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Committee Manager: Erica Keegan

14 May 2018

## **HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP**

A meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group will be held in Committee Room 1 at the Arun Civic Centre, Maltravers Road, Littlehampton on **Thursday, 31 May 2018 at 6.00 pm** and you are requested to attend.

Members: Councillors Hughes, Mrs Porter, Mrs Ayres, Bicknell, Blampied, Edwards, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Purchase, Mrs Rapnik and Miss Rhodes.

***(Note: Committee Membership is subject to confirmation at the Annual Council Meeting on 16 May 2018)***

## **A G E N D A**

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Please send your apologies to Erica Fredericks – tel: 01903 737547 or e-mail: [erica.fredericks@arun.gov.uk](mailto:erica.fredericks@arun.gov.uk)

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and officers are invited to make any declarations of pecuniary, personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on the agenda, and are reminded that they should re-declare their interest before consideration of the item or as soon as the interest becomes apparent.

Members and officers should make their declaration by stating:

- a) the item they have the interest in
- b) whether it is a pecuniary, personal and/or prejudicial interest
- c) the nature of the interest

3. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group held on 4 January 2018 (attached).

4. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

5. START TIMES

To agree the start times of meetings for the remainder of 2018/19.

6. \*HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

A full review of the Council's Constitution and decision making processes is being undertaken and the Housing and Customer Services Working Group has been asked to consider its Terms of Reference. This report sets out the background to the review and makes proposals on changes.

7. HOUSING ANNUAL UPDATE

The Group Head of Residential Services will provide the Working Group with a verbal update.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

To set and review the work programme for 2018/19 (attached)

(Note: \*Indicates report is attached for Members of the Working Group and Cabinet only and the Press (excluding exempt items). Copies of reports can be viewed on the Council's web site at [www.arun.gov.uk](http://www.arun.gov.uk) or can be obtained on request from the Committee Manager.)

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

4 January 2018 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Hughes (Chairman), Mrs Porter (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Ayres, Blampied and Mrs Harrison-Horn [from Minute 21 to Minute 26 Part].

Councillor Bence was also in attendance as Cabinet Member for Residential Services

21. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Rapnik.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

23. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Service Working Group held on 2 November 2017 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

24. REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF WORKING GROUPS

In the absence of the report’s author (Group Head of Council Advice and Monitoring), the Group Head of Technical Services presented and advised that the Constitution Working Party had requested that the operation of the current Working Groups be reviewed as part of its ongoing work on reviewing the Council’s Constitution. Members’ views were sought to inform the review.

It was explained that there were two areas to be considered, particularly:-

- Size of membership – the practice at the moment was to rely on volunteers, which had led to unwieldy numbers of 22 last year and 19 this year. A more practical membership was felt to be a maximum of 15. However, if there was a move away from volunteers then, under current rules, there would be a requirement to have political balance as that would be the only way to allocate seats.
- Past feedback from Members had indicated that it was felt that the Working Groups needed a clearer purpose and role in the decision making structure – the way forward could be to make changes to allow them some delegated authority as a decision maker.

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

It was being suggested that both Working Groups could become Subcommittees; be politically balanced with a membership size of no more than 10 to 15; and have a degree of clearly specified decision making powers.

It was explained that in putting forward these proposals, consultation had been undertaken initially with the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the two Working Groups and the Group Leaders. The Chairman of this Working Group and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Environment & Leisure Working Group all supported a review, together with the Leader of the Council. The Leaders of the Liberal Democrat and Independent Group had both advised they would present their views at Working Group meetings.

It was noted that this report had already been considered by the Environment & Leisure Working Group at its meeting on 19 December 2017. A number of Members of the Environment & Leisure Working Group did not support any change to current arrangements as they wished to see the status quo continue and that the levels of delegation being proposed would not make a significant difference to the role of the Working Groups. The Group Head of Technical Services advised that the final recommendation of the Environment & Leisure Working Group, to the Constitution Working Party, was that the proposals to change the remit of the Working Groups should be rejected and no change should be made to current arrangements.

The Housing & Customer Services Working Group was asked to compile its response to the proposals, as presented in the report, for submission to the Constitution Working Party. It was noted that once all views were known and considered by the Working Party, then any proposal for change, would then be presented to Full Council for consideration.

In discussing the report's proposals Members generally felt that working groups, too often, became an information gathering forum rather than providing backbenchers with the capacity to contribute to the Council's decision making process. Councillor Bence was permitted by the Working Group to speak on this matter and explained the main differences between Working Groups and Sub-Committees. He stated that the proposals would provide Members with decision making authority and therefore more involvement in Democratic Processes. The Chairman advised that, when consulted, he had agreed with the report's proposals as Members would be given an opportunity for more active participation.

In further discussion and after questions had been asked and responded to at the meeting the Housing and Customer Services Working Group Members rejected current working group arrangements and unanimously voted for change as described in the report and set out below:

- Both Working Groups should become Sub-Committees;
- they should be politically balanced with a membership size of no more than 10 to 15; and
- they should have a degree of decision making powers with these being clearly specified.

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

The Housing and Customer Services Working Group then,

RECOMMEND TO THE CONSTITUTION WORKING PARTY

That the proposals to change the remit of the Working Groups be accepted and changes be made to current arrangements.

## 25. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

The Working Group received a report from the Group Head of Technical Services on the Empty Homes Strategy 2018 – 2023. The strategy had been updated and detailed the positive work that had been achieved since 2012. The strategy also outlined a revised plan for the next five years to tackle empty homes across all tenures within the Arun District.

Members noted that long term empty homes could:

- Attract crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.
- Become a public health hazard and magnet to vermin as well as look unsightly and pose a potential danger to the community including children.
- Detract from the neighbourhood amenity.
- Reduce the value of adjacent properties.
- Cost the community for visits and action by Police and the Councils Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team as well as the loss of Council tax revenue.

The Group Head of Technical Services explained that Arun District Council was committed to bringing empty residential properties back into use. It was noted that since 2006 the Council had employed a part time Empty Properties Officer and from April 2017 this position was made full time. Focus had been placed on properties that had been empty for more than six months.

The Group Head of Technical Services highlighted the advantages of the Government’s New Homes Bonus grant that was paid for increasing the number of available homes. It was explained that the work of the Empty Properties Officer contributed to the amount of New Homes Bonus the Council received and since 2014 this had equated to approximately £1 million.

The Group Head of Technical Services concluded by referring Members to the report’s recommendation that requested their recommendation to Cabinet that the Empty Homes Strategy 2018-2023 be adopted.

The Chairman thanked the Group Head of Technical Services for his comprehensive report. In discussion, where questions were asked and responded to at the meeting, Working Group Members welcomed the strategy, recognising the positive work that was taking place to bring empty properties back in to use, and the report’s recommendation was agreed.

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

The Housing and Customer Service Working Group,

RECOMMEND TO CABINET

That the Empty Homes Strategy 2018-2023 be adopted.

26. HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT AND WELFARE REFORM PRESENTATION

The Group Head of Residential Services and the Rent Arrears Team Leader provided the Working Group with a presentation on the impact to the Council with respect to the Welfare Reform and Homelessness Reduction Act.

**Welfare Reform**

The Rent Arrears Team Leader outlined the Government’s Welfare Reforms as:

- Freezing of Local Housing Allowance Rates and Welfare Benefits
- 1% Rent Reduction
- Voluntary Right to Buy (Housing Association Tenants)
- Sale of High Value Assets (Council Stock)
- Spare Room Subsidy (Under occupation Charge)
- Further Reduction in Benefit Cap
- Universal Credit (UC)

It was explained that these reforms affected working age people and could affect the ability of some of the Council’s tenants to pay their rent on time and in full. The Rent Arrears Team Leader highlighted how the Benefit Cap, Spare Room Subsidy and Universal Credit could impact on Arun District Council’s tenants and outlined what strategies the Council was putting in place to help with any negative consequences of Welfare Reform.

It was noted that the introduction of Universal Credit had been piloted and the lessons learned in this pilot would help inform the Council on expected impacts and how these may be mitigated. These mitigations were outlined as:

- Housing Options Advice
- Improve links with Job Centre Plus to aid early intervention
- Welfare Rights Advice and Representation
- Money Advice
- Financial Capability
- Education
- Access to IT
- Affordable Credit (Credit Unions)
- Use of Discretionary Housing Payments

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

It was noted that full roll out of Universal Credit for “all” new claimants in Arun had been deferred from 1 April to 1 July following the November 2017 Budget.

After a number of questions responded to at the meeting, the Cabinet Member for Residential Services praised the Rent Arrears Team Leader for her hard work and thanked her for the effective methods that had been implemented to assist Arun District Council’s Tenants.

### **Homelessness and Housing Need**

The Group Head of Residential Services outlined the Council’s position with respect to Homelessness and Housing Need. Members were informed of the following National trends:

- Increase in homelessness presentations over the last 3 years
- Increase in use of and length of stay in temporary accommodation
- Increase in households applying to join the Housing Register
- Affordability issues – Local Housing Allowance Rate not keeping pace with private rented sector rents
- Housing Associations introducing stricter allocations criteria – affordability checks

It was noted that, as a result of these National trends, Central Government were introducing the Homelessness Act with effect from April 2018. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 set out new duties on local authorities with the aim of preventing homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act amended Part 7 - Housing Act 1996 but did not replace it. The Group Head of Residential Services explained how Residential Services would be responding to the increased demands and how it was preparing to meet the new responsibilities that would be placed on the council upon introduction of the Act.

Members were informed that the Council would no longer assess cases on ‘priority need’ but would be expected to provide meaningful help to all eligible households irrespective of priority need. Obligations were noted as:

- new legal obligations on English councils to provide meaningful help to all eligible households irrespective of priority need
- Extended definition of threatened with homelessness – 56 days
- Assess and agree a plan if someone is homeless or threatened with Homelessness within 56 days
- Take reasonable steps to help someone avoid homelessness –the new prevention duty
- Take reasonable steps to help to secure accommodation for homeless –the new relief duty
- An expectation that applicants should cooperate with efforts to assist them
- New duty on public services to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

‘Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting’

Members were informed that ‘new burdens’ funding would be provided by Central Government to assist with the Council’s implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act but it was not known how long this funding would continue. Another challenge was noted as the supply of suitable accommodation.

The Group Head of Residential Services outlined some of the measures that the Council would adopt to meet the Homelessness Prevention Duties:

- Personalised approach as opposed to process led
- Continue to focus on Homelessness Prevention Work
- Partnership working with Housing Associations/Private Rent Sector to maximise available social housing
- Joint working with community services that provide housing support such as housing advice/ money advice

Following questions that were responded to at the meeting the Chairman thanked the Group Head of Residential Services and the Rent Arrears Team Leader for their comprehensive and informative presentation.

(The meeting concluded at 7.18pm)



**AGENDA ITEM NO.6****ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL****HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP****31 MAY 2018****PART A : REPORT****SUBJECT: Terms of Reference 2018-2019****REPORT AUTHOR: Jackie Follis      DATE: 14 May 2018      EXTN: 37580****EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

A full review of the Council's Constitution and decision making processes is being undertaken and the Housing and Customer Services Working Group has been asked to consider its Terms of Reference. This report sets out the background to the review and makes proposals on changes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- a) To agree the revised Terms of Reference and recommend these to Full Council

**1. BACKGROUND:**

- a) A full review of the Council's Constitution and decision making processes is being undertaken. In particular it is the intention to clarify and simplify the Terms of Reference for the meetings which are a part of our formal processes. The proposed Terms of Reference for the Housing and Customer Services Working Group are therefore being presented to members of the group for consideration
- b) At the meeting of this Working Group on 4 January 2018 there was a detailed discussion on the role of the Group as part of a consultation process and views were put forward to the Constitution Working Party on 13 February 2018. Due to the mixed views put forward by the different Working Parties the Constitution Working Party was minded to make no change to existing arrangements.
- c) An issue which has been raised informally is whether or not it is possible for a Working Group to have 'Matters Arising' as an agenda item. The example given was where a number of recommendations from a Working Group to Cabinet had not been accepted in their entirety. Advice from the Council's Group Head of Advice and Monitoring Officer is that it has long been custom and practice at Arun that all meetings will not include 'Matters Arising' or 'Any Other Business'. This is in the interests of transparency as our practice has always been that every item that will be considered at a meeting will be posted at least five clear days before the meeting.
- d) An alternative suggestion to changing the Constitution would be to include an item immediately following the 'Minutes' that could be as follows:

**“Report back from Cabinet/Full Council**

The Working Group may wish to consider the outcome of the Cabinet/Full Council meeting held on (date to be inserted) when the recommendations were presented.”

This would give the option to raise any queries or comments transparently as notice is being given of possible deliberations. The Committee Manager could even list the items that had recommendations from the previous meeting and therefore make it very clear what subjects could be raised.

- e) The proposed Terms of Reference are attached, modelled on the Constitution Part 3 – Responsibility for Functions, 6.0 Working Groups

**2. PROPOSAL(S):**

To agree the revised Terms of Reference and recommend these to Full Council

**3. OPTIONS:**

Not to agree the revised Terms of Reference or to make changes to the proposed Terms of Reference

**4. CONSULTATION:**

Has consultation been undertaken with:

**YES****NO**

Relevant Town/Parish Council

x

Relevant District Ward Councillors

x

Other groups/persons (please specify)

x

**5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)****YES****NO**

Financial

x

Legal

x

Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment

x

Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act

x

Sustainability

x

Asset Management/Property/Land

x

Technology

x

Safeguarding

x

Other (please explain)

x

**6. IMPLICATIONS:**

**7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:**

To facilitate a more effective decision making and communications process for the Housing and Customer Services Working Group

**8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

[Minutes from Constitution Working Party 13 February 2018](#)

**HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP - TERMS OF REFERENCE 2018/19**

<b>Working Group</b>	<b>HOUSING AND CUSTOMER SERVICES</b>
<b>Established</b>	Following Consultation with working parties and all Members, the Overview Select Committee meeting on 15/3/2011 recommended that Working Groups be introduced. This was agreed by Cabinet on 7 <sup>th</sup> March 2011 and forwarded to the Governance Committee so that changes to the Constitution could be made. The Full Council meeting on 24 March 2011 made the decision to implement Working Groups.
<b>Membership</b>	Membership of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group will be confirmed annually at a meeting of Annual Council. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Working Group will have a Membership of not less than 6 Members of the Council made up of Volunteers.</li> <li>• The Working Group is not politically balanced and will not have a maximum number of Members.</li> <li>• Cabinet Members shall not sit on the Working Group.</li> </ul>
<b>Quorum</b>	One third of the whole of the number of Members on the Working Group
<b>Chairman/Vice-Chairman</b>	The Chairman and Vice Chairman will be decided upon at Annual Council before the first meeting of the working group in a new Municipal Year.
<b>Functions of the Working Group</b>	The Working Group will undertake work as and when requested by Full Council, Cabinet and the Overview Select Committee and any work decided upon by the majority of Members on the Working Group.  The Working Group will not consider issues dealt with by existing Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council unless items are referred to it by such a Committee. It may, however, consider any outcomes from such Committees.  The Working Group can make recommendations on the outcomes of their work to Cabinet, Overview Select Committee and Full Council.
<b>Work Programme &amp; Terms of Reference</b>	The Working Group will draw up a Work Programme on an annual basis to be agreed and reviewed by the Working Group for approval at Full Council. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually by the Working Group for approval at Full Council.
<b>Reporting arrangements</b>	The Working Group can report to Cabinet, Overview Select Committee and Full Council.
<b>Open to the public?</b>	The Working Group will meet in public unless the majority of the Members present at the meeting vote for the matter under consideration to be dealt with under exempt business in accordance with Information Rules at Part 6 of the Council's Constitution.
<b>Term</b>	Ongoing
<b>Programme of meetings</b>	Regular meetings will be held at least once per meeting cycle. Agreed dates for 2018/19 are: 31 May 2018, 19 July 2018, 20 September 2018, 13 December 2018 and 07 February 2019
<b>Lead Officers</b>	Joe Russell-Wells, Group Head of Neighbourhood Services and Satnam Kaur, Group Head of Residential Services
<b>Contact</b>	Committees on Telephone:01903 737547 or Email: <a href="mailto:committees@arun.gov.uk">committees@arun.gov.uk</a>

<b>Housing &amp; Customer Services Meeting</b>							
<b>Meeting Date</b>			<b>31-May-18</b>	<b>19-Jul-18</b>	<b>20-Sep-18</b>	<b>13-Dec-18</b>	<b>07-Feb-19</b>
<b>Item</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Origin</b>					
Terms of Reference	JF	ToR	*				
Work programme - set and review	SK/JRW		*				
Housing Annual Update	SK		*				
HRA Business Plan Update	SK		*				
Customer Services Annual Update	JRW/CB			*			
Stonepillow Update	SK			*			
Homelessness & Housing Strategy	SK				*		
ASB/Community Safety Update	GB				*		
Stock Condition Update	SK					*	
Amber House Update	SK					*	
Empty Homes Strategy Update	NS						*
Customer Services Strategy	JRW/CB						*
<b>Agenda Prep Timetable</b>							
Send to Gemma for CMT by 2pm Thurs			26-Apr-18	14-Jun-18	16-Aug-18	08-Nov-18	03-Jan-19
CMT Tues			01-May-18	19-Jun-18	21-Aug-18	13-Nov-18	08-Jan-19
Draft Reports to Committees by 9am Weds			03-May-18	21-Jun-18	23-Aug-18	15-Nov-18	10-Jan-19
<b>Agenda Prep Date 16:30</b>			<b>09-May-18</b>	<b>27-Jun-18</b>	<b>29-Aug-18</b>	<b>21-Nov-18</b>	<b>16-Jan-19</b>
<b>Room</b>			<b>CR2</b>	<b>CR2</b>	<b>CR2</b>	<b>CR2</b>	<b>CR2</b>
Final Reports to Committees by 9am Tues			15-May-18	03-Jul-18	04-Sep-18	27-Nov-18	22-Jan-19
Despatch Agendas by 2pm Thurs			17-May-18	05-Jul-18	06-Sep-18	29-Nov-18	24-Jan-19
<b>Date of Meeting 6pm</b>			<b>31-May-18</b>	<b>19-Jul-18</b>	<b>20-Sep-18</b>	<b>13-Dec-18</b>	<b>07-Feb-19</b>
<b>Room</b>			<b>CR1</b>	<b>CR1</b>	<b>CR1</b>	<b>CR1</b>	<b>CR1</b>
OSC Meeting Dates			17-Jul-18	18-Sep-18	20-Nov-18	22-Jan-19	12-Mar-19
Cabinet Meeting Dates			23-Jul-18	17-Sep-18	12-Nov-18	14-Jan-19	04-Mar-19
Full Council Meeting Dates			18-Jul-18	12-Sep-18	07-Nov-18	09-Jan-19	20-Feb-19