

BROADLAND OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Broadland Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Broadland District Council, held on Tuesday, 16 April 2024 at 6.30 pm.

Committee Members Present:	Councillors: N Starling (Chairman), P Bulman (Vice-Chair), L Douglass, J Emsell, M Goodman, S Jones, E Laming, M Murrell, P Newstead, A Tipple, E Tovell, S Ward and F Whymark
Apologies for Absence:	Councillors: C Karimi-Ghovanlou and T Yousefian
Substitute:	Councillors: P Auber (In place of T Yousefian)
Officers in Attendance:	J Sutterby (Director of People and Communities), S Phelan (Assistant Director of Community Services), M Pursehouse (Assistant Director of Individuals and Families), S Martin (Strategic Environment and Waste Manager), S Carey (Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer), L Palmer (Democratic Services Officer) and J Overy (Democratic Services Officer)

109. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs C Karimi-Ghovanlou and T Yousefian.

110. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

111. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members were informed that a scrutiny training session was being arranged for late May/early June. Members were requested to contact the Strategic Advisor and Deputy Monitoring Officer if they had any specific subjects that they would like the training to cover.

112. POLICY FOR RESIDENTS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

The Head of Housing and Benefits introduced the report, which explained that Broadland was working towards achieving Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation by autumn 2024, and as part of this work it was proposed that a Policy on domestic abuse be adopted by the Council.

DAHA Accreditation (Foundation Level) was considered the benchmark for local authorities, and the proposed Policy would enhance the comprehensive support the Council offered residents experiencing domestic abuse. Several Housing Associations were also working towards DAHA accreditation.

Members were informed that domestic abuse was a significant problem and that in October 2023 the Council had recorded a 62 percent rise in homelessness caused by domestic abuse compared to the same month in 2022.

The Committee was advised that domestic abuse training was mandatory for officers, and it was intended that it would be made available to members in due course.

Members were also informed that the Policy included a Sanctuary Scheme which allowed victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes and stay closer to their support networks if the perpetrator had been denied of any legal right to enter the property.

It was confirmed that there were no financial implications associated with implementing the Policy, and that the fees for DAHA accreditation were being funded by Norfolk County Council.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

To agree the Policy for supporting residents experiencing domestic abuse.

113. TENANCY POLICY

The Head of Housing and Benefits introduced the report which recommended adopting a Policy that would set out how the Council would meet the regulatory standards that all social landlords are expected to meet and was part of the Council's continued drive to improve support for its residents.

The Policy was applicable to tenants of the Council and clarified how Broadland would support tenancy sustainment, prevent unnecessary evictions, tackle tenancy fraud, and ensure the appropriate management of tenancies.

It was noted that the Council facilitated an extensive range of support to help residents maintain their tenancy.

Members were informed that the Policy would allow secure tenants to rent out rooms in their homes, which could help address any under-occupation penalty applied to their Housing Benefit and allow dwellings to be fully utilised.

The Committee was advised that many of the provisions set out in the Policy were not currently applicable, as the Council only held housing stock for the purposes of temporary accommodation, but it would meet ongoing requirements should this change.

It was,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

For Cabinet to recommend to Council the Tenancy Policy.

114. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENT POLICY

The Head of Housing and Benefits introduced the report which recommended the adoption of a Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy to meet with the Council's statutory duty as a registered provider and clearly set out the key principles that it would adhere to when making temporary accommodation placements.

In answer to a query, members were advised that the Council would always seek to place residents in suitable accommodation within the district, if possible.

It was unanimously,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

Cabinet to recommend to Council to adopt the Temporary Accommodation Placement policy.

115. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR OFFER POLICY

The Head of Housing and Benefits introduced the report which proposed the adoption of a Policy on the fair use of the Private Rented Sector Offer. The Policy provided a framework for empowering people to move out of temporary accommodation into suitable private rented sector dwellings and discharge the Council's homelessness duty.

Members were advised that the Policy would set out an additional means of identifying suitable properties for homeless customers and would be an important step in strengthening and broadening the options officers had to discharge the Council's homelessness duties efficiently and fairly.

The Committee was informed that encouraging residents who had sufficient income to rent private accommodation would reduce the pressure on social housing stock.

Members were also reminded that private sector accommodation was cheaper than temporary accommodation, so would reduce costs for the Council. However, it should be noted that the private rented sector had been contracting in recent years.

In summing up, the Head of Housing and Benefits confirmed that a major element of the work of the Housing Team was to work with landlords to prevent or delay evictions.

It was unanimously,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

That Cabinet recommends to Council that our policy on the fair use of Private Rented Sector Offers be adopted.

116. PROCEDURE FOR CONDUCTING INTERNAL (STATUTORY) REVIEWS OF HOMELESSNESS DECISIONS

The Head of Housing and Benefits introduced the report which proposed adopting a procedure for undertaking statutory reviews of homeless cases.

Members were advised that Broadland had no procedure set out within the Constitution in respect of Homelessness Reviews, which were currently being undertaken by officers, acting within a best practice model. The proposed procedure recommended that regular reports be made to the relevant Portfolio Holder on the reviews undertaken.

The Committee noted that although there was no requirement to involve elected members in the internal homeless review process, it was considered that doing so would provide valuable additional scrutiny and add transparency and balance to the process whilst maintaining member awareness and involvement in this important statutory function.

Members welcomed making the review process more efficient and accountable.

It was unanimously,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

For Cabinet to recommend to Council that:

The proposed process for undertaking statutory reviews of homeless cases is adopted and exceed the minimum statutory requirements by involving the leader of the Council and relevant Portfolio holder in six monthly reviews.

117. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining items of business because otherwise, information which is exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, would be disclosed to them.

118. HOUSING SYSTEM PROCUREMENT

The Head of Housing and Benefits introduced the exempt report, which proposed the procurement of a housing data system to continue to process and support residents and assist the work of the Housing Team.

Members were advised that the new IT system would meet all the needs of the Housing Team and that a minimum contract of 2 + 1 + 1 years was preferred, as this would allow the flexibility to ensure that customers were getting the best service.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

To agree to delegate authority to award the contract of the Housing System Solution, to the Assistant Director of Individuals and Families, in consultation with the S151 Officer and Portfolio Holder for Communities and Housing and the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

119. FRETtenham DEPOT - AWARD OF REDEVELOPMENT CONTRACT

The Assistant Director for Community Services introduced the exempt report which provided an update on the work undertaken for the redevelopment works at the Frettenham depot.

Following discussion, as set out in the exempt minute, it was unanimously,

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET

1. Approve the utilisation of additional funding as set out in the table at 3.7 in the report from the Refuse Services Reserve required to complete the redevelopment of the Frettenham Depot now that all costs are known.
2. Delegate to the Assistant Director Community Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Excellence, approval to utilise the project contingency if required.

(The meeting concluded at 8.20 pm)

Chairman