

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW PANEL 3

**Held on Tuesday, 17 June 2008 at 2.30 pm in
Thetford Town Council, King's House, Thetford**

PRESENT

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

Also Present

| | |
|---------------|------------------------|
| Mr T. Edmunds | Norfolk County Council |
|---------------|------------------------|

In Attendance

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Julie Britton | - Senior Member Services Officer |
| Mark Broughton | - Member Development Officer |
| Rick Steels | - Revenue Services Manager |

17/08 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs D. Irving, Mr R. Kemp and Mr. J. Labouchere.

**19/08 HOUSING BENEFITS - ANGLIA REVENUES PARTNERSHIP
(AGENDA ITEM 6)**

The Revenue Services Manager, who was also the Project Manager for Local Housing Allowance (LHA), provided Members with a brief overview of the scheme which had taken three months to complete.

It was explained that the reason behind the introduction of LHA was that the Government was encouraging tenants to take responsibility for themselves. From 7th April 2008, when LHA came into force, a tenant could not now request that their payments be made direct to the landlord. There were certain circumstances, however, in which landlords must still be paid directly by the Councils, where there was discretion to do so, to protect those requiring safeguard considerations due to vulnerability. The Vulnerability & Safeguarding Policy circulated set out the guidelines under which consideration should be given to individual cases and decisions made. This Policy had yet to be ratified through the Anglia Revenues Joint Committee.

LHA only affected tenants already receiving Housing Benefit who had moved into accommodation rented from a private landlord; it did not affect council tenants or persons living in other social housing.

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The benefit paid under this new scheme was based on the number of bedrooms it was deemed were required for the claimant and their household and which area they lived in.

The number of bedrooms required for each household was dependant upon the number of adults and the number, age and sex of any children also resident. Examples of this scheme were provided.

The Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) was the geographical area used for the determination of LHA. Our BRMA included the areas for Bury St Edmunds, central Norfolk and Norwich and Kings Lynn. The Rent Service had provided local authorities with information that had helped identify the extent of the BRMAs and therefore which properties fell within them. The BRMA figures provided were the starting point of what benefit a person was going to receive.

Since the introduction of LHA, there had been major changes in how benefit claims were processed. The Revenue Services Manager had been working very closely with other authorities to ensure consistency across borders and therefore reducing significant costs. Funding for the introduction of the LHA had been provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. A large part of the funding had been put into upgrading current software. Firstly, a project team had been established to test the software, to revise documents, to change benefit claim forms, upgrade the website and produce leaflets. A progress report was regularly reported to the Joint Committee.

At the last count, since LHA came into force, there were only 81 customers receiving this type of benefit. There had been two requests from tenants for the benefit to be paid direct to landlords. The real affect of LHA would not be felt for two to three years. A post implementation plan was in place to ensure that LHA was fit for purpose.

The Chairman asked whether there had been any significant changes in the amount of benefit paid. In response, the Revenue Services Manager advised that the ethos was that no-one should be any worse off under this new scheme.

It was agreed that there should be some reference made in the new policy document with regard to rights of appeal.

The Chairman thanked the Revenue Services Manager for his report.

RECOMMEND to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission that a reference is made to rights of appeal in the Vulnerability & Safeguarding Policy.

Elaine
Wilkes, Rick
Steels

20/08 THETFORD HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE (AGENDA ITEM 7)

Mr Tim Edmunds, Developer and Travel Planning Services Manager for Norfolk County Council, was in attendance for this item.

The Chairman reminded Members that this item was in response to concerns raised at previous meetings with regard to the monitoring of the Green Travel Plan, particularly with regard to car parking issues. The

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Panel was informed, however, that since the granting of the planning application some joint parking arrangements had been instituted with the adjacent Sports Centre. A Member pointed out that he had noticed that private cars were being parked in the ambulance bays.

Mr Edmunds highlighted the fact that when the application for the erection of the Healthy Living Centre had been submitted, Norfolk County Council had recognised that there was insufficient parking on the site.

Copies of an internal email was circulated to prove that Norfolk County Council had been listening to public concern and evidence that planning permission had been granted before the receipt of the requested Transport Assessment. In his opinion, approval had been given by Breckland Council without detailed consideration of the proposals from a highways and transport point of view. Mr Edmunds said that he had been highly disappointed that this had happened but was pleased that permission had been granted subject to the implementation of a Green Travel Plan, albeit a voluntary one. He explained that NCC would rather have had a regulatory travel plan as it would have had more 'teeth' that underlined planning obligations paid by the developer. The issue with a voluntary Travel Plan was trying to enforce it. NCC had, however, undertaken a number of improvements themselves but these had unfortunately fallen on the public's purse, given that there was not opportunity to secure funding from the developer.

A Member explained that the reason planning permission had been granted at that time had been due to a funding deadline. If planning permission had not been granted, the funding would have been lost. In response, Mr Edmunds stated that if there had been a deadline issue, then an invitation to attend the Development Control Committee would have been helpful. He reminded Members that Norfolk County Council was significantly involved in the delivery of planning across Norfolk and it wished to support and attend planning committees to defend its advice, particularly when the authority was recommending that a proposal be refused.

In summarising the aforementioned issues the Chairman stated that he hoped that the Green Travel Plan would be adhered to. In conclusion he suggested that when the results of a required Transport Assessment were not known that the Development Control Committee should ask a Norfolk County Council representative to attend to help the committee better understand any outstanding transport or highway issues.

Mr Edmunds advised that investigations were underway with regard to possible pedestrian crossing measurements and that he had looked at the subway which, in relation to the surveys undertaken, was well used. Further to this, NCC was aware of the Growth Point issue in the Thetford area. NCC would be taking stock on different options as the growth in Thetford would provide different opportunities and lead to extra Government funding which could be targeted.

The Chairman, having used the subway himself, pointed out that pedestrians still had to cross the busy Croxton Road and suggested that an island should be installed. In response, Members were advised that space on the Croxton Road was limited but the matter was being investigated.

RECOMMEND that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission recommend to the Development Control Committee that in cases when proposals were being taken to Committee before the results of a required Transport Assessment were known that a Norfolk County Council representative be asked to attend.

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Elaine
Wilkes, Phil
Daines

21/08 WORK PROGRAMME (AGENDA ITEM 8)

The schedule was noted, subject to the following amendments and additions:

Mark
Broughton

- Dog and Pest Control Service – Schedule for 29 July meeting
- Affordable Housing Policy – Schedule for 16 September meeting
- Healthy Living & Lifestyles – PFI Leisure Centres – Rescheduled to 16 September meeting
- Breckland Health Improvement Programme – Rescheduled to 16 September meeting
- Emergency Planning – Avian Flu – Possible reschedule (Mark Broughton to contact Mike Wheatley)

It was understood that Oliver Clark would be attending to speak on the Smoke Free Compliance item scheduled for 29 July.

Members were asked whether there were any further issues with regard to the Healthy Living Centre. The Panel agreed that the matter of private cars parking in the ambulance bays should be addressed by writing to the Healthy Living Centre. The agreement of NCC on the need for more signage still remained.

The Chairman raised the question of the relevance of Poly Clinics in rural areas and asked the Member Development Support Officer to find out whether there was anything on this matter on NCC Health Scrutiny Committee's work programme. If this matter had not already been included it was to be added to Panel 3's work programme accordingly.

22/08 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 9)

The Chairman stated that he might be on holiday for the next meeting and asked the Vice-Chairman to chair the meeting in his absence.

The arrangements for the next meeting on Tuesday, 29 July 2008 at 10.00am in the Norfolk Room were noted.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm

CHAIRMAN