007 with the publication of 'Safe, Sensible, Social – Next Steps for the Government's National Alcohol Strategy'. This Strategy emphasised the following:-

- A sharpened criminal justice response to alcohol-related crime and disorder.
- A review of the impact of alcohol-related harm upon the NHS; to inform targeted spending.

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- Expansion of access to information and support.
- Targeting underage sales.
- Sensible drinking guidance for parents and young people.
- Expansion of public information campaigns – ‘Know Your Limits’
- Enhanced role for CDRPs to tackle alcohol-related crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

The NDAAT would be focussing on tackling the high risk target group of 16-24 years old. Work would be undertaken with the 65+ group followed by the rest of the population.

Despite the lack of funding NDAAT had been able to progress the alcohol harm reduction agenda in Norfolk. Dr John Greenaway of the School of Political, Social and Internal Studies at the University of East Anglia had undertaken research into the policy implications of the Licensing Act 2003. An Alcohol Strategy Officer had been employed to focus on devising a Strategy based on Dr Greenaway’s research and then produce an Action Plan to reduce alcohol related harm in Norfolk. Research had been undertaken by the Eastern Regional Public Health Observatory into alcohol related harm in Norfolk. Work was ongoing to incorporate broader alcohol harm reduction into the Norfolk Local Area Agreements.

In response to Members queries Mr Harry provided the following information:-

- The de-regulation of the licensing hours would not have an effect on dependent drinkers but had provided an increased availability, especially in supermarkets. Alcoholic beverages were used as loss leaders, sold at cheaper prices and positioned in areas which enticed people to purchase alcohol. This increase in availability may have an impact on health in the longer term if people were drinking more. If sales were restricted and the price of alcohol increased people may drink less. The range of alcoholic drinks had diversified over the years; this had been to re-engage the public and entice them back to the public houses. This campaign had been successful and there was the danger that young people would carry on drinking heavily well into their adulthood.
- With regard to young people, especially young teenagers, there was issue with parents who may normalise the social attitude towards drink. There was an education programme for schools which outlined the dangers of drinking alcohol. Further to this there was a need to ensure that treatment was available for young people.

Members felt that parents needed to take a greater responsibility for children under 18. The availability of alcohol did not help the situation and distributors should not be able to sell alcohol after 8.00 pm.

- At the point of sale there needed to be information relating to the units of alcohol within an alcoholic drink. The safe levels each day were 2-3 units for women and 3-4 units for men. Although the units from drink to drink could differ quite dramatically.

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- With regard to the price of soft drinks within public houses and nightclubs the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) had been introducing the Nightsafe scheme throughout Norfolk. The scheme would engage with public houses and nightclubs and would encourage selling non-alcoholic drinks at a cheaper price. The scheme worked toward making the night-time economy safe by reducing crime and disorder through engaging landlords and late night food establishments.
- The Licensing Policy should be encouraging a more proactive approach though encouraging the sale of non-alcoholic substitutes. The fabric of a bar and club should be investigated to ensure that there were places to sit down and the heating was not turned-up, which may encourage people to drink more. With regard to planning when developing an urban area there should be regard to non-alcoholic based social activities to attract families back into the night-time economy.
- Issues which could clearly be tackled at a local level such as the price of non-alcoholic drinks; engage with distributors; education in schools; sensible drinking messages. There was engagement with GPs who did not have to ask whether a person was drinking too much but should be encouraged to ask the alcohol question. With regard to the over 65s it was well known that this age group could be isolated, depressed and maybe self medicating by using alcohol. However, there was a need to tackle national drivers which needed to go forward.

The NDAAT would be engaging with the local media together with the CDRP to send out a message over the Christmas period warning of the dangers of drinking to excess.

Members felt that in order to assess the level of alcohol related problems in Breckland a form should be made available through 'Voice' requesting that the public state where they lived and whether they experienced problems with alcohol related anti-social behaviour. The form should include the type of anti-social behaviour which was occurring. It was understood that the perception of anti-social behaviour was different from one person to another. A map of the 'hot spots' for alcohol related anti-social behaviour within the District could then be compiled.

The Chairman thanked Mr Harry for a thorough report and for bringing the issues to the attention of the Panel.

**RECOMMEND** that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission recommend to Cabinet the insertion of a form for all Breckland residents to complete through 'Voice' requesting them to give their location and whether they suffered from alcohol related anti-social behaviour and include the type of anti-social behaviour which was occurring.

**54/07 HOUSING BENEFITS – ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP  
(AGENDA ITEM 7)**

Mrs S. Wilcox, Benefit Team Leader, and Ms K. Jackson, Benefit Team Leader of the Anglia Revenues Benefits Partnership gave a brief overview of Housing Benefit and Discretionary Housing Benefit.

Housing Benefit was a means tested social security funded benefit which was administered by the Local Authority. It was targeted at people on benefits and those on low income. Other factors were taken into account such as disability, carers, children and age. Claims for Housing Benefit could be taken through the job centre or through other benefit agencies.

The rates of the housing benefit were governed by local factors such as the rate of rents within an area and whether the claimant had children which would require a larger property. There would be new changes in legislation in April regarding Housing Benefit and Members agreed that a presentation on those changes should be given to Policy Development and Review Panel 3.

Single parent families would be viewed the same as any other family unit although if a family was on income support they would automatically be entitled to the full amount of housing benefit.

The Government denoted that a single person over the age of 25 could live on £59.15 per week and for every £10 above that rate the Government stated that a person could pay £6.50 towards the cost of their rent. Those levels were even lower for a person under the age of 25.

Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) worked closely with other agencies and regular liaison meetings were held. These had been instrumental in preventing homelessness through making customers aware of the Discretionary Housing Benefit fund (DHP). The DHP had been existence since 2001 and was funded by the Government to give financial aid to those struggling financially to help with housing benefit and council tax payments. Payments would never exceed a financial year and the fund was to help with short-term difficulties. The fund was means tested and the claimant would not re-pay the money they had received.

At present the claimant would decide whether the housing benefit was paid directly to the landlord or to themselves. However, from April all housing benefit would be paid directly to the claimant. With regard to vulnerable people there would still be an ability to pay housing benefit direct to the landlord.

The government currently provided £28,029.00 in grant funding for DHP and the ARP were able to pay two and half times that amount to claimants. Anything above £28,029.00 was paid from the Council's budget and at present £46,083.13 had been paid out. These payments had prevented homelessness cases which would have cost the Authority more in the longer term.

**Action By**

Members were advised that any payment from the Child Support Agency was not an additional income as this would be taken into consideration before any Income Support was awarded. With regards to people who did not wish to declare the name of the parent when claiming; their Income Support may be reduced. However, there was discretion when a claimant did not wish to disclose the name of the parent as they may have been abusive.

**Mark  
Broughton**

**RESOLVED** that

- (1) the information be noted; and
- (2) a presentation be given to Policy Development and Review Panel 3 once the new legislation governing Housing Benefit came into force after April.

**55/07 PRESENTATION ON THE FINDINGS OF THE BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC (BME) RESEARCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BME STRATEGY FOR HOUSING (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Principal Housing Officer – Strategy and Enabling gave Members a presentation on the findings of Fordham Research who had been commissioned, by Breckland and funded by 23 organisations, to produce a report analysing the housing and support needs of Norfolk and Waveney’s Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. This was in the context of the Government’s recognition that housing could play a significant role in enhancing race equality and community cohesion. The aim of the study was to improve understanding of BME communities’ housing circumstances and support needs and better inform BME strategies and policies created by local councils and organisations.

To achieve this aim the study drew on a number of sources including:-

- A review of secondary data including the Census and existing research.
- Stakeholder consultation with organisations working with BME communities in the study area.
- Survey of BME residents conducted via face-to-face interviews.

There was no universally accepted definition of a person’s ethnicity or ethnic background; it was therefore good practice to allow individuals to self-identify. National Census categories were used to define groups, including those who identified as White Irish or White Other.

Complications existed over the over-simplified White Other groups as this was thought to predominantly include recent migrants to the UK from Eastern Europe. Further analysis had therefore been conducted looking at Nationalities to ensure coverage. Migrant workers were defined as individuals who had moved to the UK within the past five years to find or take-up work. The nationalities of those White Others included Portuguese, Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Latvian, Cypriot, Slovakian, Russian, Brazilian, Estonian, Czech and Ukranian.

**Action By**

However, it was understood that the percentages of the BME groups could be misleading as they did not take into account asylum seekers. It was further noted that the numbers of migrant workers may fluctuate as they may return home or seek work in other areas.

There were 62 different languages spoken in Norfolk and Waveney; although 85.4% of the BME population could speak English with 81.1% being able to read English.

With regard to housing circumstances 33% lived in flats/maisonettes; 57% lived in houses; 10% living in temporary structures, such as caravans and 80% of the accommodation was shared with non-family members. The majority of the sample had lived in their accommodation more than a year with the most mobility within the White Other category. Within that category 75% of those surveyed indicated that the accommodation was their main home with 66% indicated it was not their main home. Most of this category rented their housing through the private sector with only 3% being housed through social landlords.

To conclude the report found that whilst there were no housing needs identified, specific to a BME group, which were not relevant to the general population most BME groups were unaware that information and services were available. There was an element of feeling discriminated against when accessing services and most information was obtained through informal networks. In order to move forward an Action Plan would be produced which looked at the areas for improvement and the best practice to tackle those areas. Leaflets would be produced on a county wide basis to inform those groups of the services available. Whilst those leaflets would not be produced in 62 languages there would be information available in the predominant language of an area.

In answer to comments made by Members the Principal Housing Officer gave the following responses:-

- With regard to American serviceman they would be they would be picked-up by other categories; although it was understood that they did not need to pay Council Tax. It was further noted that there was a hidden population who were not voting and were using services such as education and GP surgeries.
- With the EU opening markets within Britain this has had led to an influx of migrant workers; not just in Breckland but across Britain. The Council needed to ensure that it was providing services to all groups to ensure equality within the District.
- Individuals and families were contacted by targeting areas where a large number of migrant workers were residing and through the Council's Community Liaison Officer.
- The cost of providing services to a person from a BME group was no different unless there was a translation cost. However, translation costs could be shared across the districts; especially when generic information had been translated.

**Action By**

- Members felt that minority groups may not take-up social housing as they may have fears of being housed away from their network of friends and families. Members were informed that it was not known why minority groups chose private rented accommodation; although most people wanted to live in their own communities.
- There were mechanisms for dealing with Houses in Multiple Occupations. A licensing scheme was already targeting HMOs to ensure they were fit for purposes.
- If Members were aware of 'hot bedding', where a number of beds would be installed in a house and would be shared on a rota basis, they should contact the housing team to enable them to investigate.
- With regard to the 135 houses currently being built in Swaffham these would be allocated to those on the housing register. Part of the information which would be provided to BME groups would relate to the housing register and how they could be added if they so wished.

Members wished to note the findings of the report which concluded that the housing needs of BME groups were no different to that of the general population. However, better communications of the services on offer would be circulated through a Norfolk wide initiative. As a significant element of the White Other population were transient there needed to be regular monitoring of BME figures to ensure that communities were sufficiently resourced to deal with their populations.

Members were informed that the complete final report would be provided on the website together with the slides.

**RESOLVED** that

- (1) the findings of the Housing Support Needs of Black Minority Ethnic Communities in Norfolk and Waveney be noted; and
- (2) the complete final report together with the presentation slides be made available on the website.

**Sian Harland**

**RECOMMEND** that regular monitoring of the BME populations be undertaken in order to ensure that communities were sufficiently resourced to deal with their population.

**Darryl Smith**

**56/07 BVPI 166 – PEST CONTROL, LICENSING & PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The Head of Environmental Health informed Members that BVPI 166 was made up of a list of ten questions about the recording and reporting procedures that covered some of the statutory functions and best practices of the services. In Breckland only the Environmental Health aspects needed to be redressed as Trading Standards regulatory responsibilities fell to the County Council.

**Action By**

Each of the ten questions were made-up of sub questions and should any one services covered within the BVPI not score the final score would be zero. The BVPI would not reflect performance outputs; it was based on procedures, consultations and paper evidence.

The evidence produced by Environmental Health had been checked and verified by internal audit. It was decided that one of the eight sub-questions of question one was not supported by sufficient evidence. This part of question one was worth 0.125 of a mark giving a total score of 9.78%. During this year the team were working to improve the supporting documentation across all areas and work towards achieving 100% score before March 2008.

All agencies were moving to work together to reduce the impact of visits and documentation on businesses. It was hoped that in the future one single regulatory visitation would be made to businesses which would encompass the rules and regulations of all agencies.

Members noted the information and requested that further information regarding the multi-agency work be provided at a later date.

**RESOLVED** that

- (1) the report be noted
- (2) further information regarding multi-agency working be provided at a later date.

**Mike  
Wheatley,  
Mark  
Broughton**

**57/07 EMERGENCY PLANNING (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The Head of Environmental Health informed Members that the Council had a statutory duty to produce an Emergency Response Plan; test that plan and prepare communities for civil disasters.

The response to any emergency, irrespective of the cause (flooding, power failure, explosion etc) for this Council was very similar. The 'blue light' services, with the help of Environmental Health Practitioners advice, deal with the immediate issues of threats to life and property, crime prevention and crime scenes. The Council supported by providing immediate care to the people, make safe the environment and the return of the economy and neighbourhood back to normality.

The most important common theme to all emergencies was the need to evacuate and care for people. In Breckland there were 14 Rest Centres each with a plan dedicated to the specific and local community contacts. These would be staffed by Breckland officers with a network of volunteers to aid the officers. A box was provided in all nominated Rest Centres which contained details of the emergency plan for that Centre. The volunteers were normally from the Town and Parish Council and the Clerk should be aware of the names of those individuals. The emergency services would be informed of which Rest Centres were being used as soon as they were operational to enable them to direct evacuees to those Centres.

**Action By**

The format and content of the Emergency Response Plan were shared by all Councils across Norfolk to enable a common approach to be used in line with the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act. A good example of inter-Council operational support was the provision of Breckland staff to run a Rest Centre in Gorleston to care for evacuees during the November coastal flooding.

There was an ICT Disaster Recovery Plan in place and a Business Continuity Plan was currently being produced. Members would be requested to prioritise the services which would be needed during and after an emergency and these would be built-in to the Business Continuity Plan.

A self-help guide for all Breckland residents had been produced which provided information on how to prepare for an emergency.

With regard to the flooding in November the Chairman stated that the Environment Agency website had been down. In response the Head of Environmental Health stated that web access would form part of the emergency response plan. The Chairman stated that he had written to the Environment Agency regarding this issue and was awaiting a response.

Members queried the response to the outbreak of avian bird flu and requested that the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) attend a future meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 3 to provide information on their plan for dealing with emergencies such as avian bird flu.

**RESOLVED** that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs be requested to attend a future meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 3 to provide information on their plans for dealing with avian bird flu.

**Mark  
Broughton**

**58/07 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

The Work Programme was noted.

**59/07 FUTURE MEETINGS (AGENDA ITEM 12)**

The next meeting of Policy Development and Review Panel 3 would be held on 11 January 2008 at 10.00 am in the Norfolk Room, Elizabeth House, Dereham.

The dates for February, March and April would be circulated once agreed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 12.55 pm

CHAIRMAN