

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

19 March 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman), Edwards, (Vice-Chairman) Bicknell, Mrs Bower, Mrs Harrison, Mrs Oakley, Oliver-Redgate and Squires

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors; Elkins, Mrs Goad, Haymes, Mrs Madeley, and Mrs Pendleton.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 09 January 2014 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

4. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF THE AGENDA

The Chairman stated that there would be a change the the order of the agenda and the Working Group agreed to consider the Customer Access Strategy prior to the verbal updates on Gas Safety Certificates and Rough Sleepers to assist with Peer Review timing.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICE ACCESS STRATEGY

The Head of Human Resources & Customer Services presented the report on progress with the replacement for the Lagan Customer Relationship Management System.

It was reported that, following concerns with the ongoing management of Lagan, the Customer Services Team, with input from IT, explored alternatives to the Lagan system. The objective was to look at options that were sustainable, could be developed to deliver future improvements and work well with other technologies such as electronic forms.

Members were informed that it was concluded that the best option for the Council was to develop an in-house system using Microsoft SharePoint. It was noted that SharePoint is an existing Arun District Council technology that would enable the Council to build a single information portal for customer interactions. It was pointed out that SharePoint had been able to deliver the

majority of functions delivered by Lagan and would offer a saving to the Council from April 2015 of £19,000 per annum. The proposal to move to SharePoint was agreed by the Arun Improvement Programme Board in December 2013 and would offer:

- A platform through which communications may be shared
- A storage facility that retains and shares documents and other reference materials
- Integration of web based content and multimedia through one desktop window
- Adviser scripts which could be accessed by staff working in both front and back office teams, offering flexible working opportunities.
- Council's existing workflow and electronic document management systems would have the ability to share data between different computer systems providing standardisation.
- Opportunity to develop web sites and intranet sites supported from within the platform
- Synchronisation and integrated working with other Microsoft Office Applications
- Improved customer case tracking and status updating
- Opportunity to develop the system as required at minimal additional cost.

The Head of Human Resources & Customer Services then informed the working group that as part of the Lagan replacement project the process flows used to get information from the customer to the relevant back office system, which includes E-Forms, had been reviewed.

It was reported that, with the inclusion of Arun's workflow management and electronic document applications the aim was to go live with SharePoint in Arun Direct by 30th June 2014. The Head of Human Resources & Customer Services thanked the staff who had worked collaboratively to achieve this result and particularly thanked the Contact Centre Manager.

Following questions from the working group which were responded to by the Head of Human Resources & Customer Services Members were invited to a demonstration of the new system in the Contact Centre. Those Councillors interested were asked to contact the Committee Manager, in the first instance, to arrange a visit.

6. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing reported that of the 15 Gas Safety Certificates that were outstanding, 3 had been booked for inspection, 4 cases were with the Legal Team for letter before action, 4 cases had received a 3rd hand delivered letter prior to a legal letter, 3 were related to void properties and 1 case was pending with the Council's Legal Team for injunction.

7. ROUGH SLEEPERS VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing provided the working group with an update on the use of Glenlogie to address rough sleeping issues in the District. It was reported that 72 different clients had been seen in the hub and 39 used accommodation. Members were pleased to note that 16 clients had moved into more secure accommodation reducing the numbers of those sleeping rough. It was noted that, in this way, Stonepillow was meeting its objective to support individuals in the most effective way to prevent homelessness.

It was reported that Stonepillow chaired monthly information meetings with organisations such as the Police and Mental Health support. Arun District Council would meet with Stonepillow early April 2014 to discuss future funding arrangements in the hope that the service could continue beyond June 2014. The working group noted that the work achieved by Stonepillow and the Glenlogie facility had been positive, with a clear demand for the service, and fully supported its continuation.

8. HOUSING COMPLAINTS UPDATE

The Senior Tenant Participation Officer updated the working group regarding the Council’s position regarding the Housing Complaints process following changes in legislation in April 2013.

Members were informed that a complainant can decide whether to approach a designated person or designated tenant panel. It was noted that Cllr Clayden had been appointed as the designated person for complaints from Council tenants. Arun District Council began the recruitment process for a Tenants Panel in September 2013 and identified 10 tenants as having the skills and commitment to be appointed to a panel. It was decided that the 10 tenants would be appointed the Tenants Scrutiny Panel as this panel was of the greatest benefit to the Council and the tenant base.

It was explained that an option to utilise the Scrutiny Panel as a Designated Panel had been rejected on the advice from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service. The working group noted and agreed that tenant scrutiny was time consuming for panel Members and that complaint resolution requires comprehensive training that could detract from the main focus of the panel.

In discussing this item the working group felt that a Tenant Complaint Panel would be under-utilised as escalated complaints amounted to one or two annually. It was also pointed out that the training of volunteers was expensive and time consuming for little return. As the volume of complaints was low the Senior Tenant Participation Officer advised that there was no requirement for undue concern in not establishing a panel of this nature. Members were of the opinion that complaining tenants would more likely approach a councillor or MP rather than a designated panel.

It was confirmed that Councillor Clayden would continue as the nominated designated person for the foreseeable future and other councillors

could also be approached by their constituents. The Housing Complaints Update report was then noted.

9. RAISE THE ROOF PROGRESS REPORT

The Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager and the Housing Services Manager presented the Raise the Roof Progress Report that set out the Council's housing strategy and the progress against the action plan as at February 2014.

It was reported that whilst good progress had been maintained in enabling the delivery of affordable housing, both rent and shared ownership, the Council continued to face considerable challenges in respect of its homelessness prevention work. It was noted that the Council was making good progress with its work to improve the energy efficiency of private sector housing in the District and was moving forward with plans to develop new council housing for local people.

The Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager outlined the progress on specific items in the Housing Strategy Action Plan 2010-2015. The Council's target of developing 1,000 affordable homes by 2015 was highlighted. Members were informed that the Council had achieved the completion of 812 homes in 3 years but there was some way to go before this strategy was met. Members expressed the opinion that social rents were preferable to affordable rents. It was explained that affordable rents were charged at a rate of up to 80% of market value which amount to around £170 a week for a 3-bedroom property whereas an equivalent social rent would be around £125 a week.

Also highlighted was the strategy to make better use of the existing housing stock by bringing 60 empty homes back into use by 2015. It was reported that 36 empty homes were returned to use in 2012/13 through direct intervention of the Council. It was reported that the Council now had limited capacity in this area of work as the Empty Homes Officer post was shared with Worthing and Adur Council.

The Housing Services Manager drew attention to the Council's homelessness prevention strategy where the objective was to increase the levels of homelessness prevention in order to reduce the economic cost of homelessness and avoid the high social cost. It was acknowledged that the Council had performed well in homelessness prevention in recent years but because there had been demand outside the Council's control the need of temporary housing and people often staying longer in expensive Bed and Breakfast accommodation was a significant pressure. It was explained that the Council's aim was to increase the availability of temporary accommodation to reduce the amounts spent on Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Members welcomed the provision of temporary accommodation units at Glenlogie to support this strategy.

It was reported that part of the Action Plan was to manage, retain and improve the Council's own housing stock. To achieve this the Council aimed to decommission unsuitable sheltered accommodation, tackle Tenancy Fraud, manage and obtain Council stock, better manage disabled adaptations and

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utilisation of the under occupation scheme which, so far, had encouraged 5 tenants to downsize.

Following questions from Members which were responded to by the Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager and the Housing Services Manager the working group noted the report.

10. TENANCY STRATEGY AND TENANCY POLICY

The Housing Services Manager presented the report on Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy which updated the working group on the first year of the strategy and policy, in particular the use of Fixed Term tenancies.

Members were reminded that the Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy were approved by Cabinet in September 2012. The Strategy was implemented from October 2012 and the policy was implemented from January 2013. Since April 2013 it was noted that 106 Council properties had been let on secure tenancies, 75 had been let on an introductory basis and 22 on Flexible (fixed term) for 5 years and 21 Flexible (Fixed Term) 10 years. It was noted that none of the prospective tenants had raised concerns.

It was explained that flexible tenancies would be reviewed in their final year as the first 5 year flexible tenancies would not end until 2018/19. It was noted that a report on the impact of the new tenancy arrangements would be brought back to the appropriate committee/working group at that time.

11. PHOTO ID

The working group received a report from the Housing Services Manager on the 12 months pilot project on the use of Photo ID for each new tenant that moved into council properties.

It was noted that photos of new tenants had been collected since 1 April 2013. A total of 318 new tenancies had started since the beginning of the financial year. Photos had also been taken of new tenants who had carried out a mutual exchange. Members were pleased to note that no tenant had refused to have their photos taken as part of the identification and verification process.

The Housing Services Manager outlined the future proposal to continue to collect photographs of all new tenants moving into Council properties and extended to other adults living in Council properties even if they are not the tenant.

Following discussion the Housing & Customer Services Working Group

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET – That

- (1) Photographic ID continues to be collected for new tenants moving into Council properties.

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- (2) Photographic ID be extended to include any changes of tenancy and any other adults living in Council properties as well as the tenant.

12. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The working group considered the work programme for the new Municipal Year 2014/15 and noted the items for inclusion.

As this was the last meeting of this working group for this Municipal Year (2013/14) the Chairman thanked Members and Officers for their contribution and support.

(The meeting concluded at 7.50pm)