

Democratic Services Officer: Erica Keegan (Ext. 37547)

21 June 2016

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

A meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group will be held in Committee Room 1 at the Arun Civic Centre, Maltravers Road, Littlehampton on **Thursday, 7 July 2016 at 6.00pm** and you are requested to attend.

Members: Councillors; Mrs Ayres, Bicknell, Blampied, Clayden, Mrs Daniells, Edwards, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Oppler, Mrs Pendleton, Mrs Porter and Mrs Rapnik.

A G E N D A

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN & VICE-CHAIRMAN

To elect the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for this Working Group, following the suggested approach set out below:-

The Constitution at Part 3, Paragraph 6.2 (Working Groups), provides that Working Groups shall each elect their own Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

As the Constitution is silent on the process for this, it is suggested that Members proceed as follows:

1. At the first meeting of the Working Group, before proceeding to any other business, elect a Chairman and Vice Chairman to hold office for the remainder of the Council year.
2. Nominations to be invited from the Members of the Working Group. Each nomination will be treated as a proposal for which a seconder will be required. A vote by show of hands will be taken on each nomination that has been seconded. Every Member of the Working Group that is present at the Arun District Council Housing & Customer Services 07/07/2016 meeting shall have one vote for each nomination that is seconded. The nominated member who receives the majority of votes is elected.

3. The Working Group is asked to elect its Vice-Chairman based on the same procedures in 2 above.
4. In the absence of the Chairman (or Vice Chairman) from a meeting of the Working Group a Chairman (or Vice Chairman) may be appointed by those Members present as Chairman (or Vice Chairman) for that meeting .

The Working Group is requested to consider the above and, if supported, make a recommendation to the Constitutional Review Working Party to enable the Constitution to be amended accordingly.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Please send your apologies to Erica Keegan – tel: 01903 737547 or e-mail: erica.keegan@arun.gov.uk

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and Officers are reminded to make any declaration of personal and/or prejudicial/pecuniary interests that they may have in relation to items on this agenda.

You should declare your interest by stating:

- a) the item you have the interest in
- b) whether it is a personal interest and the nature of the interest
- c) whether it is also a prejudicial/pecuniary interest

You then need to re-declare your interest and the nature of the interest at the commencement of the item or when the interest becomes apparent

4. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Services working Group held on 7 January 2016 (attached).

5. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

6. START TIMES

To agree the start times of meetings for the remainder of 2016/17

7. *TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members are requested to agree the **attached** Terms of Reference.

8. *EMPTY HOMES ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME UPDATE

This briefing paper is an update of the current work that is being undertaken by the Council in regard to empty homes.

9. CUSTOMER SERVICES SHARED SERVICES PROJECT

An update with respect to the progress of the Customer Services Shared Services Project will be provided by the Head of HR & Customer Services.

10. *WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

To plan and note the work programme for 2016/17 (attached).

Note: *Indicates report is attached for Members of the Committee only and the Press (excluding exempt items). Copies of reports can be viewed on the Council's web site at www.arun.gov.uk or can be obtained on request from the Committee Manager.)

‘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)

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP - TERMS OF REFERENCE 2016/17

Working Group	HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES
Established	Established following the decision taken at the Full Council Meeting on 24 March 2011 to change the arrangements for meetings for the new Council year 2011/12
Background	Following Consultation with working parties and all Members the Overview Select Committee meeting on 15/3/2011 recommended that Working Groups be introduced. This was agreed by Cabinet on 7 th March 2011 and forwarded to the Governance Committee so that changes to the Constitution could be made. The Full Council meeting on 24 March 2011 made the decision to implement the recommended changes. This Working Group has operated for just over two years and no change was made to the Working Group's remit following review in March 2012. In July 2012 there was a review of responsibility of Working Groups following a management restructure and reallocation of Cabinet Portfolios.
Membership	Membership as at May 2016 (Confirmed at Annual Council) Cllrs; Mrs Ayres, Bicknell, Blampied, Clayden, Mrs Daniells, Edwards, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Oppler, Mrs Pendleton, Mrs Porter, Mrs Rapnik Quorum – One Quarter of the whole of the number of Members
Chairman/Vice-Chairman	The Chairman and Vice Chairman will be nominated by the members of the Working Group at the first meeting of the Municipal Year.
Aim of Working Group	To consider policies and strategies and to review performance and other issues relating to the Housing & Community Services Portfolios. The Working Group may be requested to consider issues by referral from the Overview Select Committee, Full Council and Cabinet. The Working Group may also determine its own work and propose items to be included in the Work Programme. The Working Group will not consider issues dealt with by existing Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council unless items are referred to it by such a Committee. It may, however, consider any outcomes from such Committees.
Work Programme	The Work Programme to be agreed and reviewed by the Working Group. Terms of Reference to be reviewed annually by the Working Group.
Reporting arrangements	Working Groups can report into the Overview Select Committee, Cabinet, and Full Council
Open to the public?	Yes
Term	Ongoing
Programme of meetings	Regular meetings will be held at least once per meeting cycle. Agreed dates for 2016/17 are: 07 July 2016, 15 September 2016, 10 November 2016, 26 January 2017 and 23 March 2017
Consultation programme	Consultation to be carried out as required and agreed by the Working Group.
Research/documents	As required.
Lead Officers	Brian Pople and Jackie Follis
Support Officer	Committee Manager (Erica Keegan)

HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP – 7th July 2016

Briefing Paper: Empty Homes Assistance Programme Update

Report By: Louise Crane Principal Environmental Health Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the 1st March 2014, the Council entered into a service level agreement with Adur and Worthing Council for the provision of 2 days of empty homes work for a 2 year period, this has been extended for a further two years to March 2018. This agreement ensures the continuation of the empty homes work, but also by working in partnership with Adur and Worthing councils good practice can be shared. The Empty Homes Officer is part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team within the Housing Department.

On 3rd July 2014 Housing and Customer Services Working Group recommended to Cabinet the approval of the Empty Homes Assistance Programme (EPAP) which would provide grants and loans and also assist with enforcement work to bring empty properties back into use. This briefing paper is an update of the current work that is being undertaken by the Council in regard to empty homes.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Empty homes represent a wasted resource and can have a negative impact on local communities. Long term empty properties can:

- attract crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.
- become a public health hazard and magnet to vermin as well as look unsightly and pose a potential danger to the community including children.
- detract from the neighbourhood amenity.
- reduce the value of adjacent properties.
- cost the community for visits and action by Police and the Councils Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team as well as the loss of council tax revenue.

1.2. Arun District Council is committed to playing its full part in the national campaign to bring empty residential properties back into use. Since 2006 the Council has committed a part time resource in an Empty Homes Officer and has an Empty Homes Strategy 2012-2017 which details the aims and objectives in tackling long term empty residential properties.

1.3. As of April 2016 there were 494 Empty Homes in the Arun District based on Council Tax records. The figures for the number of properties brought back into use are detailed in the table below:

Year	Number of Properties Brought Back into Use
2010/2011	20
2011/2012	19
2012/2013	36
2013/2014	46
2014/2015	35
2015/2016	20

- 1.4. On the 1st March 2014, the Council entered into a service level agreement with Adur and Worthing Council for the provision of 2 days of empty homes work for a 2 year period, this has been extended for a further two years to March 2018. This agreement ensures the continuation of the empty homes work, but also by working in partnership with Adur and Worthing councils good practice can be shared. The Empty Homes Officer is part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team within the Housing Department.
- 1.5. The Empty Homes Officer works closely with the Council's Council Tax Department and receives monthly reports from them in regard to those properties that are empty.
- 1.6. The focus is on any property that has been empty for more than 6 months and initially a letter will be sent to the property owner advising them of the free service the Council offers in advice and the options that are available to them to bring the property back into use. This includes how they can:
- Reduce the costs of owning an empty property including council tax and deterioration in value.
 - Reduce the risks of leaving their property unoccupied - vandalism, squatters, complaints from neighbours and the decline in its condition.
 - Gain rental income or lump sum by letting or selling their property.

Options available to help empty property owners:

- List of individuals and companies interested in purchasing empty homes
 - Advice and guidance on selling their home, probate, letting and renovations
 - Availability of a grant or loan to assist in bringing the property back into use.
- 1.7. It is anticipated that this initial letter will encourage owners to contact the Council, however, if no response is received there are a 2nd and 3rd letter that is sent in a hope that they will engage with the Empty Homes Officer.
- 1.8. Each empty property is different and there are many reasons why they become empty. These reasons can be sensitive and it is important to be understanding of all different situations. Therefore the empty homes strategy

has three key steps:

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

2. NEW HOMES BONUS

- 2.1. The New Homes Bonus is a grant paid by central government for increasing the number of homes and their use.
- 2.2. The New Homes Bonus is paid each year for 6 years and is based on the amount of extra Council Tax revenue raised for new build homes, conversions and long term empty homes brought back into use and equates to approximately £1500 per property each year.
- 2.3. Therefore the work that the Empty Homes Officer carries out contributes to the amount of New Homes Bonus the Council receives, and for 2014/15 the empty homes brought back into use would generate £52,500.
- 2.4. The new homes bonus arrangements are currently out for consultation and there is a proposal that the funding will be paid for 4 years rather than 6 and is only given in cases where the Council has a Local Plan in place.

3. GUARANTEED RENTAL SCHEME

- 3.1. The Council jointly with Adur and Worthing Councils have been successfully working in partnership with Northwood Letting Agency to promote their guaranteed rental scheme.
- 3.2. The Empty Homes Officer brings the scheme to the attention of owners of empty properties and introduces them to Northwood Letting Agency. The owner can choose to let the property to Northwood, who become the tenant and then sub-let the property to a homeless customer nominated by the Council's housing options team.
- 3.3. The scheme guarantees a fixed amount of rent to the owner for one year. Many empty property owners do not perhaps know how to go about renting their property or perceive it to be too difficult, therefore the guaranteed rental scheme offers a suitable solution for them. To be referred to the scheme the property must meet the decent homes standard and the owner must join the Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme.
- 3.4. Northwood Letting Agency have been operating this scheme for 15 years nationwide and have around 13,000 landlords in their 85 branches around the United Kingdom.
- 3.5. To date since the start of the scheme eight properties have been referred to

the guaranteed rental scheme, these consist of

- 2 x studio flat
- 3 x 2 bed flat
- 2 x 1 bed flat
- 1 x 3 bed maisonette

All of these properties have resulted in housing a homeless customer by Arun's housing options team.

4. EMPTY PROPERTIES ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

- 4.1. The Housing and Customer Services Working Group on 3rd July 2014 recommended to Cabinet that the EPAP was set up to help provide grants and loans to owners of empty properties to bring them up to a decent home standard and back into occupation.
- 4.2. The assistance can be in the form of a grant which will be up to a maximum of £5,000, or an interest free loan which is up to £10,000 and paid back on a monthly basis over an agreed term.
- 4.3. In exchange for a grant or loan the property will be referred to the guaranteed rental scheme and the Council will have nomination rights for a 5 year period, also the property owner will be required to join the Arun and Chichester Landlord Accreditation Scheme and meet these standards.
- 4.4. The grants and loans are registered on the land registry and would be payable if sold or there is a change of tenure within the 5 year period.
- 4.5. To date the Council has completed 3 grants, 1 loan has been approved and the property is currently being refurbished, 14 grants are awaiting approval and 1 grant is at application stage.
- 4.6. If engaging and encouraging including the offer of financial assistance does not work then the final option is enforcement. This can take the form of a range of options depending upon the circumstances of the property, but may result in the service of a formal notice to require repairs or works, the Council could decide to undertake works in default, enforce a sale or compulsorily purchase the property.
- 4.7. The Empty Homes Officer has also been working closely with the Planning Compliance and Monitoring Officer on empty property cases. The Planning Department have powers under the Town and County Planning Act 1990 Section 215 - land adversely affecting the amenity of the neighbourhood which can be a more effective tool to bringing properties back into use.

