

## HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2012  
Committee Room 1, Civic Centre  
Commencing at 6pm

### Agenda

1. **Apologies** (Please send your apologies to Erica Fredericks – tel: 01903 737547 or e-mail: [erica.fredericks@arun.gov.uk](mailto:erica.fredericks@arun.gov.uk) )
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Minutes and Matters Arising from the Housing & Customer Services Working Group meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2012** (attached)
4. **Customer Services Access Strategy-** (Report attached with Background Paper)  
(Please note that Councillors who have visited the Arun Direct Call Centre will be invited to offer feedback to the Working Group)
5. **Tenants Scrutiny of Housing Services** (Report attached)
6. **Housing Complaints Arrangements** (Report attached)
7. **Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities & Homelessness** (Report attached)
8. **Cold Weather Shelter 2012/13** (Report, for information, attached)
9. **Work Programme 2012/13** – (Work Programme 2012/13 attached to note the addition of the Review of Housing Contractors, Mears)
10. **Next Meeting** – 27 February 2012

**Copies to: Cllrs:**  
Bicknell  
Mrs Bower  
Chapman  
Clayden  
Edwards  
Mrs Goad  
Mrs Harrison  
Haymes  
Mrs Oakley  
Oliver-Redgate  
Oppler  
Mrs Pendleton  
Squires  
Dingemans (Cabinet Member)  
Mrs Madeley (Deputy to Cabinet Member)  
Elkins (Cabinet Member)  
Gammon (Deputy to Cabinet Member)

**Officers:** Jackie Follis (Lead Officer)  
Brian Pople (Lead Officer)  
Frank Hickson  
Erica Fredericks  
Nigel Lynn

**Electronic Copies to:** Nigel Croad  
Harriet Shelley

## HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

### Minutes of a meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2012 at 6pm (to be agreed at the next meeting of the Working Group)

Present: Councillors; Clayden (Chairman), Mrs Bower, Chapman, Mrs Harrison, Haymes, Mrs Oakley

Also

Present: Councillor Elkins (Cabinet Member Housing), Councillor Dingemans (Cabinet Member Customer Services) from minute 30, Councillor Mrs Madeley (Deputy Cabinet Member Customer Services)

Officers: Housing Project Manager, Democratic Services Officer, Head of Human Resources and Customer Services (Leader Officer), Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

##### **Review of Terms of Reference and Work Programme**

***The Housing & Customer Services Working Group recommends to Full Council that;***

the revised Terms of Reference, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.

It is also recommended to Full Council that the Head of Legal Administration be given delegated authority to make the required changes to Part 3 – Responsibility for Functions in the Constitution as well as any further consequential amendments required.

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group recommends that the work programme, revised to include the addition of Customer Services Review project plan, be agreed for the remainder of the municipal year 2012/13.

##### **Council Housing Stock and Expansion Opportunities**

***The Housing & Customer Services Working Group recommends to Cabinet that;***

a) the options generally outlined in the report for purchasing newly built homes, Council shared ownership properties, former Council and other privately owned homes to increase the Council's housing stock and acquiring land to build new Council homes be adopted.

b) The criteria outlined in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.7, in the report, for repurchasing former Council homes covered by the Housing (Right of First Refusal) (England) Regulations 2005 be adopted and applied to all purchases of Council shared ownership properties, former Council and other privately owned homes.

#### 26 APOLOGIES

26.1 Apologies had been received from Councillors; Brown, Edwards, Mrs Goad, Oliver-Redgate, Squires. Apologies had also been received from the Head of Housing, Lead Officer to this working group.

26.2 In the absence of Councillor Edwards Councillor Mrs Bower carried out the role of vice-chair for the duration of the meeting.

27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

27.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

28 MINUTES OF THE HOUSING AND PLANNING MEETING ON 15<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2012

28.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> August were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

28.2 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE HOUSING AND PLANNING WORKING GROUP ON 15<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2012

28.3 With respect to the recent Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness and the issue of healthcare provision for the homeless, the Housing Project Manager confirmed that Members of this Working Group had received a copy of the letter response from the Coastal West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group. It was noted that acknowledgement had also been received from the MP Nick Gibb and the MP Peter Bottomley who will be raising the matter with the Secretary of State for Health. It was recognised that no response had, so far, been received from the professional bodies representing General Practitioners.

28.4 Councillor Chapman confirmed that he had updated the Overview Select Committee on healthcare provision for the homeless and will also report to the next meeting in February 2013. He pointed out that the West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Committee will convene during November 2012 and it will also be possible to raise this issue at this meeting.

29 COASTAL WEST SUSSEX LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN

29.1 The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager presented his report for Cabinet on the Coastal West Sussex Local (Homes & Communities Agency) Investment Plan.

29.2 It was explained that the Coastal West Sussex Local Investment Plan was developed jointly by Adur District Council, Arun District Council, Brighton & Hove City Council, Chichester District Council, Worthing Borough Council and West Sussex County Council. The partnership had to consider revised local authority investment priorities and this is now being done without the involvement of Brighton & Hove City Council who have decided to produce their own Local Investment Plan.

29.3 The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager drew members' attention to Appendix 1 which he described as an investment wish list. Although there are no guaranteed funds from the Homes and Communities Agency the Council is working on the adage that if we don't ask we don't get. He also drew attention to the Equality Impact Assessment to show that various investments have been investigated and that we are considering all groups.

29.4 Following question it was confirmed that the Council can be reasonably confident of the target of 1000 affordable homes by the end of 2015.

29.5 Disappointment was expressed with respect to the Foyer Project and Members agreed that it will be good to encourage the achievement of this scheme as a beneficial asset for the community. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager

explained that this type of project is subject to the use of capital funding and the provision from state budgets will diminish over the next few years. He stated that the Council will maintain the prominence of this issue going forward.

- 29.6 Members discussed housing delivery. Central Government's impetus on house building was considered with the recent statement that Housing Associations will be tasked with propelling this forward. It was noted that Housing Associations may not be in a position to deliver the number of required houses and so there may be monies available for local authorities that can commit.
- 29.7 The differences between Social Housing rents and Affordable rents were discussed. It was confirmed that Affordable rent is set at 80% of market value and Social Rent is set at 60% of market value. The Chairman asked for clarification with respect to the setting of Affordable rents and it was emphasised that Affordable Rent does not have to be fixed at 80% but can be set at "up to" 80%. Members agreed that there needs to be a balance between affordability and the cost of delivering housing provision and the Council does have the flexibility to make judgements depending on how Council Housing stock is financed.
- 29.8 Members thanked the housing strategy and enabling manager for his report.

## 30 CUSTOMER SERVICES

- 30.1 As the Working Group had amended its jurisdiction to become the Housing and Customer Services Working Group the Head of Human resources and Customer Services provided Members with a presentation giving an overview of Customer Services.
- 30.2 The presentation included an outline of the Corporate Customer Service Team including the Contact Centre and Reception areas, information on the Customer Access Strategy, the contact channels of website, face to face and telephone, Service Standards, Performance Indicators, Technology, where we are now and how Customer Services will be reviewed.
- 30.3 Key points raised:  
It was explained that a major project, reviewing Customer Services, will commence shortly. The review will focus on what the customer wants and consider the Customer Access Strategy which was not fully ratified at its start in 2010, the technology used to deliver our services and how the reception areas and departments of Customer Services can work together to develop a practical and efficient working synergy.
- 30.4 In terms of technology the Head of Human Resources and Customer Services emphasised its importance in delivering effective Customer Service. It was noted that technology is in the process of upgrade and review.
- 30.5 The Contact Centre was highlighted as an important area of Customer Service Delivery. It was noted that the Central Services Working Party reviewed the work of Arun Direct in March 2010. Since this time the Contact Centre has taken on more calls from departments such as Elections and now takes 190000 to 200000 calls annually. It was confirmed that the Contact Centre currently answers calls at 38 seconds, under the target of 30 seconds which is not considered achievable due to staffing issues.

- 30.6 The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services emphasised the need to avoid customer contact as the result of failure demand and the Council's aim of resolving a customer's query at first point of contact.
- 30.7 Members responded to the presentation by making it clear how deeply impressed they are with the manager, team leaders and customer service staff who work for Arun Direct noting the hard working and self-motivated approach the team adopts. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Customer Services stated that she had visited Arun Direct and had been impressed with innovative, proactive staff who multi-tasked to achieve high levels of customer service. The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services stated that all members would be welcome to visit Arun Direct and an invitation will be extended to them shortly.
- 30.8 Members felt that the website is a good channel of customer contact when used for basic information but that most customers with a query or problem would want the opportunity to speak to a member of staff.
- 30.9 Members agreed that answering a call within the target of 30 seconds was an unachievable target.
- 30.10 It was pointed out that the standard of letters, sent to customers, requires improvement and the Head of Human Resources and Customer Services agreed with this comment.
- 30.11 It was also pointed out that cost to the Council actually means a cost to the taxpayer and this should be borne in mind when providing services.
- 30.12 Members agreed that multi skilled teams, especially in reception, will result in better provision of customer service. It was emphasised that to achieve this much will depend on the investment in IT and Members felt that an improved technology base, with better synergy, will be very important in helping staff deliver a quality customer service. The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services agreed that technology is critical and a lot of work is required in this area. The update to the Lagan system was mentioned as was middleware that helps to link silo customer information systems. It was also noted that the council's website was in need of update and that the Communications Manager had been tasked with this responsibility.
- 30.13 It was agreed that a detailed project plan for the Review of Customer Services will be presented to Members for discussion at the meeting of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group on 11<sup>th</sup> December.
- 30.14 Members thanked the Head of Human Resources and Customer Services for her informative presentation.
- 31 REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13
- 31.2 The revised Terms of Reference for the Housing and Customer Services Working Group was agreed.
- 31.3 The Housing and Customer Services Working Group Work Programme 2012/13 was agreed with the addition of Customer Service Review project plan scheduled for the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

## 32 TENANTS SCRUTINY WORKSHOP ON 21<sup>st</sup> SEPTEMBER 2012

- 32.1 The Housing Project Manager provided members of the working group with feedback on the Tenant Scrutiny Event held on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012 and thanked the councillors that attended. A programme of the day and a copy of the presentations given by Reading Borough Council and Hyde Martlett tenants had been circulated to members prior to this meeting with the agenda. It was identified that a video from South Oxford Housing Association on how they approached tenant scrutiny was shown.
- 32.2 It was reported that five tenants attended and they were encouraged to express their opinions which were positive. The Chairman stated that it was important to encourage more representation from tenants and Members discussed how the Council could encourage participation from a wider group of tenants. The issue of payment of expenses was raised and the Housing Project Manager confirmed funding was now in the budget to meet reasonable expenses for tenants attending meetings and events.
- 32.3 In response to a question on the legal status of requirements for tenant scrutiny the Housing Project Manager explained that tenant scrutiny is included in the Housing Regulatory Framework (Tenant Empowerment Standard) and the Council is required to meet this standard by the Housing Regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency. It was pointed out that tenants are a good feedback resource and that a number of Local Authorities have been working in this way for years.
- 32.4 It was confirmed that funds have been identified for tenant scrutiny in the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) Business Plan to take this work forward year on year.
- 32.5 The Housing Project Manager informed members that a briefing paper, setting out a range of options, will be presented to the Housing and Customer Services Working Group at the next meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

## 33 COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK AND EXPANSION OPPORTUNITIES

- 33.1 The Housing Project Manager presented his report on Council Housing Stock and Expansion Opportunities. The report outlined options and proposals for potentially repurchasing former Council homes sold under the Right to Buy (and covered by Right of First Refusal Regulations), purchasing existing and new properties and opportunities to acquire land for increasing the Council's housing stock. The report included an outline of the specific Housing (Right of Refusal) (England) Regulations 2005 and, in section 3, a proposed formal approach to dealing with Buy Back (right of first refusal) applications.
- 33.2 Members discussed the report and stated that mechanisms must be put in to place to bring existing stock back into use which can be extremely cost effective for the Council.
- 33.3 Members identified actions required to move forward including having a budget in place and deciding rent levels. The Housing Project Manager confirmed that there is flexibility to set rents at social rent levels for affordable homes when using the Housing Revenue Account and surpluses of our own land to buy or build new

homes. He also confirmed that Full Council would have to agree a supplementary estimate from the Housing Revenue Account for 2012/2013 and there are surpluses in the Housing Revenue Account to meet this cost and provide a funding stream in future years.

- 33.4 A question was raised as to whether the Legal Department will be able to provide adequate resource to complete purchases quickly. The Housing Project Manager responded that he had spoken with the Head of Legal & Administration. She said that sufficient resources are available and as the conveyance work can be outsourced, Arun Staff may not be directly required. He advised that he had been informed that valuations could be obtained within 3 to 4 days from Chichester District Council.
- 33.5 The Cabinet Member for Housing emphasised the need for our response valuations and legal work to operate at an effective level aiming to be more efficient than the equivalent in the Private Sector. He stated that it was important to work smarter for our tenants and be able to move quickly when presented with the opportunity to redevelop sites or sell property outside of our requirements. Members concurred and expressed opinion that we must be efficient and cost effective.
- 33.6 Members considered the report's recommendations and after slight amendment agreed to recommend the following to Cabinet;
- a) The options generally outlined in the report for purchasing newly built homes, Council shared ownership properties, former Council and other privately owned homes to increase the Council's housing stock and acquiring land to build new Council homes be adopted.
  - b) The criteria outlined in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.7, in the report, for repurchasing former Council homes covered by the Housing (Right of First Refusal) (England) Regulations 2005 be adopted and applied to all purchases of Council shared ownership properties, former Council and other privately owned homes.
- 34 NEXT MEETING- 11 December 2012

The meeting concluded at 7.50pm





ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP – 11 DECEMBER 2012

---

Information Paper

Subject : Report on Review of Customer Access Strategy

Report by : Jackie Follis

Report date: 27 November 2012

---

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the Review of the Customer Access Strategy which is being carried out by an officer Project Team. It sets out the membership of the Team, the reasons for the Review, initial conclusions about the Aims of a Customer Access Strategy and the timetable for the Review.

Members are asked to consider the questions raised in the Conclusion and in particular if they are happy with the general direction for the Customer Access Strategy set out in Section 2.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The initial meeting of an officer Project Team who will be undertaking the Review of the Customer Access Strategy has taken place. The Team consists of:

Paul Warters, Assistant Director Customer Services  
Jackie Follis, Head of HR & Customer Services  
James Howman, Contact Centre Manager  
Harriet Shelley, Communications Manager  
Rupert Webb, Service Development Manager  
Sue Stallard, Bognor Regis Town Hall Manager

With project support from Paul Symes & Jane Lawrence

1.2 At the meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Party on 11 October 2012 Jackie Follis briefed Members on the scope of Corporate Customer Services and key issues. The main reasons for undertaking a review of our Customer Access Strategy were given as:

- a) The current Customer Access Strategy was written in 2010 which established the approach which we now call “Click, Call, Come in”. Whilst this appears to have been widely accepted it was never formally presented to Members. Its key aim was to move our customers to the most cost effective communications channel. A copy of this document is attached as background, but not for discussion by Members.
- b) The Contact Centre opened approximately 5 years ago and its operation was reviewed by the Central Services Working Party in 2010, but no other formal review has taken place.
- c) The new Civic Centre Reception opened in January 2011. Whilst minor changes have been made to the way it works since this date, there has been no formal review of its overall operation.
- d) We have Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software which we use to manage a number of our interactions with the public. The software (Lagan) is not fully integrated with the majority of services in the Council, although there is full integration with Cleansing. Lagan was purchased by Councils across the County through the Better Together Partnership (which took over responsibility for the CRM from the West Sussex Accessible Services Partnership) and West Sussex Chief Executives have just agreed to extend this for a further year until March 2014. There have been issues around reliability. The County has ‘refocused’ the project, bringing in an enhanced project team and moving the software to a new server. The Council will be getting a Lagan upgrade early in the New Year, but there remain concerns about the effectiveness of this upgrade and levels of support from the new team.

## 2.0 Aims of our Customer Access Strategy

2.1 The Project team have carried out an initial high level review of the previous Strategy and have concluded the following:

- a) The overall aim of the Customer Access Strategy remains relevant: that is to channel customer contact in a way that improves services to our Customers whilst reducing costs for the Council. The focus of this will be making it as easy as possible for people to access services by the channels which we would prefer them to use. A key way to support this aim will be to improve our website and then resource it in a sustainable way.
- b) The Council is committed to delivering services in a variety of ways which enable all members of our community to access them, including the website, telephone, face-to-face, social media and written communication. We understand the importance of choice so far as we are able to deliver this within financial constraints.

- c) One of our key aims must remain the resolution of queries at first point of contact.
- d) An important target should be to deliver as closely as possible the same level and quality of service through each channel and at each location.
- e) As previously stated we do need to give urgent consideration to the future of our Customer Relationship Management system. This needs to be done by March/April 2013 in order to allow time for possible procurement of alternatives. Integration with back office systems remains one of the biggest barriers to an end-to-end customer experience and this needs to be part of our planning.
- f) The group spent some time discussing the relationship between corporate Customer Services and individual services. The Customer Access Strategy must establish and inform our overall approach, but we recognise that any action plan will involve close working with all services to agree how each of them should move forward and how we can support this.

### 3.0 Data Collection and Research

3.1 We need to understand the impact of various corporate initiatives, some more advanced than others, in areas such as:

- E-forms
- Systems Thinking
- Operation of reception areas, particularly in conjunction with back office services
- Website
- Social media
- Contact Centre and integration (or not) with back office systems

3.2 Do we have enough information on our customers? We believe that we have sufficient information on what channels people use for which services and where they come from. However we do not understand why people use which channels and what is most likely to facilitate a move between channels. Whilst we can all make an educated guess at this we will be able to identify best practice in other organisations that we may then be able to apply locally.

3.3 We need to understand where there are particular issues to be addressed. For example two key issues that the Team are already aware of are the quality of letters in some areas which can increase telephone contacts where they are not clear and how we move some Housing functions into the Contact Centre.

#### 4.0 The Timetable

4.1 The draft timetable for the project is set out below with Member involvement in shaded boxes. The timetable is very tight and whilst the final document will set out our Strategic Direction there will be an attached action plan covering the next 2 – 3 years setting out how we intend to achieve this. There are likely to be financial implications for the Council, but understanding the detail of this will be part of the action plan. The exact route for decision making still needs to be decided and will depend on the scope and impact of the recommendations.

<b>TASK</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>WHO</b>
Initial project team meeting	12 November 2012	All
Data collection, analysis and identify gaps	3 weeks	Rupert Webb, James Howman, Harriet Shelley
Research into best practice in other organisations	3 weeks	Jackie Follis
Housing & Customer Services Working Group - present initial views & project plan	11 December	Jackie Follis
Project Planning meetings to include:  Next steps based on data analysis Consider and identify improvements needed including IT/Communication/consultation with services	17 December 2012 and onwards as necessary	All
Update Strategy	February 2013	
Housing & Customer Services Working Group – update & discussion of proposed new Strategy	27 February 2013	Jackie Follis
Implementation Action Plan	March 2013	All
CMT	19 March 2013	Jackie Follis/Paul Warters
Housing & Customer Services Working Group – Final proposals on Strategy and Action Plan	18 April 2013	
Cabinet, OSC?		
Full Council	15 May 2013	

## 5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Members are asked to consider the contents of this report. The Lead Officer is particularly looking for feedback on the following:

- a) Are Members happy with Section 2 which sets out strategic aims for delivering Customer Services? Is there anything which Members would like to see added or changed?
- b) Are there any specific issues which Members would like to see addressed in the Action Plan?
- c) Any other issues?

**Contact:** Jackie Follis, Head of HR and Customer Services, 37580

**Background Paper:** Customer Access and Outreach Strategy

## **Customer Access and Outreach Strategy**

### **1.0 Introduction – why are we writing this document – the internal factors**

Recently decisions have been taken to invest in website and payment technology, to revamp the reception area at the Civic Centre in Littlehampton and to review the operation of the Councils Contact centre, Arun Direct.

Combined, these three areas present an opportunity to consider and improve the way the Council works with its customers and it's work across all service areas.

This paper sets out where we are now, where we want to be in 2011, 2012 and 2013 and identifies key milestones.

### **2. Summary of Aims and Principles**

The key **aim** of this strategy is to channel customer contact in a way that improves services to Customers whilst reducing costs for the Council. The intention is that whatever point of contact the customer should receive the same service and to agreed corporate standards.

This strategy considers 3 channels of contact

*Click:* Increasing access over the web and enabling customers and front line staff to deal with service requests electronically 24 hours a day

*Call:* Increasing the services that can be accessed by telephone by using automated processes where appropriate

*Come in:* Improving the ways we manage our face-to-face interactions with customers to enable a consistent approach where service requests can be dealt with at that point of contact

Allied to these channels are 2 further aims

*Customer feedback:* Listening and responding to our customers.

*Right first time:* Dealing with customer queries at the first point of contact, measured through a local indicator

The three key **principles** are:

Customer-focussed services

Quick and easy to access services

Cost effective services

2.1 The modernisation of Customer Services should be a corporate aim which will set corporate standards and objectives to be recognised and achieved at all customer contact points, wherever they sit within the Council's structures. The programme will therefore encompass all services and access channels to ensure that the three key principles are adhered to and, where appropriate and feasible, multiple requests for services are dealt with at one point of contact.

2.2 Rather than focusing on our needs as a supplier of public services, the Council will focus its provision on what the customer needs and expects, by joining up our operations across service areas.

### **3.0 Arun in context – the external factors**

3.1 People like living in Arun - over 83 per cent of people are satisfied with their local area. Over half of people are satisfied with the way the Council runs things, and over 38 per cent of people agree that the Council provides value for money. All of these are above the national average.

3.2 Customer service in every local authority is being encouraged by central government to deliver better access to local services. Resident's views and perspectives have been measured through a Place Survey, and reductions in avoidable customer contact are often still measured despite the fact it is no longer a national indicator.

3.3 The demographic of the area's population is likely to impact on the nature of the customer service that is needed. Parts of our resident population are highly transient. There is also turnover due to short-term economic migration.

3.5 Arun's population at the time of the 2001 census was 140,000. The 2009 mid-year estimate was 149,600. The area has an ageing population, like the rest of the county, the area is home to many older people and their number is expected to grow. In the 2001 census 36500 people (26%) were aged 65 or over against a national average of 16% in 2008. The number of people under 25 is also growing.

3.6 The number of people in black and minority ethnic groups is small compared to other parts of the region. There is a small, well-established community of Portuguese people in Littlehampton, and a number of migrant workers most of whom work in agriculture.

3.7 Arun is generally wealthy but it has some deprived areas in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis, including 5 of the most deprived wards in West Sussex. Weekly earnings are the lowest in West Sussex and around one in six people claim benefits.

3.8 The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 ranks Arun 187th out of 354, placing it just above the top half of the most deprived local authority areas in England.

3.9 In order to tackle problems for communities living in the most disadvantaged areas the Council has set up two Local Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, where it runs projects to improve life for local people.

3.13 In 2009, 70% of all UK households had internet access. This has grown from 57% of households in 2006. The majority of household connections to the internet are broadband connections. In 2009, 63% of households had broadband connections, up from 40% in 2006.

3.14 A wavelength survey in 2009 showed 84% of respondents in Arun had internet access (79% through broadband). 93% of respondents to the survey had a mobile phone

#### **4.0 What do our customers think and what do they want?**

Customers contact local councils for a variety of reasons:

- Asking for information
- Asking for advice
- Making a payment
- Requesting a Council service
- Reporting a service issue
- Making a complaint
- Responding to community engagement exercises

We have no data to show a volume split between these. We do have some information on Customer perceptions and preferences through the Wavelength Panel. This information is 4 years old and may have changed over time. A summary of the 2006 results is shown at Appendix A

#### **4.1 Drawing trends from the survey and other information sources**

Although the information is now 4 years old it is relatively easy to identify key points by comparing these results with a similar survey in 2002

- People increasingly prefer to make telephone contact
- Personal visits remain important to a substantial number of people
- Letters are not seen as a key contact channel
- People have difficulty in identifying who they should contact
- People increasingly prefer email
- Younger people are less satisfied

The move to telephone contact by other providers (e.g. utilities and banks) has made this a more acceptable channel to many members of the public. Similar parallels can be drawn with the banks need to maintain a network of branches to satisfy a customer need for face to face contact.



Preliminary work, in Revenues and Benefits, with Experian Mosaic (for summary of Experian's services see Appendix B) suggests that younger people prefer contact by telephone, email and SMS messaging, so the limited use of these may be reflected in satisfaction levels in that group.

The suggestion that letters are not seen as a key communication method is interesting in light of the fact the Council sent 583,000 items of post (approx 9 per household) in 2009/10

## **5.0 Community Engagement**

5.1 The Council consults members of the community on a number of issues and this is reflected in the Sustainable Community Strategy document 'Our Kind of Place'

"Our Kind of Place" describes its aims as "capturing the needs, hopes and aspirations of Arun residents and turning them into actions that improve quality of life, now and for generations to come. It's about all the agencies and organisations which provide services in the Arun area, from the public, business and voluntary sectors, pulling together to make things happen. It's about people of all ages getting involved in their local community".

Consultation takes the form of discussions with stakeholder groups and the wavelength panel. The Wavelength Panel is a group of residents broadly representative of the population of Arun. There are currently around 1,200 Arun residents on the Wavelength Residents' Panel and the response to surveys is usually high (1,000 commented on the Sustainable Community Strategy).

Changes in the availability of technology, notably through instruments such as Experian//Mosaic (see Appendix B) provide the opportunity to target areas and gather information on preferred methods of communication. Exploiting these opportunities is a fundamental part of the Customer Contact and Access Strategy

## **6.0 Where are we now?**

At present, customer contact functions across the Council are delivered in a multitude of different ways and across a wide variety of access channels, with no standardised measures of the quality of the contact and little consistent assessment of how we meet our customers' needs. This situation has occurred organically, because each service has traditionally considered front office functions as an 'add-on' to back office processes, without necessarily fully integrating them into those processes.

The Council does not routinely take information from visitors or callers to provide customer insight data which would enable the targeting of services.

### **5.1 Current Contact points**

#### Agenda Item 4 - Background paper to Report on Customer Access Strategy

The Council has 3 main reception areas for the public, on the ground floor of the Civic Centre in Littlehampton, Bognor Regis Town Hall and the Housing Department in Church Street, Littlehampton. In addition the Planning reception is located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Civic centre and the Engineering contact area on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor.

Each location offers service specific functions, none providing access to the complete range of council services

Numbers of customers making personal visits in 2009/10 were as follows

Civic Centre, ground Floor	20,065
Bognor Regis Town Hall	43,800
Housing	7,260
Planning	TBA
Engineering	Not collected

In addition, the Council has a Contact Centre, Arun Direct, based in the Civic Centre. This service deals with calls for a limited number of services and calls in 2009/10 were split as follows

Revenues	44,682
Benefits	30,087
Cleansing	20,963
Planning	19,881
Environmental Health	13,950
General Enquiries	10,092

Arun Direct also take payments and took approximately 6,000 payments in 2009/10

The Council has a website that is enabled to take payments.

In addition the Council has 2 Cashiers Offices, at the Civic Centre and Bognor Regis Town Hall which take cash payments for Services. In 2008/9 they accounted for 8.9% of the monies collected by the Council. These offices are scheduled to close in March 2011, to be replaced by use of the Paypoint network.

The Council has a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This is not integrated to many back office systems and is therefore used only by Arun Direct and cleansing. This means the Council has no holistic data on users of it's services.

## 6.0 Current projects

6.1 The Customer Contact Strategy of the Council does not stand alone and impacts on a wide range of current projects as shown in the diagram below.

#### Agenda Item 4 - Background paper to Report on Customer Access Strategy

Each of the projects needs clear objectives and timescales to enable the strategy to be successful.

6.2 A review is being undertaken as to how we can provide more services electronically, e.g. online application forms, billing, benefits notifications, planning applications, housing allocations and direct access to personal account data. It is intended this will be complete in 2011.

6.3 The Council website is currently being developed to make it more 'transactional', and this is the subject of a dedicated project plan. This means that customers will be able to contact the Council and request more information or services. It is intended this will be complete in 2011.

6.4 The implementation of a new customer payments system is also in progress. And new payment systems increasing customer choice and reducing costs will be in place by April 2011.

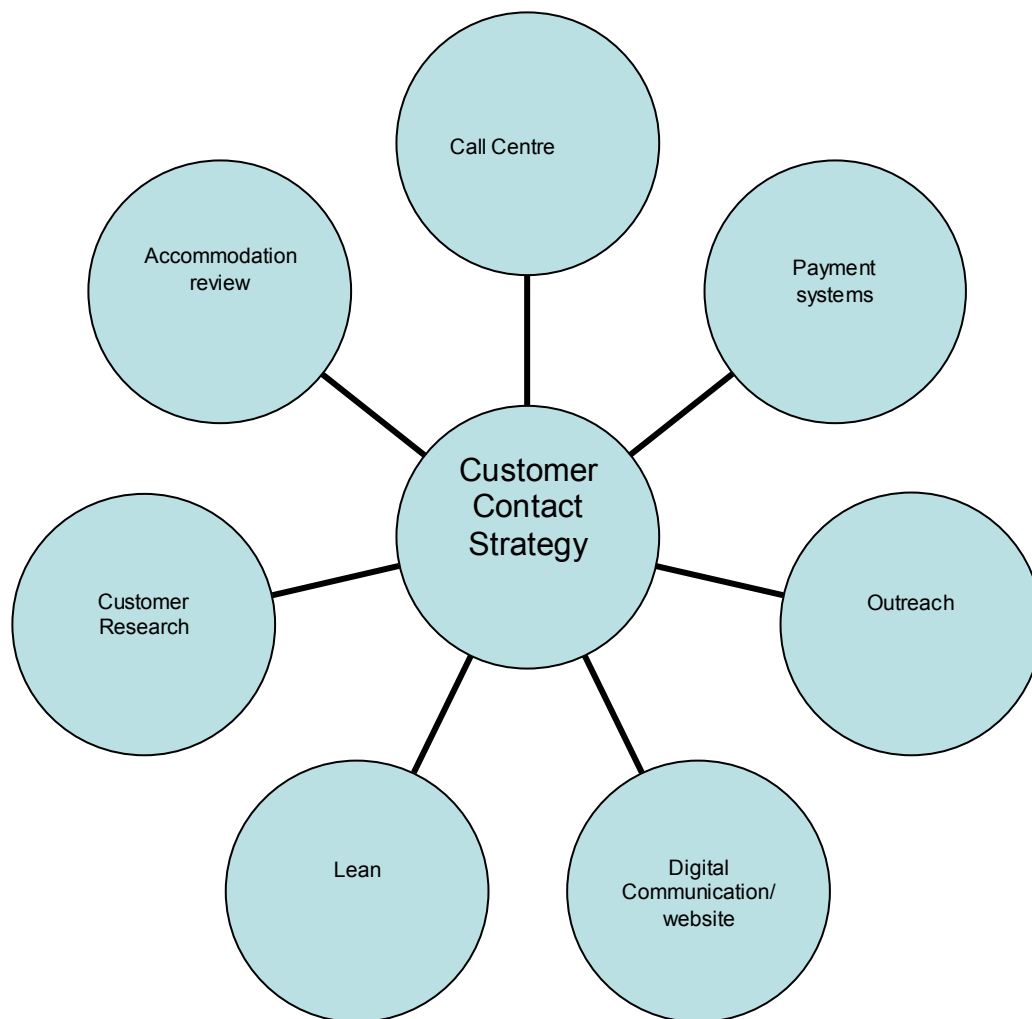
This will make it easier for customers to pay by debit and credit cards, most notably through the web and telephone.

6.5 An accommodation review is currently underway, with the objective of making more effective use of our office space coupled with modern ways of working. The aspirations for face-to-face customers will both influence and fit within that solution. It is intended this will be complete by April 2011.

6.6 A review of the operation of Arun Direct has been requested by Cabinet with a view to ascertaining any opportunities to change and increase the scope of the service. Implementation of these changes should be complete in 2011.

6.7 Customer Research is scarce and not up to date. Proposals for increasing this by 2012 form part of the action plan attached to this paper. A pilot using information about the callers to Bognor Regis Town Hall has shown the uses that can be made of the data in targeting geographical areas where service take-up is apparently low

A Head of Service has been identified to monitor and draw together these projects as they impact on Customer Contact and this is shown diagrammatically below:



## 7.0 Where do we want to be in 2013?

7.1 In summary, by 2013 it is intended customers contacting the Council will find

- A consistent, reliable, high quality level of customer service whatever the access channel, every time underpinned by corporate service standards
- Easy access to services at a convenient time, using the method customers prefer including the web, calling the council, or coming into council outlets
- A service which can solve most customers' problems there and then, at the first point of contact, and which can track enquiries through to completion

When consulting members of the community and stakeholders the Council will

- Work in partnership for our customers with complementary organisations.
- Develop improved Customer insight to enable targeted consultation and communication
- Communicate using the methods the Customers prefer.

For our partners who provide advice and receive a grant from the Council, we will ensure that service provision is complementary to our services through our service level agreements, and at the next grant review.

### *7.2 Face-to-face Contact ('Come in')*

7.2.1 We will continue to provide two contact points, one in the Civic Centre and one in Bognor Regis Town Hall They will deliver a comprehensive range of council services, with the intention of dealing fully with enquiries at the first point of contact..

7.2.2 The service will deliver the same opening hours as now - that is from 8.45 am to 5:15 pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.45 am to 4:45 pm on a Friday. This will be subject to regular review focusing on customer needs.

7.2.3 These contact points will also provide public access to computers to enable people to access our online services.

7.2.4 Visiting Officers for Housing and Council Tax Benefit services, together with community based housing surgeries will complement the contact points particularly for the vulnerable members of the community.

### *7.3. Telephone Contact ('Call')*

7.3.1 The service will deliver the same opening hours as now - that is from 8.45 am to 5:15 pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.45 am to 4:45 pm on a Friday. This will be subject to regular review focusing on customer needs – recent benchmarking of Revenues and Benefits, for example, has shown this to be below the average opening hours for Council contact centres

7.3.2 By April 2011 we will have the facility for credit and debit card payments to be made 24 hours a day

7.3.3 By 2012/13 a review of failure demand and avoidable contact will be complete. Where appropriate front line staff will be generic and trained to deliver the a wide range of services

### *7.4 Online and E-mail Contact ('Click')*

7.4.1 Where possible, information about services will be accessible online to all customers to provide more efficient and cost effective services by the end of 2011.

7.4.2 A review of working practices will aim to increase the amount of services provided by email and encourage the issuing of standard forms by email rather than post by 2012

7.4.3 Staff will be encouraged to use email and e-forms rather than post when dealing with Customers

7.4.4 Public access to the internet will be continue to be made available at our contact points in Littlehampton and Bognor Regis.

### *7.5 Postal Contact*

7.5.1 Some people will prefer or need to contact the Council by post. By (date) we will develop our processes to make this method of contact more effective.

7.5.2 We will use the Councils EDRMS system to make this more efficient and cost effective. A timetable for adoption by all departments is already agreed

## **8.0 Our staff**

8.1 Appropriately trained staff will deal with a range of service or information requests from across the portfolio of council services. Consideration will be given to increasing flexibility between Arun Direct and Face to face staff.

8.2 We will provide a customer contact training programme by (date)

8.3 Customers access a wide range of Council services and facilities within their local neighbourhoods in our parks, car parks and from our Enforcement Officers for example. These staff will be included in our customer contact training programme.

## **9.0 Listening to our customers**

9.1 If we are to improve customer satisfaction, it is important that we provide services that our customers want delivered in a way that they are able to use. This will involve a rolling programme of review across all our services and changing aspects of our services to reflect changing customer demands. Such reviews will be based both on systems thinking reviews and enhanced customer insight.

9.2 To help us provide a good quality service we will ask customers regularly about the service they have received, through Customer Contact Surveys. This information will be used to make sure that we continue to provide a consistently excellent level of service and to help us to look for new ways to improve our service delivery.

9.3 Feedback, including complaints, will be monitored and responded to in a timely and consistent manner.

9.4 For each way that customers use to contact the Council, we will set standards and guidelines for the level of customer care they will receive.

9.5 These service standards form part of our commitment to our customers and will be reported by all services and monitored corporately to ensure that they are met. They will form the basis of staff training.

## 10 Cost effective services

10.1 The implementation of this strategy will provide value for money services in the following ways:

- Lowering transaction costs by making it easy for customers to contact us online, by telephone and email rather than making face to face visits;
- Identifying service efficiencies by cutting out duplication and improving first contact resolution performance;
- Undertaking a programme of Process Improvement through the Systems Thinking initiative
- Improving payment methods by ensuring we have robust technology to allow us to accept electronic payments;

## 11. The way forward

Milestone	Date	Responsibility
Customer Contact Strategy	Q4 2010	PW
Improved payments methods	Q1 2011	AP
Revamped Civic Centre contact point	Q1 2011	NH
Contact point process review		PA/relevant Heads of service
New Website live		MC
E-forms live		MC
Arun Direct review complete and recommendations accepted		JP
Arun Direct recommendations implemented		JP/relevant Heads of service
Lean review to reduce amount of letters sent		PA/relevant Heads of service
Implementation of EDRMS		MC/ relevant Heads of service
Pilot programme with Experian/mosaic	Q3 2010	PW
Improve customer insight with		?JB/JP?

Agenda Item 4 - Background paper to Report on Customer Access Strategy

Experian/mosaic		
Wavelength survey		JB/JP
Customer Contact Training		JF
Regular customer contact surveys		JP
Agree Customer standards and targets		JP?



## Appendix A

### Key points from 2006 wavelength survey

A.1 The Wavelength Panel is a group of residents broadly representative of the population of Arun. There are currently around 1,200 Arun residents on the Wavelength Residents' Panel

A.2 A Wavelength survey last looked at customer contact in 2006. The headline findings were:

77% were either 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' (42% 'very' and 36% 'fairly') with the service they received the most recent occasion that they made contact the Council. Younger residents appeared somewhat less satisfied - with only 23% 'very satisfied' compared with 53% of those aged 60+ who were 'very satisfied'

58% of people contacted the Council during the 12 months prior to March 2006.

The percentage telephoning was 70%

The percentage visiting in person was 13%

Downland area respondents have increased their use of e-mail such that they are more likely to use this method than either post a letter or make a personal visit.

The percentage of Western area residents making personal visits had dropped to 10% in 2006 from 26% in 2002.

Just 6% make contact with the Council outside normal office hours.

The percentage of respondents 'finding telephone contact and personal contact easy' was 86% and 90% respectively.

The percentage 'finding contact by letter easy' was 62%.

Western area residents' satisfaction with the ease of making personal visits was 83%

Overall, a slightly higher percentage of respondents had problems contacting the Council in 2006 (17%) than in 2002 (14%). The percentage of Western area residents experiencing problems had risen to 17% from 9%.

Respondents were asked for the preferred method(s) for contacting the Council. The overwhelming preference was for telephone contact - 86% were happy with this method of contact.

#### Agenda Item 4 - Background paper to Report on Customer Access Strategy

The 20% of respondents who said contacting the Council was difficult were asked why they felt this way. "Getting through to the right person" was the number one reason at 60%. The percentage feeling that "finding the right telephone number is difficult" was 35%, and "waiting for a response takes too long" was 25%.

## Appendix B

Experian Mosaic is used by a number of Councils including Horsham who used it to when developing their LDF.

### *Extracts from Experian website*

Offering a wide range of services, Experian helps Local Government address challenges – from strategic planning to the day-to-day delivery of public services. Drawing on our unique economic, business and citizen data, we work with local authorities across the country to develop:

- Strategic planning, including Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks
- A deep insight into who your customers are and what they need
- A clear view of how to engage with them
- An ability to communicate enabled by clean data and effective campaign management
- Information and processes to collect more revenue, authenticate identity and combat fraud

Our insight into customers informs the effective targeting of resources by locating the demand for services. We then support the development of tailored communication to maximise response and increase take-up, whilst making your customer management processes more efficient



ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP –  
11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2012

---

Decision Paper

Subject : Tenants Scrutiny of Housing Services

Report by : Frank Hickson

Report date: November 2012

---

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report sets out the background to Tenant Scrutiny, identifies a range of options for developing Tenant Scrutiny in the Council and seeks views from the Housing and Customer Services Working Group on the approach for future consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group consider the options for developing the Tenants Scrutiny of Housing Services and identify the appropriate elements for further consideration at future meetings.

1.0 **BACKGROUND**

1.1 Social landlords have been involving and consulting their tenants for many years. Arun District Council's Tenant Participation Agreement has been in place since 2005 and includes a commitment to consultation and participation through regular meetings with Arun Tenant and Leaseholder Association (ATLO). However, changes to the regulation of social housing require landlords to give their tenants increased opportunities to set priorities, monitor performance and make recommendations for improvement, known as "Tenant Scrutiny".

1.2 This paper sets out the changing regulatory requirements, including co-regulation and tenant scrutiny, considers best practice from other social housing providers, discusses how Arun might develop its approach to tenant scrutiny and makes recommendations for the next steps.

2.0 **THE NEW APPROACH TO REGULATION**

2.1 In 2010 the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published its Review of Social Housing Regulation. This includes transferring the

previous Tenant Services Authority's (TSA) regulatory powers to a statutory regulatory committee within the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) from April 2012.

- 2.2 The HCA now have a statutory duty to regulate in a manner that minimises interference, and although it will be more proactive in its approach to economic regulation and value for money within private registered providers, it will take a more reactive approach to consumer protection and only intervene in the event of serious failures.
- 2.3 This continues the approach begun in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, which introduced statutory objectives to empower tenants and ensure they have an opportunity to shape standards and services. This approach is called co-regulation and aims to move the focus of decision making and performance management from the Regulator towards tenants and their locally defined needs and priorities. The way in which the Council worked with its tenants to develop a Local Offer in 2010 is part of this approach.
- 2.4 The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England implemented from April 2012 makes a clear distinction between economic and consumer standards. The economic standards only apply to private registered providers and not to local authorities but the consumer standards will apply to all social housing providers including local authorities.
- 2.5 There are 4 consumer standards, covering the key services for tenants:
  - Tenant involvement and empowerment
  - Home
  - Tenancy
  - Neighbourhood
- 2.6 The Regulator's role will be limited to setting standards and intervening only when there is a risk of serious harm to tenants. They will have no role in monitoring how providers are performing against these standards. Instead the tenant involvement and empowerment standard has been revised to place greater emphasis on landlords involving tenants in scrutinising their performance.
- 2.7 The Involvement and Empowerment Standard requires that registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given wide opportunities to influence and be involved in:
  - the formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities;
  - the making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards;

- the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved;
- the management of their homes, where applicable;
- the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and
- agreeing local offers for service delivery.

2.8 Future regulation will be based on the following principles:

- Responsibility for service delivery lies with landlords, not the regulatory system or the Regulator;
- Landlords are responsible to their tenants for customer service standards, not the Regulator;
- Tenants need adequate information and effective influencing structures to hold their landlord to account and to shape service delivery ;
- Landlords should make honest and robust self-assessments of their own performance, including external validation such as benchmarking and peer review;
- While the Regulator will set clear outcome focussed standards, these should be enhanced by more specific local offers agreed between landlords and their tenants;
- There should be a clearer role for tenants in scrutinising performance;
- With regard to consumer standards, the Regulator will only step in when there is serious detriment (or a risk of it) to tenants.

2.9 The increased role for tenants in scrutinising performance has also been extended to the management of complaints. The Localism Act 2011 has introduced changes to the Housing Ombudsman Service and from April 2013 there will be a single Ombudsman for all housing complaints. However, the Act also proposes that more complaints are resolved at a local level by introducing a democratic filter. Tenants who have exhausted their landlord's complaints procedures will have to go through the democratic filter before being able to take their case to the ombudsman. Democratic filters can include MP's, local Councillors or a local Tenants Panel. Proposals for updating Arun's Complaints Procedure to comply with this are subject to a separate review.

2.10 The Chartered Institute of Housing advise that the changes to social housing regulation will have the following implications for the way in which landlords engage with their tenants:

- The principals of co-regulation and greater service user involvement will form an important element of consumer protection for the foreseeable future;
- Landlords will need to develop an approach to service delivery which positively engages with tenants, formally incorporates tenants' views and is transparently accountable to tenants;
- Tenants themselves are the key to driving service improvement and protecting consumer standards;
- Tenant Panels will play a key role in complaint resolution;
- There will be an enhanced role for tenants to support landlords to deliver the right services and develop a value for money approach.

### 3.0 **THE PRINCIPLES OF TENANT SCRUTINY**

3.1 Tenant scrutiny should be viewed as an approach to involving tenants in decision making rather than a prescribed process and the way in which it will be implemented will vary from organisation to organisation. However, it should always be based on the principle that the priorities and views of tenants should be at the heart of a housing provider's framework for setting service standards, monitoring their delivery and improving performance. Successful organisations in any sector know and understand their customers but tenant scrutiny goes beyond this and where it works well, it delivers a range of benefits including service improvements, efficiency savings, enhanced tenant satisfaction and staff confidence. Tenant scrutiny is intrinsically linked to the delivery of value for money services that meet local needs.

### 3.2 **Critical success factors: what makes tenant scrutiny work?**

A briefing from TPAS, HouseMark and the CIH, "Tenant Scrutiny: now and in the future" (published in 2010) identified the following critical success factors for effective tenant scrutiny:

#### 3.2.1 ***Clearly defined and real power***

What is important here is how scrutiny relates to the decision making structure of the organisation, including its relationship with (and separation from) governance and the executive team. There should be a clear and accepted way in which it influences the setting of strategic direction. For tenant scrutiny to be effective, it must integrate with the strategic and performance management frameworks of a landlord.

#### 3.2.2 ***Tenant led and independent***

The tenant scrutiny role should be independent from governance. Whatever structures are put in place to deliver the scrutiny role, there must be accountability, openness and transparency. There is also a need for an evaluation of the effectiveness of scrutiny itself and the ability for the wider tenant body to challenge this.



### 3.2.3 ***Clear roles and responsibilities with capacity to deliver***

Roles and responsibilities must be clear and agreed from the beginning. In order to deliver against expectations, it is crucial that those undertaking scrutiny are supported and have the right skills and knowledge; and that there is sufficient capacity and plans in place for succession.

### 3.2.4 ***Decisions based on freely available and commissioned information***

To make sure the scrutiny role works well in practice and maximises the impact it has on improving services and influencing strategic direction, it needs to be based on the principle of evidence-based decisions. This is supported by tenants having access to a range of information from different sources but also being able to influence how and why the organisation collects and analyses key data.

### 3.2.5 ***Embedding scrutiny in performance management arrangements***

Tenant scrutiny should be fully part of the formal structure which forms the operating and assessment framework of an organisation. Being a recognised part of the way in which the organisation and service is run gives tenants the confidence that activities of tenants involved in scrutiny will be taken into account. It also gives staff confidence about the role and legitimacy of tenant scrutiny.

### 3.2.6 ***Accessible***

The scrutiny role should encourage diversity and promote equality. There should be an emphasis on raising the profile of scrutiny and making as many tenants aware as possible of what it is and how to get involved. There should be links between scrutiny and other forms of tenant involvement (tenant scrutiny will be stronger if it can draw on the work and views of other tenant groups within the organisation).

## 4.0 **GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES FROM OTHER LANDLORDS**

4.1 The Tenants Services Authority identified 10 organisations as Co-Regulatory Champions from whose experience others can learn. Their models for tenant scrutiny are not intended to be copied wholesale but to help landlords and tenants develop their own approaches. Based on the experiences of the Co-Regulatory Champions, the Centre for Public Scrutiny has developed 4 principles of effective scrutiny:

- Provides “critical friend” challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers;
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public;
- Is carried out by independent minded tenants who lead and own the scrutiny role;

- Drives improvement in public services.

4.2 Summarised below are examples of how some of the Co-Regulatory Champions have introduced tenants scrutiny:

4.2.1 **Bromford Housing Group (BHG)** is a large registered provider with 26,000 homes. It has Customer Influence Members who are residents who work very closely with BHG in a variety of ways to develop services, for example as part of Offer groups, Customer Influence Group or the Customer and Communities Board. For residents who do not want to attend meetings or do not have time to get very involved, BHG have been using social media. As well as following BHG on Facebook and Twitter and being able to make comments, on-line debates have been used for more inter-active feedback.

BHG invited residents to debate on-line about their Annual Report through Twitter and Facebook “Annual Reports – worthwhile or worthless?” Some residents gave their comments prior to the meeting, others tweeted comments directly onto Twitter during the meeting and a staff member co-ordinated the discussion in the meeting and enabled live debate on line. The debate was lively with a mixture of staff and residents giving their comments. The general conclusion was that the annual report should be shorter, reported on-line and regularly updated.

4.2.2 **Chester West and Chester Council (CWAC)** manages 5,000 homes and has been engaging with residents for some time in traditional ways but scrutiny arrangements including the recruitment of Customer Service Inspectors (CSIs) to undertake scrutiny, began in March 2011.

The Terms of Reference, which were supported by the Council, involve the results of scrutiny being reported initially to the Executive Team. CSIs and Officers discuss the report at the meeting and Officers then draft an action plan for approval by the Executive Team. The CSI’s can approve the action plan or raise further issues, prior to the matter being reported to the Housing Stock Panel of the Council, which is made up of Elected Members, senior officers and 2 residents. CSI’s attend the Housing Stock Panel to present their findings and Elected Members have been encouraged by the in-depth work of the CSI’s and their emphasis on the customer experience. Policies and ways of working have been updated as a result of the inspector’s reports.

Reports on the scrutiny work of the CSI’s in newsletters has resulted in more success in encouraging residents to get involved in other activities including becoming mystery shoppers, empty property auditors and joining an editorial panel. Staff have become more used to engaging with residents in a partnership arrangement.

4.2.3 **Community Gateway Association (CGA)** manages 6,000 homes. It has the Gateway Tenants Committee (GTC) which reports directly to the Board. It has

places for 30 tenants who are elected onto the group for 3 years, with 10 standing for re-election each year. It meets bi-monthly, receives Board reports, questions senior staff about them and then makes recommendations to the Board.

The Gateway Tenants Committee feeds into 2 other roles - 7 resident Board members come from the GTC and the remainder of the GTC members form a Scrutiny Panel which carries out the scrutiny programme. Annual road shows take messages out to the community and help to gather opinions from non-involved residents on local offers and other subjects for scrutiny. Community options studies have taken place in sub-areas, where local residents identify issues and develop action plans to resolve them. Less time consuming involvement mechanisms in CGA's menu for engagement include completing surveys, mystery shopping, workshops and focus groups.

4.2.4 **Helena Partnerships** is a stock transfer organisation managing 13,000 homes. Its approach to scrutiny involves the following elements:

- One Voice: a panel of around 400 tenants who work with Helena to help shape and improve services by providing regular feedback, 4 times a year. Panel members can choose how they want to be consulted, for example by postal, telephone or e-mail surveys or attending a one-off discussion group. The results are publicised regularly through a newsletter;
- Customer Inspectors and Young Inspectors who test services and Helena's customer promises;
- Customer Excellence Panel (CEP) who maintain an overview of service delivery, scrutinise performance and consider how Helena can improve customer satisfaction and value for money. It has developed its own basket of customer focussed performance indicators so that they can monitor and review services from a customer perspective;
- Resident Involvement Group that measures the impact of involvement activities.

Key successes resulting from tenant scrutiny include extending repairs appointments to evenings and weekends; changing the frequency and format of rent statements and repairs receipts, leading to savings of £80,000; reducing external repairs response times at no extra cost; developing a new Customer Charter together with measurement and reporting arrangements; increasing frequency of contact with victims of anti-social behaviour to ensure they are kept informed about the progress of their complaint, increasing customer satisfaction and implementing an enhanced complaints management process.

4.2.5 **New Charter Housing Trust** has a housing stock of 15,000 homes and delivers co-regulation in the following ways:

- Mystery shopping and resident inspection – both receive regular training and have forward work programmes, including work in support of the scrutiny panel;
- Service Review Groups covering repairs and maintenance, relets, revenues and neighbourhoods;
- Working groups and panels for specific tasks, for example developing local offers and writing the annual report to tenants;
- Scrutiny Panel with 12 tenants who scrutinise performance across the service areas and carry out in depth reviews. The Panel aims to complete 3–4 scrutiny reviews per year and report their findings to senior managers and the Board.

4.2.6 **SOHA (South Oxfordshire Housing Association)** is a community based housing association managing 5,500 homes in Oxfordshire. Its approach is a resident-led system of “critical friend” scrutiny and challenge and it likens the different elements of its approach to tenant scrutiny to the different parts of national government:

- The Board, which includes 4 residents, is like the Cabinet and makes decisions about governing the organisation;
- The Tenants’ Forum is like Parliament and holds the Board to account – its views must be considered by the Board when making decisions;
- Tenant Inspectors are like the former Audit Commission or other regulators – they check the performance of services;
- The Tenant Scrutiny Group are like a Select Committee – they challenge the organisation about plans, policies and performance at a strategic level;
- Representative groups for residents with specialist interests act like national lobbying organisations and are consulted by the groups above.

4.2.7 **Wherry Housing Association** is a stock transfer housing association managing 6,700 homes across rural East Anglia. Managing homes across small, dispersed communities means that Wherry have to offer a wide range of ways for residents to get involved.

11 neighbourhood areas have their own Patch Panel made up of resident representatives and recognised residents’ associations. Resident representatives champion their local area and do estate walkabouts and inspections. There are also Mystery Shoppers, a Readers Panel and Focus Groups for residents with different skills and amounts of time available.

All these sources feed into the landlord-wide residents’ representative body – Way Ahead with Wherry, which has set up Wherry Independent Scrutiny Panel to review strategic service issues and performance.

Wherry also works with other social landlords to develop resident involvement in localities with dispersed stock, where any individual landlord only has a small number of homes. Work has included developing a Neighbourhood Charter with commitments by local residents and landlords to make the area cleaner, safer and greener and a Neighbourhood Standards Panel, which monitors delivery of the Charter through quarterly surveys and service reviews. This has led to an increase in resident satisfaction and a reduction in reported anti-social behaviour.

4.3 From the examples above, it can be seen that the Co-Regulatory Champions have used a variety of methods to introduce tenant scrutiny. However, research by the Centre for Public Scrutiny has identified the following ingredients for success, on which all the Co-Regulatory Champions agree:

- A genuine belief and commitment to staff and residents working together;
- Transparency and accountability;
- A formal, constructive challenge from residents;
- Building skills and confidence for residents;
- Accountability to all residents;
- A representative, resident-led voice;
- A belief that what residents think is good for them is good for the landlord.

## 5.0 **TENANT PARTICIPATION IN ARUN**

5.1 As part of the work to develop the Local Offer, in 2010/11 tenants were asked for their views about the consumer standards, including tenant involvement and empowerment. In response to their feedback the following objectives for the Local Offer were developed and agreed with tenants;

“We will work with tenants to develop a new Tenant Participation Agreement that will **improve tenant involvement and include systems for monitoring our performance**. The new arrangements are likely to provide a range of ways for tenants to be involved, including Arun Tenants and Leaseholders Organisation (AT&LO) meetings, focus groups, email and telephone surveys, and web-based information.”

5.2 In order to take this forward a review of the Council’s Tenant Participation Agreement was undertaken in early 2011, which identified the current opportunities for residents to be involved in influencing and shaping the decisions taken by the Council about housing issues:

- Telephone and postal surveys;
- Consultation and participation through Arun Tenant and Leaseholder Association (AT&LO);

- Local residents groups;
- Joining focus groups;
- Involvement in contractor selection for major contracts, such as reactive repairs;
- Estate inspections involving neighbourhood and maintenance officers.

5.3 The review raised concerns about the effectiveness of current consultation arrangements. The AT&LO is the main consultation body and Council officers meet with it regularly to discuss a range of issues. However, relatively low numbers of residents attend AT&LO meetings and they are overwhelmingly above retirement age. A broad cross section of residents is not actively involved and the 2008 status Tenant Satisfaction Survey found that there is a general lack of awareness of opportunities for involvement.

5.4 The lack of a specific budget to support tenant involvement was identified as a barrier to developing, promoting and resourcing new initiatives to offer a wider range of opportunities for involvement. The review recommended that an updated Tenant Participation Agreement would need to incorporate the following:

- A menu of options to give tenants a choice of different ways to be involved;
- A variety of consultation methods to appeal to a diverse range of people;
- Identifying new ways of communicating with residents;
- On-going support for AT&LO, including encouraging participation by a wider range of residents;
- Practical ideas which can be achieved within existing resources;
- Proposals for residents to be involved in monitoring and scrutinising the Council's performance, including implementation of the Local Offer;
- Training and guidance for staff and residents to support the development of a culture of resident involvement and customer focus.

5.5 These recommendations have yet to be implemented due to lack of resources but the new self-financing arrangements for Council Housing presented the Council with an opportunity to review its priorities and set new objectives for the Housing Service. As well as a commitment to develop proposals for tenant scrutiny, of which this Report is a first step, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan also includes objectives for 2012-13 to:

- Update the review of the Tenant Participation Agreement and develop an implementation plan; and

- Develop a training programme for tenants, staff and members to support tenant involvement and scrutiny.

The resources required to support implementation of these objectives have been identified within the Business Plan.

## 6.0 **OPTIONS FOR INTRODUCING TENANT SCRUTINY**

6.1 Based on the experiences of the Co-Regulatory Champions, a structure for Tenant Scrutiny at the Council might include the following elements:

- A menu of opportunities for resident involvement, offering a range of activities for tenants to meet a variety of interests and time commitments, both at neighbourhood and council-wide levels;
- A representative tenant and leaseholder forum to act as the main consultative body for the Housing Service;
- A Scrutiny Group to undertake a programme of service reviews whose recommendations feed into the Council's decision making processes.

6.2 To achieve this, a number of steps need to be taken:

- (i) As discussed in paragraph 5.4 above, the 2011 review of the Tenant Participation Agreement needs to be updated and an implementation plan developed, including a budget and resources, to enable new opportunities for resident involvement to be established, publicised and promoted. As well as giving residents an opportunity to be involved in neighbourhood activities, this would establish a range of feeder activities which might encourage a wider range of tenants to want to be involved in a Tenant Scrutiny Group and the AT&LO;
- (ii) As discussed in paragraph 5.2 above, the AT&LO was originally established to act as the main tenant's consultative body for the Council but it lacks a sufficiently wide and representative membership. If this could be successfully tackled by recruiting new members with a more representative demographic profile, as well as an on-going training programme to develop the skills and knowledge of the membership, AT&LO could continue to contribute to scrutiny activities as a consultative body for the Housing Service. This would include monitoring performance and considering the impact of changing legislation, policies, procedures and service developments;
- (iii) It is also proposed that a new Tenant Scrutiny Group is established to undertake an on-going programme of service reviews. This might include recruiting and training tenants to act as mystery shoppers and tenant

inspectors. The group might undertake 2 or 3 service reviews each year, reviewing performance, concentrating on the customer experience and making recommendations for improvements;

- (iv) To be successful, there needs to be an established way for the Tenant Scrutiny Group to make recommendations to senior officers and Elected Members. Consideration could be given to establishing a joint working group including tenant representatives, Elected Members and senior officers, which would feed into the Council's decision making processes;
- (v) It is important to establish new and creative ways to report back to residents on new initiatives and promote the ways in which tenant scrutiny is having an impact upon improving services. Different methods of communication should be used, including the use of social media, to attract interest from the widest possible range of residents;
- (vi) A programme of capacity building for residents, staff and Elected Members will be essential to the successful development of tenant scrutiny within Arun. The HRA Business Plan identified that once plans for Tenant Scrutiny have been agreed, a training and development programme for tenants and leaseholders will need to be devised, agreed and implemented. The Housing department will need to develop a new ethos within the staff group which supports the development of resident involvement and a customer service culture. Elected Members and staff will also need support for changes to their roles in relation to tenant involvement and complaints. A key objective for 2012-13 is to develop a training programme for tenants, staff and members to support tenant involvement and scrutiny.

6.3 It is anticipated that it will take some time to move from the current limited position to an effective range of activities to support scrutiny and co-regulation. However, the experience of other organisations has been that publicising the impact tenants involvement has had on improving services encourages others to get involved. It will be important to develop a realistic and adequately resourced implementation plan to begin moving forward and essential first steps should include:

- Updating the outcomes from the review of the Tenant Participation Agreement;
- Widening membership of AT&LO; and
- Agreeing a budget and resources to support the development of tenant scrutiny and co-regulation.



**7.0 DEVELOPMENT OF APPROPRIATE ELEMENTS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

7.1 The Housing and Customer Services Committee is invited to comment on the options for developing tenant scrutiny outlined in this report and identify appropriate elements for further investigation and reporting to future meetings.

**Background Papers:** None

**Contact:** Frank Hickson Ext 37550  
Frank.Hickson@arun.gov.uk



ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP –  
11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2012

---

Decision Paper

Subject : Housing Complaints Arrangements

Report by : Frank Hickson

Report date: November 2012

---

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report sets out the requirements for change to the way in which Housing Complaints are dealt with from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, identifies three options for dealing with Stage 2 Complaints prior to any referral to the Housing Ombudsman and recommends further investigation of and development Option 2 for further consideration by the Housing and Customer Services Working Group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group is requested to note that Option 2 as a preferred approach to handling Housing complaints and a further report be submitted to the next meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013 to outline how this proposal can be implemented.

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Part 7 of the Localism Act 2011 introduces changes to the way the Council will have to deal with complaints relating to Social Housing with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. This Report:

- explains the implications of the Act for the Council in (Section 2);
- outlines the factors to be considered by Arun in deciding the way forward (Section 3);
- considers three options for dealing with complaints (Section 4);
- recommends one option for further investigation and development (Section 5);
- outlines issues for further development (Section 6).

2.0 **IMPLICATIONS OF THE LOCALISM ACT 2011**

2.1 **Current Position**

2.1.1 Currently, there is no distinction between complaints related to Housing and any other types of complaint. All complaints are handled in accordance with

Arun District Council's Official Complaints Procedure. This is a two stage internal procedure followed by recourse to the Local Government Ombudsman as a third stage:

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Person Dealing with Complaint</u>	<u>Target Timescale</u>
1	Senior staff member from the relevant service area	10 working days
2	Senior staff member from a different service area with sign-off from Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive or Assistant Director	25 working days
3	Local Government Ombudsman	Not Applicable

## 2.2 **What is Changing?**

2.2.1 The Localism Act will introduce two changes with effect from April 2013 which will specifically affect the handling of complaints made against Local Authorities relating to Housing.

- The Local Government Ombudsman will no longer deal with housing matters. They will instead fall under the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman Service. At present, we are seeking confirmation of the level of subscription which Arun District Council might have to pay to belong to the Housing Ombudsman Service. We understand that currently for registered providers this is £0.45 per unit.
- After a Local Authority's internal complaints procedures have been exhausted, a dissatisfied complainant will have two options:
  1. to wait eight weeks and then contact the Housing Ombudsman, or
  2. to refer the complaint to a so-called "democratic filter". This can be a Local Councillor, MP or a Tenant Panel designated by the Local Authority to serve such a role. The expectation is that this democratic filter will work with the Local Authority and complainant as appropriate to attempt to resolve the complaint. If unable or unwilling to do so, with the complainant's consent they may refer the complaint in writing to the Housing Ombudsman. Should the democratic filter decline to deal with the complaint in the first place, then the complainant will be able to go directly to the Ombudsman.

As a consequence, Arun needs to revisit its Complaints Procedure relating to housing and bring this into line with the new regime from April 2013. There are a number of options as to how this could be done. Before considering these, it is helpful to look at the bigger picture and examine other factors to be taken into account aside from this specific legislative change.

### 3.0 **FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN DECIDING THE WAY FORWARD**

3.1 In formulating a new procedure for handling Housing Complaints, there are a number of background issues and factors which should be considered. These are outlined below.

#### 3.1.1 **The Continuing Development of Co-regulation as a Driver for Tenant Involvement**

3.1.2 As explained in the Discussion Paper on Tenant Scrutiny, the current change fits within the wider context of an orchestrated shift towards “co-regulation”. Here the emphasis will be on landlords and tenants working together to formulate local policy and objectives and to agree and monitor performance standards. This embeds the role of Tenant Scrutiny Groups which should also have full visibility of complaints as a prerequisite to fulfil their function effectively. Complaints may present valuable data that will enable systemic shortcomings and performance improvement requirements to be identified.

3.1.3 The backdrop to this is a regime of lighter touch regulation under the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) which took over the regulatory powers of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) with effect from April 2012. The HCA will have no routine involvement in monitoring landlords’ performance against regulatory standards.

#### *Implication for Arun District Council*

*Separate discussions are being held about the possible extension of the membership profile of the ATLO and the formulation of a Tenant Scrutiny Group. Consideration should be given to involving representatives from this group in some capacity in any new procedure for handling complaints. This might include their use as a “democratic filter”.*

### 3.2 **Requirements of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard Relating to Complaints**

3.2.1 The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard included within the regulatory framework published by HCA outlines requirements relating to the handling of complaints. Landlords should have a “clear, simple and accessible” procedure that deals with complaints “promptly, politely and fairly”. In terms of specifics, as a Local Authority provider Arun District Council is expected to:

- offer a range of ways for tenants to complain;
- have clear service standards for responding to complaints;
- explain how they use complaints to improve services;
- publish an annual report on the number and nature of complaints and their outcomes.

### Implication for Arun District Council

*Information from the Local Government Ombudsman on complaints **received in respect of Arun** is published on the Council's website. There does not, however, appear to be any similar information about complaints **received by the Council**. If this information is not currently published, then arrangements should be made to ensure its ready availability. If not currently available, it may also be appropriate to explain in more detail the links between complaints and specific performance improvements. This should interface well with the Council's Lean approach to continuous service improvement.*

### **3.3 The Need for Timeliness in Responding to Complaints**

3.3.1 The importance of responding to complaints quickly is well understood, especially as such a prompt initial response may often serve to resolve less complex issues. More involved complaints will require detailed investigation before any conclusive response can be given. Such potentially time consuming investigation also needs to be conducted promptly.

3.3.2 Any democratic filter would become involved only after a Local Authority's internal complaints handling process had run its course. It will therefore be doubly important that any party serving as a filter should be equipped to deal with complaints with minimal delay. With effect from eight weeks after a Local Authority's internal process has been completed, a complainant may go directly to the Ombudsman. It should be borne in mind that it might be a number of days before a democratic filter even receives a complaint. If it does not deal with the matter promptly, its involvement in the whole process might therefore prove pointless. That is, if the complaints filter has not produced an outcome within eight weeks, the complainant may simply abandon discussions with this filter and go straight to the Ombudsman.

### Implication for Arun District Council

*The meeting frequency and level of involvement of any Tenant Scrutiny Group remains to be established. The meeting frequency of the ATLO would not predispose it to serve routinely as an active part of any speedy complaints resolution process.*

### **3.4 Anticipated Volume of Complaints**

3.4.1 Where there is a high volume of complaints spread throughout the year, a Tenant Panel specifically for complaints could be convened at regular and frequent intervals, possibly as often as fortnightly. Where complaints are infrequent, this would not be sustainable. In such a situation, any Tenant Group involved in complaints should ideally be a sub-group from a Panel serving a more general role which requires it to meet regularly and frequently irrespective of complaints. The Complaints Sub-Group could then meet before or after the Main Panel to consider complaints separately in a confidential environment. If there were no complaints to discuss, then the Sub-Panel's Meeting could simply be dropped from the Main Panel's Agenda. The

alternative would be to have a complaints panel which has the capacity to arrange to meet at short notice when required.

#### Implications for Arun District Council

*As a relatively small provider with some 3,400 properties, Arun District Council would not be expected to have a large volume of complaints to handle. The precise number of Housing complaints received by the Council is not published, although the number made to the Local Government Ombudsman about Arun in 2011/12 was only 4.*

*This suggests that any “democratic filter” would be approached by complainants on an infrequent basis. Any specific complaints panel could therefore end up being convened ad hoc and expected to act quickly. If any new Tenant Scrutiny Group were to be asked to include a complaints sub-group, then this Tenant Scrutiny Group would need to meet at least monthly. Any complaints panel could be separated from the Tenant Scrutiny Group only if the panel had the capacity to meet as and when required at short notice. As an alternative, a Tenant Panel shared with other landlords could be considered.*

### **3.5 The Skill and Expertise Required to Resolve Complaints**

- 3.5.1 A degree of training will be required to equip tenants to play an effective role in resolving complaints. They should then ideally have the opportunity to apply the skills learned and evolve into a centre of expertise trusted by tenants and respected by the landlord. It is also appropriate that any panel dealing with complaints should have a suitably diverse membership.

#### Implications for Arun District Council

*With such a low potential volume of complaints, significant investment in training may be hard to justify. Further, any Tenant Complaints Panel might struggle to build up expertise and become recognised as a helpful resource. The demographic profile of current tenant participation, as represented by the ATLO, suggests that proactive initiatives would be needed to meet the requirement for diversity. To attract more people of working age, involvement in any Tenant Panel would need to be seen as useful for enhancing their employability and career. This would mean offering training and skills development as well as the opportunity to practise these skills through dealing with complaint cases. The Council might therefore find itself with a “Catch 22” situation. A low volume of complaints might mean that a role on the Panel was not seen as particularly purposeful and task-focussed. In this case it could lose those members with strategic thinking skills whose primary focus was on producing concrete outcomes and learning in the process.*

### **3.6 Best Practice**

- 3.6.1 Appendix 1 summarises some best practice examples of tenant involvement in complaint resolution. They have been taken from the guide “Tenant Panels:

Options for Accountability” published in 2012 by the National Tenant Organisations (NTO) with Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) funding. The guide deals with the wider issue of Tenant Panels and Tenant Scrutiny, and Appendix 1 separates out case study information relating purely to complaints.

- 3.6.2 The Appendix lists seven landlords – including Arm’s Length Management Organisations (ALMO’s), Housing Associations and Local Authorities – where a Tenant Panel currently has an integral role in complaint resolution. In all but one case, Tenants’ involvement is at the final stage of the complaints process i.e. prior to the Ombudsman. The Tenant Panel can act as a monitoring or reviewing body but in some cases they have clear powers to make decisions which are binding on the landlord. In this respect, Viridian’s Complaints Panel is acclaimed by the National Tenant Organisations (NTO) as a flagship example. It has power to decide how complaints are resolved and levels of compensation. The panel has a wide role which includes monitoring and improving complaints handling, training staff in complaints and promoting residents’ awareness of their right to complain.
- 3.6.3 It will be noted that these landlords are all significantly larger than Arun in terms of the number of homes they manage. Indeed the smallest is over twice the size of Arun (i.e. Slough with 7,400 homes). The only examples cited of smaller landlords making arrangements for Tenant Panel involvement in complaint resolution relate to cases where a Multi-Landlord Tenant Panel exists. The second table in Appendix 1 lists these examples. The arrangements, which are in the process of being developed, will consist of tenant involvement at the review stage of the complaints process. There is a potential issue created by the fact that individual landlords have differing internal complaints processes. This means that careful consideration needs to be given to how the Tenant Panel would fit with different landlords’ procedures.
- 3.6.4 The Welwyn Hatfield Scrutiny Panel example (covering all social housing in the Welwyn Hatfield Borough) may be of particular interest to Arun. The leading role in this case is played by Welwyn Hatfield Community Trust, which is Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council’s ALMO. The Trust is responsible for some 80% of the Borough’s social housing and was therefore the obvious candidate to lead the project. There is a potential parallel with Arun’s situation where the Council manages around a half of the District’s social housing.

#### *Implications for Arun District Council*

*If the Council aspires to follow the best practice in terms of Tenant Complaints Panels, then consideration may need to be given to approaching other landlords to explore the possibility of a Multi-Landlord Panel.*

### **3.7 Interface with Corporate Complaints Process**

- 3.7.1 In discussing any change to the management of Housing complaints, consideration needs to be given to how this will fit with the Council’s general



complaints procedure. This procedure currently governs Housing complaints and has two internal stages prior to the Local Government Ombudsman. The letter and the spirit of the new regulatory framework is to earmark Housing complaints for separate treatment. They will now be channelled to the Housing Ombudsman via the “democratic filter”. In keeping with this, Arun will now be a “registered provider” on a par with a Housing Association. It may therefore be appropriate to revisit the use of the Council’s current complaints procedure for Housing complaints.

#### *Implications for Arun District Council*

*At the very least, a separately worded Housing complaints procedure will be needed to explain the change to Stage 3 (i.e. the role of the Housing Ombudsman and the democratic filter). It may well be appropriate to consider if a separate internal procedure (i.e. Stages 1 and 2) should be formulated for Housing complaints. This might facilitate more effective management and monitoring of Housing complaints in compliance with the new regime.*

#### **4.0 OPTIONS TO CONSIDER**

##### **4.1 Option One : Do the Minimum Required by Law**

4.1.1 This would mean simply rewording the current Council complaints procedure to state that Stage 3 will be recourse to the Housing Ombudsman. This would also include an explanation that complainants would need to wait eight weeks or alternatively approach an Elected Member or their Local MP. (If the Council does not designate a tenant panel for assisting with complaints, a Local Councillor/MP would be the only democratic filter available.)

4.1.2 The advantages of this option are:

- It will be the simplest for the Council to implement.
- The current policy wording states that at Stage 2, with the complainant’s agreement, “the relevant Ward Councillors are made aware of the nature of the complaint”. This would prepare the ground for Councillors’ involvement as a democratic filter under Stage 3.
- Electors are familiar with the concept of referring their grievances to MPs and Councillors. To many this may seem a natural thing which they might have done in any case.
- As representatives elected by them, residents may be likely to consider MPs and Councillors to be on their side.

4.1.3 The disadvantages of this option are:

- In the absence of a designated Tenant Complaints Panel, the Council might be viewed as not fully embracing the spirit of tenant involvement and empowerment.

- All complaints would be spread among 59 different individuals – the three constituency MPs in addition to the 56 District Councillors. This would prevent the building up of the skills, expertise and relationships that would facilitate the most effective complaint resolution.
- MPs and Councillors would need some support and training to prepare them for this role. Training all 59 individuals would arguably not be very cost-effective, especially as some of them (perhaps the majority) may never get a complaint.
- The involvement of politicians could mean that complaints become politicised.
- When faced with an inappropriate or groundless complaint, an MP or Councillor may feel more vulnerable and might find it harder to objectively explain the position to an aggrieved voter.
- If faced with an isolated and potentially time-consuming complaint, an MP or Councillor is less likely to be equipped to delve into the detail of the complaint than a specialist Tenant Complaints Panel.

#### 4.2 **Option Two : A Designated Arun Tenant Complaints Panel**

4.2.1 This could mean selecting Tenants from the ATLO to serve as a designated Complaints Panel. It is understood that the possible formation of a new Tenant Scrutiny Panel is being discussed separately. A Sub-Group of any such Panel could similarly be allocated a complaints role. Owing to the confidentiality of complaints work, the Panel would need to be a small, select group.

4.2.2 This Panel could initially serve simply as a democratic filter after completion of Stage 2 (i.e. the Internal Complaints Procedure). Once established, its role might evolve into becoming part of this internal procedure; for example, it might oversee the Staff member dealing with Stage 2 of a complaint.

4.2.3 The advantages of this option are:

- The Council would be seen to embrace the spirit of tenant involvement and empowerment.
- The Council's Tenant Scrutiny Group would have greater visibility and understanding of the nature of complaints arising. This would empower them to play a more effective role in performance monitoring and improvement.
- The role of the Tenant Panel might raise awareness of residents' right to complain, resulting in hidden issues being brought to attention and addressed.
- The Panel could come to play an advisory role for tenants earlier on in the complaints process. This might include helping them make their complaint more effectively so the Council's staff find it easier to process. It could

equally mean giving tenants an explanation that avoids the need for making a complaint in the first place.

- The fact that the Tenants' Complaints Panel would be specific to the Council could facilitate its eventual incorporation into the Council's Internal Complaints Procedure. This would mean that it would always be involved in complaints.
- Skills and expertise associated with dealing with complaints would be built up in one body.
- The Complaints Panel could develop relationships with Arun staff which might facilitate the settling of complaints.
- It would provide additional personal development opportunities for some residents, potentially enhancing their employability.
- The Council could ensure that any party involved in complaints is suitably skilled and positively motivated. The nature of the work would require a careful selection procedure. This means the Council would need to play a role in selecting the individuals who would make up the Complaints Panel. This could include provisions to ensure that tenants were not involved with complaints from people known to them personally or living in close proximity.

#### 4.2.4 The disadvantages of this option are:

- The volume of Housing complaints might not justify a specialist Complaints Panel specific to the Council. To be able to deal with complaints sufficiently quickly when they arise, the Panel would need to have regular scheduled meetings (i.e. at least monthly). This could mean that scheduled meetings would end up being cancelled at short notice if no complaints materialised. More data on complaints **received by the Council** (rather than just those **received by the Ombudsman about the Council**) would be needed to assess this.
- The current profile of tenant participation suggests that the Council could struggle to find a suitably diverse Tenants' Complaint Panel. (As complaints may be seen as something concrete and interesting it might initially attract people of working age keen to develop their skills. However, if complaints cases did not materialise, they could lose interest.)
- If residents, who are already involved in tenant participation in some capacity, also deal with complaints, there could be the potential for role confusion, if not conflict. This might be problematic if, for example, a tenant was involved in governance or decision making in one context and was required to consider complaints resulting from those decisions in another context.

### 4.3 **Option Three : A Multi-Landlord Complaints Panel**

- 4.3.1 This would involve forming a Specialist Complaints Panel from members of the Tenant Panels of a number of landlords. A possible variation on this could

be to canvass applicants for a Multi-Landlord Complaints Panel directly from the tenant populations of the constituent landlords. The Panel would be a reviewing and mediating agent at Stage 3 and act as a democratic filter.

#### 4.3.2 The advantages of this option are:

- The volume of complaints is more likely to justify and make best use of a Specialist Complaints Panel.
- The role of the Tenant Panel might raise awareness of residents' right to complain, resulting in hidden issues being brought to attention and addressed.
- The Panel could come to play an advisory role for tenants earlier on in the complaints process. This might include helping them make their complaint more effectively so Arun staff find it easier to process. It could equally mean giving tenants an explanation that avoids the need for a complaint in the first place.
- With a larger population to select from it should be easier to form a suitably diverse Panel.
- The Panel could be seen as more "at arm's length" from Arun and hence more independent.
- The Panel could draw upon the experiences of a number of landlords to suggest ways in which complaints handling could be improved.
- The Complaints Panel could develop relationships with Arun staff which might facilitate the settling of complaints.
- It would provide additional personal development opportunities for some residents, potentially enhancing their employability.
- This could take the form of a Complaints Panel covering most, if not all, social housing tenants in a specific geographical area, e.g. Arun District. As a result all complaints would be handled locally. The Council could be seen to be playing a leading role in serving Arun District tenants, irrespective of who their landlord happened to be.

#### 4.3.3 The disadvantages of this option are:

- Likely differences between individual Landlords' Internal Complaints Procedures would make it hard for such a Panel to contemplate any active involvement in earlier complaint stages. This would limit its role to that of a Stage 3 review and democratic filter.
- Arun would have less control over the make-up of the Panel than with a designated Panel specific to Arun.

## 5.0 **RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

5.1 There are strong grounds to support the formation of a Tenant Complaints Panel. In addition a Panel would be a positive change for tenants. This is

because it takes no options or freedoms away from them but merely gives them additional choice. Tenants not wishing to use a Tenant Panel can either approach an MP or Councillor or wait eight weeks before contacting the Housing Ombudsman directly.

5.2 The question then becomes the issue of whether such a Panel should be specific to Arun or a Multi-Landlord Panel. The following table looks at this question.

<b>Relative Advantages of Specific and Multi-landlord Panels</b>	
<b><u>Relative Advantages of a Specific Panel</u></b>	<b><u>Relative Advantages of a Multi-lord Panel</u></b>
If desired, it would be easier to incorporate into the earlier Stages of the Complaints Procedure (i.e. the internal Stages).	This is probably better suited to the likely low volume of Housing complaints specific to Arun.
Arun may have greater control over the Panel's make-up	This is likely to result in greater diversity on the Panel due to the larger population from which to select.
This would be potentially easier and quicker to set up.	This could be viewed as more independent from Arun District Council.
	The Panel would become more expert as it would pool knowledge gained from dealing with complaints relating to a diverse group of landlords including Housing Associations.
	It offers greater potential for Arun District Council to enhance its reputation for serving its wider electorate. For example, Arun District Council could play a high-profile role in setting up an Arun District independent social housing complaints review Panel.
	This would promote closer relationships with other housing providers.
	The expense and administrative burden would be shared with other landlords.
	There would be a more distinct separation between Arun's Tenant Scrutiny Group and the Complaints Panel.

5.3 A consideration of the relative advantages of the two models would clearly seem to point in favour of a Multi-Landlord Panel. The precise role and powers of such a panel would need to be established in discussion with the partner landlords involved. Initially at least, the Panel is unlikely to have any power to make decisions which bind landlords to take any particular course of action in relation to any specific complaint. Instead, its role will be more one of influencing, communication and mediation. Where it thinks a complaint decision was inappropriate, it will attempt to persuade the landlord to review this decision. Where it agrees with the decision, it will endeavour to help the complainant understand the justification for this. Short of making a formal ruling, the Panel will take what action it can to avoid escalation of the

complaint to the Ombudsman. If this fails, then it will refer the complaint to the Ombudsman as provided for in the Localism Act.

- 5.4 Aside from its involvement in individual complaints, the Panel could also monitor and review complaints handling across the various landlords. To facilitate this, it might be agreed that it was given copies of all Housing complaints irrespective of whether they reach the Complaints Panel in an official capacity. Over time, from its more detached perspective, the Panel might also identify underlying issues suggested by types of complaints. This may become particularly apparent when comparing the types of complaints received by different landlords. Such issues would then be raised with the Landlord's Tenant Scrutiny Group.

## 6.0 **ISSUES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

- How much 'power' do we give the Panel, especially concerning the levels of financial compensation they could award;
- The 'scope' of the panel in determining redress;
- Panel would have to be prepared to meet on an 'ad hoc' basis because of the 'randomness' of complaints coming in i.e. we cannot prepare for the submission of a complaint.
- We would have a 'pool' of Panel Members to call on, needing three to form a Panel;
- Restrict attendance of Panel Members if they live in the vicinity of the complainant, or have been involved in connected issues such as policy development;
- Allow complainant and Stage 1 Investigating Officer to attend Review Hearing;
- Agree a format for the Hearings;
- Tenant Engagement Officer to oversee process and attend Hearings to take notes and confirm Decision of Panel;
- Panel Members will need training;
- Housing to agree issue of expenses for Panel Members;
- Scrutiny to review complaints received and implementation of recommendations;
- Advise Panel that they cannot review any Policy issues;
- Report to go to H&CSWG meeting in December and Cabinet March 2013 - some concerns about meeting deadlines.

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN COMPLAINT RESOLUTION**

**Below are Examples of Cases where Tenant Panels Relating to a Single Landlord currently have Involvement with Complaint Resolution**

HOUSING PROVIDER	NO. OF HOMES	TYPE OF PROVIDER	NOTES
CityWest Homes	21,700	ALMO	Residents from one of four area Tenant Panels are selected to sit on a Stage 2 Complaints Panel alongside a Board Member and CityWest Homes staff.
Crawley Borough Council	9,500	Local Authority	A Tenant and Leaseholder Action Panel has as part of its remit the task of checking Stage 2 Complaints to ensure they have been handled correctly.
Green Square Group	10,000	Housing Association	A Residents Scrutiny Panel has complaints monitoring as part of its remit.
Salix Homes	10,500	ALMO	A Customer Senate has acting as a Stage 3 Complaints Panel as part of its remit.
Slough Borough Council	7,400	Local Authority	Members of the Customer Senate sit on a Complaints Panel which hears Stage 3 Complaints.
Stockport Homes	11,600	ALMO	A three-person Complaints Panel reviews complaints at the final stage of the Complaints Procedure. Complainants may instead opt for their complaint to be reviewed by a Director. The Panel hears from and questions the Manager who decided the case at the Second Stage.
Viridian	16,000	Housing Association	A nine resident Complaints Panel hears cases not resolved at the previous stage. It has power to decide how complaints are resolved and levels of compensation. The Panel has a wide role which includes monitoring and improving complaints handling, training staff in complaints and promoting residents' awareness of their right to complain.

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES OF TENANT INVOLVEMENT IN COMPLAINT RESOLUTION**

Below are Examples of Cases where it is Planned to Extend the Role of Multi-Landlord Tenant Panels to Include Involvement in Complaint Resolution

EXISTING MULTI-LANDLORD TENANTS PANEL		HOUSING PROVIDERS INVOLVED		NOTES
NAME	NO OF HOMES COVERED	NAME	NO OF HOMES	
Welwyn Hatfield Scrutiny Panel	12,000	Welwyn Hatfield Community Trust	9,400	<p>The current Panel's focus is on scrutiny, monitoring and review.</p> <p>Welwyn Hatfield Community Trust is Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's ALMO. As it owns nearly 80% of the homes involved, it is playing the leading role in the Panel's development and management.</p> <p>It plans to set up a Sub-Group to serve as a Borough-wide Complaints Panel by becoming a Stage 3 for providers' complaints handling procedures.</p>
		Genesis Housing Group	2,600	
		Guinness Trust		
		Circle Anglia		
		Paradigm		
		Home Group		
		Aldwych Housing Group		
		Moat		
		Sanctuary		
Leeds Collaborative Group	11,000	Connect Housing	3,300	<p>The Complaints Panel being considered will involve a different group of tenants to those participating in the existing Tenants Panel. It will have a Stage 3 role in dealing with complaints.</p>
		Headrow Housing	1,400	
		Leeds & Yorkshire Housing	1,200	
		Leeds Federated	4,000	
		Unity Group	1,100	
Worcestershire Tenant Panel Partnership	25,000	Festival Housing Group	8,000	
		Rooftop Housing Group	6,000	
		Community Housing Group	6,000	
		Worcester Community Housing	4,800	



**Background Papers:**     **None**

**Contact:**                 Frank Hickson Ext 37550  
                                  Frank.Hickson@arun.gov.uk



ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP –  
11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2012

---

Decision Paper

Subject : Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness

Report by : Frank Hickson

Report date: October 2012

---

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report updates the Housing and Customer Services Working Group on progress with the Recommendations made under the last themed Report on Access to Health Services for Homeless Households and focusses on the second agreed theme, Information about and access to support services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to recommend to the Overview Select Committee that:

- 1) It notes the progress made to-date with implementing and/or developing actions to address the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities.
- 2) No further work is undertaken in respect of Recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 from the Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness.

1.0 UPDATE ON PROGRESS WITH PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 At the meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2012, the Working Group recommend (to the Overview Select Committee) to:

Agree that a further communication be sent to the Secretary of State for Health, the Registrar of the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Coastal West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group to seek a response to the letters sent in March 2012. Any or all responses to be circulated to the Working Group and further actions reported to the Working Group for approval.

Agree that arrangements are made for the Arun Wellbeing and Health Partnership and Arun and West Sussex Local Strategic Partnerships to consider the Report of the Joint Scrutiny Review.

- 1.2 In respect of the further communications, a letter was received from Dr. Katie Armstrong of the Coastal West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group (previously circulated to Members of the Working Group) explaining she had passed copies of the correspondence to Primary Care Commissioning at NHS West Sussex and West Sussex Local Medical Committee. I wrote to Dr. Armstrong asking her to identify the name and title of the individuals at these organisations she has copied the correspondence to so that I can pursue them if no response is received.
- 1.2.1 Letters have also been received from the Department of Health (on behalf of the The Secretary of State), NHS Sussex and Surrey and Sussex Local Medical Committees (LMC's). The latter two were in response to Dr. Armstrong's letter which was copied to them. These have been circulated to the Working Group as previously agreed.
- 1.2.2 The letter from the Department of Health states that a reply was previously sent to the Cabinet Members of Adur, Arun and Worthing Council's in June 2012 and enclose a copy of that reply. The letter was addressed to all three Councillors at Worthing Town Hall so it is likely that it was never sent on to Councillor Elkins by Worthing Borough Council.
- 1.2.3 The letter clarifies that it is not necessary to have a permanent address to register as a patient with a G.P. Practice and that some practices register homeless people by using the practice's address or the address of a hostel which appropriate. It also states that G.P. Practices are not required to check, record or take copies of any supporting documentary evidence of their identity. It does however also state that it is not unreasonable for a G.P. Practice to request supporting documentary evidence at the time of application to join its N.H.S Patients List is made. However, this should be a policy for all new patients.
- 1.2.4 The letters from NHS Sussex and Surrey and Sussex Local Medical Committees (LMC's) also clarify various points in relation to identification required by G.P. Practices. In particular, NHS West Sussex state that identification may include current benefits or State Pension notification letter confirming rights to benefits for the current period. It was a recommendation of the Joint Scrutiny Review that identification of this nature be accepted so it is pleasing that this is acceptable.
- 1.2.5 It should also be noted that in response to the letter from Dr. Armstrong, NHS Sussex and Surrey and Sussex Local Medical Committees (LMC's) have agreed to register people who are homeless and do not have a permanent address by entering the G.P. Practice address on the patient's demographic system. This should assist households living in temporary accommodation such as a Hostel or Bed and Breakfast establishment to register with a local G.P. Practice.

- 1.2.6 However, whilst these changes do provide some level of improvement in existing arrangements, the change does not altogether address the requirements of the original Recommendation 3 which states “That a Protocol be agreed in agreement with the Adur/Worthing and Arun Chief Executives and with all homeless support agencies providing support for homeless people to accept alternative proof of I.D. from a list of approved providers such as DWP Giro letters to enable homeless people to identify themselves and access services”. I have recently attended discussions with Officers and Members of Adur and Worthing Councils about all the Joint Scrutiny Review recommendations and a stakeholders event organized by Adur and Worthing Councils to see how Recommendation 3 can be taken forward. At the Stakeholders Event, a number of organizations attended and came forward with ideas to provide additional/alternative forms of ID. These ideas are being transcribed and will be circulated for further consideration. I will update the Working Group on these two aspects of this work at the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2012.
- 1.2.7 In view of the responses now received from the Department of Health, Primary Care Commissioning at NHS West Sussex and Surrey and Sussex Local Medical Committee it is proposed that no further work is undertaken on Recommendations 1 and 2.
- 1.3 In respect of arrangements for the Arun Wellbeing and Health Partnership and Arun and West Sussex Local Strategic Partnerships to consider the Report of the Joint Scrutiny Review, I attended Arun Wellbeing and Health Partnership on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2012 to present a Report (Copy attached as Appendix 1 for information).
- 1.3.1 The Wellbeing and Health Partnership made the following comments:
- 1.3.1.1 The PCT will pick up the main recommendations from the Joint Scrutiny review as many of the gaps in service need addressing through national commissioning. Wellbeing Hubs could not be expected to deliver such an Agenda but will be encouraged to support initiatives, both local and national and Arun Wellbeing Hub does work at a low level with Clients of local homeless service providers. It was agreed each Operational Partnership (i.e. Community Safety, Community Cohesion) should be expected to look at the groups of people they deal with and work out how they can help homeless people practically. The AWHP could then draw up an information pathway to ensure clear referrals and information. The Chairman will approach and collect statements in support from other partnerships together with how joint working can be better co-ordinated.
- 1.3.1.2 The Report has been added to the Work Programme for the Arun Local Strategic Partnership but a date for its consideration has not yet been fixed. The Report will be considered by West Sussex Wellbeing and Health

Partnership, following discussion with the Chief Executive of West Sussex County Council. This will be at the meetings on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013.

## 2.0 INFORMATION ABOUT AND ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES

2.1 This is the second broad theme agreed by the Working Group to focus on the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Review. The recommendations covered under this theme in the Report are:

### Recommendation 4

That Homelink and other service providers, acting as a co-ordinating body in conjunction with the Homelessness Forum, bring in other representatives and give energy and presence on the streets to pull all interested parties together to take the lead in education in schools and of the public in these issues.

### Recommendation 5

That the Homelessness Forums in each District be reconstituted and amalgamated to include all of the statutory and voluntary agencies in the Council areas to improve co-operation and efficiency in examining current homelessness issues; and

### Recommendation 6

That the Adur/Worthing and Arun Council Chief Executives agree a protocol to determine which Council will take the lead when clients are dual registered and go to more than one authority for services to help improve outcomes for homeless people.

### Recommendation 7

That all Agencies involved in promoting support for homeless people be encouraged to provide additional training for their staff about the needs of homeless people. A training module be developed for all front line Council Staff who have contact with homeless people to be part of their professional development. This training needs to include guidance to help with on the spot signposting.

### Recommendation 8

That training and support be provided in schools and further education to spread the word about homelessness issues.

### Recommendation 9

That Councils use their media resource to educate the public on homelessness issues via press releases and poster campaigns to identify how homeless people can be helped rather than how they can be turned away, which should include a strengthening of the duty to advise and assist.

### Recommendation 10

That all relevant agencies utilise available support to help tenants maintain their tenancies thus preventing homelessness.

### Recommendation 11

That tenants be provided with details of available support and a dedicated telephone number provided by one of the Local Authorities or a named body to help them find help. This line should provide answers to those services such as financial help and education, information on utility companies and literacy and language.

### Recommendation 12

To prevent social isolation, a support worker service be provided either by a Local Authority or through a Service Level Agreement to help people maintain their housing and links to existing services and opportunities. This could include appropriately trained staff, learning from existing service models, helping them to access services and be included in the wider community.

## 3.0 ACTIONS ON RECOMMENDATIONS 4 AND 5

- 3.1 The Arun Homelessness Forum is now co-ordinated and chaired by Voluntary Action in Arun and Chichester (VAAC) which was formed in April 2012 following the merger of CVS - Arunwide and Voluntary Community Action Chichester District.

The attendees of the Arun Homelessness Forum include Homelink, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Bognor Housing Trust, Shelter, Stonepillow, CRI, Sussex Police, Surrey and Sussex Probation Service, Arun and Worthing MIND.

Its functions include:

- Monitoring the implementation of Arun's Homelessness Strategy and provide support for that process;
- Identify and disseminate good practice and share with the group;

- Discuss national and local issues that affect homeless persons and the provision of services, with a view to service development
- Provide support to other members in meeting the needs of homeless persons and those at risk of homelessness.

Issues of particular importance to the Homeless Forum can be raised at the Arun Local Strategic Partnership, through Hilary Spencer as its Chairman.

- 3.2 Although Officers from Arun District Council attend the Forum Meetings, the Forum is independent of the Council. It is chaired by a representative from Voluntary Action in Arun and Chichester (VAAC). Other Statutory Agencies such as Sussex Police and Surrey and Sussex Probation Service attend to give information on their activities/services. The Homeless Forum itself is the most appropriate group to act in the Arun District as a Co-ordinating body to bring together representatives of the various groups who are involved with homeless people.
- 3.3 To develop the approach outlined in Recommendation 4 of the Joint Scrutiny Review, the Homeless Forum would need to carefully consider if it wanted to or how it could evolve in a way envisaged. This would have to be a matter for the Homeless Forum to address itself, with input from its representative organizations.
- 3.4 The Forum would need to consider if there is the willingness and capacity to develop itself in the way envisaged in the Recommendation. The Forum has no direct funding, relying on administrative resources provided by the VAAC and the capacity/resources of the organisations involved in the Forum to achieve its aims and objectives. It does appear that some organisations which are identified by the VAAC as providing services to homeless people/households do not attend the Forum.
- 3.5 Equally, the proposals outlined in Recommendation 5 of the Joint Scrutiny Review in relation to reconstituting and amalgamating the Homelessness Forums, must be a matter for the Forum to consider and decide upon itself.
- 3.6 A meeting has been held with the Chief Executive of VAAC and Chair of the Homeless Forum to discuss the detail of Recommendations 4 and 5. They have expressed concern about the practicality and validity of implementing most aspects of these Recommendations.
- 3.6.1 They advised that the Homelessness Forum has already considered its role as a co-ordinating body to improve and expand communication between the Agencies and Service Providers working with the homeless. This involved the VAAC, Homelink, CRI and Stonepillow. The Forum is now devising a co-ordinating role in this respect for Stonepillow. The Forum has established links with the education sector which it utilizes effectively to create an awareness for young



people at school about homelessness. As an example, Year 8 students at Littlehampton Academy undertook a project on homelessness, focusing mainly on issues affecting Littlehampton.

- 3.6.2 They advised that the Terms of Reference for the Homelessness Forum are regularly reviewed and are changed to reflect the priorities the Forum agreed were of local importance/priority. As part of this last review, the Forum considered disbanding as an option but decided to continue because those organizations who regularly attend wanted to continue. They believe their role as Reference Group for the development, implementation and monitoring of the Council's Homeless and Rough Sleepers Strategies is key to being effective in addressing and preventing homelessness in Arun. It is felt that the Forum actively helps to foster good relationships between all agencies/organizations working with homeless people and helps to quell antagonism that sometimes occurs towards the Council.
- 3.6.3 With regard to proposals for amalgamating the Adur and Worthing and Arun Homeless Forums, there is a real concern that this would result in some organizations who work in Arun no longer wishing to be involved because it is felt there would inevitably be a lesser focus on homelessness issues within Arun. It should be noted that Adur and Worthing Homelessness Fora have already amalgamated and this arrangement is apparently working well. It has been suggested that rather than amalgamating the three Fora, there could be an annual meeting of the three, at which issues or topics of mutual interest or concern are discussed. This option may provide a worthwhile alternative to complete amalgamation and would likely be more acceptable to the Arun Homelessness Forum.
- 3.6.4 In the light of the explanation outlined in the above, it is proposed that no further action be taken in respect of Recommendations 4 and 5 but Adur and Worthing Homelessness Forum be approached regarding setting up an annual meeting of the three Forums to consider issues or topics of mutual interest.

#### 4.0 ACTIONS ON RECOMMENDATION 6

- 4.1 Anyone seeking assistance with homelessness from a local housing authority must take the initiative and approach that local housing authority. Each local housing authority must make arrangements so that advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness is available to everyone in its District (Section 179(i) Housing Act 1996).
- 4.2 Local housing authorities are obliged to have arrangements in place so that anyone who wants to make an application for homelessness assistance can do so (Section 183(i) Housing Act 1996). People seeking accommodation or assistance in obtaining accommodation can apply to any local housing authority

they choose, as they need not have any residence requirement or other preliminary condition.

- 4.3 On this basis, applications for homelessness assistance can be made consecutively or concurrently. The Statutory Homeless Scheme is based on the premise that the applicant will apply to the local housing authority for the area in which they wish to be accommodated. Therefore, if the local housing authority to which the homelessness application is made decides to accept the duty to house the applicant in its area, there is no redress against that decision (for the applicant) even if they would prefer to have been referred to another local housing authority to meet the homelessness duty.
- 4.4 There is no eligibility or geographic connection required to make a homeless application. The local housing authority cannot turn away homeless applicants who seem to have no local connection with its district. The proper course of action if an applicant does not appear to have a local connection is for the local housing authority to make enquiries into:
- (i) whether the applicant is eligible for services under Part 7, Housing Act 1996;
  - (ii) if so, whether any duty is owed to the applicant under Part 7 Housing Act 1996.

The scope of the latter enquiries may (but does not need to) include considering whether an applicant has a local connection with the local housing authority and, if not, whether they have a local connection elsewhere.

A local housing authority can accept a duty is owed to an applicant but refer them to another local housing authority if it is believed they have a stronger local connection with that authority's area.

- 4.5 On the basis of the legal obligations/requirements owed to homeless/potentially homeless households, it is believed that the Protocol as proposed by the Joint Scrutiny Review goes against the legal requirement for the local authority where an application is made to provide advice and assistance. It is, therefore, proposed not to take any further action on this recommendation.

## 5.0 ACTIONS ON RECOMMENDATIONS 7, 8 AND 9

- 5.1 Statutory and Voluntary Agencies involved in providing support services for homeless people have their own bespoke training programmes for their staff. These programmes reflect the agreed key development needs/priorities/targets for the individuals and the organizations as well as updates on existing elements of skills and knowledge. Some voluntary organizations/agencies involved in the homelessness in Arun have very limited resources available to cover training and

as volunteer time commitments can be very limited, they prefer that volunteers focus on their work duties rather than training. It is proposed to put training on the Agenda for future Homelessness Forum to try and identify what arrangements are in place.

- 5.2 The Housing Department draws up training plans for its staff in Homelessness and Housing Options Sections on an annual basis. These training plans are devised from the annual appraisal process and reflect both personal development and Departmental priorities. These plans will cover a range of issues/topics relating to homelessness. Training is also provided for Reception, Neighbourhood Management and Housing Allocations staff on issues/topics relating to homelessness.
- 5.3 For example, in 2012/2013, the Housing Department was able to access a free training Programme delivered by National Housing Advice Service, part of the homeless charity Shelter. The topics covered included domestic violence and young homeless people. The Department also has access to test effective quality training through the joint training events with other Local Authorities in West Sussex.
- 5.4 There are a variety of sources of training programmes available which can provide detail for staff who have contact with homeless or potentially homeless households. Staff dealing with homeless enquiries are well briefed in relation to directing homeless people to a range of support or advice services. Team meetings are utilized to provide up to date information on available services and contact/referral arrangements.
- 5.5 Training on homelessness for schools is carried out on request from individual schools. From time to time schools invite the Department to contribute to a related topic in the curriculum. In 2009 the annual Youth Council Conference concentrated on housing and homelessness issues. It has been established that the Joint Review Recommendation was particularly focused on Further Education Colleges and Adur and Worthing Councils are preparing to approach Northbrook College. In Arun, University of Chichester would be the equivalent but it could be difficult to secure interest of students at this level. A contact at Felpham Community College has been identified to discuss how or if appropriate training could be considered for Year 10 or above students at secondary schools.
- 5.6 With regard to use of media resources, in the Summer of 2012, Arun District Council ran a co-ordinated campaign to raise awareness about homelessness. The campaign involved placing posters on buses and in bus shelters, press releases, features on BBC Radio Sussex (including BBC Sussex online), Spirit FM, Splash FM and articles in the local press. Information is also available on the Council's Website. Staff in the Housing Options Section reported a 10% increase in contact calls following the campaign.

- 5.7 The Housing Department have available a variety of leaflets and information about how to secure accommodation and access support services which is given to homeless/potentially homeless people who approach for advice. It should be noted that the cost of producing additional promotional or publicity material has to be found from existing budgets and in the current financial climate this can prove to be difficult, particularly if it is at the expense of or detriment to services specifically provided for homeless/potentially homeless households.
- 5.8 It is therefore believed that the Recommendations 7, 8 and 9 are already being addressed within available resources, but Recommendation 8 could be developed further, subject to interest/involvement from secondary schools and the availability of staff time to prepare and to undertake the training. It is therefore suggested that the existing arrangements for promoting the awareness of services, training for staff are continued and no further action is taken on these recommendations.
- 6.0 ACTIONS ON RECOMMENDATION 10, 11 AND 12
- 6.1 I have been investigating/researching how these recommendations can be progressed. There are resource implications, both financial and staffing, involved in successfully implementing them.
- 6.2 In order to provide the necessary detail to the Working Group to properly consider the implications of implementing them, further work is required and I am not able to report as planned to this meeting. I am therefore proposing that a Report specifically addressing these three Recommendations is presented to the next meeting of the Working Group on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

**Background Papers:** None.

**Contact:** Frank Hickson Ext 37550  
Frank.Hickson@arun.gov.uk

ARUN WELLBEING AND HEALTH PARTNERSHIP  
23<sup>RD</sup> OCTOBER 2012

---

Information Paper

Subject: Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness

Report By: Frank Hickson

Report Date: October 2012

---

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Between July and October 2011, Adur, Arun and Worthing Councils established a Joint Member Working Group which undertook a joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness. The review examined the provision of and access to services for homeless people in the Adur, Arun and Worthing areas of West Sussex to see if more could be done to help improve the health and wellbeing of homeless people.
- 1.2 Having undertaken the review and reviewed the evidence presented to it, the Joint Working Group issued a report which identified that more can be done and further work is required to improve suitability, access and take up of all services to highlight the issues affecting homeless people. It made 17 recommendations in relation to its findings. Each Council then individually considered the report and agreed how they would take forward the recommendations. In Arun, the Housing and Customer Services Working Group (previously the Housing and Planning Working Group) has been considering Reports on the recommendations and proposing, where appropriate, further action to be taken. A full copy of the original Joint Working Group Report is being circulated with the Agenda for this meeting.
- 1.3 The recommendations in the original Joint Working Group Report which relate to the Arun Wellbeing and Health Partnership are:
- That the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Health and Wellbeing priorities of the Local Strategic Partnerships recognise the needs of the homeless people and these also be included in the Sustainable Communities Strategies by all tiers of Local Government.
  - That the new local Health and Wellbeing Hubs are utilised as a key strand of service delivery for the Councils to help with the co-ordination of the recommendations from the review.

- 1.4 This Report seeks to prompt discussion by the Arun Wellbeing and Health Partnership about these two recommendations and identify how the Partnership can help to achieve the outcomes expected by the Joint Working Group.

## 2.0 PRIORITIES FOR ARUN WELLBEING AND HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

- 2.1 Priorities for the Arun Wellbeing and Health Partnership, which have been identified from the Arun Community Strategy, Our Kind of Place, are relevant to the recommendations above include:

- Supporting delivery of first class mental health services at all levels
- Working to tackle Health Inequalities across the district
- Limiting the impact of drugs and alcohol, particularly with children and young people
- Enabling People to have independent choices about their care

- 2.2 In its Terms of Reference (Purpose of Partnership) the following elements have links to the Recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Review.

- To be aware of and advise on the differing needs across different areas of the Arun District, especially areas of deprivation and inequality (both urban and rural) and for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups
- To influence and advise on Wellbeing Strategy, commissioning and delivering in relation to Arun

- 2.3 The Joint Scrutiny Review identified these areas, directly or by association through evidence provided to it, as being a feature of homelessness.

- 2.4 The Arun Local Action Plan 2012/2013 to support “Promoting Health Equalities – the health inequalities strategy for West Sussex” identifies the following actions which are relevant to the recommendations of the Joint Working Group.

- A1
- Develop a Wellbeing Hub as part of the West Sussex Prevention and Wellbeing Programme
  - Deliver a programme of scheduled out reach
  - Commission programmes to meet wellbeing needs
- B3 ACCG leading joint work with Chichester regarding addressing gypsy and traveller health and social care issues

B5 Rough Sleepers Strategy to support Eastern European rough sleeping street drinkers to get off the street

2.5 The recently approved Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012-2015 by the West Sussex Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board has identified evolving priorities set out under 5 key areas. The relevant key areas to the Joint Scrutiny Report are

- Mental Wellbeing – Covers Services, Self-Management, Resilience, Alcohol, including impact on families
- Cross-cutting issues:- Includes specific reference to Housing

2.6 The Strategy also identifies a number of principles to judge and challenge commissioning plans and it is expected that Commissioners will use them as an integral part of developing their plans. Amongst these principles which are relevant to the Joint Scrutiny Report are

- Clear on improved outcomes
- Identifying contributions to reduced health inequalities, increased patient access, choice and control, more seamless patient pathways
- Identifying the potential interaction with other services such as Housing

2.7 These aspects of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for West Sussex do reflect broadly the recommendation of the Joint Scrutiny Review but it is important to identify how they will be implemented and monitored.

### 3.0 ISSUES FOR THE ARUN WELLBEING AND HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

3.1 In order to clarify how the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Review are being addressed by the Arun Health and Wellbeing Partnership, there are a number of points to be addressed by the Partnership. These are:

- How do the priorities for the Arun Wellbeing and Health Partnership meet the needs of homeless households?
- How can the local Health and Wellbeing Hubs be utilised as a key strand of service delivery for the Councils to help with the co-ordination of the recommendations from the review?
- Which programmes of scheduled outreach work are appropriate for the needs of homeless households, as identified in the Joint Scrutiny Review

- 3.2 The Wellbeing and Health Partnership are invited to consider these points and how these elements can be clearly identified to homeless households.

**Background Papers :**

Health Inequalities – Homelessness November 2011  
Report by the Joint (Adur, Arun, Worthing) Overview and Scrutiny Working Group

**Contact:** Frank Hickson, Housing Projects Manager  
Tel: 01903 737550  
Email [frank.hickson@arun.gov.uk](mailto:frank.hickson@arun.gov.uk)



ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP – 11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2012

---

Information Paper

Subject : Cold Weather Shelter 2012/13

Report by : Frank Hickson

Report date: November 2012

---

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report provides details of the Cold Weather Shelter arrangements for Rough Sleepers/Street homeless individuals during the period 1<sup>st</sup> December 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Housing and Customer Services Working Group note the arrangements for the Cold Weather Shelter during the period 1<sup>st</sup> December 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Government's "No Second Night Out" Programme addresses the challenges of rough sleepers/street homeless, and actively encourages Local Authorities to provide Cold Weather (or Winter Shelter) for people who are sleeping rough or on the streets during the period 1<sup>st</sup> December and 31<sup>st</sup> March. It is a matter for individual local authorities working with voluntary and statutory partners to decide what arrangements should be put in place.
- 1.2 In the last two years arrangements have been put in place with voluntary sector partners and Police support to utilise Glenlogie, the former Hostel Building in Bognor Regis to provide this Cold Weather Shelter. It was anticipated that Glenlogie would not be available this year but the situation regarding the sale has now stalled so it is intended to continue to use the building for the period 1<sup>st</sup> December 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

2.0 ARRANGEMENTS FOR DECEMBER 2012 TO MARCH 2013

- 2.1 As identified above, Glenlogie will be used as the Cold Weather Shelter this year. The basement area in the building has been reinstated for this purpose and will be secured to prevent access to the upper floors.

- 2.2 It is proposed to continue to work with Stonepillow, a local voluntary organisation who have extensive experience of working with Rough Sleepers/Street Homeless people and of providing a range of signposting and support services. Stonepillow will operate the Cold Weather Shelter, using their own specialist staff and volunteers. Stonepillow have recently secured funding from the DCLG under the No Second Night Out Programme to provide specific support and advice services to Rough Sleepers/Street Homeless people in Arun and Chichester. Stonepillow will use the opportunity of operating the Cold Weather Shelter in Arun to make or maintain contact with Rough Sleepers/Street Homeless and work with them to address where practical, their housing options.
- 2.3 The Cold Weather Shelter will open at 7.00 p.m. each night (on the nights it is to be used) and the clients will leave by 7.40 a.m. the following morning. Hot drinks and food will be provided at night and a light breakfast in the morning. The Shelter area will be secured once the clients have left until it is reopened.
- 2.4 Last year a total of £5,019.00, was paid to Stonepillow for operating the Cold Weather Shelter and budget provision has been made for payment of a similar level in 2012/2013. The costs will be met from the Homeless Prevention Fund.

**Background Papers:**        **None**

**Contact:**                      Frank Hickson Ext 37550  
   Frank.Hickson@arun.gov.uk

Housing & Customer Services Working Group - WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13									
<b>Working Group Meeting Date:</b>			13-Jun-12	15-Aug-12	11-Oct-12	11-Dec-12	27-Feb-13	18-Apr-13	
<b>Agenda Prep Meeting on:</b>			23-May-12	26-Jul-12	17-Sep-12	19-Nov-12	04-Feb-13	25-Mar-13	
<b>Final reports to IPS by 11am:</b>			29-May-12	30-Jul-12	24-Sep-12	26-Nov-12	11-Feb-13	01-Apr-13	
<b>Agendas to post room by Thursday 2 pm:</b>			31-May-12	02-Aug-12	27-Sep-12	29-Nov-12	14-Feb-13	04-Apr-13	
<b>Reports to OSC meeting on:</b>			24-Jul-12	20-Sep-12	20-Nov-12	22-Jan-13	19-Mar-13	TBC	
<b>Reports to Cabinet meeting on:</b>			18-Jun-12	10-Sep-12	12-Nov-12	14-Jan-13	11-Mar-13	TBC	
<b>Reports to Full Council meeting on:</b>			11-Jul-12	05-Sep-12	07-Nov-12	11-Mar-13	20-Mar-13	15-May-13	
Item	Lead	Origin							COMMENTS
Consider WG's Terms of Reference	PA	ToR	13-Jun-12						
Work programme - set and review	PA		13-Jun-12						
Quarterly Portfolio performance reports	PA		13-Jun-12 (Q4 11/12)			11-Dec-12			
Feedback from Site Visit of Council Garage Sites, Council Housing Stock and land that may be appropriate for new Council builds.	FH	WG	13-Jun-12						Site Visit on 23rd April
Council Housing Stock development & Expansion opportunities	FH	FH		15-Aug-12	11-Oct-12	11-Dec-12	27-Feb-13		
Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities & Homelessness	PA	FH	13-Jun-12	15-Aug-12		11-Dec-12		18-Apr-13	Agreed at meeting on 21.3.12 for this item to be on the first agenda of H&P WG for the 2012/13
Planning Policy for Traveller Sites	KR	KR	13-Jun-12						
Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	FH	SZ		15-Aug-12					
Tenancy Strategy & Policy	FH		13-Jun-12	15-Aug-12					Extra WG meet held on 3/5/2012

<b>Working Group Meeting Date:</b>			13-Jun-12	15-Aug-12	11-Oct-12	11-Dec-12	27-Feb-13	18-Apr-13	
<b>Agenda Prep Meeting on:</b>			23-May-12	26-Jul-12	17-Sep-12	19-Nov-12	04-Feb-13	25-Mar-13	
<b>Final reports to IPS by 11am:</b>			29-May-12	30-Jul-12	24-Sep-12	26-Nov-12	11-Feb-13	01-Apr-13	
<b>Agendas to post room by Thursday 2 pm:</b>			31-May-12	02-Aug-12	27-Sep-12	29-Nov-12	14-Feb-13	04-Apr-13	
<b>Reports to OSC meeting on:</b>			24-Jul-12	20-Sep-12	20-Nov-12	22-Jan-13	19-Mar-13	TBC	
<b>Reports to Cabinet meeting on:</b>			18-Jun-12	10-Sep-12	12-Nov-12	14-Jan-13	11-Mar-13	TBC	
<b>Reports to Full Council meeting on:</b>			11-Jul-12	05-Sep-12	07-Nov-12	11-Mar-13	20-Mar-13	15-May-13	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Origin</b>							<b>COMMENTS</b>
Review of Enforcement Service	KR	KR	13-Jun-12						
Review of Planning Performance Indicators and Targets	KR	KR	13-Jun-12						
Coastal West Sussex Local Investment Plan	AE	AE			11-Oct-12				
Report back on Tenants Scrutiny Workshop in September 2012.	FH	FH			11-Oct-12				
Tenants Scrutiny of Housing Services	FH	FH				11-Dec-12	27-Feb-13	18-Apr-13	
Housing Tenants Complaints Arrangements	FH	FH				11-Dec-12	27-Feb-13		
Cold Weather Shelter Provision						11-Dec-12			
Review of Customer Services - Customer Access Strategy	JF					11-Dec-12	27-Feb-13	18-Apr-13	From OSC
2013 'Housing Strategy Year 2 Update'	AE						27-Feb-13		AE added item provisional for Feb
Review of Housing Contractor Mears	BP						27-Feb-13		From OSC