

## **HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP**

### **Minutes of a meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013 at 6pm**

(to be agreed at the next meeting of the Working Group)

Present: Councillors; Clayden (Chairman), Edwards (Vice-Chairman), Bicknell, Mrs Bower, Chapman, Mrs Goad, Mrs Harrison, Haymes, Mrs Oakley, Oliver-Redgate [from Minute 48], Mrs Pendleton, Squires [from Minute 1 to Minute 50]

Also

Present: Councillor Elkins (Cabinet Member Housing), Councillor Dingemans (Cabinet Member Customer Services) Councillor Gammon (Deputy to Cabinet Member Housing)

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

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

#### **Housing Complaints Arrangements**

1. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, the Chairman of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group, in consultation with the Assistant Director Customer Services, act as the Designated Person for Housing Complaints. In the event that the Complainant is a Constituent of the Chairman of the Housing & Customer Service Working Group or the Chairman is unavailable, the Vice-Chairman of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group will deputise.
2. Arrangements are put in place to recruit Council tenants to form a Designated Tenants Panel to take over the Designated Person role from the Chairman of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group at the appropriate time.
3. The Council's Complaints Procedure is amended to identify the Chairman of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group as the Designated Person for Housing complaints, with the Vice-Chairman of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group deputising.

#### **Tenancy Fraud Prevention**

The Council introduces a photographic ID for all named tenancy holders from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. This would coincide with the implementation of the Allocations Policy and Tenancy/Strategy Policy and the introduction of Flexible Tenancies which became live on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. This recommendation should be considered as a way of tackling tenancy fraud. Cabinet Members are asked to approve the proposal to undertake a pilot project for one year, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013.

***The Housing and Customer Services Working Group recommends to the Overview Select Committee that;***

#### **Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness**

No further work is undertaken in respect of Recommendations 10, 11 and 12 of the Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness.

45     APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor Mrs Madeley.

Apologies for late arrival had been received from Councillor Oliver-Redgate.

46     DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

47     MINUTES OF THE HOUSING AND PLANNING MEETING ON 11 DECEMBER 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE HOUSING AND PLANNING WORKING GROUP ON 11 DECEMBER 2012

The Housing Projects Manager referred to Minute 41 confirming that he had attended the Overview Select Committee Meeting on 22 January 2013 with this working group's recommendations concerning the Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness. It was reported that these recommendations were accepted by the Overview Select Committee.

The Housing Projects Manager then referred to Minute 42, Cold Weather Shelter. It was confirmed that the Council had bid for additional funding from Homelessness Link to extend the opening of the Cold Weather Shelter. It was explained that the funding would allow Stonepillow to open the cold weather shelter for an additional three nights. The Housing Projects Manager thanked Stonepillow and Housing Staff for helping with this bid, adding that and transport to collect rough sleepers from other parts of the district on nights that the Cold Weather Shelter was open.

48     2013 HOUSING STRATEGY RAISE THE ROOF YEAR TWO UPDATE

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager presented the Raise the Roof Year 2 Progress Report outlining the Council's second year progress with the Raise the Roof Action Plan.

Members were informed that there had been significant achievements during the second year of the strategy including the number of empty homes brought back into use and the quantity and quality of new affordable homes developed for local people. The challenges the Council continued to face in respect of homelessness prevention work was noted.

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager presented photos of Abbotswood, a facility in Rustington, that provides extra care housing for assisted living. It was noted that Abbotswood was the first housing scheme of its type built in Arun at a cost of ten million pounds. Slides were shown of the facilities including 19 electronic buggies, gardening area, restaurant and a bathroom for use by those with disabilities. It was noted that the restaurant and bathroom were also available for use by the local community. The Working Group agreed that Abbotswood was

an excellent facility.

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager pointed out the key issues outlined in the Raise the Roof Action Plan, Housing Strategy for the Arun District 2010 to 2015. With respect to the Council's target to deliver 1000 affordable homes good progress was reported with 621 affordable homes to date. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager stated that he was optimistic the target would be met by the end of 2015 despite a difficult economic climate. Members acknowledged that primary housing developers would be developing at relatively low levels when compared to the rate of developments prior to the housing recession.

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager was also pleased with the Council's target to put empty homes back into use and the plan to deliver 50 affordable homes for rural areas.

The Council's work on Homelessness Prevention was highlighted as positive with the acknowledgement that temporary accommodation was, on average, used for 49 weeks. It was explained that a planned reduction in the use of temporary accommodation had been thwarted by the pressures of the present economic climate.

It was concluded that despite tough economic circumstances Arun District Council had been delivering and would continue to deliver progress against the Raise the Roof Housing Strategy.

Having listened to the presentation Members raised the following points:

- It was asked how much genuine enthusiasm the Parishes had shown for Community Land Trusts. In response the Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager confirmed that three parishes had expressed interest with a few including Community Land Trusts in their Neighbourhood Plans. It was also confirmed that the Council would promote policy that would help Community Land Trusts thrive.
- A question was asked with respect to the progress on Arun Foyer. It was noted that there had been a reduction in the Supporting People Budget by West Sussex County Council. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager explained that West Sussex County Council had introduced a supported housing service for young people with some 600 being helped to return to the family home, provided with alternate accommodation and given housing advice. This service had reduced the need for Foyer.
- Members congratulated Saxon Weald on the development at Abbotswood and expressed the opinion that the Council should continue to provide sheltered housing.
- Members referred to the Housing strategy objective to reduce the number of dwellings in poor repair noting that only 56 of the targeted 214 were brought up to the Decent Homes Standard. The Head of Housing agreed to investigate and brief Members on what action would be taken.
- It was noted that the Arun District had the highest levels of rough sleepers in West Sussex and the use of temporary accommodation was discussed. It was confirmed that a report would be put to the Cabinet Meeting on March 11<sup>th</sup> as a further £125 thousand would be required, from the budget, to fund Bed and Breakfast use. Members expressed their concern with respect to costs and the length of use at an average of 49 weeks per case.
- It was noted that the Council's Local Plan would address standards issues with respect to building affordable homes developments and this would include direction on renewable energy .

Following the discussion about the Council's Housing Strategy the Working Group agreed that Members should be better informed with respect to homelessness prevention and it was requested that the Options Team provide a report detailing their work. This item would be included in the Housing & Customer Services Working Group Work Programme for 2013/14.

#### 49 CUSTOMER SERVICES ACCESS STRATEGY

The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services updated Members on the progress with the Review of the Customer Access Strategy.

It was reported that, in order to understand how customers want to receive information and contact us a customer survey was undertaken over a week at the end of January 2013. The initial results had been informative but more analysis and possibly more survey work would be required to collect more detailed information on customer requirements.

Members were informed that improvements to Bognor Regis Town Hall reception area were expected by 1st April 2013 with the introduction of a queue management system. This would benefit customers and enable Customer Services to measure waiting times and transaction times to plan for the peaks and troughs of service demand.

The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services was pleased to inform Members that Arun Direct had recently undergone assessment for the Customer Service Excellence Award and had been successful. An award would be given formally at the appropriate time. Members joined the Head of Human Resources and Customer Services in congratulating the Contact Centre Manager and his staff on all their hard work.

Members discussed the progress with the Review of the Customer Access Strategy, particularly referring to the required IT support.

It was agreed that enhancing Arun District Council's website was a significant part of the required improvement work. Members agreed that it was a high priority to decide how the Council would move forward with the Customer Relationship Management System, Lagan, and improved technology integration with back office functions.

It was noted that it was important to maintain all methods of Customer Access to the Council. It was pointed out that the Council should encourage cost effective methods of access and part of that would be to enhance the services available to the customer via the internet. However the Working Group agreed that all channels of communication, including telephone and face to face contact, should be maintained to offer choice and fully serve the residents of Arun.

#### 50 TENANTS SCRUTINY OF HOUSING SERVICES

The Housing Projects Manager presented his information report on Tenants Scrutiny of Housing Services outlining the initial framework with proposals for development and implementation.

It was agreed that a working party should be formed of Councillors, Officers and Tenants so that the framework proposals could be considered in greater detail.

Councillor Clayden and Councillor Mrs Oakley agreed to represent Members.

The initial framework for developing Tenant Scrutiny of Housing Services within the Council and the proposals for its implementation was noted. It was also noted that a further report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

## 51 HOUSING COMPLAINTS ARRANGEMENTS

The Housing Projects Manager presented his report on Housing Complaints Arrangements describing the role of the Designated Person who would refer complaints to the Housing Ombudsman and outlined proposals for identifying Members of the Council to act as the Designated Person from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. Proposals to develop a designated Tenants Panel to take over from the Designated Person Role from Members of the Council were also outlined.

The Working Group considered the report and its recommendations. Following discussion Members proposed that the interim arrangement of a Designated Person should be held by the Chairman of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group. This was agreed and the report's recommendations amended as follows:

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

1. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, the Chairman of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group, in consultation with the Assistant Director Customer Services, act as the Designated Person for Housing Complaints. In the event that the Complainant is a Constituent of the Chairman of the Housing & Customer Service Working Group or the Chairman is unavailable, the Vice-Chairman of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group will deputise.
2. Arrangements are put in place to recruit Council tenants to form a Designated Tenants Panel to take over the Designated Person role from the Chairman of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group at the appropriate time.
3. The Council's Complaints Procedure is amended to identify the Chairman of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group as the Designated Person for Housing complaints, with the Vice-Chairman of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group deputising.

## 52 JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW OF HEALTH INEQUALITIES & HOMELESSNESS

The Housing Projects Manager presented his report on the Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness which focussed on Recommendations 10, 11 and 12 in the Joint Scrutiny Review Report and as attached to the Minutes of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group dated 11<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

Members thanked the Housing Projects Manager for his helpful and useful report and agreed the recommendation to the Overview Select Committee as follows:

*The Housing and Customer Services Working Group recommends to the Overview Select Committee that;*

No further work is undertaken in respect of Recommendations 10, 11 and 12 of the Joint Scrutiny Review of Health Inequalities and Homelessness.

53 TENANCY FRAUD PREVENTION – INTRODUCING PHOTOGRAPHIC ID FOR ALL TENANCY HOLDERS

The Head of Housing presented his report on Tenancy Fraud Prevention advising Members of proposals to introduce photographic ID for all Council tenancy holders, initially as a one year pilot with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013.

Members expressed concern that new Tenant Agreements should be completed accurately and a very clear process followed when introducing photographic ID. Following short discussion the Working Group approved the pilot with the agreement that the Head of Housing would report back to the Working Group after the scheme had operated for one year.

The report's recommendation was agreed as follows:

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group recommend to Cabinet that;

The Council introduces a photographic ID for all named tenancy holders from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. This would coincide with the implementation of the Allocations Policy and Tenancy/Strategy Policy and the introduction of Flexible Tenancies which became live on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. This recommendation should be considered as a way of tackling tenancy fraud. Cabinet Members are asked to approve the proposal to undertake a pilot project for one year, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013.

54 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

It was agreed that the topics of "cold weather shelter" and "Mears Voids" should be included in the Work Programme 2013/14.

55 The Chairman informed Members that this would be the last Working Group meeting for the Housing Projects Manager before his departure from Arun District Council. Members thanked him for all his hard work and gave their future best wishes.

NEXT MEETING - 16<sup>th</sup> April 2013 at 6pm

The Chairman requested that Members note the change of venue for the next meeting which would be held in the Council Chamber at Bognor Regis Town Hall.

The meeting concluded at 8.13pm