Housing and Public Health Policy Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Public Health Policy Committee of South Norfolk Council held at South Norfolk House, Long Stratton on Monday 10 November 2014 at 9.30am.

Committee Members Present:  
Councillors L Neal (Chairman), N Legg, T Palmer, S Thomson and G Walden

Apologies:  
Councillor N Ward

Other Members in Attendance:  
Councillor Y Bendle

Officers in Attendance:  
The Housing & Public Health Manager (M Swann), the Housing Access and Standards Manager (T Cooke), the Early Intervention Manager (M Pursehouse), the Independent Living Team Leader (S Cayford), the Housing Options Senior Case Advisor (D Neville), the Housing Enabling & Strategy Officer (K Mitchell), the Project Manager Environment & Housing (T Durell), and the Housing & Public Health Partnerships Officer (K Gallagher)

47 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following member declared an 'other' interest in the matter listed below.

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<tr>
<th>Minute No.</th>
<th>Councillor</th>
<th>Reason for Declaration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>T Palmer</td>
<td>Board Member of Saffron</td>
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48 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 9 June 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
### GOOD NEWS STORIES

**a. Gypsy & Traveller Site, Costessey**

The Housing Access and Standards Manager provided members with a brief update on the Gypsy and Traveller site at Costessey, advising members that the site, which had been welcomed by residents, had shown a reduction in the number of queries relating to illegal encampments in the area and had proved an effective and useful tool for both the Council and the Police. He explained that, although there had been some issues at the site, it had been almost continuously occupied since opening, providing a controlled, spacious environment for the travelling community.

**b. Empty Homes**

Members were given an update on the current position regarding Empty Homes in the District. The Committee was informed that the number of empty homes as at 1 October 2014 stood at 338 and that the challenge for 2014/15 was to keep it at this level or lower as any increase would impact on the New Homes Bonus.

The Housing Access and Standards Manager reminded members that a forced market sale of a property in the District had been completed earlier in the year, and advised that further forced sales would be considered in the future to reduce the number of long-term, empty properties in the area. He added that forced market sales were only considered as an solution where all other options had been exhausted.

The Housing & Public Health Manager commented that the Empty Homes initiative was providing a financial benefit to the authority through an increase in New Homes Bonus and Council Tax monies.

The Housing Enabling & Strategy Officer informed members that the report of the Lyons Housing Review cited South Norfolk Council as an example of good practice in using New Homes Bonus to fund affordable housing.

### HOUSING & PUBLIC HEALTH REALIGNMENT UPDATE

The Housing & Public Health Manager presented a structure chart to the Committee which sought to clarify the changes within the Housing and Public Health team, following a recent realignment.

Members were advised of the rationale behind the changes, which was to bring the structure of the team more into line with the focus and objectives of the Council, giving significance to the promotion of independent living and early help.

Cllr Bendle endorsed the changes, adding that she was pleased to see how the services were already linking together and that the team was making positive steps towards providing a more preventative approach.

Members noted the changes and requested that a structure chart be forwarded to the Committee which included officers’ names, and the telephone numbers for new members of staff.
The Early Intervention Manager presented members with an update on the work being carried out by the Council and its partners at the Early Help Collaboration Hub. He advised members that eleven partners were now signed up to the initiative, sharing information and working jointly, seven of which were located within the Hub.

The Committee was given information regarding the Family Connectors scheme which enabled representatives with local knowledge to make connections with vulnerable families and to bridge the gap in supporting and steering them towards obtaining the appropriate assistance required. Officers advised the Committee that two people had been appointed as Family Connectors and that funding of £20,000 had been obtained from Our Place Funding towards the project.

Members were advised that South Norfolk Council, together with Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Councils had reached a further stage in the Transformation Challenge Awards which focussed on how services joined and worked together.

The Early Intervention Manager advised members of the next steps planned in the development of the Collaboration Hub, and that the plan was to achieve a service where data sharing, local knowledge and the ability to build strong connections would ensure that residents would be able to access a full range of help following consultations with staff.

Members were presented with two case studies which demonstrated how officers had already put their knowledge into practical use by helping residents to find early assistance to improve their situations.

In response to a member’s question regarding safeguarding children, officers confirmed that staff in the Hub were working closely with Social Services to ensure that, in such cases, early help was achieved and assistance could be escalated where necessary. The Committee was also advised that local schools had been supportive with the project which meant that potential issues could be identified earlier.

The Committee was advised that promotion of the Independent Living Team was taking place in doctors’ surgeries and that cards advertising the services offered were available for distribution by members. The Early Intervention Manager and the Independent Living Team Leader agreed that they would distribute addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses for contacts, by email, to members of the Committee.

The Housing Options Senior Case Advisor provided members with an update on the Peer Review of the Homelessness Service and summarised the salient points contained in his briefing note, including the successes, outcomes and objectives for the team following the review. Cllr Bendle commented that she had been involved in the process and was impressed by the hard work of officers during and following the process.

In response to a member’s question, officers advised that as part of the Continuous Improvement Plan, there were key areas to consider and some areas of the Council’s work would be reviewed during the next stages of the process.
Members queried the usage of temporary accommodation in the District and whether this would need to be reviewed. Officers advised that this would be an area for review but that there was a need to balance the availability of emergency temporary housing with cost effectiveness. It was also noted that the current use of temporary accommodation had declined in the area due to the good provision of affordable homes.

53 HEALTH & WELLBEING STRATEGY UPDATE

The Housing & Public Health Manager provided members with a verbal update on the Health & Wellbeing Strategy. The Committee was informed that since the approval of the Strategy, learning hours had been held which focussed on Health and Wellbeing priorities, and that a Year One Action Plan had been put into place.

Members were advised of some of the successes so far, including the accomplishments of Early Interventions work and the Collaboration Hub, and of the implementation of the HONOR Award scheme which had helped local businesses provide healthy food to customers.

The Committee was given details of the Fit for Work initiative being delivered by Active Norfolk which sought to support health and fitness in the workplace, and was pleased to note that although six districts were covered by the scheme, 50% of the activity would take place within South Norfolk.

The Housing Access and Standards Manager gave a brief update regarding excess winter deaths advising members that, following an event in South Norfolk, a multi-agency project group had been formed in May 2014 to tackle the issues raised. Members were advised that the group’s work would include simple measures such as training for helpers going into customers’ houses, the provision of winter packs, and advising residents and landlords on Green Deal funding.

54 GREATER NORWICH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report on the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy which sought to attain the views of members regarding the proposals contained in the new joint Homelessness Strategy. The Housing & Public Health Partnerships Officer summarised the salient points in the report, including the priorities and vision of the Strategy and the proposed timetable for its formation and publication.

In response to a member’s request that the specific needs of those who had left the armed forces should be considered within the Homelessness Strategy, as specified in the Home Options Policy, it was agreed that this would be raised with the Homelessness Strategy development team and implemented within the document.

After a brief discussion, it was:

RESOLVED:

1. to note the progress on the Homelessness Strategy with the addition regarding ex military individuals, as detailed above; and
2. to approve the Homelessness Strategy consultation timetable.
55. THE RIGHT TO BUILD VANGUARD PROJECT

The Housing Enabling & Strategy Officer presented his report which described the principles of the DCLG’s Vanguard project and explained how the Council was considering options to extend the principle of custom-build to the affordable housing sector. He introduced Tim Durell as the Project Manager of the Vanguard project and explained that the initiative was a six month field trial to establish how Right to Build might work in practice.

During discussion, members were generally supportive of the project but concerns were raised regarding the limited availability of land within the District, which might become available for custom build. The Project Manager agreed that it was not yet known how much land might become available, but stressed that the project was in a discussion stage and that the Council would shortly be opening a register for people wishing to build their own homes in the district, to gauge the interest in the scheme.

Following a brief discussion, it was:

RESOLVED:

to note the contents of the Right to Build Vanguard Project report.

56. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

A copy of the current work programme for the Housing and Public Health Policy Committee was tabled at the meeting and members were asked to forward their views to the Housing & Public Health Manager by 31 December 2014.

57. DATE OF NEXT FORMAL MEETING

Members noted the date of the next formal meeting to be held on 23 February 2014, at 10.00am.

The meeting closed at 11.32 am

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Chairman