

**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, 22nd March, 2022 at 4.30 pm in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ**

**PRESENT:** Councillors C Sampson (Chair), L Bambridge (substitute for J Lowe), A Bubb, C J Crofts (substitute for C Bower), M de Whalley, I Devereux, C Hudson (substitute for S Collop), J Kirk, J Moriarty (substitute for A Bullen), S Squire and M Wilkinson.

**PRESENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 34:** Councillors A Kemp and J Rust.

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER:** Councillor B Long – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services.

**OFFICERS:**

Martin Chisholm – Assistant Director

Chris Black – Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager

Nikki Patton – Housing Strategy Officer

Duncan Hall – Assistant Director

**EC67: APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR FOR THE MEETING**

**RESOLVED:** Councillor Devereux was appointed Vice Chair for the meeting.

**EC68: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bower, S Collop, Lowe and Bullen.

**EC69: MINUTES**

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

**EC70: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**EC71: URGENT BUSINESS**

There was none.

**EC72: MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillors Kemp and Rust.

**EC73: CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE**

There was none.

**EC74: SUPPORT IN SAFE ACCOMMODATION FOR NORFOLK 2021/2024**

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The Housing Strategy Officer presented the report which presented the Safe Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021/2024. She explained that the Council would be asked to endorse the Strategy which followed on from the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act. She outlined the requirements the Act, the duties placed on Local Authorities and the key aspects of the Strategy.

The Chair thanked the Housing Strategy Officer for her presentation and invited questions and comments as follows.

In response to a question from Councillor Bambridge regarding gaps in accommodation, the Housing Strategy Officer explained that the Council was working with Norfolk County Council to look at accommodation options, with some new accommodation recently being made available in West Norfolk. Councillor Bambridge commented that she understood that the Dogs Trust could assist in finding foster placements for Dogs if people needed to leave their homes because of Domestic Abuse. The Housing Strategy Officer explained that work to ensure that a wide range of organisations were working collaboratively was being looked at.

In response to questions from Councillor Moriarty, the Housing Strategy Officer explained that the Domestic Abuse Act recognised victims of Domestic Abuse as a priority need for homelessness. She also referred to the grants available from Government. Some of the grant was being used for pilot projects for new accommodation in West Norfolk and she explained that the funding could be used for Capital and Revenue projects. The Housing Strategy Officer explained that the Council participated in the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, which brought together support services for victims and survivors. The Housing Strategy Officer explained that there had been an increase in dementia cases and elderly abuse and work was being undertaken with Adult Social Care and Adult Social Services.

Councillor Kemp addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34 and made reference to the Norfolk County Council Community Safety Scheme and IDAS. She asked what would be done to support children

and what services were available for perpetrators. The Housing Strategy Officer explained that Norfolk County Council were the lead organisation on this and the Strategy ensured that organisations were working collaboratively to provide the necessary support.

Councillor Kemp also made reference to support for people with disabilities and high dependency and the Housing Strategy Officer explained that flexible accommodations would be looked at on a case by case basis.

Councillor Rust addressed the Panel under Standing Order 23 and asked if any data was available on financial difficulties and the breakdown on different people who required support. She also asked why some data for West Norfolk was missing in the Strategy. The Housing Strategy Officer explained that data was now available for West Norfolk and would be updated in the annual data report.

Councillor de Whalley raised concern on the lack of data and asked what support was available for people moving out of safe accommodation. The Housing Strategy Officer explained that the lack of data had been recognised and work was on going to ensure data collection was robust. This also linked with the accreditation programme work. She also provided information on those moving out of safe accommodation and the demand on social housing. She explained that all cases were different and some people wanted to move back home, but a range of options would be explored.

Councillor Squire referred to the support available for people who wanted to stay in their own homes and the Housing Strategy Officer referred to the information in the report which listed a range of support services. She agreed to circulate this list to all Councillors.

The Chair asked for the Panel to be kept up to date as appropriate.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel supported the Safe in Accommodation Strategy for Norfolk 2021/2024 being presented to the Councils Cabinet.

The Panel supported and recognised the Councils membership on the Norfolk Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.

The Panel supported the Housing Department in undertaking the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation over the next 2-3 years.

EC75: **CABINET REPORT - MEMORIAL SAFETY TESTING POLICY FOR CEMETERIES AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS**

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The Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager presented the report which set out the procedure for the ongoing testing of memorials and headstones and the policy and methodology for managing memorial safety.

The Chair thanked the Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager for his report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

In response to a question from Councillor Crofts, the Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager outlined the process for closing a Churchyard. He explained that it would transfer to the Parish, but they could forfeit this to the Borough Council. If the Parish decided to maintain the closed Churchyard, they would be responsible for health and safety issues.

In response to a question from Councillor Bubb, it was explained that the Council did not have the resources to extend the testing service and make it commercial.

In response to questions from Councillor Moriarty, the Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager explained that to close a churchyard it had to meet certain criteria. Within the report mention was made of 'grave owner' and it was clarified that the deeds would specify who the grave owner was, and was usually the executor of the will. Work would be carried out to transfer grave ownership where necessary.

The Cemeteries and Crematorium Manager provided the Panel with detail of the testing process and the financial implications as set out in the report. The Panel was reminded that additional testing staff were not available, and existing resources would have to be utilised.

Councillor Bambridge asked for information on what happened to unsafe gravestones and those affected by flooding. It was explained that even in flood risk areas a qualified Stone Mason would be able to repair or replace as required.

In response to a question from Councillor Devereux, it was explained that once tested a stone would not be left if it was unsafe. It would be laid down respectfully and then the owner would be contacted. If the owner could not be traced, other options would be considered.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Long thanked the Panel for their comments and input and explained that it was very important to ensure that Churchyards were safe and posed no health and safety risks.

In response to a question from Councillor Crofts it was explained that if the Council was responsible for a closed Churchyard, it would be responsible for the whole area, including footpaths and walls.

**RESOLVED:** That the Environment and Community Panel support the recommendations to Cabinet, as set out below.

1. That the Council be invited to adopt the new policy for Memorial Safety Testing and subsequent methodology for dealing with unsafe memorials.
2. To agree an additional capital amount of £25,000 to test and inspect closed churchyards, with subsequent testing funding by an increase in the annual contributions to reserves.

EC76: **PORTFOLIO HOLDER QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

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No questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting.

Councillor Moriarty asked if flood risk and rising sea levels were a concern when it came to identifying sites for new cemeteries. The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Long explained that this was a concern and careful consideration had to be given to future sites. The Assistant Director explained that this was a concern and options for a site close to the town were currently being looked at.

The Panel discussed the issues that could become apparent when identifying future sites and the Assistant Director agreed to keep the Panel updated on options for a site in King's Lynn.

EC77: **WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD DECISION LIST**

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The following were identified for addition to the Work Programme:

- Wash and North Norfolk Marine Partnership – Information on 'Motion for the Ocean'.
- King's Lynn Cemetery Site.
- Anti-littering/update on the Enforcement Policy and roadside littering.

Comments were also raised about some signage that was muddy or in need of repair and Members were advised that it depended on where the signs were on who was responsible. Many of them were the responsibility of Norfolk County Council Highways and Members were encouraged to report any problems through that route.

Councillor Bubb made reference to a particular damaged sign, which the Assistant Director agreed to look into.

Graffiti was also raised as an issue and the Assistant Director explained that this could be reported to the Borough Council's Clean Up Team.

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

EC78: **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Environment and Community Panel was scheduled to take place on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022 at 4.30pm in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn.

**The meeting closed at 6.15 pm**