

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY PANEL**

Minutes from the Meeting of the Environment and Community Panel held on Thursday, 2nd February, 2023 at 3.00 pm in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

PRESENT: Councillors C Sampson (Chair), C Bubb (Vice Chair for the meeting), A Bullen, M de Whalley, C Hudson (substitute for S Collop), J Kirk, J Moriarty (substitute for T Parish) and A Ware (substitute for M Wilkinson)

PRESENT UNDER STANDING ORDER 34: Councillor Ryves (in the room) and Councillors Devereux and Parish (remotely)

OFFICERS:

Martin Chisholm – Assistant Director

Nikki Patton – Housing Strategy Manager

Karl Patterson – Senior Housing Development Officer

Lorraine Gore – Chief Executive

Alexa Baker – Monitoring Officer

EC52: APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

RESOLVED: That Councillor Bubb be appointed Vice Chair for the meeting.

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EC53: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bower, Collop, Devereux, Parish and Wilkinson.

EC54: MINUTES

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

EC55: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

EC56: URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

EC57: **MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillors Ryves, Devereux and Parish.

EC58: **CHAIR'S CORRESPONDENCE**

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The Chair informed the Panel that he had received correspondence from Councillor Devereux as below:

Colleagues, I note that at the 3rd January E&C, remarks are recorded about my involvement with the Environment Agency and seeking clarification of my current commitments.

Following my appointment to Cabinet in 2017 with the Environment Portfolio and my previous involvement as a Parish Councillor on the Wash East Coast Management Strategy (WECMS), I applied for the Nationally advertised post of Coastal Appointee to the Anglian (Central, now Great Ouse) Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. Following competitive Interview, I was appointed in 2018. The post is non remunerated but attracts EA approved out of pocket expenses for travel to meetings and is subject to governance arrangements similar to those applying in Local Government service.

I regret that I did not formally declare that I had been re-appointed to this post for another four years in August 2022.

The Coastal Appointee post involves me in a range of activities and meetings associated with the RFCC in furtherance of its objectives and purposes as can be seen on the Government Website and in the minutes and proceedings. Some of those activities overlap with the interests of BCKLWN.

Coastal Responsibilities are defined through the national Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy and implemented through Shoreline Management Plans with SMP4 covering The Wash. The BCKLWN interest includes "WECMS" and 'The Hunstanton Coastal Management Plan' on which I worked as The BCKLWN Environment portfolio holder, with our Officer Team, including Dave Robson, Peter Jermany and Jade Kite, as well as with Cllr Long in both his BCKLWN Leadership (and Lead Local Flood Authority) and his NCC Risk Management Authority roles; and who is also a Member of the A(GO)RFCC.

These management arrangements have been in place for some years and implementation is proceeding well.

Arrangements for the Northern and Western coasts of the Wash, under control of The Anglian (Northern) Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (which covers Lincolnshire and parts of Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire, including the Nene, Welland, Withey and Wainfleet river catchments) are not as well developed as highlighted by the National Review conducted by the Environment Agency at a joint meeting in our Council

Chamber in King's Lynn in late 2019. Together with BCKLWN Officers we established the need for a harmonised approach across the whole SMP4 area of The Wash. Cabinet and Council were advised at the time.

Progress towards this goal culminated last year in my Environment Agency Appointment as Co-Chair of the Wash Elected Members Governance Forum (For SMP4), together with the Chair of the A(N)RFCC, Eddie Poll. This was reported to the A(GO)RFCC meeting in October 2022. This role also has no pecuniary interests for me to declare.

At the October A(GO)RFCC I also reported that I had been made aware of Centre Port Tidal Power Barrage project as a potential project within its area of interest. As Environment Agency Coastal Appointee, I was obliged to inform the Committee of the prospect.

As stated in The Council of BCKLWN on 26th January, I declared that I have no legal nor pecuniary interest in Centre Port.

Were circumstances to change such that I did have such pecuniary interest I would be obliged to inform this Council and the Environment Agency and to respond accordingly.

EC59: **CABINET REPORT - LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND**

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Officers presented the report which provided information on the grant funding offered to the Borough Council in December 2022 through the Local Authority Housing Fund programme which had been established by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support Local Authorities to acquire homes to accommodate households with housing needs who have arrived in the UK via Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes.

The Chair thanked the officer for their report and invited questions and comments from the Panel, as summarised below.

Councillor de Whalley welcomed the scheme and commented that he had investigated community sponsorship schemes which identified vulnerable people for resettlement and matched them with sponsors. He commented that those entering the scheme needed protecting and he referred to existing charities that could also provide support. He commented that the houses should not go into the wider stock and instead the Council should set up, or support an existing charity to act as a community sponsor so that the support was ongoing and could deal with any future emergencies.

The Housing Strategy Manager explained that the grant funding offered by Government for this scheme was for Capital purposes and revenue would be required for ongoing support elements. She highlighted the criteria of the funding in that it could only be used for those who had already arrived through schemes as set out in the report. The scheme

granted flexibility so that the provision could be used in the wider housing stock if required.

Councillor de Whalley commented that he would like plans for the future to be looked at so that the Council was prepared to ensure that refugees had safety and security.

Councillor Hudson referred to the match funding element of the scheme and that any overspend would be the Council's responsibility. She felt that the grant funding awarded would not cover the costs of acquiring the properties. She referred to the existing housing stock available via Housing Associations and that some were in desperate need of refurbishment and felt that this funding should be used to make improvements to the existing housing stock.

The Housing Strategy Manager explained that the grant funding could not be used for refurbishment and explained that West Norfolk Housing Company would take on the delivery of the units through this scheme and the budget for this had been accounted for in the Company's Business Plan. Modelling would be carried out to identify the mix of housing to be delivered through the scheme and it was likely that houses that were already under construction would be used for the scheme so that the tight timescales could be achieved.

Councillor Hudson commented that there were so many people on the housing register that could be frustrated by this scheme and felt that funding should be directed towards this instead.

Councillor Moriarty asked for clarification on the recommendation within the report relating to delegated authority for the final terms on the Memorandum of Understanding. The Housing Strategy Manager explained that the delegation would involve accepting the principles set out by Government in terms of accepting the funding allocation, the number of homes to be delivered and timescales. It would not involve increasing the match funding.

In response to a further question from Councillor Moriarty, the Assistant Director explained that the prospectus set out the terms of the scheme and then further detail would be required to establish the Council's Policy for delivery of the scheme including details of tenures, eligibility and assessment of need.

In response to a question from Councillor Moriarty regarding the tight timescales involved, the Housing Strategy Manager explained that the purchase of homes already under development would be investigated. There was some flexibility afforded if the homes were not completed within the timeframe as long as the necessary contracts were in place.

Councillor Moriarty asked for details of tenures and how long people would be permitted to stay in the homes so that stock would be

available for those who needed them. The Assistant Director explained that tenancies would be included in the Policy document.

In response to a question from Councillor Moriarty, it was clarified that the Government had made an allocation of fourteen homes for those who had arrived from Ukraine and two homes for Afghan refugees. And this was based on a Government formula. The requirement was for sixteen properties to be delivered and it was confirmed that these could be a mix of sizes to respond to the need of eligible people.

Councillor Ware commented that the fund would be better used to refurbish existing Housing Association properties. She also asked how rents would be paid and it was explained that affordable rents would be paid and it may be that some of the tenants would be eligible for certain benefits to assist with payments. The Assistant Director explained that West Norfolk Housing Company were a social housing provider and they would be taking the scheme forward.

Councillor Bubb asked if the properties would be pepper potted, if locations near to facilities and towns would be considered and if the properties would be furnished. The Housing Strategy Manager explained that the availability of stock would be investigated, but it was likely that homes would be made available close to towns. It was also confirmed that this scheme did not include furnishings, but there were other schemes available that people could be signposted to if required.

Councillor Bullen commented that consideration needed to be given to the location of the properties in relation to families who were already here and had support networks in place.

Councillor Ryves addressed the Panel under Standing Order 34. He felt that there would be resentment from local people who had been waiting on the housing register for a long time. He commented that there was also lots of sub-standard social housing and that the Council should work with Freebridge Community Housing and commit to refurbishment. The Assistant Director explained that this was something that could be investigated separate from this scheme and he was aware that Freebridge Community Housing were currently assessing their stock and looking at options.

Councillor Moriarty commented that he agreed with the suggestion put forward by Councillor Ryves, that the Council work with Freebridge Community Housing to look at ways that improvements could be made to the social housing stock in the Borough.

The Chief Executive explained that there could be further opportunities through Government funding schemes to address other needs such as refurbishment in the future.

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

note the comments made about looking at opportunities to work with Freebridge Community Housing in the future.

It is recommended that:-

1. The Council will enter a Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC based on the attached prospectus for the Local Authority Housing Fund (see appendix 2). Authority is delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing People and Communities to agree the final terms of the Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC.
2. The Council will accept the total sum of £1,719,141 offered to the Council by DLUHC under the Local Authority Housing Fund to deliver the programme understanding the match funding requirements as set out in the report and attached prospectus.
3. Cabinet agrees that, subject to agreement from West Norfolk Housing Company, the properties will be acquired by West Norfolk Housing Company, funded by the grant, debt financing and other available funding
4. The Council requests that West Norfolk Housing Company works with the Council to deliver the properties through the fund.
5. Cabinet agrees to the principle of allocating properties acquired through the fund to eligible Ukrainian and Afghan households. A further report setting out a policy approach will follow separately.
6. Authority is delegated to the Assistant Director Programme & Project Delivery to
 - a. alter the proposed NORA 4 tenure mix, originally agreed by Cabinet on the 4th February 2020 (CAB 106), where necessary, to facilitate the disposal of properties previously identified as Private Rent and/or Open Market Sale, to West Norfolk Housing Company (WNHC) as affordable housing
 - b. negotiate the terms of any disposal with West Norfolk Housing Company.

EC60: **WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD DECISION LIST**

Councillor de Whalley reminded the Panel that friends of Horsey Seals were keen to come back to the Panel to provide an update and look at next steps. The Chair explained that he had asked the Democratic Services Officer to make contact with them and an update would be provided in due course.

Councillor Bullen asked for an update on the recommendations from the Urban Wildlife Informal Working Group and it was explained that these had recently been presented to the Cabinet who had directed the recommendations to the Biodiversity Task Group for consideration.

RESOLVED: The Panel's Work Programme was noted.

EC61: **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Environment and Community Panel was scheduled to take place on 21st February 2023 at 4.30pm in the Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 3.56 pm