

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

03 July 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman), Bicknell, Mrs Bower, Mrs Harrison, Mrs Oakley, Oliver-Redgate [from Minute 8], Mrs Pendleton and Squires

Councillor Elkins was also present.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN & VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Clayden was nominated and seconded for the post of Chairman. No other nominations were received and Councillor Clayden was elected as Chairman.

The Chairman then asked for nominations for Vice-Chairman. Councillor Edwards was nominated and seconded for the post of Vice-Chairman. No other nominations were received and Councillor Edwards was elected as Vice-Chairman.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors; Edwards & Mrs Goad.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MEETING TIMES

The Working Group

RESOLVED

That its start times for meetings during 2014/2015 be 6.00 pm.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group's Terms of Reference for the Municipal Year 2014/15 was agreed.

6. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2014 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

7. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing confirmed that 13 properties had expired Gas Safety Certificates. 6 cases were with the legal team, 2 tenants were in hospital and 5 cases will be sent final letters.

Following request, The Head of Housing confirmed that he would advise the working group on the process followed upon Gas Safety Certificate expiry.

8. ROUGH SLEEPER & STONEPILLOW UPDATE

The Head of Housing updated the working group on the nightshelter operation at Glenlogie, along with steps that would be taken to ensure its future operation. In view of the Arun District reporting the highest levels of Rough Sleepers in the West Sussex area the importance of this service was noted.

It was reported that, given the success there had been with the service, it had been concluded that it would be sensible to extend the service for a further 12 months, with a review to go back to Cabinet after 6 months, which will take effect in October 2014. Funding arrangements for the extended operation was approved by an Individual Cabinet Member decision made on 1 May 2014.

The working group noted that, since opening in November 2013, Glenlogie had enabled 31 of their clients to move away from rough sleeping into housing. The complex nature of individual cases was demonstrated by the many different ways Glenlogie had restored clients to accommodation. It was noted that of the 31 clients:

- 7 have moved into the private rented sector
- 4 have moved into Housing 1st (specialist supported housing)
- 3 have moved into supported living with Stonepillow
- 4 have moved with Bognor Housing Trust (supported housing)
- 3 into Sands (residential rehabilitation unit)
- 7 back in with family/partner
- 3 into residential detox secondary support (medical setting)

It was noted that the Hub facility which operated day time surgeries had also seen significant numbers with over 80 individuals using the service.

It was reported that the Street Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference, which Stonepillow chairs, was working well with good input from the Police and Arun District Council. This helped ensure that the most up-to-date information was held on clients and helped various agencies for work and support.

The Head of Housing reported on the good work that Stonepillow's 'Restore' project in Chichester had achieved which helped clients re-engage

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with the world of work. It was noted that a similar service was to be developed in Littlehampton pending Arun District Council’s planning permission.

The Working Group commended the work of Stonepillow and Arun District Council’s partnership with them. Members were pleased that 31 clients had been rehabilitated into accommodation.

Discussion centred on the converted flats above Glenlogie that provided temporary accommodation. It was reported that this accommodation had been finished to a high standard and gave the Council an alternative to expensive Bed and Breakfast lodgings which was not always suitable for families. It was confirmed that the garden area to the rear of the Glenlogie would be cleared and provided for use for those living in the flats. The working group agreed that it would be important to make the garden area private, for resident’s use only.

The working group noted the need for volunteers to cook for the clients at Glenlogie and a plea was made encouraging more people to help.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Housing for his report.

9. EMPTY HOMES ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

The Principal Environmental Health Officer (Housing) presented the report on the Empty Homes Assistance Programme that explained the current work being undertaken by the Council with respect to empty homes.

It was reported that on 1 March 2014 the Council had entered a service level agreement with Adur and Worthing Councils for the provision of 2 days of empty homes work for a 2 year period ensuring the continuation of this work in the district.

It was advised that Arun District Council is committed to bringing empty residential properties back into use and the empty homes officer had been working with the Council’s Council Tax Department to identify empty properties. The Empty Homes Strategy had three key steps and these were outlined as :

- Engage in methods of identifying properties
- Encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use
- Enforcement action used in appropriate circumstances to target long term empty properties, if owners fail to co-operate with renewal options.

The working group was informed that the Council receives a New Homes Bonus grant, paid by Central Government, for increasing the number of available homes.

Two ways owners could be encouraged to put their empty properties back into use were described. Firstly, the Guaranteed Rental Scheme, which encouraged owners to let their property to Northwood Letting Agency who

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would then become the tenant and sub-let the property to a homeless customer nominated by the Council’s Housing Options Team. Secondly, the Empty Property Assistance Programme could be offered to owners where assistance could be given to bring their properties back into use. This would be in the form of a grant, up to a maximum of £5,000, or an interest free loan of up to £10,000, paid back on a monthly basis over an agreed term.

In discussing the report Members commented as follows:

- Compulsory Purchase Orders should always be used as a last resort.
- The idea of an interest free grant, tied to a property, was seen as low risk to the Council.
- The number of empty homes in the Arun District (599, based on tax records) was referred to and seen as very high. Members supported work to reduce the amount of properties that were not in use in the area.
- It was suggested that council house owners should be told that the council would be willing to purchase their home and put the property back into council housing stock. The Head of Housing confirmed that this had been done and something that would continue should if the funding was available.
- The various ways an owner could be encouraged not to leave a property empty were discussed including the recent increased Council Tax charges for empty properties.

Following this discussion, the Housing & Customer Service Working Group;

RECOMMEND TO CABINET – That

- (1) the Empty Homes Assistance Programme be approved for a maximum up front cost of £100,000 per year for a two year period to be recouped from property owners.

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The working group considered the work programme for the new Municipal Year 2014/15 and noted the items for inclusion. Items were then scheduled to the appropriate meeting date.

(The meeting concluded at 7.15pm)