

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

07 July 2016 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Mrs Ayres, Blampied, Clayden, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Mrs Porter and Mrs Rapnik.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Committee Manager opened the meeting and directed Members to the process for electing the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Working Group for the forthcoming year, as set out on the front pages of the Agenda.

Councillor Clayden was proposed and seconded for the role and, following a vote, the Working Group

RESOLVED

That Councillor Clayden be elected as Chairman for 2016/17.

Councillor Clayden then took the chair.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

In line with the above process, Councillor Mrs Pendleton was proposed and seconded for the role of Vice-Chairman of the Working Group and, following a vote, the Working Group

RESOLVED

That Councillor Mrs Pendleton be elected as Vice-Chairman for 2016/17.

The Constitution at Part 3, Paragraph 6.2 (Working Groups) provided that Working Groups should each elect their own Chairman and Vice-Chairman but was silent on the process. The Working Group agreed that the following procedure (as used at the meeting) was satisfactory and should be recommended for inclusion in the Constitution:-

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

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present at the meeting shall have one vote only. 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 then

RECOMMEND TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW TASK
& FINISH WORKING PARTY

That the Constitution be amended to take account of the procedure to elect a Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Working Groups at the start of the municipal year, as set out above.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors; Bicknell, Edwards and Oppler.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Monitoring Officer has advised Members of interim arrangements to follow when making declarations of interest. They have been advised that for the reasons explained below, they should make their declarations on the same basis as the former Code of Conduct using the descriptions of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Reasons

- The Council has adopted the government’s example for a new local code of conduct, but new policies and procedures relating to the new local code are yet to be considered and adopted.
- Members have not yet been trained on the provisions of the new local code of conduct.
- The definition of Pecuniary Interests is narrower than the definition of Prejudicial Interests, so by declaring a matter as a Prejudicial Interest, that will cover the requirement to declare a Pecuniary Interest in the same matter.

Where a Member declares a “Prejudicial Interest” this will, in the interest of clarity for the public, be recorded in the Minutes as a Prejudicial and Pecuniary Interest.

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

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5. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Service Working Group held on 7 January 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

6. START TIMES

The Working Group

RESOLVED

That its start times for meetings during 2016/17 be 6.00 pm.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chairman referred Members to the Terms of Reference for the Housing & Customer Services Working Group 2016/17 and sought approval for the Terms of Reference as laid out in the Agenda.

The Working Group

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – That

the Terms of Reference for the Housing & Customer Services Working Group be approved.

8. EMPTY HOMES ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Principal Environmental Health Officer updated Members on the Council's Empty Homes Assistance Programme and the current work that is being undertaken by the Council.

Members were reminded that on 3 July 2014 the 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. 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 had been extended for a further two years to March 2018.

It was noted that this agreement ensured the continuation of the empty homes work and, by working in partnership with Adur and Worthing councils, good practice could be shared. It was pointed out that this work was with privately owned homes and the Empty Homes Officer was part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team within the Housing Department.

It was explained that empty homes represented a wasted resource and in the long term could have a negative impact on local communities by:

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- attracting crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour
- becoming a public health hazard
- potentially reducing the value of adjacent properties
- become costly with possible police action and the Council's Private Sector Housing & Public Health Team as well as loss of Council Tax Revenue.

It was noted that, as of April 2016 there were 494 Empty Homes in the Arun District based on Council Tax records. Members were informed that the Council was taking a proactive approach and had adopted an Empty Homes Strategy (2012-2017) which detailed the aims when tackling long term empty residential properties. Since 2010 176 empty properties had been brought back into use.

Members were informed that the New Homes Bonus, a grant paid by Central Government for increasing the number of homes, was currently out for consultation and there was a proposal that the funding would be paid for 4 years rather than 6.

Following a number of questions that were responded to at the meeting, the Chairman thanked the Principal Environmental Health Officer for her informative update. He welcomed the work that was being undertaken to restore empty homes which assisted those with housing need whilst enhancing the local community.

9. CUSTOMER SERVICES SHARED SERVICES PROJECT

The Head of HR and Customer Services presented Members with an update on Customer Services Shared Service and circulated a briefing paper tabled at the meeting.

It was suggested that Members read the Shared Services Paper which would be going to Cabinet on 11 July 2016 as this gave an overview of all the shared services projects.

It was explained that the current financial environment for Local Authorities was extremely challenging and would only become more so. The three Councils looking at potential Shared Services, Arun, Chichester and Horsham, had a predicted budget deficit. It was noted that shared services had the potential to deliver more resilient customer services with reduced costs and with improvement in processes over time. The Head of HR and Customer Services pointed out that a critical element to be understood and taken into account in any final decision by the Council was the Customer Services link with most other services within the Councils and that Customer Services would never be able to work in isolation.

Members were informed that, in March 2016, Arun, Chichester and Horsham District Councils agreed that there was merit in exploring the potential to share ICT, Customer Services, HR, Legal, Internal Audit, Transactional Finance and Revenues and Benefits. It was agreed by Cabinet

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on 8 February 2016, that each of these areas would review the option of a shared service and to what extent this might be practical, desirable and deliver savings and efficiencies.

It was noted that although the original parameters for the Project included all of Customer Services for all three Councils, Horsham notified the other partners at a meeting on 15 June 2016 that it did not wish to continue with shared Customer Services at this stage, although it would still be involved in other work streams (Audit, Legal and HR).

It was anticipated that there would be savings across the councils due to economies of scale. Both councils were keen to retain good levels of Customer Service and although increased customer self-service would be a feature, face to face contact would be retained.

Members were informed that the next stage of the project must be completed by December 2016. Agreement to go forward depended on Cabinet on 11 July 2016 and Full Council on 20 July where shared services would be addressed as part of the wider picture on the ‘Vision 20:20’.

Following a number of questions responded to at the meeting the Chairman thanked the Head of HR and Customer Services for her informative update.

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

In discussing the work programme 2016/17, items were added and allocated dates as follows:

- Update from stonepillow – September 15 2016
- Draft rent arrears policy – scheduled for September 15 2016
- New Housing & Planning Act – date to be confirmed

The work programme 2016/17 was then noted.

(The meeting concluded at 7.10 pm)