

'Subject to Approval at the Next Working Group Meeting'

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

19 July 2018 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Hughes (Chairman), Mrs Porter (Vice-Chairman), Blampied, Mrs Madeley and Mrs Rapnik.

Councillor Bence was also in attendance as Cabinet Member for Residential Services for all or part of the meeting.

8. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Mrs Ayres, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Purchase and Miss Rhodes.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

10. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Customer Services Working Group held on 31 May 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11. STONEPILLOW ANNUAL OPERATIONAL UPDATE

The Rent Arrears Manager introduced the Chief Executive of Stonepillow, Hilary Bartle, to the working group and the Chairman welcomed her to the meeting.

The Chief Executive of Stonepillow gave a presentation that outlined the work of Stonepillow as an organisation that offered shelter, information and support to empower homeless and vulnerable people to make positive changes in their lives. Stonepillow, as one of the Council's partners, had regularly visited the Housing and Customer Services Working Group over the years and this presentation was their annual update to the Council on current work and progress.

It was noted that their work covered the Chichester, Bognor and Littlehampton areas offering hubs, hostels, supported housing, recovery services, social enterprise and food collection in partnership with UK Harvest. It was explained that UK Harvest collected surplus food from all types of businesses and producers and distributed this to shelters and families/individuals in need.

Members were informed that since 2010, the number of rough sleepers in the Chichester District had ranged from 14 to 26. This Included rough sleepers who intermittently engaged with homeless services and transient

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rough sleepers. Although the number of rough sleepers had not increased, the visibility of rough sleeping had increased over the past five years. The numbers of 'vulnerably housed' people had also increased rapidly. Members were also informed that there had been a marked increase in Eastern European Migrants who used Stonepillow's hub for food, shower and clothes. This could be as many as 17 per day. A younger, chaotic people, under 25 accessing Stonepillow's services had also been noticed.

The Chief Executive of Stonepillow then outlined the ways that the organisation offered assistance as follows:

- Support given 365 days a year with 96 clients in accommodation on any given evening
- Long term support to help people leave the streets for good
- Working in partnership with other agencies
- Accommodation for people who are discharged from hospital or require medical treatment and would otherwise be on the streets
- Abstinence based accommodation and support for people dealing with substance misuse and addiction
- Supported accommodation offering people more independence preparing them for independent living
- Social Enterprise – Restore Chichester and Bognor Regis charity shops that receive donations of furniture/household goods to provide income and help furnish our properties. Clients benefitted from learning new skills through work experience
- Local Assistance Network (LAN) a fund for people who are in crisis or on low income and require urgent support

It was explained that Stonepillow relied heavily on volunteers and fund raising to support its services. Members were informed that West Sussex County Council had constraints on their budgets and were looking at significant cuts to the funding given to Stonepillow. As most of the organisation's contractual funding came from WSCC this would cause significant challenges in recouping any shortfalls.

Following questions which were responded to at the meeting, Members praised the work of Stonepillow and the Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for attending the meeting and her informative presentation.

12. CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL UPDATE 2017-2018

The Chairman welcomed the Group Head of Neighbourhood Services, the Customer Services Manager (Operational) and the Customer Services Manager (Strategic Direction) to the meeting.

The Group Head of Neighbourhoods introduced the report that provided a brief overview of Customer Services and how this had evolved since the service was set up in 2006. It considered the operation of services over the last financial year ending March 2018 and identified emerging trends of operation. It was reported that the following services are dealt with by

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Customer Services who aimed to deal with customer enquiries at first point of contact:

- Cleansing
- Environmental Health
- Revenues
- Benefits
- Planning
- Building Control
- Elections
- Car Parks
- Housing repairs
- General inquiries & Switchboard

The Customer Services Manager (Operational) then provided the working group with a presentation. This centred on what the service provides, why customers call and how customers access Council services (click, call, come-in).

It was noted that Customer Services provided telephony support (Arun Direct) for 10 of the Council’s departments with 86.4% of all telephony enquiries being dealt with at first point of contact. Members were informed that during 2017/18 170,726 calls were dealt with.

It was also noted Arun Direct’s biggest customer was Council Tax with 41,713 calls being taken in the past year. On average 3,000 calls per month were responded to solely for Council Tax. It was explained that every year in March, Annual Billing increased call volumes for Revenues to 4,000 per month.

Members were reminded that customers were also supported face to face for general and housing related queries both at Bognor Regis Town Hall and the Arun Civic Centre. It was reported that over 23,000 customers visited the Civic Centre for assistance in 2017/18 with a further 18,000 visiting Bognor Regis Town Hall.

The Customer Services Manager (Operational) then provided Members with a breakdown of figures for the various ways a customer could contact the Council. Contact during 2017/18 was distributed as follows:

- ‘click’ - total amount of website hits – 763,296
- ‘call’ - customer contact via telephone – 170,705
- ‘come-in’ - customers served face to face - 41,404

It was noted that the most economic method of contact, ‘click’ had steadily increased since 2015/16.

In summing up, the Group Head of Neighbourhoods informed Members that the Customer Access Strategy 2013-2017 had identified several initiatives to improve the service offered to the public. A review of this strategy was underway. It was noted that a report would be brought to this working

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group early next year with a revised strategy. This would aim to identify the priorities for the service with the objective of putting the customer at the centre of everything that the Council does.

Following questions which were responded to at the meeting, the Chairman thanked the Group Head of Neighbourhoods, Customer Services Manager (Strategic Direction) and the Customer Services Manager (Operational) for the informative report and presentation.

13. WORK PROGRAMME – 2018/19

It was noted that the Anti-Social Behaviour/Community Safety item that was on the work programme for the September meeting had been moved, with agreement from the Chairman, to the meeting on 13 December 2018.

(The meeting concluded at 7.03 pm)