

BROADLAND ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Broadland Environmental Excellence Policy Development Panel of Broadland District Council, held on Thursday, 8 December 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: K Kelly (Chairman), N Brennan (Vice-Chair), D Britcher, J Davis and G Nurden

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: A Crotch, J Fisher, S Prutton and J Ward

Substitute: Councillors: S Gurney (In place of A Crotch)

Cabinet Member in Attendance: Councillor: J Leggett

Officers in Attendance: N Howard (Assistant Director for Regulatory), K Strandoo (Health and Wellbeing Programme Manager), A Sommazzi (Clean Growth and Sustainability Manager) and D Matthews (Democratic Services Officer)

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr A Crotch, Cllr J Fisher, Cllr S Prutton and Cllr J Ward.

13. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

14. MATTERS ARISING

Minute No 9 - Anti Social Behaviour Policy

The Assistant Director for Regulatory informed members that officers were in the process of finalising the Anti-Social Behaviour Public Space Protection Orders and that these would be published shortly. Members would be advised by email when these were available on the website, with a link to the relevant pages.

Minute No 10 - Environmental Strategy and Delivery Plan

The Panel was advised that the County Council was reviewing the economic viability of the Postwick park-and-ride being provided year-round, as opposed to the current seasonal service.

15. WARM HOMES PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Warm Homes Programme Manager introduced the report, which provided the Panel with an overview of the activities and outputs delivered by the Norfolk Warm Homes Programme led by Broadland in partnership with Norfolk local authorities, Clarion Housing and Saffron Housing Trust.

Members were advised that the recent cost of living crisis had resulted in increasing numbers of people struggling to afford to keep their homes warm in winter. Data from 2020 estimated that 6,700 Broadland households were already living in fuel poverty and due to rising energy costs this figure was predicted to increase to over 11,000 households this winter. This was a serious concern, as apart from the financial hardship caused by these pressures, living in a cold home could cause or worsen serious health issues, such as respiratory conditions, cardiovascular disease and dementia.

To help address these issues the Government had launched a Warm Homes Fund in 2018, which had enabled the Council to deliver insulation and first-time central heating to those in need of support. In addition the Council had also successfully bid for two more sources of funding; the Local Authority Delivery scheme and the Sustainable Warmth scheme.

By the end of October 2022 a total of £6,152,528 had been spent across all Norfolk Districts that were part of the consortium led by the Council. In Broadland this equated to £1.6m being invested in 106 private sector homes.

As part of this support, the Council had also realised over £2m of additional financial benefits and savings to support over 600 low income/fuel poor households. It had also delivered nearly £400,000 of grant funding for the installation of retrofit energy efficient measures.

However, despite their success the delivery of these schemes had been challenging, due to the onerous processes required by the Government, which included installers being accredited to Public Available Specification 2030 standards.

Currently the Council had five accredited installers and officers were encouraging more to become accredited, but as accreditation could cost up to £5,000 and installers were not in need of additional business they might not feel it was a worthwhile investment. This could cause delivery of measures to be delayed. The Government were aware of this problem and it was confirmed that officers

would speak to the Economic Development Team to find out if grants were available for accreditation.

The Warm Homes Fund and the Local Authority Delivery scheme had now closed and the Sustainable Warmth scheme would close in March. The Government recognised the need for longer term more sustainable funding and had recently announced a new wave of funding for off-gas properties.

Broadland would be submitting a bid to the scheme on behalf of the consortium consisting of most Norfolk Councils, to meet the 27 January 2023 deadline set by the Government.

The new scheme would have an additional requirement for Government approval for each house prior to the release of funds. This might further delay the process for residents, which currently was about 3-4 months from application to completed installation. However, the scheme would be for a longer two-year period and the eligibility criteria had been broadened, so that more households could be targeted.

In response to a question about the estimates of fuel poverty in Broadland if local rates rose in line with national projections (para 2.2), the Panel was advised that the statistics were extrapolated from a number of different sources and methodologies. This indicated that although houses were being made more energy efficient, it did not necessarily mean that residents were being moved out of fuel poverty, due to the overall increase in energy costs. This had also led to an increase in the number of households with two working people being classed as in fuel poverty.

The Warm Homes Programme Manager acknowledged that reducing the carbon footprint of a home did not always mean that the cost of heating a home was reduced. Officers remained very conscious of this and that they should take a balanced approach to an individual's circumstances, as they did not want to put in heating measures that would push vulnerable households further into fuel poverty.

In response to a query, members were advised that the Government had issued a directive to utility providers informing them not to inflate customer's direct debits in response to rising energy prices, although it was acknowledged that this could still occur and that energy providers might need to be challenged by customers to reduce their direct debits.

The Panel were informed that funding was currently available for the Sustainable Warmth scheme and the Council had adequate resources to administer it but, as already stated, the major source of delay in delivering energy efficiency measures was the availability of accredited installers.

It was confirmed that the new round of funding would give the Council wider discretion over the allocation of grants, so that residents whose income was slightly over the previous threshold could now be included. The criteria so far used by the Council to allocate grants had been the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The Panel was also informed that measures could vary considerably between properties and that funding had been accessed from a number of different sources, which meant that direct comparisons between measures for social housing and private housing could not always be made. For example, whilst most measures averaged £10,000 to £25,000; external wall insulation could cost between £30,000 and £40,000.

It was explained that properties with an Energy Performance Rating of D, E, F or G were targeted for these schemes. These properties would then have an independent retrofit assessment, which identified what work needed to be done to increase their Energy Performance Rating by two bands.

It was

AGREED

To note and support the ongoing activities of the Norfolk Warm Homes Programme with the aim of supporting residents living in fuel poverty through grant assisted improvements to increase thermal efficiency and provide renewable heating solutions to homes.

(The meeting concluded at 6.52 pm)

Chairman