

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

10 September 2013 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman), Bicknell [from minute 6], Mrs Bower [from minute 1 to 7], Mrs Oakley, and Squires

Councillors Dingemans, Elkins and Mrs Madeley were also present for either all or part of the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs Goad, Mrs Pendleton & Oliver-Redgate.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2013 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

4. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing confirmed that on 10th September 2013 there were five gas safety certificates outstanding. It was clarified that two were at a stage where hand delivered letters would be used, two were being progressed by the Legal Team and one was expected to be completed on 11th September 2013.

5. UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS WITH FORMULATION OF THE TENANTS SCRUTINY AND COMPLAINTS PANELS

The Senior Tenant Participation Officer, who was appointed at the end of May 2013, was introduced to the Working Group by the Head of Housing. The Policy & Performance Manager and the Senior Tenant Participation Officer then presented the report on Tenant Scrutiny and Complaints Panels. The results of the local consultation with Arun tenants and the proposed next steps were outlined.

It was explained that the Council had written to all Council Tenants requesting their views on various aspects of Tenant Scrutiny and Tenants Complaints Panel. Members were informed that the Council received 143 responses (3.4% response rate). As the respondent's time was being requested as voluntary participants in scrutiny and complaints it was felt that the response rate was positive. It was reported that the respondents

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supported the formation of a Tenants Complaint Panel and involvement with Tenant Scrutiny.

It was pointed out that the Out of Pocket Expenses Policy had been approved by the Cabinet Member for Housing which would help to remove the potential barrier to tenants getting involved.

The Senior Tenant Participation Officer outlined the next steps required for the formation of a Tenant Scrutiny Panel and a Tenants Complaints Panel which included:

- Invite all interested participants to an introductory meeting to clarify what is involved.
- Development of job descriptions and person specification.
- Undertake a recruitment process
- Training needs analysis and development of a training programme
- Appointment of official roles
- Statement of purpose / terms of reference

The Working Group discussed the response of the Council’s tenants and the report’s proposals. The main points considered were:

- The Complaints Ombudsman recommends that Local Authorities must ask tenants if they want a Complaints Panel and if their response is affirmative then its provision becomes a statutory duty of the Local Authority.
- Members expressed disappointment with the 3.4% response rate but noted that in the context of asking for voluntary help it was a good response.
- Members noted the statutory requirement but expressed the opinion that the systems put in place to facilitate the panels should be kept simple and free from bureaucracy.
- It was pointed out that with the right to buy, estates had become mixed tenure with both Council tenants and private occupants living in the same area. It was suggested that the Council support the formation of Resident Associations to represent both council tenants and private occupants. The Senior Tenant Participation Officer stated that, during the course of her work to engage tenants, she had worked with the Residents Associations at Bognor and Wick and also investigated Housing Associations progression with the formation of their panels.
- Members requested that Ward Councillors be kept informed of consultations with their constituents so that their support and knowledge could be offered.

Following discussion the Working Group noted the report and approved the proposed next steps.

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6. ROUGH SLEEPERS AND COLD WEATHER PROVISION

The Head of Housing presented the report on Rough Sleeper and Cold Weather Provision and outlined the proposed way forward for the development of an improved service for homelessness. The Head of Housing requested that Members consider this service for a six month trial, from November 2013 to April 2014, and dependent on the outcome of this trial Members would be requested to consider a year round service for homelessness.

The Head of Housing explained that the service would be provided at Glenlogie in partnership with Stonepillow and described the homelessness support that would be offered. This support consisted of three weekly surgeries, overnight accommodation from 7pm to 8am, three lunches and evening meals per week, A10 Client Workshop and support to temporary accommodation. It was noted that the Council would be responsible for the maintenance of the basement at Glenlogie and the electric/heating costs. Stonepillow will underwrite the cost of staff required to support the provision of the overnight accommodation and finance the food and bedding laundry costs for the homeless clients.

It was confirmed that the purpose of the six month trial was to work towards a model that would mirror the good working elements of both the hub and hostel within the Chichester area with the provision of accessible services which would engage new and entrenched rough sleepers and provide a way out of homelessness.

Members discussed the report and supported the proposals.

The Housing and Customer Service Working Group agreed to;

RECOMMEND TO CABINET

1. the adoption of the 6-month trial period for the enhanced Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) at Glenlogie, Bognor Regis which would be open every night during the Winter Period (November 2013 – April 2014 inclusive) and provide 3 surgery-type daytime openings per week,
2. that a report be completed for the Housing & Customer Services Working Group following the 6-month trial period which identifies how support for homelessness is delivered.

7. CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY

The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services presented the Customer Access Strategy report which set out the initial Action Plan to go with the Customer Access Strategy which was recently agreed. Members were informed that the Action Plan covered a number of areas of work and it would be expanded as individual services include their own projects. The report also described what Customer Services at Arun would look like at the end of 2014/15.

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The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services emphasised the plan to meet the changing needs of customers and the need to support joined up working with respect to Corporate Systems and Technology. Members were informed that part of the plan was to deliver the same level of reception service at Bognor Regis Town Hall that Arun Civic Centre had already provided. It was reported that the Communications Manager would provide a review of the Council’s website by the end of October 2013.

It was noted that the Council had bid for the sum of £270,000 from Central Government Funds to help facilitate the improvement with customer communications and overall service. It was explained that if this bid was unsuccessful a bid for funds would be requested from the Council’s Capital Programme. It was also noted that a large proportion of the Action Plan should be achieved within 18 months.

Members made comment that partnership working should be emphasised so that customers could experience a one stop shop service. It was noted that the Accommodation Strategy was being used to allocate space for partners that would like to base their operations at Arun Civic Centre. The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services informed Members that customers had access to a West Sussex County Council Network via reception and could be linked to the correct service provider as well as access to a public phone.

Comment was made that access to computer terminals should be provided for customers within the reception area as well as the provision of a list that identified all the local internet points and cafes.

In respect of the provision of services for vulnerable customers, with specific reference to the deaf, it was suggested that the Head of Human Resources and Customer Services could gain valuable information on customer access problems through contact with hospital audiology departments, private audiologists or through organisations such as Foresight.

Members of the Working Group noted the Action Plan.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

It was noted that a number of items had been listed but not scheduled. It was agreed that the update on Housing Development Progress would be scheduled for the next meeting on 7th November 2013. The new Housing IT system item was also scheduled for the meeting on 7th November 2013 to provide Members with an outline plan.

It was suggested and agreed that a verbal update will be given to Members on progress with the Rough Sleeper and Cold Weather Provision at the meeting to be held on 9th January 2014.

Members requested a report on Choice Based Lettings. It was noted that this topic could be covered within the Landlord Accreditation Scheme

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item already listed on the work programme when resources allow. It was agreed that the Head of Housing and the Chairman of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group would schedule this item and the remainder of items without allocated dates.

(The meeting concluded at 7.30pm)