

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

24 November 2016 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Clayden (Chairman) Mrs Pendleton (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs Ayres, Mrs Harrison-Horn and Mrs Rapnik.

Councillor Bence was also present.

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Mrs Ayres

19. 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.

20. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Service Working Group held on 15 September 2016 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

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21. CUSTOMER SERVICES UPDATE

The Head of HR & Customer Services introduced the Customer Services Manager (Operational) and Customer Services Manager (Strategic Direction) to the working group.

The working group had received a Customer Services Quarterly Report from 1 July 2016 to 30 September 2016 that outlined how each of the customer service channels were performing and a further, verbal update was given.

It was noted that the shared services programme had been looking at the opportunities and business cases for sharing services with neighbouring authorities, Horsham District Council and Chichester District Council. These business cases related to the sharing of:

- ICT
- Internal Audit
- HR/Payroll
- Legal
- Revenues and Benefits
- Customer Services

Members were informed that work was progressing well to achieve final Business Plans. It was anticipated that the final Business Cases would be presented to Cabinet early February 2017 with consideration at the Overview Select Committee in January 2017.

The Head of HR & Customer Services informed Members of the West Sussex County Council and Arun District Council Digital Tea Party event that was held in Littlehampton Library on 6 October 2016. The event helped members of the public with tablet/smart phone use, providing tips and guidance. Guidance was also offered on navigating the web. Along with Barclay's Digital Eagles and O2, Council staff were on hand to give advice and guidance on accessing local services online, staying safe, and how to video call friends and family for free, plus lots of practical tips for using Google, email and social media. It was noted that another Digital Tea Party Event was being organised by West Sussex County Council to take place in Crawley.

The Digital Tea Party event was described as a great success and the Head of HR & Customer Services suggested that Arun District Council may like to host their own event. Members of the working group were keen on this idea and the Chairman asked the Head of HR & Customer Services to report progress to the next meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group.

Members then received updates from the Customer Services Manager (Operational) and the Customer Services Manager (Strategic Direction). Key points noted were:

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- Web transactions were up by 31% from the last year
- E-form transactions were up by 56%
- Development of e-forms to minimise abandoned forms half way through completion. The Vice-Chairman made a suggestion that Revenue and Benefit e-forms could contain information on what the customer would need to hand in order to complete the form through to the end. The Head of HR & Customer Services stated that this idea would be put forward to the Revenue and Benefits team.
- A full time advisor from the Council’s Housing Team had been placed in the Civic Centre’s reception since July 2016 to offer residents a more comprehensive service. This had allowed updates to SharePoint Scripting so that customers could be given consistent advice.
- It was noted that Arun Direct had taken on work from several services including Housing’s Reactive Repairs, Housing Leaseholders enquiries and payments and straight forward Car Park enquiries.
- Arun Direct’s call volumes had remained static at an average of 10,000 calls per month (not including switchboard calls). There were peaks and troughs in demand due to national, outside influences and internal communications to customers.

The Chairman thanked the Head of HR & Customer Services, the Customer Services Manager (Operational) and the Customer Services Manager (Strategic Direction) for their informative presentation. The working group was particularly keen on the Council pursuing a Digital Tea Party and looked forward to further information on this at the next meeting.

22. ENFORCED SALES PROCEDURES

The working group received a report from the Principal Environmental Health Officer that sought approval for Council adoption of an Enforced Sales Procedure in circumstances where there are long term empty residential properties.

It was noted that Arun District Council was committed to playing its part in the national campaign to bring empty residential properties back into use. Since 2006 the Council had 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 residential properties. Members were informed that the aims of the strategy were to engage and encourage property owners to bring their properties back into use, however, if an owner failed to engage then there were a variety of enforcement tools that the Council could use, one of which was an enforced sale.

Following a number of questions that were responded to at the meeting, the Chairman referred the working group to the report’s recommendations which were agreed.

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group,

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RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL – that

- (1) the Enforced Sales procedure as attached at Appendix 1 of the report be approved;
- (2) appropriate authority be delegated for authorising the operation of the Enforced Sales Procedure to the appropriate Service Director; and
- (3) the Equality Impact Assessment be noted

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group then considered the report’s recommendation that the Council’s Constitution would require amendment to reflect the changes recommended to Full Council. The recommended change was tabled at the meeting as follows (* and in bold):

PART 4 – OFFICER SCHEME OF DELEGATION
SECTION 3 – HEADS OF SERVICE

Legislative Powers:

3.2. The following is a list of the Head of Housing's legislative powers. These powers are detailed further in the following paragraphs.

Legislative Powers in Alphabetical Order:	
Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003	Housing Grants Construction & Regeneration Act 1996
Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014	Housing & Planning Act 1986
Building Act 1984	Landlord & Tenant Acts 1985, 1987
Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970	Local Government (Misc Provisions) Acts 1976, 1982
Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005	Localism Act 2011 – Part 7 Housing
Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994	National Assistance Acts 1948, 1951
Defective Premises Act 1972	Open Spaces Act 1906
Disabled Persons Act 1981	Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949
Environmental Protection Act 1990 (as amended)	Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013
Homelessness Act 2002	Protection from Eviction Act 1977
Housing Act 1985	Protection from Harassment Act 1997
Housing Act 1985 (as amended)	Public Health Acts 1936 and 1961
Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003)	Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984

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Housing Act 2004	Rent Act 1977
Housing & Building Control Act 1984	*Law of Property Act 1925

**PART 4 – OFFICER SCHEME OF DELEGATION
SECTION 3 – HEADS OF SERVICE**

Housing Grants Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

3.65. To apply the standard formula in cases where repayment of Improvement and Renovation Grants becomes necessary and the circumstances requiring sale of property are genuine. (the Head of Finance and Property also has this power)

***Law of Property Act 1925**

***To serve notice under section 103(i) and authorise enforced sale procedures.**

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group then,

RECOMMEND TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW
WORKING PARTY

that the Council’s Constitution is amended to reflect these changes.

23. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY

The Business Improvement & Policy Manager presented the report on the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy which provided details on the updated policy. It was emphasised that the policy applied specifically to Arun District Council’s tenants, leaseholders and members of their households.

In discussing the report, the working group noted that the policy covered all types of tenancies and that wider community issues of Anti-Social Behaviour were dealt with by the Safer Arun Partnership, led in Arun by the Community Safety Team.

The Chairman thanked the Business Improvement & Policy Manager for her report and referred the working group to the report’s recommendations.

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL

that the updated Anti-Social Behaviour Policy 2016 be approved.

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24. WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

The Head of Housing confirmed that the report on the New Housing & Planning Act would not be ready until the Council had received instructions from Central Government. The work programme 2016/17 was then noted.

(The meeting concluded at 7.00pm)