

## HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

21 July 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bennett (Chairman), Mrs Pendleton (Vice-Chair), Mrs Cooper, Mrs Haywood, Hughes and Ms Thurston

Councillors Bicknell and Mrs Gregory were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

Apologies: None

### 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

### 2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2020 were approved as a correct record by the Working Group and will be signed by the Chairman as soon as practicably possible.

### 3. START TIMES

The Working Group

RESOLVED

That the start times of meetings for the remainder of 2019/20 be 6.00 p.m.

### 4. CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL UPDATE

The Customer Services Manager introduced her report and gave the Working Group an overview of its detail for the last financial year. Arun Direct the Council's telephony service sees the team dealing with 10 different types of enquiries, for face to face customers the team provide a general enquiries service at both the Littlehampton Civic Office and Bognor Town Hall receptions as well as providing support for housing enquiries. Work is currently taking place on the customer access strategy alongside the digital strategy as it is a key part of improving the Councils services for customers.

During the last year a total number of calls dealt with was 169,463 which was decrease on the previous year's figures. This was assumed to be due to the improvements in the online self-serve services. A total of 37,620 customers visited reception services at both the Civic Centre and Bognor Regis Town Hall. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic the offices were closed, only allowing service for any person presenting as homeless. A review was now being completed of future access to services provided as a result of the closure. A high

number of visits to the website showed that this method is by which, most customers access the Council services. In particular last year saw the Election pages have a significant increase from 43,187 in 2018/19 to 74,642 in 2019/20. This was due to the local Elections in May 2019 and the General Election in December 2019.

The Chairman thanked the team for the report and expressed thanks to the entire customer services teams for all their continued hard work.

The Working Group noted the report update.

#### 5. FIRE POLICY & MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Repairs and Maintenance Manager introduced his report to the Working Group. It was explained that a Fire Safety Policy and Management Plan had been compiled that would enable the Council to comply with regulations and manage fire risk for all its properties and it clearly sets out the Council's responsibilities and the responsibilities of any Council contractors.

There were questions raised regarding the 'Stay Put' policy and whether this was the best advice. It was explained that the strategy for escape was driven by the Fire risk assessments that had been completed which comprised of several different factors. It was also explained that there are Fire Doors in place to help stop/delay the spread of Fire.

The Working Group recommend to Cabinet that;

- 1) the Fire Safety Policy 2020 be adopted
- 2) the Fire Safety Management Plan 2020 be adopted
- 3) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services to make minor changes to the policy and plan

#### 6. VOID LETTABLE STANDARD 2020

The Repairs and Maintenance Manager introduced his report to the Working Group. It was explained that the standard enables the Council to comply with health and safety and security requirements, it provides clarity to contractors on the expected performance from them and provides value for money.

The Working Group recommend to Cabinet that;

- 1) the Void Lettable Standard 2020 be adopted
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services to make minor changes to the standard

## 7. HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE

The Group Head of Residential Services introduced her report to the Working Group. She explained that the update set out the progress being made against in respect of health and safety compliance.

Members will remember that in 2018 it was determined by the regulator that the Council could not demonstrate that it could meet its statutory duties. An improvement plan was implemented, and highlighted four major themes that needed attention;

- 1) Systems – systematic approach to health and safety
- 2) Policy and procedures
- 3) Data – is it robust
- 4) Performance monitoring

For the last 18 months the Council had been providing monthly updates to the regulator and it will continue to do so. In respect of the progress that had been made, you see from the report that the Council is making significant progress to ensure that we are on the road to full compliance, from implementation of a new centralised data system to enable improved reporting, to the ongoing restructure of the housing service, additionally the Council had now mobilised contracts across all 7 disciplines in respect of Health and Safety regulations.

The Working Group asked several questions in relation to when it would be expected that the regulator would deem the Council as compliant and therefore no need to report to them so frequently. It was explained that currently the expectation based on the current progress made and the independent review suggest that it would be August 2021, the Council would be in a position to sign off with the regulator.

There was also concern raised in relation to any special provisions to be made for properties with multiple occupation/sheltered housing schemes and the communal areas that were closed due to Covid-19 pandemic and Government restrictions that were put in place. It was explained that the plan now, in line with the easing of Government restrictions was that these facilities were being phased back in.

The Working Group congratulated the Group Head of Residential Services for her team's dedication and hard work particularly throughout this pandemic.

The Working Group noted the report update.

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8. REPORT BACK FROM CABINET/FULL COUNCIL

The Chairman referred Members to the Agenda sheet for this item, and asked Members to note the recommendations put forward by the Working Group, in its last meeting on 6 February 2020 to the Cabinet. At the Cabinet meeting on 9 March 2020 these were all approved.

9. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

The Group Head of Neighbourhood Services presented the Work Programme for 2019/20 to members.

The Working Group

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL

That the Housing & Customer Services Working Group Work Programme for 2019/20 be approved.

(The meeting concluded at 6.30 pm)