

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

08 January 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

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

Councillors Elkins and Chapman were also present.

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs Goad and Oliver-Redgate.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2014 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

31. GAS SAFETY CERTIFICATES VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing reported that there were three Gas Safety Certificates outstanding. Of these, two had been referred to Legal Services for resolution and entry was planned for Monday 12 January for the remaining one.

32. ROUGH SLEEPER VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing distributed a hand-out which gave members an update from Glenlogie for November and December 2014, and informed members that a hand-out would be available prior to the meeting in future. He confirmed that there had been 14 new clients (13 male and one female), and that 50% of clients were homeless due to substance abuse, and over 50% were in the 18-45 age range.

In response to questions raised, the Head of Housing agreed to bring information from Stonepillow to the next meeting of the working group to inform members about the impact of its new service in Littlehampton. He also confirmed that, whilst it remained full, Glenlogie had not turned anyone away.

33. RENT SETTING POLICY FROM APRIL 2015

The Finance and Home Ownership Manager presented the report setting out the current rent setting policy and the changes in government

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policy effective from April 2015.

It was confirmed that the policy was proposed to apply to existing tenants, however when a property was re-let (excluding mutual exchange or succession) the rent would be set at the 'formula' rate, as would any additional properties built or acquired by the council. It was discussed that the formula rate was approximately 60% of market rent, whereas affordable rent is approximately 80% of market rent.

In answer to a question raised, it was discussed that an increase in rent could have an impact on Housing Benefit claims, however it was noted that this proposed change was as a result of government policy.

Following the debate, the Housing & Customer Services Working Group agreed to

#### RECOMMEND TO CABINET

that the Council adopts the Government policy of increasing rents by CPI +1% (2015/2016 = 2.2%) for existing tenants and of charging formula rents on new tenancies from April 2015..

#### 34. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS REVIEW

The Housing Services Manager presented the report on the proposed amendments to the Housing Allocations Scheme.

It was noted that the amendments were proposed following a change in case law at the end of 2014 which clarified issues around access to the housing register.

The Housing Services Manager drew members' attention to the proposed changes, which centred on balancing housing legislation, which gave certain applicants the right to apply for housing, with the localism agenda which gave local authorities the ability to set local connection criteria. The priority categories were discussed as detailed in the report and the proposed Housing Allocations Scheme, and it was noted that certain groups of applicants would not be excluded from priority categories if they did not meet the council's local connection criteria.

It was noted that other minor changes were proposed to the policy in line with current good practice.

Members welcomed the proposal to assist down-sizing for tenants with some housing arrears in cases where the arrears would be cleared by the Under-occupation Incentive payment. It was noted that changes affecting ex-armed forces personnel would not have a large impact in Arun. It was also clarified that, although institutions were covered in the legislation, there were no specific benefits offered to people leaving prison.

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It was questioned whether the proposed changes would have an impact on Arun’s housing list, but was noted that the proposed changes were in line with case law and good practice and were therefore supported.

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group agreed to

**RECOMMEND TO CABINET**

That the further amendments to the Allocation Scheme 2014 be accepted and implemented from April 2015.

**35. ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL’S WEBSITE VERBAL UPDATE**

The Services Development Manager updated members on the ‘Digital Arun’ project, which was currently in its second phase. The first phase had been the appointment of SOCITM to assist in identifying how to improve Arun’s on-line services. This followed meetings with stakeholders and Councillors, among others in order to identify what our customers want from our website and how best to provide this.

It was noted that a new team had been established to manage and develop the website, and access had been removed from most of the 60 people who had previously been updating different parts of the site. The new team was located next to the Contact Centre and was within the Customer Services team. This location was also endorsed by SOCITM and it was recognised as providing the best opportunities for information exchange and learning from the questions our customers were asking.

A new website was being built by the team and would be launched at the beginning of March 2015. There would be a new front page and fewer, and more succinct, service pages.

It was likely that the new site would first be launched internally in order to resolve any potential issues prior to a public launch. There was potential for new services to be developed in the future, including live messaging to resolve customer questions.

In response to questions raised it was discussed that service areas have been looking at their web pages and how they provide services to their customers and it was hoped that this could lead to greater efficiency.

The Chairman extended the thanks of the working group to the Services Development Manager and his team.

**36. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15**

In addition to the items due for discussion at the next meeting, an item on the impact of the Welfare Reform Act was requested. As this had been discussed at the meeting on 23 October, the Head of Housing agreed to provide members with a brief update on the report presented at that time. It

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was noted that the Local Government Association was considering this issue in the coming week so more information might also be available to members from LGA resources.

The work programme, as updated, was agreed. It was noted that the next meeting of the working group was on 5 March 2015.

37. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Committee

RESOLVED

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

38. GREENSPACE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT RETENDER (Exempt – Paragraph 3 – Information Relating to the Financial or Business Affairs)

The Greenspace Contract & Development Manager presented the report, informing members that the current contract would end in December 2016 and detailed work was underway to establish a new contract to start from January 2017.

A full report was being considered by the Environmental Services & Community Development Working Group on 18 February 2015 with recommendations to Cabinet, but the contract would cover grounds maintenance services for housing land, thus Arun’s housing service would be a key stakeholder.

The length of the contract and the formula for awarding it was discussed and supported.

Members discussed the alignment of the contract with the council’s priorities of supporting people who need help, and delivering the best services we can afford. Members also discussed the opportunities for added value and working with local communities. Consultation was also debated, along with biodiversity and wellbeing.

It was confirmed that the awarding of the contract would comply fully with Arun’s procurement rules.

The Greenspace Contract & Development Manager was thanked for his report.

(The meeting concluded at 7.02 pm)

Signed..... Dated.....