

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

07 November 2013 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman), Edwards, (Vice-Chairman)  
Bicknell, Mrs Oakley and Mrs Pendleton

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors; Mrs Bower,  
Mrs Goad, Mrs Harrison, Mrs Madeley, Oliver-Redgate & Squires.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2013 were  
approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

4. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing reported that of the 11 Gas Safety Certificates  
outstanding, four had been booked for inspection, 4 final reminders had been  
sent, two were void properties and one was subject to an injunction.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICES BRIEFING ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
ASSOCIATION PEER REVIEW

The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services provided  
Members with a verbal update on the Local Government Association (LGA)  
Peer Review. It was explained that the review would consider the following,  
corporately, with respect to Arun's approach to Customer Services:

- whether the Council understands its local context and established a clear set of priorities
- If there is clear financial planning to ensure long term viability and evidence that it is being successfully implemented
- whether there is effective governance and decision making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change, transformation and disinvestment
- If organisational capacity and resources are focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities.

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It was reported that the Membership of the Peer Team would include:

- a Leader of a District Council sharing a number of characteristics with Arun
- a Member with significant experience of excellent customer services
- Chief Executive
- a Senior Officer with significant experience of excellent customer services
- a Peer Review Manager

Members were informed that the review would take place, on site, over two to three days and the specific timing of this would be decided in December 2013. The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services advised that there was a possibility that the review would take place in March 2014.

The Working Group noted the update.

## 6. ARUN DIRECT PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services introduced the Contact Centre Manager and the Chairman welcomed him to the meeting. A presentation was given to the Working Group on the Performance of Arun Direct over the last six months.

Key items presented were call volumes, the development of Arun Direct and its operational progress from 2008 to 2013, technology, the contact centre's strengths, identified areas for development and the future vision.

Call Volumes were described as being subject to peak and trough fluctuations and were noted as 4% higher than last year. The Contact Centre Manager informed Members that the Arun Direct Team were highly skilled and self-motivated and quick to react, consistently adapting working methods to meet business and customer needs. It was noted that staff concentrate on resolving customer queries at first point of contact whilst working within a target driven, quality focused, environment. This Customer Service focus was rewarded when Arun Direct received the Customer Service Excellence Award 2013. Survey feedback had also shown high customer satisfaction with the Arun Direct service.

The Contact Centre Manager stated that Arun Direct was heavily dependent on technology and advisers used an average of nine applications to resolve calls. The Contact Centre Manager explained that due to this dependence Arun Direct worked closely with IT and a Service Level Agreement had been adopted. Members were advised that current technology required update and alternatives would be considered over the next six months.

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It was pointed out that any additional services absorbed by Arun Direct in the future would require an additional staff resource as existing staff were already operating at full capacity.

Following a short question and answer session Members expressed how impressed they were with the efficient and friendly service from the Staff in Arun Direct.

The Chairman thanked the Contact Centre Manager for his presentation and encouraged Members to visit Arun Direct should they wish to see contact centre operations, at first hand.

## 7. UPDATE ON HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

The Head of Housing introduced the Housing Project Development Officer and the Chairman welcomed him to the meeting. The Housing Project Development Officer then delivered a presentation on the New Council Homes Programme 2013/14. Members were informed that the Council’s objective was to achieve Housing Development through a combination of Buy Backs and New Builds.

### The presentation explained -

- that Housing Management had advised of the need for two bed room houses based on analysis of the waiting list and the effects of the bedroom tax. Any new housing developed would be charged at Social Rent rates.
- that the Council had bought seven properties so far and had concentrated on the purchase of two bedroom properties.
- how the New Build programme had begun the process to determine 30 suitable plots of land. The Council’s existing land holdings were examined for potential sites where gaps could be in filled and new houses built. The constraints were outlined as small sites restricted by other houses, the loss of open space and parking which would need to be assessed and garage ownership issues.
- how Hyde Martlet had achieved the same type of build programme about four years ago.
- that a Housing Association called Hastoe and Chartered Surveyors, Welling Partnership, had been appointed following a procurement process.
- that a public consultation process would be followed. Part of the process would inform people in the locality what had been proposed. Letters would be sent to residents in Wick from 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013 advising residents living near garages that survey work would be carried out. A consultation exhibition event was also planned where proposals would be sent to all residents and comments invited.

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- it was anticipated that following a planning permission process new builds should begin from May/June 2014.

The Housing Development Project Officer then invited questions from Members.

The main issue raised was with respect to Central Government’s Policy on Right to Buy. Members commented that they would not wish to invest in social rent properties if they were subsequently sold under right to buy. It was advised that any new builds would have a cost floor attached so people would have a right to buy but the normal discount would not be available for fifteen years. It was also emphasised that residents would not be able to buy for less than the Council’s cost price. The Cabinet Member for Housing pointed out that the working group was straying off topic and this discussion would be more appropriate within a Housing Policy item.

Members of the working group welcomed the positive news that much needed, social rate, houses would be developed. The Chairman stated that the working group would keenly follow housing development progress and thanked the Housing Development Project Officer for his presentation.

#### 8. UNDER OCCUPANCY INCENTIVE SCHEME

The working group received a report from the Housing Services Manager which reviewed the Council’s Homes Under-Occupation Scheme currently in place. Members were informed that the scheme’s purpose was to encourage under occupying tenants to move to smaller accommodation which would make right sized properties available for customers on the Housing Register and help tenants affected by the Bedroom Tax to move to right sized accommodation.

It was explained that this scheme had been operating for some years to encourage tenants to downsize by helping with the costs of moving up to the value of £2000. It was noted that during 2012/13 eleven customers took advantage of the Incentive Scheme. The next steps were outlined as follows:

- Promote the Scheme in the second half of 2013/14 with a cash incentive of £1,500;
- Advertise the Scheme in the October Residents’ Newsletter and on the ADC web-site;
- Remove the criteria of specific property types, and make the Scheme available to all ADC Tenants who down-size irrespective of property type, including those who down-size via a mutual exchange;
- Remove the need to provide quotes and invoices for expenses and replace with a cash incentive after the move has taken place;
- (Allow flexibility for staff to promote incentives via quotes and invoices if this will assist Customers with the cost of removals); and

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- Review the outcomes of the re-promoted Scheme at the end of 2013/14.

The working group, in discussing this report, welcomed the proposals. Comment was made that although it was a good scheme the challenge would be to persuade tenants to move. It was recognised that financial incentives alone were not always enough and although people can be encouraged to move it is ultimately up to individuals whether they want to or not.

The working group then

#### RECOMMEND TO CABINET

- (1) the adoption of a modified Under-Occupation Incentive Scheme which will operate until 31st March 2014.
- (2) that a report is completed for the Housing & Customer Services Working Group which reviews the outcomes of the repromoted Under-Occupation Scheme with a view to continuing, if it proves successful.

#### 9. NEW HOUSING IT UPDATE

The Policy and Performance Manager presented his report which provided background and detail in relation to the procurement of the replacement I.T. Housing System.

Members were informed that the present system, Simdell Housing Management, was introduced seventeen years ago and this application had now reached the end of its life for a number of reasons. It was explained that the Simdell System was based on 1980's technology which restricted the introduction of new, more efficient, ways of working and affected the Council's ability to keep up with new legislation.

It was reported that funding for the replacement Housing I.T. System had been drawn from the Housing Revenue Account Budget and the cost of implementation would be classified as capital expenditure. The project timetable was outlined with an expected completion date of January 2015.

In discussing this report Members agreed with the necessity to replace the existing system. The working group then noted the progress with the replacement Housing I.T. System and thanked the Policy and Performance Manager for his report.

#### 10. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

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The working group considered the work programme and the following points were raised:

- The Head of Housing requested an additional item for the meeting scheduled on 9 January 2014 on Rough Sleepers Strategy and the working group agreed.
- The Democratic Services Officer made comment with respect to the amount of information reports the working group received and whether alternative ways of providing information updates could be explored. One concern was the amount of work information reports caused officers. The Democratic Services Officer offered to circulate information when necessary by e-mail, website or hard copy.
- It was agreed that the Lead Officers would discuss the way forward with respect to expected items at the meetings in January and February 2014 with the Chairman and report to the next meeting of the working group for approval.

(The meeting concluded at 7.40pm)