

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

16 July 2013 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman), Bicknell, Chapman, Mrs Oakley, Oliver-Redgate, and Squires.

Councillors Elkins, Mrs Emberson, Evans, Gammon, Maconachie, Mrs Maconachie, Mrs Madeley and Steward were also present for either all or part of the meeting.

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Edwards, Mrs Goad and Mrs Pendleton. Apologies had also been received from the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Councillor Dingemans.

In the absence of Councillor Edwards, Councillor Squires carried out the role of Vice-chairman for the duration of the meeting.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

12. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

13. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chairman confirmed that there were no items to consider.

14. GAS SAFETY CERTS VERBAL UPDATE

The Working Group had requested an update with respect to Gas Safety Certificates at every Housing & Customer Services Working Group meeting. It was noted that there were 9 Gas Certificates outstanding as of 16 July 2013 with 5 of those currently pursued by Legal to gain access to conduct a gas safety check.

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15. REVIEW OF ROUGH SLEEPERS AND COLD WEATHER SHELTER PROVISION

The Head of Housing presented his report on the Review of Rough Sleepers and Cold Weather Provision. The report identified the success of the homelessness night shelter operating from Glenlogie, delivered by Stonepillow, and outlined the possible next steps for the future development of the service.

It was explained that Arun District Council, along with Chichester District Council had the highest levels of homelessness of all Councils in West Sussex. For the past two winters the Council had operated a Night Shelter, with Stonepillow, between 1<sup>st</sup> November and April which had opened when the temperature was forecast as below minus zero degrees for three consecutive evenings. Members were informed that Arun District Council had made a successful grant application to Homeless Link for £2,000. This grant enabled Stonepillow to extend the service it was able to offer by funding a driver and fuel to transport rough sleepers from other areas of the Arun District to Bognor Regis. The grant also allowed advice sessions to take place at Glenlogie on evenings when the night shelter was not open.

It was reported that there had been significant use of the Night Shelter. During the last winter there were 443 visits and 291 overnight stays which highlighted the demand for a service that supported the homeless in the District. The Head of Housing advised that there were a number of options for the Council to consider. Following the decision to retain Glenlogie for the provision of six units of temporary accommodation, located on the floors above the basement, the opportunity was available to extend services beyond the night shelter provision during winter months.

The Head of Housing requested that the Working Group support further investigations into funding and development of a service to support homelessness and once this had been concluded brought back to a future meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group for consideration prior to recommendation to Cabinet.

The Chairman then introduced staff members from Stonepillow, a charitable organisation based in Chichester. A presentation was given outlining the work of Stonepillow and their mission to offer shelter, information and support to empower homeless and vulnerable people in order to make positive changes in their lives.

Key Items presented were –

- The proactive work between Stonepillow and Arun District Council was welcomed. The focus of the work was described as homelessness prevention as well as offering cold weather shelter provision.
- Members were informed that there had been a large increase of young people that had found themselves homeless. Broadly the types of homelessness was described as economic (including

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redundancies and loss of job), mental health, substance misuse, family breakdown, crime related (including prison discharge).

- The presentation outlined how Stonepillow focused on the prevention of homelessness whilst helping with the “recovery journey” for homeless individuals.

This included:

use of the day centre, the Old Glassworks - Assistance to homeless and vulnerably housed people. Members were advised that the centre provided breakfast, snack facilities, laundry facilities, statutory services, life skills training, GP Surgery, access to mental health nurse, substance misuse triage and a resettlement service.

the Arun Resettlement Worker supported by Stonepillow – It was stated that a primary worker had been appointed to support new rough sleepers into accommodation.

The Restore Project – This was explained as a project that provided purpose for homeless individuals with the provision of work that entailed the restoration of, donated, old furniture.

St Joseph’s – Members were informed that clients were offered an initial 28 day stay in supported living and specialist accommodation. It was noted that ex-offender support was also given to prevent further offences. The Clockwalk Project provided the substance misuse triage.

Mental Health Support – It was reported that individuals that suffered from mental health issues were often left vulnerable by the mental health system and Stonepillow had taken steps to close this gap.

ASURA (Abstinent Service User Recovery Assistant) – ASURA was described as a service of recovery workers who had experienced homelessness themselves and could identify with homeless individuals on a personal level.

- The presentation then described Stonepillow’s work on Cold Weather Shelter Provision at Glenlogie with Arun District Council. It was noted that the service is well run and there had been no reported incidents from its operation at this site. Stonepillow was pleased with the grant from Homelink that indicated their support for the work carried out.

Following a short question and answer session the Chairman thanked Stonepillow for their informative presentation and the Working Group commended the organisation for their excellent work.

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The Working Group Members were particularly pleased with the successful use of Glenlogie given that the Housing & Customer Services Working Group had strongly recommended the building's retention as a cold weather shelter facility.

Councillor Evans, as an elected representative for Arun District Council, informed Members of the work of the project led by West Sussex County Council called Bognor Regis Community Street Outreach Project. It was reported that meetings take place on a quarterly basis and involved representatives from organisations that included Sussex Police, Stonepillow, Arun District Council's Housing department and CRI (a social care and health charity working with individuals, families and communities across England and Wales that are affected by drugs, alcohol, crime, homelessness, domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour). It was reported that the project was tasked with outreach work for rough sleepers in Bognor Regis. It was confirmed that the project had been funded, in the main, by West Sussex County Council with the remainder from Arun District Council and Sussex Police. Stonepillow confirmed the excellent collaborative working between the agencies involved.

A question was raised as to whether CRI produce a newsletter or other means of updating Members with respect to their service. The Housing Services Manager stated that she would investigate.

The Working Group noted the Review of Rough Sleepers and Cold Weather Provision Report and agreed the report's recommendation that the Housing & Customer Services Working Group support further investigation into funding and development of a service to support homelessness and once this had been concluded brought back to a future meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group for consideration prior to recommendation to Cabinet.

## 16. IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM ACT

The Head of Housing presented the report on the Implications of Welfare Reform changes on Arun Council Tenants which identified the possible next steps that would assist in reducing the impact of such changes.

The potential impact on tenants and Arun Housing Services was outlined.

### Key Items -

- It was noted that of the 2,400 working age tenants about 20% received full Housing Benefit and a further 20% received partial benefit. Tenants over pensionable age would be exempt from many of the welfare benefit changes.
- It was reported that the Council's rental collection rate was good at 98.5%. Comment was made that this collection rate could suffer when tenants, under state pension age, in under occupied accommodation receive a housing benefit reduction of 14% for

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each room unoccupied. It was identified that it was too early to precisely predict levels of arrears.

- All 77 households affected by the Benefit Cap had received a letter from Arun District Council.
- Members noted that Housing Services would give consideration to appointing a Financial Inclusion Officer to increase Tenant Support.

Following question and discussion it was agreed that the report was speculative and required update when accurate information was available. The Head of Housing stated that he would further update the working group in January 2014. In view of this, the Working Group agreed not to support the report’s recommendation to forward the report for noting, to the Overview Select Committee, at this stage.

#### 17. WORK PROGRAMME

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group amended the work programme 2013/14 with the addition of the Impact of the Welfare Reform Act at the meeting scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

It was suggested that Stonepillow could update the working group early in the municipal year 2014/15 and this suggestion would be included in the suggested item part of the work programme.

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group noted and agreed the work programme 2013/14.

(The meeting concluded at 7.40pm)