

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

04 September 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman), Edwards (Vice-Chairman), Bicknell [from Minute 15], Mrs Bower, Mrs Oakley, Oliver-Redgate and Mrs Pendleton

Councillor Elkins and Councillor Gammon were also present.

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors; Mrs Goad, and Mrs Harrison.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2014 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

14. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing reported that there were two properties with expired Gas Safety Certificates which meant that the Council had performed at 99.92% compliance. It was confirmed that one case would be sent a final letter and one case would be resolved with eviction.

15. ROUGH SLEEPER VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing informed the working group that between March and July 2014 Glenlogie had received 61 clients, 46 male and 15 female. The main reason for presenting as homeless was outlined as; family breakdown, loss of job, mental health and substance misuse. Members were pleased to note that 32 of clients had been rehabilitated into accommodation.

It was reported that the day centre, known as the Hub, had been well attended receiving 10 to 15 clients daily. The Samaritans visited the Hub regularly to help support clients.

The Head of Housing reported that Stonepillow's 'Restore Project' in Chichester had helped clients re-engage with working life and a similar service was being opened at Harwood Road, Littlehampton. It was anticipated that a 'hub' day centre would also operate at Harwood Road.

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Members were impressed with the services offered by Stonepillow and at Glenlogie, particularly the work that was being done to help clients back to work and more secured forms of accommodation.

16. TENANT SCRUTINY PANEL REVIEW OF THE HOUSING COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Chairman welcomed representatives from Arun District Council’s Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) and Richard Tomkinson, Independent Chairman, from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).

The recently constituted TSP had produced its first review which had focused on Housing Complaints and the recommendations of this review were brought to the attention of the working group.

It was noted that the TSP had worked extremely hard and produced an excellent first review. Richard Tomkinson (TPAS) outlined the scope of the review which had centred on the investigation of low numbers of complaints about Arun District Council’s Housing Service, with particular consideration of:

- Tenant awareness of the Complaint Procedure
- Application of the procedure by Arun DC Housing staff
- How complaints are logged/recorded

The review also compared the Council’s approach to best practice within the Housing Sector.

The methodology of the review was explained where the TSP gathered evidence from staff interviews, staff focus group, mystery shopping and an online Survey which had achieved a high response rate at around 20% (72 responses).

The representatives of the TSP presented the findings of the review to the working group and outlined their recommendations in view of these. Key findings were:

- There was no proper logging and recording of complaints
- Feedback from complainants in terms of satisfaction with the process was not sought
- There was no clear process for deciding whether a complaint was ‘accepted’ as a complaint and this had caused staff confusion
- There was staff inconsistency around understanding the complaint handling process
- There was no time limit on complaints which could lead staff investigation of service failure that was 18 months old or more
- Customers were forced to complete a complaint form which had caused unnecessary delay with response/resolution
- No clear commitment, on the Council’s part, to provide an apology
- Communication weaknesses both internally and to tenants

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- Lack of staff training due to pressures of workload
- No evidence of a complaints leaflet in the Council Offices and the complaints form was not easy to find on the website

The recommendations from the TSP review to address these findings were brought to the attention of the working group. The Head of Housing thanked the TSP and acknowledged their voluntary time and commitment to this review. He stated that the findings would be taken seriously and resolutions would be implemented. It was noted that a new IT system would be introduced to Housing shortly which should help to accurately record complaints and demonstrate trends. The Head of Housing also confirmed that staff training would be undertaken in view of the need for more awareness and confidence. He explained that an action plan with time table would be produced to identify how and when Housing addresses the issues raised.

In discussing the TSP’s report Members were impressed with the valuable work of the panel, recognising their positive influence on future service provision. The Chairman and the working group passed on their thanks to them. Members noted the review’s findings and recommendations and requested that the Head of Housing presented the working group with the action plan and time table at the next meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Housing also formally thanked the TSP for their voluntary work which had produced a review of great value to the Council. He acknowledged the benefit of the TSP which would help shape future Council services. The Cabinet Member for Housing and the working group also thanked Richard Tomkinson (TPAS) and the Senior Customer Service & Tenant Participation Officer for their directional support.

The working group then considered and agreed the report’s recommendation.

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET – That

the findings of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel Review of Housing Complaints are endorsed and that Housing implement such changes to their procedures to address the recommendations where possible.

The Chairman thanked Richard Tomkinson (TPAS) and the representatives from the Tenant Scrutiny Panel for their attendance at this meeting.

#### 17. ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL’S WEBSITE

The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services presented an information paper on Arun District Council’s Website and Intranet.

It was recognised that the Website had received little corporate attention in recent years and was performing poorly. The Head of Human

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Resources and Customer Services outlined the phased review process that would work towards finding solutions with many of the issues noted as fairly straightforward to resolve.

Phase 1 – Members were informed that consultants would help initiate a project to improve the Council’s Website by ensuring the scope includes all linked issues.

Phase 2 - It was stated that the Council would upgrade to version 5 of VerseOne which had already been purchased. Version 5 would help to re-write content, look at menu structure and links and provide a new front page. It was explained that if version 5 does not deliver the required resolution then consideration would be given to the purchase of a different platform. It was noted that VerseOne, version 5 would not support Parish Council sites and the Council will need to consider how to address this. The plan was to complete this phase by mid-March 2014.

Phase 3 - It was noted that the Grapevine (Intranet) would be re-built using Sharepoint and the feasibility of an Intranet for Members would be investigated.

Phase 4 - It was explained that this phase would look at the outcomes of the review and conclude the best solutions which may be to migrate the website to a new platform or to perhaps use Microsoft Sharepoint.

Phase 5 - A Digital Media Strategy would be created with the Communications Team.

The Head of Human Resources and Customer Services pointed out that a consultation would take place with customers, staff and Members and that any solution had to be sustainable in terms of resource and management arrangements.

Members of the working group were keen that they should be included in consultation. The Chairman stated that the Member IT Working Party was in place to address some of these issues for Members.

Members were pleased to note that an improvement programme was in place that would progress the Council’s website and the Head of Human Resources and Customer Services was thanked for the report with the request that the working group be kept informed.

## 18. HOUSING BUSINESS PLAN ANNUAL REVIEW

The Head of Housing presented the working Group with a report, for information, that had been considered by Cabinet at the Cabinet Meeting on 18 August 2014. This report updated Members on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan (HRA) and Cabinet had agreed the priorities for delivery.

The working group discussed the HRA plan and its impact on the Council in terms of the number of changes that had occurred since the

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Business Plan was agreed. It was noted that the existing Business Plan forecast that there would be sufficient funding from rent income to service the loan and to generate surpluses for additional investment including, potentially, new homes. The recent changes could impact on the ability of the Council to service its debt whilst at the same time delivering improvements to the Housing Service and house building/acquisition in terms of:

- Right to Buy
- Rent rises were now set annually using Consumer Price Index (CPI) as opposed to rent income rising (RPI) which would impact on rental income projections in the longer term.
- The Business Plan was based on an assumed 6 Right to Buy (RTB) disposals each year. There were no RTB disposals in 2011/12, 9 in 2012/13 and 20 2013/14. This would impact more on rental income than anticipated

The working group discussed the Council’s progress and the difficulties that needed to be overcome. Following this discussion it was requested that the working group received regular updates concerning the HRA Business Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Housing thanked the Head of Housing for his work on this matter. It was pointed out that the HRA Business Plan was not static but would be updated according to change. The Cabinet Member for Housing stated that he would answer any query Members have regarding HRA and pointed out that the Head of Finance would also be able to help with any HRA financial query.

#### 19. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

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

It was agreed that an update on the HRA Action Plan would be presented to the working group on a quarterly basis.

The Chairman brought Members attention to the Committee Suite refurbishment at the Civic Centre which would mean that the scheduled working group meetings would relocate, on a temporary basis, to an alternative venue.

(The meeting concluded at 7.55pm)