

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

23 October 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman), Bicknell (from Minute 24), Mrs Bower, Mrs Oakley, Mrs Pendleton (from Minute 24) and Squires.

Councillor Elkins and Councillor Gammon were also present.

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors; Edwards, Mrs Goad, Mrs Harrison and Oliver-Redgate.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2014 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

23. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing reported that there were no Gas Safety Certificates outstanding. The working group congratulated Housing Services on this achievement.

24. ROUGH SLEEPER VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing informed the working group that since July 2014 Stonepillow had received 90 clients, a quarter of these were from self referrals and a further third referred from the Crime Reduction Initiative and Arun District Council.

It was noted that 41% of homelessness was caused by family breakdown closely followed by substance misuse. The largest age group supported by Stonepillow was noted as 25 to 44 year olds at 62%. Stonepillow had referred 8 homeless cases for mental health support, 42 to substance misuse support and 1 to domestic violence support.

The Hub at Harwood Road, Littlehampton was receiving 10 to 15 clients daily.

Cllr Squires asked whether Housing Services could inform the Littlehampton Town Council about this work because they had raised concerns about rough sleepers and street drinkers, largely in relation to impact on local retailers. The Head of Housing agreed that this would be

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arranged and informed Members that, in the future, a regular briefing note from Stonepillow would be circulated to the working group. It was suggested and agreed that this briefing note would be sent to all Members of Arun District Council.

25. DISCHARGE OF HOMELESS DUTY TO THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

The working group received a report on the Discharge of Homeless Duty to the Private Rented Sector. Members were requested to consider the Council including offers of private rented sector tenancies as part of its homelessness duty.

It was noted that The Homelessness (Sustainability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012, made under the Localism Act 2011, introduced powers to local authority housing departments to offer private rented properties as part of their homelessness duty. It was also noted that a number of local authorities had adopted policies to use these new powers as a solution to accommodating the increasing numbers of homeless clients to whom they owe a statutory duty.

The increasing demand of the Council’s homeless clients was outlined. In 2012/13 Arun District Council accepted a statutory duty to house 129 homeless clients who had met the assessment criteria of the homelessness legislation. This figure had increased to 142 in 2013/14 and in the first quarter of 2014/15 there were 61 homeless acceptances. Members were informed that in 2012/13, 2013/14 and the first part of 2014/15 homeless applicants were housed in Council or Housing Association properties with the percentage of those housed in this way increasing from 27% to 41%. It was reported that this indicated a need for alternative sources of accommodation from other tenures to help meet homelessness demand.

It was proposed that existing private rented sector checks and landlord accreditation would be used.

Members of the working group discussed the report and asked questions. It was felt that it was important that Landlords would be supported and potential tenants placed carefully. It was noted that if the scheme was accepted then the Council would require an increased amount of private rented housing stock and would need to encourage Landlords to join.

The Cabinet Member for Housing informed the working group that Arun District Council had a Landlords Forum which was well supported. The next meeting was noted as 12 November 2014 at Bognor Regis Town Hall. It was agreed that Landlords joining the Council’s accreditation scheme would benefit from talking to other Landlords at this forum.

It was noted that private landlords could still receive Housing Benefit payments directly.

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RECOMMEND TO CABINET

that the Council includes offers of suitable private rented sector tenancies as part of its homelessness duty.

26. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS REVIEW

The working group received a report from the Housing Services Manager on the proposed amendments to the Housing Allocations Scheme.

It was reported that the Housing Allocation Scheme was reviewed in 2012 in the light of the new powers that had been given to local authorities by the Localism Act 2011. These powers enabled the Council to apply its own criteria to determine who may join the Housing Register. The Council's Allocation Review of 2012 determined that two main criteria would apply: a housing need and a local connection to Arun would be required. In addition the priority bands were amended and Band D was removed so that in January 2013, when the change was implemented, there was a reduction in the number of housing applicants on the register from 6000 plus to approximately 1100.

It was noted that this review had proposed amendments to priority bands, a clearer requirement regarding debts to the Council and the removal of priority for Deposit Bond Customers. Priority Band amendments were noted as follows:

- Band A would apply to applicants with an emergency or high priority need or where rehousing the applicant is required for reasons which assist the Council. An example was given that all applicants who had been under-occupying would be placed in Band A.
- Band B would apply to applicants to whom the Council had a homeless statutory duty.
- Band C would apply to Arun tenants who needed to transfer for a reason which could not be met by the other priority reasons.

The review also proposed that applicants with any amount of debt would be excluded from the register until it was cleared.

The Housing Services Manager then referred Members to Section 6.4.10 of the Allocations Scheme and stated that another recommendation would be inserted for local lettings plans to add that preference would be given to local people of that ward. It was noted that the scheme would be implemented from April 2015 to coincide with the installation of new IT Software for Housing Services.

The Chairman and Members of the working group expressed concern that the amendments to the Housing Allocations Scheme were not put to Members prior to consultation. The Head of Housing and the Housing services Manager agreed that any future matters of Policy would be presented to Members for their comment prior to wider consultation. It was also requested that Members be kept informed of any Allocation issue that

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affected ward members so that Councillors were more able to deal with their constituents' queries.

The Working Group then considered the content of the Housing Allocations Scheme and provided the Housing Services Manager with comment and amendments.

Following amendment the working group considered and agreed the report's recommendation.

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group

RECOMMEND TO CABINET

that the proposed amendments to the Housing Allocation Scheme be accepted.

27. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group considered the work programme for 2014/15 and noted the included items.

(The meeting concluded at 7.25pm)