

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

23 March 2017 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Mrs Pendleton (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Mrs Ayres, Blampied, Mrs Harrison-Horn, and Mrs Rapnik [from Minute 35(part)].

32. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence had been received from Councillors Clayden, Mrs Daniells and Mrs Porter. Apologies had also been received from Councillor Bence, as Cabinet Member for Housing.

33. 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.

34. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Service Working Group held on 26 January 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

35. FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT

The Chairman agreed an item on Flexible Homelessness Support that was not on the agenda but required consideration as a matter of urgency as the Council had recently received a notification from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The Head of Housing provided the Working Group with a report, tabled at the meeting that briefed Members on the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant that the Council was to receive in place of the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee.

It was noted that a formula had been applied by the DCLG based on details relating to the Council’s homelessness position in the first 3 quarters of 2017/18. The Council had made 558 homelessness decisions of which a duty was owed to 158 applicants, and advice was given to more than 430 applicants, and this was reflected in the allocated funding as,

2017/18	£304,441.38
2018/19	£350,289.38

Members were informed that these figures were the second highest level of grant funding made to Councils in West Sussex. The Head of Housing explained that this was a significant grant and the DCLG had emphasized that the new grant would be able to provide flexibility to authorities in providing intervention services, moving away from exclusive funding for procurement and funding temporary accommodation. The Head of Housing explained that the funding would be used to innovatively find ways of reducing homelessness.

The Working Group discussed this update and asked questions which were responded to at the meeting.

The Chairman congratulated the Housing Team on being recipients of the second highest grant made to Councils in West Sussex and welcomed the opportunity the money would bring to enhance the already proactive approach the Council was taking on homelessness prevention. The Chairman pointed out that funds would need to be allocated wisely and requested that a plan with costings be brought to the working group at the appropriate time.

The Head of Housing confirmed that a further report would be brought back to the Working Group shortly which would identify the projects and initiatives that the Council could consider, along with details to measure their effectiveness in preventing homelessness.

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

36. AMENDMENTS TO ALLOCATION SCHEME

The Working Group received a report from the Housing Services Manager that proposed further amendments to the Council’s Housing Allocation Scheme.

Members were reminded that the Housing Allocation Scheme 2012 was amended in 2014 and 2016 following developments in case law, Ombudsman judgements and good practice. Further amendments were now recommended to take into account recent case law as well as some changes that would help prioritise applicants.

Recommended amendments to the Housing Allocation Scheme included:

- Section 6.2.3 – updated to clarify that those who could not work, train or volunteer will not be disadvantaged.
- Section 5.4.2 – updated to state that applicants would not be excluded for behaviours associated with a ‘spent’ conviction.
- Sections 4.2 and 6.1 – updated to incorporate additional detail about: seeking confirmation from a healthcare professional, officers carrying out home visits, the assessment of the impact of current accommodation on the applicant’s condition as well as giving a more specific differentiation between Housing Bands A1, B1 and C1.
- Sections 4.5 and 7.3 – update to include provision for couples who require separate bedrooms for medical or disability reasons with confirmation from a medical professional.
- Section 6.1.1 – updated to remove provision for ex-Sheltered Scheme Managers under priority Band C5 as all have reached retirement or been rehoused.
- Section 6.5.4 – updated to include clarification in the explanation of the legal right for an applicant, to whom the Council owes a homelessness duty, to request a review if they disagree about the property that has been offered to them.

Following discussion and questions that were responded to at the meeting the Housing & Customer Services Working Group agreed the report’s recommendation.

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group

RECOMMEND TO CABINET

That the further amendments to the Housing Allocation Scheme and its Equality Impact Assessment be agreed, with the implementation date of 1 July 2017.

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

37. HOUSING PLANNING ACT 2016

The Head of Housing presented the Working Group with an Information Paper on the Housing and Planning Act 2016 that provided an overview of the Act which impacted on the Housing Service.

Members were informed that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 implemented a range of Housing related measures which included, the sale of higher value council homes, starter homes, pay to stay and a range of other measures that would promote home ownership and levels of home building.

It was noted that the issues affecting or could affect Council Housing included:

- Extension of Right to Buy
- Sale of Higher Value Vacant Council Houses
- Mandatory use of fixed term tenancies
- High income social tenants mandatory rents (pay to stay)

The Head of Housing stated that, in the event of further regulations being produced in relation to matters affecting Council Housing a further update would be presented to the working group.

The Working Group then noted the report.

38. WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The outline work programme for the municipal year 2017/18 was noted. The Council’s corporate changes were discussed and it was agreed that the 2017/18 work programme would be planned when the Working Group’s new Lead Officers began their roles.

In discussing future changes, the Chairman praised the Housing & Customer Services Working Group as a highly effective group, positively influencing the Council’s decision making. It was hoped that this Working Group would be able to continue its good work in the future.

(The meeting concluded at 6.40pm)