

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

7 September 2017 at 6.00 p.m.

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

Councillor Bence, Cabinet Member for Residential Services, was also present for the duration of the meeting.

8. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Councillors, representatives of the public, press and officers to the meeting. The newly appointed Group Head of Residential Services, Satnam Kaur and the Group Head of Neighbourhood Services, Joe Russell-Wells were introduced and welcomed as Lead Officers to the working group.

9. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Ayres, Blampied and Purchase.

10. 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.

11. MINUTES

In approving the minutes, the Chairman pointed out a typographical error in the Recommendation at Minute 6 and this was amended from '...in approved' to '...is approved'. Following this amendment the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Service Working Group held on 6 July 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

12. UPDATE ON HOUSING FIRE SAFETY

The Working Group received a verbal update from the Group Head of Residential Services in view of the recent and horrendous fire disaster at Grenfell Tower in London. This outlined 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 begun investigations on its housing stock in July 2017 and initial testing at Wick had confirmed that the cladding material used there was non-combustible and met required standards. It was confirmed that there would be further tests carried out to ensure materials had been fitted according to the manufacturer's specification.

In terms of the fire risk assessments at Wick, no major risks had been identified. One potential issue had been identified in relation to communal areas being kept clear. In order to reduce risk to residents in relation to the communal areas – halls, stairs, stairwells and landings, it was identified general housekeeping would be required to maintain clear accessibility with no obstructions. The Group Head of Residential Services informed Members that the Council would be introducing a Policy for residents so that they could recognise and adhere to their responsibilities with respect to fire hazards. It was advised that the draft Policy would be brought to the working group for comment and approval.

It was confirmed that the Council continued to work closely with West Sussex Fire Service. Arrangements were underway for fire alarm systems in Council owned two storey blocks of flats to be linked. This involved more than 130 properties, with work commencing in April 2018 over a five year period. Fire Risk Assessments would be carried out on all flats in the District not just those with cladding. It was noted that recent fire drills in the Council's sheltered housing accommodation had seen some residents refusing to leave their property. This issue was being addressed by the Council's Housing Neighbourhood team.

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 and were also pleased that the Council's tenants were being kept informed.

13. MOBILITY SCOOTER STORAGE CHARGES

The Business Improvement and Policy Manager presented this report which provided a brief overview of the recent introduction of charges for Mobility Scooter Storage.

It was noted that mobility storage provisions take the form of brick built garages, purpose built scooter stores and a variety of wooden sheds. Historically the Council provided the storage area and access to an electrical plug socket to charge the scooter without making a charge to the end user.

The Business Improvement and Policy Manager explained the new charging arrangements which equated to 50 pence a day for safe, secure storage and charging of mobility scooters. Members were advised that tenants had, on the whole, been positive and understanding of the reasoning behind the need to charge.

It was explained that the Council now had a programme of planned works to bring the mobility scooter storage up to a safe and consistent standard across all Council locations. A waiting list had been introduced for charging spaces and this had enabled the Council to assess demand and would help with future marketing and storage provision. Members were pleased to note that the waiting list was not long, with 4 residents currently waiting, and were happy that the Council would respond by finding imaginative ways to target demand with provision.

Following questions that were responded to at the meeting, the Working Group noted the report and the Chairman thanked the Housing Business Improvement & Policy Manager for this update.

14. STOCK CONDITION REPORT

The Working Group received a report with regard to the work on the Housing Stock Condition Survey presented by the Group Head of Residential Services.

Members were informed that, following discussion with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services during May 2016, it was deemed appropriate for a stock condition housing survey to be undertaken on all of the Council's housing stock. It was noted that since work had begun in March 2017 more than 700 surveys had been completed. This programme of work was expected to take two years with completion by March 2019.

The Working Group noted the benefits of this survey, which would help the Council effectively plan its programme of housing maintenance work as well as being important in terms of budgeting, by providing details of expected maintenance costs. It was also noted that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, to be presented for consideration at the Full Council meeting on 13 September 2017, would reflect an increase in budget for Housing Planned Maintenance in 2018/19.

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The Group Head of Residential Services stated that a further update on progress with the Stock Condition Survey would be provided at a future meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group in a year’s time.

In receiving this report, Members welcomed the Survey and congratulated the Cabinet Member for Residential Services on his foresight to initiate this project that would not only take stock of the Council’s assets but also provide the Council with the tools to effectively plan and cost housing maintenance.

15. WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

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

(The meeting concluded at 6.21 pm)