

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 3**

**Held on Tuesday, 19 February 2008 at 10.00 am in  
Council Chamber, King's House, Thetford**

**PRESENT**

|                                      |                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Mr R.G. Kybird (Chairman)            | Mr J.P. Labouchere |
| 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      |
| Mrs D.K.R. Irving                    |                    |

**Also Present**

Lady Fisher

**In Attendance**

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Martin Seymour | - Health Improvement Manager                        |
| Darryl Smith   | - Principal Housing Officer (Strategy and Enabling) |
| Mark Broughton | - Scrutiny Officer                                  |
| Elaine Wilkes  | - Senior Committee Officer                          |

**1/08 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**2/08 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Mr. R. Kemp due to other commitments.

**3/08 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Lady Fisher declared a personal interest in relation to reference to the YMCA in agenda item 6, as she was a member of the YMCA Board.

**4/08 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

- Lady Fisher – Executive Member for Environment and Housing.

**5/08 THETFORD HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE - GREEN TRAVEL PLAN MONITORING (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Nicola Reeve and Helen Richter from the Thetford Healthy Living Centre were in attendance for this item.

The Chairman reminded members that this item was in response to concerns raised at previous meetings about car parking at the Healthy Living Centre.

Miss Reeve presented the Travel Plan Monitoring Report for the Thetford

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Community Healthy Living Centre, which set out the results of the annual travel survey conducted over a two-week period during January 2008, a copy of which had been circulated to members prior to the meeting.

It was proposed to conduct a further staff travel survey in the summer to see whether there was any evident seasonal variation in the results.

It was explained that this was a multi-user facility, with a number of staff having peripatetic jobs and therefore needing their cars for work.

It was noted that the Centre was not yet fully occupied, so it was likely that there would be more pressure on car parking spaces in the future. However, it was explained that current parking area attached to the Centre was focused on patient use and alternative parking provision for staff was being investigated.

The Travel Plan sought to address some of these issues, for example through the use of a car sharing scheme for staff and the provision of a staff bicycle for local visits.

Pedestrian access would be further improved by a proposed footpath link to the rail station. Plans were also in hand to provide for an ambulance turning bay.

Signage remained an issue and the Centre had been unable to secure the agreement of County Highways on the need for more signage.

During the discussion, members remained concerned about the issue of signage and inadequate car parking provision at the Centre. Members considered that these problems, including the omission of an ambulance turning bay, were serious failures in the design and planning process of the Centre.

Public transport was also an issue of concern, as there was currently no bus service to the Centre as originally understood to have been part of the proposals for the Centre. However, it was noted from the travel survey results that only a small percentage of visitors to the Centre had indicated they would be prepared to consider using public transport.

**RECOMMEND** that

- (1) the Overview and Scrutiny Commission notes that the parking levels envisaged in the planning process are wholly inadequate for the Centre use, mainly affected by the lack of public transport and the location of the Centre and the fact that there is no user acceptance of the goals of the Green Travel Plan; and
- (2) County Planning representatives and the relevant County Executive Member be asked to attend a future meeting to review the planning process and the issues of signage and bus services to the Centre.

6/08 **HOUSING WAITING LIST - ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND CHOICE BASED LETTINGS (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

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The Principal Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer gave a presentation on forthcoming changes to the Breckland Housing Register consequent upon the move to a Choice Based Lettings system.

The current Housing Register contract with ARPT came into operation in July 2007, with a commitment to move to a Choice Based Lettings Scheme by December 2008 (in advance of the Government target of December 2010). There was also a commitment to review the allocations policy and move to a common policy of allocating properties with all affordable housing providers.

There were presently 3071 applicants on the Register, which was an open register operating on a points system, with a weighting towards homelessness.

A number of improvements had been identified in respect of the allocations policy. These included:

- Priority for those who currently live within the District and have a long local connection. It was proposed to achieve this through a points system based on length of residence.
- Suspensions from the Register for those who have rent arrears (i.e. those in the main who intentionally withhold rent payments) or are anti-social residents. There would be a need to establish an appeals process for this policy.
- Improving the use of the housing stock by prioritising moves to reduce under-occupation. This would be achieved through the use of an increased points system for such applications.

Other areas for improvement would come from: the new legislation (awaited from the Government) on allocations, which would shape the move towards Choice Based Lettings; opportunities to learn from new schemes already being operated by other key partners; and changes to enhance the current system in preparation for the new scheme.

The proposed timetable provided for consultation with members, key stakeholders and focus groups, waiting list applicants and the public on the proposals over the next three months, with recommendations being reported through the full Committee processes during September 2008, for implementation in December.

Key focus groups would include young people, hard to reach groups, the elderly, those with mental health problems and disabled people.

Arising on a question about the make-up of the present Register, the Principal Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer undertook to include a breakdown of the list, which would show the number of applicants from outside the District, with the next monitoring report to the Panel. However, it was noted that there was often a local connection attached to applicants wishing to move into the District, some of whom were returning for various reasons after moving away.

It was also noted that people could be multi-registered with other authorities but there were no regional or local statistics available on this at present but would rather be a national statistics issue.

It was important to be mindful, however, that housing need was not purely defined by the Housing Register. Housing need covered wider circumstances and this was why there was a necessity to conduct regular Housing Need Surveys to assess the broader picture, which included information on the provision and needs of private as well as social housing.

During discussion, members expressed interest in the opportunity to attend as observers any fact finding visits to other authorities or conferences.

So far as the reference to the need to establish an appeals process in regard to the proposed policy for suspension of applicants from the Register was concerned, it was suggested the officers should investigate how that requirement might be integrated with the existing Appeals Committee. There would also be a need to provide training for all members as the new scheme developed so that they were sufficiently informed to be able to assist their constituents.

The Executive Member for Environment and Housing expressed the wish to have feedback on the proposed use of new advertising and publicity methods under the new scheme, the types of tenancies/leases and terms that would be on offer and on the type of landlords (including accredited landlord schemes) other than Registered Social Landlords that would be available under the new scheme.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted and a further update be reported to the Panel for its meeting on 13 May 2008 as part of the continuing consultation process.

**7/08 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY REVIEW ACTION PLAN - 6 MONTHLY MONITORING REPORT (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Principal Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer presented the report and explained the current position on progress on the delivery of the Homelessness Strategy Review Action Plan.

The following highlights from the report were noted:

- The new staff structure was continuing to be bedded in.
- A YMCA supported lodging scheme and a night-stop emergency housing scheme for young people were being developed.
- Proposals were in hand for the development of a hostel for young people. Funding bids had been submitted for this and results were awaited.
- The Rent and Deposit Loan Scheme as part of the work on prevention of homelessness had proved to be successful. There were high administration resources associated with this, however, and ways of reducing these costs were being explored.
- Plans were progressing for the redevelopment of John Room House in Thetford.
- Proposals for a family support centre were being discussed. Only one site had been identified for this use to date and the suitability of the site for such development was under investigation. There was the risk that match funding for this scheme might be lost if it was not able to proceed in time.

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**Darryl Smith**

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- A mobile rural advice service was about to be launched.

During discussion, it was noted that the homeless figures were much the same as for last year. There was slower movement of properties available for re-housing which was felt to be consequent on the current housing market and its impact on the affordable housing market.

Performance monitoring figures would be reported to the next meeting and it was agreed these should include some comparison statistics with neighbouring authorities.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted and, in particular, that it be noted that demand for homeless housing was expected to continue due to the economic climate and that the slow down in the housing market is putting pressure on the availability of affordable housing.

#### **8/08 HEALTH IMPROVEMENT WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

The Health Improvement Manager attended for this item and presented an update on the Breckland Health and Well-being Partnership and on progress of the Action Plan.

In noting progress on items in the Action Plan, discussion took place on the work area for combating obesity. In response to a question about whether diabetes was linked to obesity, it was confirmed that there was a link. A recent local study, however, indicated a surprising contradiction of this in relation to obesity in young people living in rural areas. Members thought that some of the reasons for this could be related to issues of lack of accessibility to sports and other physical activity facilities, lack of street lighting (reducing outdoor activity in winter months), lack of neighbouring friends in the age group (discouraging outdoor activity) and parents driving their children to school.

Some remedies to these issues suggested by members included introducing car exclusion zones around schools, walking school buses and promoting active travel plans for schools. This was suggested as a suitable topic for a presentation to the next Town and Parish Council Forum.

The Panel also discussed the desirability of measuring achievements from the Action Plan which could be a useful tool in furthering the promotion of healthy living. It was acknowledged that it was difficult to achieve a baseline against which to measure performance in the areas contained within the Action Plan and some areas would require some detailed research. Nonetheless, members felt that the Council should look to see what indices were available.

Particular highlights from the report were:

- Reducing Smoking – An evaluation to be undertaken of the introduction of the smoke-free legislation in Breckland through a survey of over 120 businesses across the District representing the catering and hospitality sectors, food production, small businesses on industrial estates, the transport and taxi sectors. The results of the survey would be available at the end of April 2008.
- The continued growth and success of the walking for health

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scheme. A new partnership had commenced with Active Norfolk and Lloyds Pharmacy to deliver the scheme under the Fit Together programme. The Health Improvement Officer was asked to keep Town Councils informed about this programme.

- The Breckland Community Sports Network delivery plan had been produced and submitted to Sport England for approval.
- The notable success of the sexual health campaign in Thetford to reduce teenage pregnancy rates.
- Initial findings from an evaluation of the Joy of Food pilot project in Thetford showed marginal improvements in people's diet on completion of the programme but qualitative data collected to date showed significant improvements in people's knowledge and confidence, particularly in respect of feeding young children. It was now proposed to roll-out the next phase of the programme across Norfolk, which would involve the training and deployment of a number of community food workers across the County.

The Health Improvement Manager advised the Panel on forthcoming changes to the structure and function of the Norfolk Primary Care Trust. He explained that he was employed by the PCT and had worked within Breckland Council to develop partnerships and deliver joint health improvement initiatives. The proposed structural and function changes in the PCT reflected a change towards a more thematic-based role. Changes included the role of the Health Improvement Manager expanding to take on responsibilities for aspects of public health and health improvement across the PCT area, with a consequently reduced focus on Breckland. However, he would continue to represent the PCT on the Breckland Local Strategic Partnership, to support the development of the Health and Well-being Partnership and the delivery of its Action Plan. The Health Improvement Manager would also continue to report to this Panel. In addition, the PCT was shortly to appoint further Health Improvement Practitioners to work in the areas of health inequalities, partnership for health and workplace health. It was envisaged that some of their work would be in the Breckland area and that capacity to deliver health improvement across Breckland would be enhanced by these changes.

**RESOLVED** that

- (1) the report be noted and in particular the changes to the structure of the Norfolk PCT as highlighted above;
- (2) the Health Improvement Manager be asked to report back to a future meeting on what indices are available to enable the results from the Action Plan to be measured and on how these might be used towards further health promotion.

**Martin  
Seymour**

**9/08 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

The report was noted.

**10/08 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 11)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 were noted.

The meeting closed at 1.10 pm

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CHAIRMAN