

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 3

**Held on Tuesday, 29 July 2008 at 10.00 am in
The Norfolk Room, Conference Suite, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

PRESENT

Mrs S.R. Howard-Alpe (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)	Mrs D.K.R. Irving
Mr G.P. Balaam	Mr R. Kemp
Mr P.J. Duigan	Mr J.P. Labouchere

In Attendance

Anita Brennan	- Strategic Housing Manager
Julie Britton	- Senior Member Services Officer
Mark Broughton	- Member Development and Scrutiny Officer
Riana Rudland	- PFI Monitoring Officer
Mike Wheatley	- Environmental Health Manager

23/08 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following typographical amendments:

Housing Benefits – Anglia Revenues Partnership (Minute No. 19/08)

Second paragraph – 6th sentence – to read: “landlords must still be paid directly by the Councils, where there was discretion to do so”.

Eighth paragraph – 3rd sentence – to read: “The real effect”.

24/08 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Messrs R Kybird, B Rose and F Sharpe.

**25/08 HOUSING PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN -
MONITORING REPORT JULY 2008 (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

The Strategic Housing Manager presented the report, which set out progress against the delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan.

The report outlined the background to the development of the Housing Improvement Plan in response to the Audit Commission’s inspection report in May 2005. The recommendations contained in the Improvement Plan formed the basis of the Council’s Annual Delivery Plan and the Strategic Housing Service Plan for 2007/08 and 2008/09. These documents in turn influenced the staff appraisal process and the development of statutory documents, such as the housing and homelessness strategies.

Progress against the targets contained in the Plan had been consistent

Action By

Action By

since its adoption, despite pressure on the team to respond to other national and local targets not contained within the Improvement Plan itself.

The majority of targets had been met. The main recommendation outstanding for the Housing Team was a comprehensive review of the Council's private sector policies on empty properties and fuel poverty and the development of a new Private Sector Housing Strategy. Although work was well under way on these recommendations, the completion had been delayed somewhat by the Department of Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) response to Breckland's request for a district wide licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupancies (HMO).

Referring to the HMO scheme, the Strategic Housing Manager explained that the DCLG had requested that Breckland Council should concentrate on towns only, in particular, Thetford. Although this approach had not been supported by the Housing Team, further consultation would take place with all Town Councils. A policy would then be implemented on the market towns following which the Housing Team would lobby for a full district wide licensing scheme. This scheme would allow the Council to licence all HMO landlords. Landlords that failed to abide by this scheme could be fined an amount of £20K.

The Chairman was concerned about the Government not backing such a scheme. Another Member asked whether the Government's response to this scheme had been published. The Strategic Housing Manager advised that no formal written response had been received; however, she had been contacted by the DCLG to discuss the Council's desire to adopt such a scheme and to assess how the approach on market towns could be developed.

Referring to fuel poverty this policy would be brought back to the Panel in due course and would cover matters such as energy efficiency and budgeting etc. A Member was very concerned about this matter as he was aware that fuel costs would increase to £1200 for an average Band D property; for Norfolk that equated to more than 10% of an average household's income. He felt that the figures should be modified for Norfolk and that the Council should be facing the prospective problems sooner rather than later. The Strategic Housing Manager agreed with the aforementioned comments but highlighted that there were already a number of schemes in operation which were explained. One of the schemes involved working with the Council's RSL's partners to wield their purchase powers to buy fuel from suppliers in bulk.

A recommendation to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission was proposed to recommend to Cabinet that a policy should be put in place to address the poverty problems that would occur in the forthcoming months. The Strategic Housing Manager agreed that there would be difficult times ahead but explained that a Financial Inclusion Policy had already been included on the Risk Register that educated residents on how they used their money, such as prioritising debts etc. Articles of this nature would also be placed in future editions of Breckland Voice. She further agreed, however, that there was an important role for Breckland Council to play, to advise all people, not just the elderly, about planning for the winter ahead.

Action By

The Choice Base Lettings Scheme was scheduled on the agenda for the meeting scheduled for 16 September 2008.

There remained a number of targets that were influenced by corporate rather than strategic housing issues/timescales and Members were requested to agree to monitor progress against these as a part of Housing Strategy 2008-2012 currently in development. These were:

- a) Migration of Housing Service into Customer Contact Centre
- b) Affordable Housing Policies/approach

Referring to issue (a) above, Members were informed that no timetable had been set at present for this to be moved forward. A Member felt that all contact centre staff must be well trained before the migration took place. The Strategic Housing Manager advised that she was very conscious of the appropriate advice that must be provided.

RECOMMEND that

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Commission recommend to Cabinet that a policy be put in place to address the poverty problems that would occur in the forthcoming months; and
- 2) Breckland Council be seen to support local people by actively raising awareness of fuel poverty in the District by placing articles on this matter in future editions of Breckland Voice.

**Elaine
Wilkes/
Mark
Broughton/
Anita
Brennan/
Robert
Leigh**

26/08 LEISURE PFI UPDATE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

The PFI Monitoring and Sports Development Officer presented the report which provided Members with an update and overview of the PFI Leisure contract and the performance of Dereham Leisure and Breckland Leisure Centres.

The first 12 months of operation of the centres had proved an exciting and challenging time for the operator Parkwood Leisure, who had worked hard to drive up participation and memberships while coping with some ongoing defects resulting from the building phase. The key challenges during this period had related to the tiles in the learner pool at Dereham and the MUGA fencing at Thetford, both of which had now been rectified with pleasing outcomes.

The overall usage of the Leisure Centres had increased dramatically, particularly for Dereham. Dereham Leisure Centre had achieved Quest accreditation, the leisure industry quality award scheme for leisure management, with an excellent first time score of 72%. This score had put Dereham in the "commended" category. Breckland Leisure Centre was currently undergoing Quest.

The PFI Monitoring and Sports Development Officer explained the rigorous assessment process. Quest Approval status lasted for two years, and was supplemented by an additional maintenance visit, and mystery visit. This mandatory stage ensured that quality of service delivery was maintained and/or continuously improved in line with the Quest standards. In response to a question about who carried out these

Action By

inspections, it was confirmed that QLM, an independent organisation, was responsible for this work and Parkwood paid for the privilege of being inspected. The Chairman asked for the results of Breckland Leisure Centre to be emailed to Panel Members.

Both facilities had also gained the environmental management standard ISO14001 in recognition of the environmental systems in place.

An additional investment of £35k by Parkwood Leisure had been made to improve the MUGA netting and the café area in Thetford. A high level catch net had been installed on the MUGA to limit the number of balls deflecting into the adjoining properties. This had greatly improved the relationship with these residents. Investment into the catering facilities had resulted in a brand new front counter and serving area, a new store room, kitchen and state of the art catering equipment. A number of user satisfaction surveys had also been undertaken during the first year of operation covering a range of service areas that had resulted in the menu being changed at Thetford. Another area of improvement that had been identified was signposting. Parkwood had been in discussions with Norfolk County Council about better signage being installed for the Thetford Leisure Centre. As for Dereham, Parkwood was looking at installing a large sign outside which for the moment it lacked.

There had been a dramatic increase in swimming lessons both in Dereham and in Thetford. A table showing comparative figures for both centres had been included in the report. The PFI Monitoring and Sports Development Officer said that it was evident that the level of increase was due to Parkwood branding.

The PFI Monitoring and Sports Development Officer highlighted on-going issues for both Centres that had or would be rectified.

Appendix 1 and 2 attached to the report showed membership maps for each of the centres identifying where the users lived. The data had been collected through direct debit payments and the Leisure Card. The maps highlighted the fact that people were travelling from all over the District which was a great achievement for Parkwood.

A Member asked about the free swimming lessons that had been suggested by the Government. The Government's intention was to fund councils to provide free swimming for some groups, as a first step towards an aspiration to provide free swimming for everyone by 2012. Firm conclusions should have been reached by the end of July so that councils were able to take account of the money in their budgets for next year. Members were informed that no conclusions had been reached as yet; however, as Breckland Leisure Centres were operated via a management agreement, the monies would have to be passed to Parkwood making it very difficult to monitor and therefore be unsustainable. There would be a draft report on this matter in due course. The PFI Monitoring and Sports Development Officer said that it was unfortunate that the Government had gone public on this without consultation with authorities. Other questions related to membership discounts and whether a sauna was being installed at the Dereham Centre. Members were informed that special circumstances were taken into account in giving discounts. As far as a sauna being installed was concerned, that element had been taken out of the PFI contract as the

sauna and steam bath at Thetford had caused so many maintenance problems in the past, one of which, as mentioned earlier, would not be rectified until September.

The Panel felt that it was very important to ensure that the press was kept informed of the dramatic increase in swimming activities for both Centres, which was contrary to the current national trend.

It was noted that the next monitoring report would be made to the Panel at its January meeting and thereafter every six months.

Members thanked the PFI Monitoring and Sports Development Officer for an excellent report.

RESOLVED that the Panel notes the report and the successful results in usage, which were against the national trend and the results of Thetford Leisure Centre for Quest be emailed to Panel Members in due course.

Action By

**Riana
Rudland**

27/08 PROVISION OF DOG AND PEST CONTROL SERVICE (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The Head of Environmental Health provided Members with the background to this report which was to review the future provision of the Dog Warden and Pest Control Services.

The Dog Warden report had been to Cabinet on 22 July where an option had been agreed to go forward to Council for a decision.

The Pest Control options would be going to the next Cabinet meeting on 9th September.

In the interim both services were meeting statutory deadlines.

Following a number of questions, the report was noted.

28/08 BRECKLAND HEALTH IMPROVEMENT WORK PROGRAMME/SMOKE FREE COMPLIANCE (AGENDA ITEM 9)

Members were informed that this report would be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for 16 September 2008.

29/08 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 10)

The Member Development and Scrutiny Officer circulated a revised work programme. The following items had been programmed for the next meeting:

- Housing Waiting List – Allocations Policy & CBL
- Breckland Health Improvement Work Programme
- Monitoring of Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
- Smoke Free Compliance
- GP Led Health Centres in Rural Areas (Poly Clinics)

This full Agenda would include time slots.

30/08 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 11)

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 16 September 2008 were noted.

Action By

All to note

The meeting closed at 11.35 am

CHAIRMAN