

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

6 July 2017 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Hughes (Chairman), Mrs Porter (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Ayres, Blampied, Edwards, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Purchase, Mrs Rapnik and Miss Rhodes.

[Note: Councillor Purchase was absent from the meeting during the consideration of matters referred in Minute 6 [Part]].

1. 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.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Service Working Group held on 23 March 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

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3. START TIMES

The Working Group

RESOLVED

That its start times for meetings during 2017/2018 be 6.00 pm.

4. UPDATE ON HOUSING FIRE SAFETY

In light of the recent and horrendous fire disaster at Grenfell Tower in London, the Working Group received a verbal update from the Head of Housing outlining the action that the Council was taking in response with its social housing.

The first point made was that the Council did not have any Council housing that could be categorised as ‘high rise’. This had been classified by the Department of Community and Local Government (DCLG) as being over six floors high. Secondly, it was confirmed that the Council had no buildings which had any form of aluminium cladding. The Council had, however, taken this incident as an opportunity for it to ensure the safety of its tenants and leaseholders.

The Head of Housing then informed Members of the action that the Council had taken – in summary this was:

- Checking blocks of flats which had been clad to ensure correct insulation and that there were fire breaks between the floors of flats
- That the materials used for cladding met current fire safety and building regulations. Initial findings confirmed that the materials had been fitted correctly.
- Letters had been hand delivered to all tenants and leaseholders who lived in properties that had been clad, including houses. This had set out the steps that the Council was taking to assess the cladding and to identify any action, if required.
- Flats had been inspected and front doors that were not believed to be fire doors had been identified.
- Leaseholders had been asked to provide evidence of fire door compliance by no later than 31 July 2017. Any door found to be non-compliant would need to be replaced by the Leaseholder and in the event that this was not replaced, then the Council would take steps to undertake the installation and then recharge the leaseholder.
- Risk assessments had been undertaken on a number of blocks of flats and to date no significant issues had been found.
- The Council, along with other West Sussex District and Borough Councils, had recently attended a meeting with West Sussex

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Fire Brigade in which information on appropriate fire safety had been shared.

- It was outlined that the fire service had already carried out 53 requested inspections of high rise buildings across the County. Work on non-residential high rise buildings would follow
- A meeting to review the provision of various information relating to private sector housing; building control; and planning and housing was due to be led by the Director of Services. This information would then be fed back to West Sussex Fire Brigade.
- Council housing staff had been written to, to ask that when they were not on site, steps needed to be taken to ensure that corridors and stairways in flats remained free from obstruction and rubbish.
- There were still a number of issues that the Council wanted to investigate further. One was whether the Council had an obligation to fit fire alarms into two storey flats.

The Head of Housing stated that this was clearly an ongoing issue and that it was anticipated that further matters relating to fire safety would be identified locally or nationally and that details would be brought back to Members in due course.

In discussing the update provided, the Working Group confirmed that it was pleased to know that the Council had and was continuing to take fire safety very seriously. It was reassuring to hear that the Council had used the correct installers and equipment to make sure that the fire safety regime was constantly in line with current regulations. Some questions were asked about risk assessments and how often these were reviewed. The Head of Housing confirmed that he would check if there was a review pattern that the Council needed to be following and how frequently to date the Council checked risk assessments. He outlined that consideration was being given as whether fire assessments should be put on-line. Although there was no statutory requirement to review of them annually, it was his view that this would provide an added comfort for residents.

Other Councillors stated that it was positive to hear that the Council was working so closely with the Fire Brigade in terms of the safety of its buildings. A question was asked as to whether there were plans to look at privately owned high rise buildings such as Kingley Gate in Littlehampton and whether freehold residents had the correct fire alarm systems in place for each building. Members were interested to learn what publicity or communication had been undertaken by the Council, if any, with the residents of these properties as well as Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to ensure their compliance with regulations. The Head of Housing outlined that the Fire Brigade was taking on this role and to date had checked 53 high rise buildings across the County. This was also an issue that the Council would be discussing with other Councils and taking up with the Fire Brigade so that the Council could learn best practice and what was happening elsewhere.

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The Working Group in thanking the Head of Housing for his update noted the contents that they had been supplied with.

5. FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT GRANT

The Head of Housing introduced this report which set out the ways that the new Flexible Homeless Support Grant would be used by the Council to prevent homelessness and to sustain tenancies.

Members were reminded that at the last meeting of the Working Group, they had received a report briefing them about this Grant that the Council would be receiving in place of the Temporary Accommodation Management Fee and in terms of the allocation of funding for Arun. The report before Members this evening was asking the Working Group to confirm how the Grant should be best used within the Council to meet local homelessness demand.

In discussing this item, the Working Group agreed that this was exciting news and that the grant would massively assist the Council in being able to continue to assist vulnerable people. It was explained that the grant needed to be used in four ways – these being:

- Staffing resources to focus on prevention, tenancy sustainment and sourcing alternative accommodation, through a keyworker model;
- Financial remedies to prevent or relieve individual cases of homelessness;
- Contribution to partnership initiatives in homelessness prevention or in achieving accommodation solutions; and
- The purchase of specialist software to record prevention data specifically for the purpose of reporting on the new Performance Indicators returns to the DCLG.

Members were reassured to hear that the Council was working with external partners to ensure that it did all it could to enable people to remain where they were living. On software, the question was asked if this would provide a better way of managing homelessness. The Housing Services Manager outlined that the Council had not yet seen the software that would be made available but could outline that this would be specific software built around homelessness which would assist in data gathering which was not as in-depth as the Council would like. The Council was therefore taking part in a trial and as part of this was asking for more information about clients and outcomes. This new software would provide the technology to allow the Council to do this.

The role of the homelessness intervention keyworker was supported and it was hoped that in the long-term this would end up saving the Council money. It was recognised that prevention was a big issue and problem to overcome as many people on benefits struggled to find suitable accommodation in the private sector with many landlords not accepting them as tenants or would not

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accept rent bonds. The Housing Services Manager explained how the intervention of the keyworker would assist with this problem.

Following some further discussion, the Working Group

RECOMMEND TO CABINET

That the proposed initiatives and expenditure of the Flexible Support Grant, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.

6. BED AND BREAKFAST PAYMENTS – BUDGET INCREASE FOR 2017/18

The Working Group received a report from the Head of Housing which sought approval for the Bed and Breakfast Budget for 2017/18 to be increased to better reflect demand.

Members were reminded that on 19 June 2017, Cabinet had considered a report on tackling homelessness and as part of those recommendations it had been identified that the Working Group should receive a report regarding an increase in budget for Bed and Breakfast for 2017/18. At the same time that that report was approved, details regarding the first two months expenditure would have been available which could provide some clarity in terms of the possible outturn for 2017/18.

As identified in the report to Cabinet, the increase in homelessness was continuing to grow at a District, County and National level. The reasons for this were many and varied, some of which had been discussed as part of the previous agenda item. Although the Council continued to provide a range of assistance to those who were homeless or were about to be made homeless, the Council was continuing to spend significant sums on the provision of Bed & Breakfast accommodation. It was outlined that in 2016/17 a total of £440,000 was spent on Bed and Breakfast and that financial provision for Bed & Breakfast for 2017/18 had been set at £360,000. It was clear that the budget allocated was insufficient as expenditure at April 2017 had been £30,000 and £50,000 for May. It was too soon to be able to confirm the spend for June 2017. Based on these trends, it was proposed that the Bed & Breakfast budget for 2017/18 be increased to £550,000.

As this recommendation was wholeheartedly supported by the Working Group, it then

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL

That an increase in the Bed & Breakfast Budget for 2017/18 from £360,000 to £550,000 in approved.

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7. WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The Working Group received and noted its Work Programme for 2017/18.

(The meeting concluded at 6.48 pm)