

MEETING:	Central Area Council
DATE:	Wednesday 6 December 2023
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Reception Room - Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present Councillors K. Dyson (Chair), Clarke, Fielding, Mitchell, Moyes, Murray and P. Wright

22 Declaration of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were no declarations of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests.

23 Minutes of the Previous Meeting of Central Area Council held on 27 September 2023 (Cen.06.12.2023/2)

The meeting received the minutes from the previous meeting of Central Area Council held on 27 September 2023.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Central Area Council held on 27 September 2023 be approved as a true and correct record.

24 Support for Private Tenants and for Berneslai Home Tenants - Lisa Harris, Dominic Dimanna and Sharon Laister (Cen.06.12.2023/3)

Lisa Harris, Housing and Cohesion Officer, Barnsley Council, Dominic Dimanna, Tenants First Team Leader, Berneslai Homes, and Sharon Laister, Cost of Living Advisor, Berneslai Homes, were welcomed to the meeting.

Members were made aware of the Hardship Fund which was available to Berneslai Homes tenants. £0.5m from Housing Support Grant was made available to assist those struggling in the cost of living crisis. Support was available in the form of payments for gas and electricity, including pre-payment vouchers or assistance with arrears, or by providing vouchers for food and toiletries.

The fund was capped at £750 per household per 12 months, and details of income and expenditure was required to be provided to assess eligibility. Members heard that members could apply every 3 months if the maximum of £750 per household had not been reached.

Members noted that food vouchers were available for a variety of supermarkets, and available in different denominations. Applications to the fund could be made online, or via telephone, and tenants could self-refer or be referred by various external agencies. Members noted that around £280k remained in the fund, but that there was a backlog of applications to be processed.

In addition, members were made aware of two other sources of financial support, one which provided help with hoarding cases, and another for support with water debt,

school uniforms and hygiene. It was noted that with hoarding, financial support could be provided in the form of skips or cleaning, and that referrals would be made to support agencies.

Questions were asked in relation to leaseholders, who were not tenants, and it was confirmed that only tenants were eligible, however support may be available through the More Money In Your Pocket for those in other housing tenures. It was noted that the fund was not equipped to respond to urgent needs, and applications could take from 2-6 weeks depending on the current backlog of applications.

It was noted that eligibility criteria would be circulated to Members. Members were encouraged to promote the fund to pensioners, as they were currently underrepresented as recipients.

Those present were then provided an update in relation to the role of the Housing and Cohesion worker and their work with tenants in the private rented sector and with owner occupiers. Members noted that financial support could be provided through Household Support Grant in the form of £49 energy vouchers for pre-payment meters, and that the officer had made many referrals to the fund. It was noted that applications from each household could only be made every 30 days.

Members noted the work undertaken to support tenants with damp, with many noticing deteriorating conditions due to the rise in fuel prices and heating being used more sparingly. Members heard how some households had been supported with food vouchers to help offset the increased heating charges and in other cases blankets, moisture boxes and extra quilts had been provided for individuals to keep warm.

Members noted that heavy rains had also highlighted cases of damp and disrepair, and many vulnerable tenants had been supported to deal with these issues with the officer liaising with the landlord on their behalf.

The proactive nature of the post was acknowledged and Members heard that the officer was currently supporting 36 households. Noted were the widespread difficulties due to rising costs, which had led to a number of owner occupiers unable to service their boilers, potentially leading to significant health impacts. Where possible referrals to other sources of support, such as Age UK were made. Those present also discussed other sources of support such as CISWO.

Members noted the additional pressures on landlords, and the options available to improve conditions for tenants, such as serving improvement notices. The option for works in default with a charge on the deed being made, or payment plans was discussed.

Those present heard of the support to landlords and tenants, with resources available in the form of a 'how to rent' booklet for the latter.

Noted was the workload of the Housing and Cohesion Officer, with the current prevailing weather increasing the number and severity of issues faced by vulnerable residents.

RESOLVED that thanks be given for the attendance of officers, the information provided, and their continued hard work to support residents.

25 Performance Management Report Quarter 2 (Cen.06.12.2023/4)

The Area Council Manager introduced the report that provided an overview of performance in quarter 2 and covered the period August- September 2023.

Members heard that contract management meetings had been held with all organisations delivering for the Area Council, and no issues with performance had been identified.

RESOLVED that the report be received, and the contents noted.

26 Procurement and Financial Update (Cen.06.12.2023/5)

The Area Council Manager introduced the report which provided the current position of Area Council commissions, service level agreements and grants. It was noted that a panel had met to consider applications to the Social Isolation Fund. Four had been selected to proceed, and details would be made available in the new year.

Members noted that deadline for the Youth Work Fund call for submissions had recently passed and those received would be considered shortly. An update on both funds would be provided at the next meeting of the Area Council.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the overview of Central Area Council's current priorities, and overview of all current contracts, contract extensions, Service Level Agreements, and grant funded projects, with associated timescales be noted;
- (ii) That the actual financial position to date for 2023-2024 and the projected expenditure, including future proposals, to 2023-2025 as outlined in appendices 1 and 2 of the report be noted;
- (iii) That it be noted that the Social Isolation moderation panel met on 17 November 2023 with details of successful applicants being made available to the next meeting of the Area Council.

27 Notes of the Ward Alliances (Cen.06.12.2023/6)

The meeting received the notes of the following meetings of the Ward Alliances within the Central Area:-

Central – held on 23 August, 27 September and 25 October 2023

Dodworth – held on 3 October 2023

Kingstone – held on 2 September and 15 November 2023

Stairfoot – held on 11 September, 9 October and 13 November 2023

Worsbrough – held on 7 September and 12 October 2023

It was remarked that Dodworth had held a very well attended Christmas Fayre, which had been funded through the contributions from the Ward Alliance Fund and from Better Barnsley Bonds. The latter was recommended as a useful source of external funds.

RESOLVED that the notes and feedback from the Ward Alliances be received.

28 Report on the Use of Ward Alliance Funds (Cen.06.12.2023/7)

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chair