

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Ian Sherwood (Executive Member for People & Governance)
Maxine O'Mahony (Executive Director Strategy & Resources)

To: Cabinet, 21 June 2021

Author: Susie Richardson (HR Manager)

Subject: Council Health and Wellbeing Support (Smoking-Free Policy)

Purpose: To outline the rationale and impacts for making our council smoke-free and to seek Cabinet agreement for implementing a supporting policy to enable this to happen.

Recommendation(s):

That the Smoke-free Policy, as set out in Appendix A of this report, be implemented by approving the following recommendations:

- 1) To encourage and proactively support our staff to quit smoking with the support of Smokefree Norfolk, the NHS and other local support organisations.
- 2) To designate Elizabeth House – including its car park and outdoor areas – as a completely smoke-free site.
- 3) To ensure staff only take smoking breaks in their own time and away from Elizabeth House.
- 4) To permanently remove the smoking shelter at Elizabeth House and make the area an outdoor space for staff to use.
- 5) To include e-cigarettes and vaping in the list of prohibited activity in the Council's Smoke-free Policy.
- 6) To positively encourage adherence to the policy, but where necessary, enforce compliance through existing staff disciplinary procedures, or the code of conduct.

1.0 SUMMARY

As a council, we are adapting to our changing role, responsibilities and priorities in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Part of this includes adopting a hybrid working model, with staff expected in future to spend more time working out in the communities they serve, and through a mix of remote and office-based working.

This being the case, the Council wants to ensure that it is doing everything it can to make sure that members and staff feel they are returning to a healthy, safe and supportive environment, with new policies and ways of working established.

The Council prides itself on promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of its staff, providing a range of support and assistance which includes: Mental Health First Aid support, Men's, Women's and Carers' Sheds (informal support groups) and a comprehensive Employee Assistance Programme.

This report proposes that the Council's health and wellbeing support be further extended and enhanced by implementing a new smoke-free policy. With staff and members working from home

during the pandemic, we are now in a position to do this with minimal disruption – with the potential to return to Elizabeth House as a smoke-free site when the office reopens this year.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Health impacts

There has been a huge shift in the smoking culture in England over the last few years and rates of smokers are falling faster than ever. However, the health impacts remain significant and concerning:

- Smoking is responsible for somebody being admitted to hospital every minute and is responsible for around 80,000 deaths in the UK every year.
- Smokers die younger on average than non-smokers, but it is the most preventable cause of premature death.
- Smoking is the most preventable cause of cancer in the UK, responsible for one in four deaths.

In response to this, the government has set out an ambition to go 'smoke-free' in England by 2030*, and we want to support this by adopting a Smoke-free policy. (*As set out in the Government's green paper 'Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s', published in 2019.)

2.2 Business impacts

It is widely recognised that smoking not only impacts on an individual's health but also on organisational productivity and effectiveness:

- Smoking costs organisation's money, in terms of lost productivity: with staff taking regular smoking breaks.
- Smokers have a higher rate of absence as shown by research undertaken by Smokefree Norfolk, the county's smoking cessation service.

2.3 Breckland Council's current position

At present, the Council is not doing everything it can to actively discourage smoking:

- The Council wants to do more to actively support staff in quitting smoking, to not only encourage a healthier workforce but to help manage sickness absence.
- The Council has historically provided a smoking shelter on site (currently in storage), thereby helping to facilitate smoking onsite.
- Smoking breaks are not formally monitored for impacts on productivity; this is not fair to other non-smoking employees who may be taking less breaks during their working day.

Breckland's current position is at odds with staff sentiment. Prior to Covid, the Staff Forum put forward a request that the Council explore the possibility of being a smoke-free site. More recently, the HR team revisited the question of staff support in our staff survey this year which had overwhelming agreement that 89% of respondents to be smoke-free (out of 174 respondents).

Unison, Capita and DWP have also signalled their support for a Smoke-free Policy to be implemented onsite, following recent informal consultation.

2.4 Breckland Council's Smoke-free ambition

Having set out the reasons why the Council wishes to become smoke-free, it is important to clarify our message to the organisation and our staff is one of support: we want to support people who want to quit smoking in their smoke-free journey.

We also acknowledge that not everyone will want to quit smoking; we are not dictating what people do in their personal lives or in their breaks during the working day. Should the policy be agreed, all internal communications will reflect the supportive nature of our approach, in conjunction with signposting to the smoking cessation services available to support those who want to quit.

3.0 POLICY FEATURES

The policy proposes that Breckland becomes a smoke-free council, immediately after Cabinet approval and to align with the re-opening of the building in June 2021.

If approved, this would mean that:

- 1) The Council would commit to actively encouraging supporting our staff to quit smoking with the support of Smokefree Norfolk, the NHS and other local support organisations.
- 2) Elizabeth House – including its car park and outdoor areas – would be designated as a completely smoke-free site.
- 3) Staff could only take smoking breaks in their own time and away from Elizabeth House.
- 4) The smoking shelter at Elizabeth House would be permanently removed to make way for an outdoor space that all staff could use.
- 5) E-cigarettes and vaping would be included in the list of prohibited activity in the Council's Smoke-free Policy.
- 6) Staff and members would be positively encouraged to adhere to the policy, but where necessary, the Council would consider enforcing compliance through existing policies and procedures, or code of conduct.
- 7) Clear public signage will be placed around Elizabeth House, advising visitors that the Council operates a Smoke-free policy and requesting that they do not smoke.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- Reduce the percentage of our workforce that smoke.
- Increase the attractiveness of our site by going smoke-free.
- Encourage a healthier workforce and reduce absence (the office of national statistics report on the UK labour market 2016 reported that smokers have an absence rate of 2.5% compared with 1.6% non-smokers)
- Increase staff productivity by not allowing extra smoking breaks during working hours.
- Ensure consistency in our approach to taking breaks during working hours.
- Create a smoke-free culture where not smoking is the 'norm'.

4.0 ASSUMPTIONS

- Approval is given by Cabinet to implement being smoke-free.
- CMT and members are in full support of the site going smoke-free and set an example.
- Managers will support new policies and actively encourage and/or enforce us being a smoke-free council and not allow smoking breaks during working hours.
- Costs associated with being smoke-free will be minimal and supported.
- External organisations will support our staff in quitting smoking and resources will be available.
- That we can enforce smoke-free at Elizabeth House with our partners on-site

5.0 RESEARCH

Public Health England, Smokefree Norfolk and the NHS stop smoking service have shared their research and learnings from supporting other organisations to become smoke-free. Norwich City Council has a smoke-free site, but to our best knowledge, no other rural council has yet declared itself to be smoke-free within Norfolk, making Breckland the first. This presents a positive opportunity for Breckland Council to lead the way on health and wellbeing support, with our communications team ready to manage and generate media interest.

6.0 SMOKING CESSATION SUPPORT

We have met with Smokefree Norfolk and the local team that work for Public Health England in their smoking team and they offer great support to smokers who want to quit. These organisations are able to offer advice, clinics, group support and nicotine replacement therapy as part of going smoke-free.

We also have a smoke-free advice service in our neighbouring Tesco pharmacy and we will be asking them what support they can also provide. It is vital that our message as an organisation is that we are supporting smokers to give up - and not dictating to them - and that means providing them with information, support and advice to go smoke-free.

We need to consider what we can help staff replace their cigarette breaks with as a release from a stressful environment, our wellbeing programme will help address this by suggesting ways to manage stress at work and the advice services will offer support in terms of alternatives to smoking to help manage stress.

7.0 COMMUNICATION & CONSULTATION

A communication plan has been detailed in this document under our approach.

Staff are encouraged to take breaks in their working day, in line with the hours they work and the working time regulations. We will be encouraging staff to use our outside spaces for their breaks to get away from their work and monitors, but smokers will not be allowed to take breaks outside of this to smoke.

We have conducted our wellbeing survey with staff which shows 89% of those who took part support going smoke-free. Following approval, we will communicate as part of WorkSmart that when the building reopens it will be a smoke-free site and what that will mean for staff along with the policy being published.

The communication will form part of the WorkSmart programme's communications as the building reopens this summer and that along with our new facilities, we are now also a smoke-free site.

We need to recognise that some smokers may feel unhappy about the proposed changes and may feel that they are being singled out, especially if they don't wish to quit smoking: our communication needs to be clear that we are not dictating to people to quit smoking, but we are offering support if they want it. For those that want to continue to smoke then we need to respect their decision, while making it clear that we do not support smoking within working hours (other than break times) and on our site.

8.0 MEMBERS

Members will be affected by the Smoke-free Policy and other visitors to our site will also be expected to adhere to our smoke-free policy. Members can also access the smoking cessation support via the NHS.

9.0 OPTIONS

9.1 Do nothing.

9.2 Implement the Smoke-free policy, from June 2021.

10.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

To improve the wellbeing of our staff, bring consistency to our approach to staff breaks and have a more attractive council site.

11.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

Wellbeing: we will expect to see an improvement in absence management as staff who are smokers are more likely to have higher absence levels, as shown in NHS research; we will also have a healthier workforce if people choose to quit.

Productivity: Evidence shows that productivity picks up when staff do not smoke so we should see an increase in productivity if people choose to quit.

Reputation: We will be trailblazers in going smoke-free, locally, as a rural council and we will need to manage the message that is given to the press We believe this should be a good news story that we are supporting staff to be healthy and quit smoking.

Consistency in approach to breaks: we will be breaking down the barrier between smokers and non-smokers. Smokers take more regular breaks, on average, and by not allowing smoking breaks within working hours it will give us a fairer approach to the time out staff take away from their work. Our advice on breaks remains the same, employees are allowed to take their breaks as per the hours they work and if they choose to go off site and smoke within that break, that is their choice.

12.0 IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Comment
Legal Implications of changing policies around smoking and breaks	We have consulted our employment lawyer who has reviewed the business case and policy
Impact on staff morale, particularly smokers	Smokers will still be able to smoke, just not on our site, they can use their breaks to smoke if they wish off site
Impact on current policies and working practices	A smoking policy has been written with the other current policies also considered
Impact on HR team to manage the project and support changes	The work is planned in the HR programme of work
Implications for facilities in removing the site and replacing the area	Has been indicated at a day's work for a contractor to do this

13.0 Constitution & Legal

Our draft policy (see Appendix A) has been approved by our employment law solicitor to ensure it is legally compliant and reflects smoking policies that have been researched from other authorities nationally and organisations who are smoke-free.

14.0 Financial

There is a cost associated with the temporary removal of the smoking shelter; this cost is being met by the WorkSmart programme.

The cost of smoking cessation services and support for staff is free as part of the NHS's smoke-free campaign: in particular, we will be using Smokefree Norfolk and the local branch of Public Health England that lead on smoking.

15.0 Risk Management

Risk	Mitigation
<i>Smoking is an important release and coping mechanism for smokers and stress levels could be increased by smoking less and/or in the initial phases of quitting.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The support on offer to staff will be helping them with nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) if they wish to quit. • We will be encouraging staff to use their breaks to be active to aid stress release. • There are areas outdoors provided for staff to take a break without smoking such as the courtyard and bench areas around the building
<i>The decision to go smoke-free could be seen as dictating to staff about their lifestyle.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comms will be positive and supportive about why we are going smoke-free. • We are will not try to make people quit, but we are going smoke-free and there is support on offer for staff that wish to quit
<i>We don't enforce the smoke-free site and working policies and the project ultimately fails.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy is enforced by all Managers and staff if they see visitors smoking on site. • Support is given to staff for them to advise if people aren't adhering to our smoke-free policy
<i>Smoking is not supported by members and CMT</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approval process gains support from both of these groups. • Members have been involved in the process and they will have support on offer if they wish to quit smoking. • Smokefree Norfolk is a campaign that we sign up to as an organisation and in our district so we should be supporting it in our own sites.
<i>Staff morale is affected by going smoke-free.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The messages to staff will be positive and empathetic in recognising how difficult it is to quit an addiction.
<i>Smokers feel targeted.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to be clear we are not making people quit, but the support is there if they want it
<i>Negative press</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to proactively manage the press leading up to go live and position being smoke-free as being trailblazers in supporting a healthy workforce and district

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Key Decision: Yes

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Mandatory Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix A Smoke-free policy