

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Sustainable Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday 11 October 2022
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bellamy, Bowler, Bowser, Eastwood, P. Fielding, W. Fielding, Hayward, Lodge, Markham, Moyes, Osborne, Peace, Richardson, Smith, Webster and Wray.

23 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representative (England) Regulations 2001.

24 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Osborne declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 26 as he is the Cabinet Support Member for Regeneration and Culture, he works for Reed in Partnership as a Partnership Manager and is a member of the Berneslai Homes Board. His wife is employed as Higher Executive Officer for the DWP.

Councillor Peace declared a non-pecuniary in Minute No.26 as he works for the Department for Work and Pensions.

Councillor Lodge declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 26 as he is a Berneslai Homes Tenant.

25 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th September, 2022 were received.

26 Cost of Living Crisis Report

The following witnesses were welcome to the meeting:

Matt O'Neill, Executive Director Growth & Sustainability, BMBC
 Kathy McArdle, Service Director Regeneration & Culture, BMBC
 Sarah Cartwright, Head of Strategic Housing, Sustainability & Climate Change, BMBC
 Julia Burrows, Executive Director Public Health & Communities, BMBC
 Phil Hollingsworth, Service Director Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities, BMBC
 Jayne Hellowell, Head of Commissioning, Healthier Communities, BMBC
 Councillor Robert Frost, Cabinet Spokesperson Growth & Sustainability, BMBC
 Councillor Caroline Makinson, Cabinet Spokesperson Public Health & Communities

Councillor Frost gave members of the committee a brief summary of the various grants and schemes that had been introduced in the fight against the cost of living crisis. Members were also informed of the Adult skills and community learning courses available for aiding people back into learning in order to gain qualifications to get back into work. All of the information detailed would be available on the More Money in Your Pocket website.

Julia Burrows spoke of how important it was to recognise that the council could not solve the cost of living crisis but could work together with partners to try and mitigate the impact with the resources available. It was acknowledged that Barnsley already had significant poverty in the Borough and that the cost of living crisis would exacerbate the problem making some residents more vulnerable than before. The short term response would be how to help over winter going into the long term impact

Phil Hollingsworth introduced the report, with an update to the work being undertaken in the response to the cost of living crisis including the launch of the More Money in Your Pocket website which is a one stop shop for support and guidance to residents. Members were provided with details of the government grants already received and what they were being utilised for, the work being carried out in the community and the Affordable Warmth Charter due to be launched in the Autumn.

Members heard how the forward plan strategy had been introduced with the message around the resources, grants and funding available to residents being relayed to the community through a number of avenues including frontline workers, health partners, police, community and voluntary sectors, leaflets, bookmarks in libraries and adverts in the Barnsley Chronicle.

Sarah Cartwright informed members of the resources available to all home owners and tenants including private rented and Berneslai Homes to make their homes more energy efficient.

In the ensuing discussion and in response to detailed questioning and challenge the following matters were highlighted:

The long term plans to support residents out of poverty and to reduce the number of people affected in the future included a strategic approach to help the economically inactive people gain employment by enhancing their skills. A big piece of work was being undertaken independently to look into pathways across the country and internationally in order to gain an action plan to get people back into work.

The issue around redistributing food past the 'best before' date was being addressed so as to reduce the amount of good food that goes into landfill and to instead get it to people who need it at cost. Recipes to support cooking on a low budget are available on the website.

Storehouse and Field's is a community led food pantry that offers access to good quality and affordable food each week. The aim is to develop more of these through a franchise with local community groups and to set up as many as possible to help the local communities. However, the aim was not to monopolise the market with only

Storehouse and Field franchises but there would also be support for independent schemes, of which some had already received funding and been established.

Alongside the energy crisis, there was also an expectation to see a housing crisis due to mortgage rates increasing. This would be monitored over the winter months and members were asked to help reiterate the message for anyone struggling to pay their mortgage or rent to get in touch and engage early in order to prevent homelessness.

A grant from the South Yorkshire Mayor's Office of £15,000 had been realigned in order to help the armed forces community. The More Money in Your Military Pocket campaign would be promoted with the help of Councillors and local armed forces organisations such as - Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) and the British Legion.

The National Grid and Ofgem had hinted at an energy shortage during winter raising fears around blackouts. Mitigations were in place for a crisis response, but expectations would be for a joint council and whole community approach. It was hoped that if anything so drastic were to happen, then a national alert would be given in order to plan a response.

Whilst there was no additional grant support for council and Berneslai Homes employees affected by the cost of living crisis, there was support through the More Money in Your Pocket website, information sessions for staff members, support for mental health and wellbeing and debt management. Employees were not restricted to the 3 days a week in the office, they could opt to spend 5 working days in an office or council building in order to save on energy bills at home.

The approach taken to deciding and managing which buildings would be open and operational for offering a warm place provision was being undertaken without a clear understanding of what the demand will be. Currently, existing buildings and opening hours would be utilised, with a view to flexing this offer if demand required it, and any independent community halls or venues that wished to create a provision would be welcomed in addition to the venues that the Council and Berneslai Homes' had offered.

Local elected members were in a good position to identify those residents in most need and at significant risk of being adversely affected by the crisis. Ward Alliances and Area Council's were also in a good position to identify additional residents through their Age UK, DIAL and CAB contracts. Age UK had funded some slow cookers with recipes and food packages to be handed out in addition to winter warmth packs. Some smaller independent groups had received funding to provide a hot meal once a week and cups of tea and in total had reached out to around 3,000 pensioners which was a condition of the grant.

It was identified that there were many elderly residents who would be eligible to claim pension credits who were either too proud or were not aware they could claim. In turn this could then open up avenues to other benefits.

Whilst it was positive communicating to the wider public on social media and websites, it was acknowledged that those who would be most vulnerable would

probably not have access to those platforms. Visits to large employers such as GXO had taken place and were planned, and also potentially visits to Barnsley Football Club on match days, as well as spreading the word through community groups.

It was felt that some people would be overlooked as they did not qualify for a lot of help and benefits due to owning their own homes but yet only receiving a state pension. There were warm homes grants for loft, wall and under floor insulation with a threshold of a yearly income of £30,000 available. The grants were also open to private tenants and landlords, with the expectation that private landlords would maintain properties at an EPC rating of C and above.

A significant risk was identified in care homes and how they would be able to keep the elderly residents warm with the increase in gas and electricity prices. The National Agency for Care Homes were making representations to the Government for a future funding package for care homes.

An increase in Berneslai Homes rent charges was expected with an estimated increase of between 5% and 10%. It was anticipated, but not guaranteed, that it would be around 5% as anything higher could cause tenants financial difficulties. Berneslai Homes were providing a support package of £50 per tenant to try and support people.

A significant rise in mental health issues was expected and there were concerns around how the already stretched Mental Health Service would cope. The Mental Health Partnership Board were aware of the issues on the back of the covid pandemic and risk assessments were being undertaken. Mental Health Services were being signposted through the literature available through warm spaces. It was hoped that within the warm spaces there would be an added benefit of removing some isolation for people and that communities would come together in order to help the elderly and those in need to get to those venues and access the services they would need.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution;
- (ii) that the report and presentation be noted;
- (iii) Witnesses to use further good practice to inform service delivery, including model Warm Space Charters from other local authorities; CILIP guidance on warm spaces; and fire safe guidance issued by the National Fire Chiefs Council to ensure the safety of residents;
- (iv) Witnesses to ensure Councillors are involved in the identification of those in need as well as support provided in their communities; and
- (v) Members to inform the Head of Commissioning of any schemes they may be aware of that have not been captured by the service.

Chair