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**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**Held on Tuesday, 5 April 2022 at 2.00 pm in  
The Anglia Room, The Conference Centre, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Cllr Lynda Turner (Chairman)  
Cllr Ed Colman (Vice-Chairman)  
Cllr Linda Monument

Cllr Susan Dowling  
Cllr Phillip Duigan (Substitute Member)

**Also Present**

Cllr Gordon Bambridge  
Cllr Timothy Birt

Cllr Philip Morton  
Cllr Peter Wilkinson

**In Attendance**

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Sarah Barsby  | - Assistant Director People and Governance |
| Jason Cole    | - Executive Director                       |
| Gill Duffy    | - Housing Manager                          |
| Craig Fowler  | - Environmental Health & Licensing Manager |
| Sarah Shipley | - Assistant Director Health & Housing      |
| Julie Britton | - Democratic Services Officer              |

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**9/22 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

**10/22 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ashby and Hambidge. Councillor Duigan was in attendance as the only substitute.

**11/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (AGENDA ITEM 3)**

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor Ed Colman, although not strictly related to the items on the agenda, declared that his employer had changed since he last completed his declaration of interest form and was now employed by International Investment Services Ltd.

He would either complete a new DPI form or make the relevant changes to his existing form.

**12/22 URGENT BUSINESS (AGENDA ITEM 4)**

None.

**13/22 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

Councillors Bambridge, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health & Licensing and Councillors Birt and Morton were in attendance.

**14/22 MEMBER TRAINING (STANDING ITEM) (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

Sarah Barsby, the Assistant Director for People & Governance was in attendance and provided Members with an update on Member Development.

A budget of £7,000 had been set for Member Development for this financial year, the same as the previous year.

At the last meeting there had been a discussion about how the Members page could be improved. Since that meeting, a survey link had been sent to all Members and any feedback would be reported back to this Committee accordingly.

In terms of Member training, there was no scheduled training in the short term; however, mental awareness and safeguarding training sessions were being arranged to take place in the near future.

In response to a question about whether there had been any feedback received in respect of the survey, Members were informed that there had not been any feedback thus far and the response rate had not as yet been confirmed. A reminder email would be sent to all Members.

Councillor Wilkinson asked if all the budget from last year had been spent and if not, had any remaining budget been rolled over into this financial year.

It was noted that budgets were not carried over year on year but there had been a small underspend and the amount would be confirmed and Members would be informed accordingly.

Councillor Birt mentioned the 'Hutsix' cyber security training that all Members had been asked to complete and asked if this training was still on-going and whether there had been any feedback from Members. He also asked if there was any feedback mechanism in place in respect of the results.

Jason Cole, Executive Director, reported that the initial deadline for completion had been extended by 2 weeks. On completion, 'Hutsix' would provide a report on the results that would subsequently be reviewed. Simulated phishing exercises were carried out and if mistakes were made, additional training and support would be provided.

**15/22 AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS TEAM STAFFING (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

In the absence of Councillor Webb, the Executive Member for Housing, Health & Communities who had sent her apologies due to other commitments, the Housing Manager, Gill Duffy presented the report.

In April 2021 Breckland Council took on the responsibility for delivering Aids and Adaptations through Disabled Facilities Grants in the Breckland Area. This had previously been done on Breckland Council's behalf by Kings Lynn & West

Norfolk Council.

The grants and associated staffing costs were funded by the Better Care Fund, which came from Central Government to district councils via tier one authorities, i.e. County Councils.

The aim of the service was to enable people to either remain in their homes if they had a disability and need adaptations and / or building work to make the home suitable for them or to return home from hospital after a life changing illness or event.

The team structure had been developed and agreed as part of the whole Housing Service Review in January 2021, with 3 FTE permanent posts being appointed. This was during the height of the pandemic where it had been more difficult than usual to assess the service needs and therefore 2.5 additional temporary posts had been appointed as well as a contracted private Occupational Therapist to gain a better understanding of demand. This approach had enabled the Team to progress the backlog of cases awaiting assessment or works and provided the time to consider what staffing structure would be required going forward to deal with normal service demand.

The number of applications that the new Team had assessed, completed or started to work on from April to December 2021 was highlighted.

At the end of December 2021 there were 96 people waiting for an assessment, an improvement in comparison to the 188 people who had been waiting in December 2020. The Housing Manager was pleased to report that at the end of March 2022 the figure had reduced to 76.

A tender process had recently been undertaken, with the aim to contract between 6 and 8 building companies, of varying sizes, to take on the specified works. These contracts should be in place by 1 April, providing more flexibility and speed, which would further improve the service.

The Housing Manager was keen to retain the excellent staff and the proposal to make the 2.5 FTE temporary posts permanent was highlighted. It was noted that the cost to Breckland Council would be zero as such costs would be met by the Better Care Fund.

In terms of benchmarking and the average waiting times, the Vice-Chairman asked if this authorities work had been benchmarked against Kings Lynn & West Norfolk and North Norfolk who had a similar demographic and similar challenges as Breckland Council. He also asked about the processes in place for someone with relevant needs being discharged from hospital or someone that could have other health problems that could be excluded from the Disabled Facilities grant and asked if the terms of the grant this was set by Government or County.

Members were informed that Breckland Council worked very closely with six other districts, and all had the same targets set in terms of timescales and the results were reported on a quarterly basis. The target to reduce the start to finish times had been set to 140 days across the whole County so together ideas were shared as to how to achieve this how this could be improved.

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In response to the second question, Members were informed that it was not a requirement for someone to have been in hospital to apply for such a grant. Each authority had a link to the hospitals and the relevant authority would be informed of the people who would benefit from simple adaptations to their homes.

Councillor Monument drew attention to paragraph 1.7 of the report and queried the figures provided and also asked for the meaning of completed. The Housing Manager explained that as at December 2021, the last time a quarterly assessment had been carried out, 24 applications had been completed from start to finish but there had still been many in progress at that particular point. A further review was due shortly and it was expected that many of the 246 applications would have also been completed.

Councillor Dowling asked if there were any expectations as to whether numbers would increase when such a service was more well known. The Housing Manager pointed out that the service had always been in existence but run by Kings Lynn & West Norfolk and although advertised and people were directed to Breckland Council it could increase. It was also pointed out that Social Services had stopped occupational health visits during the pandemic and could be the reason why the number of assessments had now increased. It had already been taken into account that numbers would rise due to the increase in the elderly population and hence the reason for the Government putting more money into this fund.

Councillor Bambridge felt that 10-15 new applications per week (see paragraph 1.8 of the report) was rather high compared to historic figures. Members were informed that accurate figures were not available from the previous service, so it was impossible to compare.

Councillor Birt felt that if authorities were dealing with such high numbers of cases would it be more cost effective or any merit in employing an Occupational Therapist on a full-time basis rather than contracted on a casework basis to assist with the case load going forward.

Members were informed that such a service was not funded by Breckland Council normally but by Norfolk County Council. The Occupational Therapist that had originally been provided by Norfolk County Council had since gone on long term sick and consequently a private Occupational Therapist had been contracted by Breckland Council to deal with the backlog. In the interim, Norfolk County Council was undertaking a piece of work to establish whether the staffing levels across the county should be increased.

The Chairman asked if the Better Care fund had a set timeline. The Housing Manager explained that this funding was set for 3 years. After that it was still unknown.

The Chairman also asked if the facility to liaise with hospitals pre-discharge was still in place to enable the process for adaptations etc to start earlier as preventive work was much better than reactive.

Members were informed that such communications were looking to be increased but overall, a better service was now being provided.

Councillor Wilkinson pointed out that such a service had originally been funded

by Breckland Council and was a stand-alone service.

The Housing Manager advised that the Disabled Facilities grant was mandatory, but authorities were allowed to use some of the Better Care funding for discretionary elements.

The Chairman felt that Members should be used for getting the information out into the communities and into the Parish magazines that such funding was available.

The Housing Manager reminded Members of the 'Forget-me-not' grant that was available for people with Dementia and as there had not been much take up she would be grateful if Members could share all such information with their parishes. She would arrange for flyers/posters to be emailed to Members for display at parish councils' premises etc.

In response to a request, it was agreed that an update be provided to this Committee in 12 months.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded and following a vote which was unanimous, it was:

**RESOLVED** that Option 1 of the report be approved, that the 2.5 FTE temporary posts in the Team be made permanent:

**16/22 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The arrangements for the next meeting on Wednesday, 29 June 2022 at 10am in the Anglia Room were noted.

*Due to other commitments, it has since been agreed that this meeting should be moved. The date of the next meeting has now been confirmed as Wednesday, 13 July at 10am in the Anglia Room.*

**17/22 EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC (AGENDA ITEM 9)**

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 2 of Schedule 12A to the Act".

**PART B – ITEM FROM WHICH THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC ARE EXCLUDED**

**18/22 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & LICENSING SERVICE REVIEW (AGENDA ITEM 10)**

Councillor Bambridge, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health & Licensing introduced the report and thanked the Officers for all their hard work on this matter.

Craig Fowler, the Environmental Health & Licensing Manager then provided Members with a detailed overview of the report and explained that the last review was undertaken in 2012 and since then several changes had taken

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place, hence this service review.

Following a number of questions, and a suggestion by the Legal Services Manager to add additional wording to the recommendation, that was duly proposed and seconded, it was:

**RESOLVED** that the recommendation as detailed in the report, to include the additional wording be approved.

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm

CHAIRMAN