

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

07 January 2016 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Mrs Ayres, Bence, Mrs Bence, Bicknell, Mrs Bower, Clayden, Edwards, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Mrs Pendleton, Oppler & Mrs Porter.

Councillor Elkins was also present.

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Blampied and Councillor Mrs Daniells.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2015 were approved by the Working Group and were signed by the Chairman.

14. ROUGH SLEEPER AND COLD WEATHER PROVISION

The Head of Housing introduced his report and Sylvie Johnston, the Chief Executive of Stonepillow, a charitable organisation. The working group then received a presentation from Stonepillow that provided an update on the Nightshelter at Glenlogie, in operation since 1 November 2013. It was noted that Arun District Council operated a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, with Stonepillow, whenever the temperature forecasted below minus zero degrees for three consecutive evenings. This presentation also outlined other provisions offered by Stonepillow that focused on the prevention of homelessness whilst helping with the “recovery journey” for homeless individuals.

The following key points were made:

- The Stonepillow Mission Statement was outlined as, “Stonepillow offers shelter, information and support to empower homeless and vulnerable people to make positive changes in their lives. It aims to create a safer environment that promotes social inclusion with practical assistance and without prejudice for all”. The Chief Executive of Stonepillow stated that this

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Mission statement had been set for 25 years and was still relevant to the organisation.

- The types of homelessness was described as Substance misuse 30%, Family breakdown 20%, Mental Health 20%, Loss of a job 12%, Prison discharge 10%, Transient 5%, Eastern European 2%, Victim of Domestic Abuse 1%.
- It was noted that, due to the nature of homelessness, the work that Stonepillow offered to rehabilitate was complex. Projects ranged from substance misuse recovery, residential respite, training opportunities for employment, education (e.g. learning to read/write) and supported accommodation which aided those learning to live independently.
- The Chief Executive of Stonepillow emphasised the importance of building trust with homeless individuals so that assessments could be carried out. This work required expertise and was undertaken with the aim to provide future stability.
- Members were informed that Stonepillow’s Peer scheme was working well where individuals, who had been rehabilitated, were able to support others through to independence.
- It was noted that Stonepillow worked closely with Arun and Chichester local Authorities to ensure that, when stable, clients could access affordable housing.

Stonepillow’s Chief Executive concluded her presentation by inviting Members to visit Stonepillow should they wish to see operations first hand.

Following questions, from Members, that were responded to at the meeting, the Chairman thanked Stonepillow for their informative presentation. The Chairman stated that the Housing & Customer Services Working Group had always respected the work of Stonepillow and would continue to take an interest in their work.

The Housing & Customer Services working group then agreed the report’s recommendation by noting the success and ongoing need for the Nightshelter at Glenlogie.

15. HOUSING COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The Housing Policy and Performance Officer presented the report on the Housing Complaints Procedure which sought Member approval to adopt changes to the complaints process following a review by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel in 2014.

The working group discussed the report and opinion was that the revised complaints process would be more efficient. In discussing the report’s recommendations it was agreed to amend the second recommendation to request the removal of the Housing Complaints Procedure from the Council’s Constitution. The Chairman of the Constitutional Review Working Party was

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present and agreed with this proposal. Following amendment the report’s recommendation were unanimously agreed.

The Housing & Customer Service Working Group

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – that

- 1) the adoption of the housing specific complaint policy is endorsed;
- 2) removal of Housing Complaints Process from the Council’s Constitution is approved.

16. CUSTOMER SERVICES UPDATE

The working group received a presentation from members of the Customer Services team that provided key issues and ideas for Customer Services at Arun. The Head of HR & Customer Services introduced the Service Development Manager, Customer Services Manager (Operations), and Customer Services Manager (Service Development).

Members were reminded that Arun Direct was 10 years old. The service had continually progressed in order to develop systems that met changing customer needs. It was explained that, over the years, Arun Direct had advanced processes so that staff were now able to resolve more customer calls at first point of contact. One example of this was Election calls where Arun Direct had worked closely with the Elections Team so that their back office systems could be accessed allowing Arun Direct staff to instantly deal with customer enquiries. It was noted that Customer Services had looked at ways to streamline all of their services and continued to strive for efficiency.

Members were informed that during the month of November 2015 14000 calls were taken with a staff of 12 FTE. It was explained that the customer services team had looked at ways for customers to move to self-service on the Council’s website wherever possible and appropriate. This would enable Arun Direct to release resources and allow staff the time to deal with more complex issues. One example was noted as the relatively simple Sharps Exchange where customers phoned Arun Direct every month, mostly on busy Monday mornings, to arrange a medical sharps box exchange. This amounted to approximately 400 calls which could be transferred to the Council’s website.

In line with encouraging customers to use the Council’s website for simple customer transactions the Customer Services Team had followed the concept of ‘Digital Arun’ and a new website was introduced as well as an improved intranet for Members and staff. The Service Development Manager explained that digital customer services were being discussed as part of the Council’s Future – 2020 Vision project. It was noted that the Council would need to be flexible and respond to future demands by working effectively

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within budget constraints. Members were informed that the Council’s website would be continually under review and may change its platform in order to keep up with modernisation and meet customer needs. One example of a benefit of modern website software was given where a customer would receive automatic transaction e-mails to keep them fully informed of their enquiries progress. Another example was assisted self-service where customers could be encouraged to communicate digitally with the help of staff.

The Head of HR & Customer Services concluded the presentation by informing Members that the Customer Services Team had and would continue to adapt and change to effectively and efficiently meet customer need. The Head of HR & Customer Services welcomed Members comment should they receive useful constituent feedback or have any operational ideas.

The Chairman thanked the team for their informative presentation and encouraged Members to visit Arun Direct should they require any further information.

17. WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

This item was deferred to the meeting on 10 March 2016.

(The meeting concluded at 7pm)