

**BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**

**ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY PANEL**

**Minutes from the Meeting of the Environment and Community Panel held on  
Tuesday, 4th July, 2017 at 6.00 pm in the Education Room - Town Hall,  
Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ**

**PRESENT:** Councillors C Sampson (Chairman),  
Miss L Bambridge, A Bubb, Mrs S Collop, Mrs S Fraser, G Hipperson, T Parish  
(substitute for J Moriarty), T Smith, Mrs J Westrop, D Whitby and  
Mrs M Wilkinson

**Portfolio Holders**

Councillor I Devereux - Portfolio Holder for Environment  
Councillor A Lawrence – Portfolio Holder for Community

**Officers:**

Sheila Farley – Housing Services Operations Manager  
Richard Fisher – Arboricultural Officer  
Duncan Hall – Housing Services Manager  
Ray Harding – Chief Executive  
Honor Howell – Assistant Director

EC16: **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Moriarty.

EC17: **MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** The Minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EC18: **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

EC19: **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was none.

EC20: **MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillor Baron Chenery of Horsbrugh – EC23  
Councillor Devereux – EC23

EC21: **CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE**

There was none.

EC22: **REPORT OF THE INFORMAL WORKING GROUP - OPERATION OF THE WEST NORFOLK DISABILITY FORUM**

The Panel was reminded that in March 2017 the Environment and Community Panel had established an Informal Working Group to look at the future operation of the West Norfolk Disability Forum. Members of the Informal Working Group, Councillors Bubb, Fraser and Westrop, presented the report, which had been circulated with the agenda and set out the recommendations from the Informal Working Group.

Members were informed that attendance at meetings had been decreasing over the past few years and it was felt that this could be because there were many other routes for individuals and organisations to go through to raise issues or find out information. Members of the Working Group commented that they felt that their recommendations would result in an improvement to the service as individuals and organisations would have a direct contact route, through the proposed Disabilities Champion.

The Chairman thanked Members of Informal Working Group for their report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Mrs Collop asked if other Members of the West Norfolk Disability Forum had been involved in the work of the Informal Working Group. She was informed that, at this stage, the proposals were those of the Informal Working Group which was established by the Environment and Community Panel. The proposals would have to be considered by the Environment and Community Panel and any recommendations would then be presented to Cabinet. Members were reminded that any Member of the Council could attend any meeting under Standing Order 34.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Bambridge commented that she was previously a Member of the West Norfolk Disability Forum and she supported the recommendations put forward by the Informal Working Group.

Councillor Smith made reference to the proposal for Cabinet to appoint a Disabilities and Equalities Champion. He was concerned with the title and suggested that consideration be given to ensuring that all relevant groups and vulnerable people were included in the role of the Champion.

Councillor Mrs Wilkinson commented that it was a shame that the West Norfolk Disability Forum no longer delivered its objectives. She asked if the Disability Champion role would be remunerated. The Chairman

felt that it would not be a paid position, but it would ultimately be up to Cabinet to decide. Councillor Bubb commented that he anticipated that the role would be a central point for individuals and organisations to contact if they had any issues or concerns. The Disabilities Champion could then monitor all ongoing issues and delegate them to the relevant officers for investigation. The report also proposed that the Champion provide an update to the Environment and Community Panel on an annual basis, however the Panel could decide on more frequent updates if they felt it appropriate.

Members were informed that the Champion's contact details would be made available to the public, so that if people did not have internet access they could contact the Champion over the phone, or a meeting could be arranged if required.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Councillor Lawrence, commented that he supported the recommendations put forward by the Informal Working Group. He was a Member of the West Norfolk Disability Forum and agreed with the comments of the Informal Working Group in that the Forum was not productive in its current format. He explained that he would take forward any recommendations from the Environment and Community Panel to Cabinet as appropriate. He thanked the Informal Working Group and officers for the report.

Councillor Mrs Collop asked who would be the Disabilities Champion, and she was informed that it would be a decision for Cabinet, however Councillor Mrs Fraser did indicate that she would be interested in the position.

The Assistant Director explained that there could be the opportunity for the Disability Champion to become involved in other projects, such as Lily.

The Chairman explained that the recommendations put forward by the Environment and Community Panel would be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

**RESOLVED:** The Environment and Community Panel make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. Disband the West Norfolk Disability Forum.
2. Cabinet to give consideration to appointing a Disabilities/Equalities Champion.
3. That the Environment and Community Panel be given the opportunity to look at the Borough Council's Equalities Policy which is due for review and give consideration to establishing an Informal Working Group to input into the review if necessary.
4. That the Environment and Community panel receive an update on the Equalities Policy on an annual basis.
5. That ways to promote Equality on the Corporate Agenda be investigated.

6. That a page be created on the website to promote the Equalities and Disabilities Champion. An e-form to be created so that members of the public could report issues direct to the Champion.
7. An e-learning package on disability awareness be made available to staff and Members.
8. The Disabilities Champion to hold open forums as required, which will be open to all.
9. The Disabilities Champion to report to the Environment and Community Panel on an annual basis.
10. That the Opportunity Awards and other events hosted by the Forum be incorporated into other events already organised by the Borough Council.

EC23: **INITIAL DRAFT TREE STRATEGY**

The Arboricultural Officer presented the Draft Tree Strategy, which had been circulated with the Agenda in advance of the meeting. He explained that the Strategy covered the stock in the Borough's control.

The Chairman thanked the Arboricultural Officer for his report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, and Members of the Regeneration and Development Panel, who had been invited for this item of business, as summarised below.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Bambridge, thanked the Arboricultural Officer for his report and commented that it was very easy to read and understand. She commented that it was important that work at the Walks was carried out in a phased way and disturbance to residents was minimised. She commented that Southgates Park was not specified in the Strategy and she felt that work was required in the area to make it more attractive, and that the addition of trees could help with air quality in the area. The Arboricultural Officer explained that a separate initiative for tree planting at Southgates had been suggested and was part of the wider tree planting scheme.

Councillor Smith referred to page 6 of the Strategy which showed the ages of trees in the Borough and asked why there were less semi-mature trees. It was explained that the majority of older trees were in parks and were planted in Victorian times and there could have been a lull in planting once the trees had matured

Councillor Parish felt that there was a lack of trees in rural West Norfolk and suggested that work be carried out to increase planting on verges and small parcels of land around the Borough, including play areas. He also commented that he would like to see changes to the Tree Preservation process to make it easier to place an order on a tree, as he felt that important trees were often removed before an order was put on them. Councillor Parish further asked how the Tree Strategy would

be incorporated into the planning. The Arboricultural Officer explained that the Tree Preservation Order process was outside of this strategy and the strategy dealt with the Borough Council's stock, however this was something that could be looked at in the future. The Panel was informed that the Council did have some parcels of land in the Borough and consideration would need to be given to if and what sort of planting was appropriate. It was explained that not many of the verges in the Borough were owned by the Borough Council.

Councillor Hipperson requested that information be made available to Parish Councils on suitable planting and what trees were appropriate in what areas. The Arboricultural Officer agreed to look at sending out information as appropriate.

Councillor Mrs Wilkinson referred to Centre Point at Fairstead and the trees that had been removed from the Car Park. She asked if these were to be replaced. The Arboricultural Officer explained that this was a hostile area for trees and there was not much room, however replacements could be looked at if appropriate.

Councillor Baron Chenery of Horsbrugh, who had been invited to the meeting as a Member of the Regeneration and Development Panel, addressed the Panel. He asked if anything could be done about the Horse Chestnut which was going brown and it was explained that this was because of leaf mite, which was brought into the Country about eight years ago from the Balkans. It was explained that native predators were now realising that the mites could be a source of food so the mite was being seen less and less.

Councillor Baron Chenery of Horsbrugh requested that consideration be given to the Mistletoe present in some trees and to ensure that this was not eradicated if trees needed to be felled.

Councillor Devereux addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34. He stated that he was pleased that a Strategy was being produced and asked how the Strategy would be incorporated into the Planning Process. The Arboricultural Officer explained that the Strategy would have to be adopted by the Council and could then be considered as part of the Planning process and provided to developers. The Chairman asked if the Strategy could tie in with CIL and Section 106's and the Arboricultural Officer agreed to investigate if this was possible. The Arboricultural Officer confirmed that he was consulted on Planning Applications.

Councillor Parish explained that some Parish Council's had appointed Tree Wardens and he requested the consideration be given to their role and relationship with the Borough Council.

The Arboricultural Officer explained that the next stage in the process would be to send the draft Strategy to Parish Councils and other

relevant groups for comments and feedback. A final version of the Strategy would then be presented to the Panel.

**RESOLVED:** (i) The Environment and Community Panel supported the Draft Tree Strategy.

(ii) The Environment and Community Panel consider the final version of the Strategy, once available.

EC24: **PRESENTATION ON THE HOUSING REGISTER AND HOW TO BID FOR PROPERTIES**

The Housing Services Operations Manager provided a presentation on the Housing Register and the process that customers went through to bid for a Property. A copy of the presentation is attached.

The Chairman thanked the Housing Services Operations Manager for her report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor Smith asked if statistics were available on how long customers were on the register for under each band and if the form was in plain English. The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that a new system had recently been installed which made it easier to provide statistics reports and meaningful figures. She also explained that the form was simple to use and comments and feedback could be submitted and the form amended if required. She explained that the majority of customers completed the online form without any problems, but the form could be completed over the phone if required.

Councillor Mrs Collop referred to the requirement to provide five years' worth of Council Tax Bills and asked what customers could do if they did not have the information. The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that customers had to provide proof of where they had been living for the past five years and other sources of proof could be provided if available. The Assistant Director informed those present that replacement Council Tax bills dating back to 1993 could be provided by the Council if required. The Housing Services Operation Manager explained that customers had a personal responsibility to provide the information but assistance was available from the team.

The Vice Chairman, Councillor Bambridge explained that she received queries from constituents on how to bid for properties and the presentation had provided the necessary information that she could pass on as required. She asked how many people were in each Housing band and Councillor Lawrence, the Portfolio Holder for Community explained that this information was contained in his Cabinet Members report to Council on a regular basis.

Councillor Fraser asked how people were informed that inclusion on the register did not guarantee housing. She asked if this was made

clear on the form. The Housing Services Operations Manager explained that there was additional information on the website to explain this and customers were informed during telephone calls and other contact methods.

**EC25: HOMELESSNESS REVIEW**

The Housing Services Manager and Housing Services Operations Manager presented the Homelessness Review which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The review showed a significant rise in homelessness acceptances and a rise in the number of people rough sleeping. The Report provided detail of issues dealt with and future challenges.

The Chairman thanked the Housing Services Manager and Housing Services Operations Manager for the report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

In response to questions from Councillor Smith, it was explained that Universal Credit would have a big impact on the service and lessons were being learnt from areas where it had already been introduced. An action plan on how to deal with the roll out would be produced. It was explained that emergency direct access beds were available to people sleeping rough, and the number of beds available was increased during periods of cold weather. It was noted, however, that sometimes people who were sleeping rough did not want help or assistance and may refuse the offer of an emergency access bed.

Councillor Westrop asked what the criteria was to bring in a specialist outreach service as she felt that this was necessary in the Borough, especially if the amount of people sleeping rough continued to increase. The Housing Services Manager explained that the Council worked with partner organisations to assist rough sleepers and investigations were ongoing to see if an outreach service could be commissioned. The Housing Services Manager explained that the service would be subject to some drastic changes in the future including the introduction of Universal Credit, the Homelessness Reduction Act and this would require a fundamental review of the Homelessness Strategy within the next 12 months.

**RESOLVED:** (i) The Panel to be kept up to date on progress

**EC26: WORK PROGRAMME**

Members of the Panel were reminded that an eform was available on the Intranet which could be completed and submitted if Members had items which they would like to be considered for addition to the Work Programme.

Councillor Smith explained that the Principal of the College of West Anglia had offered to come along to a future meeting to answer questions about the Ofsted Report and this would be added to the Work Programme.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel's Work Programme was noted.

EC27: **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Environment and Community Panel would be held on **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2017 at 6.00pm in the Education Room, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn.**

**The meeting closed at 7.50 pm**