

RESIDENTIAL AND WELLBEING SERVICES COMMITTEE

30 September 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Pendleton (Chair), Gregory (Vice-Chair), Catterson, Mrs Cooper, Mrs English, Hughes, Seex (Substitute for Daniells) and Yeates

Councillors Gunner and Stanley were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

311. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence had been received from Councillors Needs and Daniells.

312. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

313. MINUTES

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 July 2021 and the Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 19 August 2021 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chair.

314. 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

The Committee

RESOLVED

That Agenda Item 8 [Safer Arun Partnership Annual Review 2020-21] be heard after Agenda Item 5 [Public Question Time] due to the presence of a guest speaking on the item.

315. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair invited questions from members of the public who had submitted their questions in advance of the meeting in accordance with the Council's Constitution. The Chair confirmed that two questions had been submitted. The questions were asked and responded to by the Chair.

*(A schedule of the full questions asked and the responses provided can be found on the meeting's webpage at: [Arun District Council](#))*

The Chair then drew Public Question Time to a close.

316. SAFER ARUN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REVIEW 2020-21

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Community Safety Officer presented his report. He outlined the purpose of the report as the statutory annual scrutiny of the Safer Arun Partnership as Arun's Local Community Safety Partnership. He confirmed that the Committee in leading on this statutory function would legislatively be the Local Authority's Crime and Disorder Committee for the purposes of this report. In particular, he drew Members' attention to the Safer Arun Partnership Plan 2020-21 [Appendix C in the Agenda Pack] and its strategic priorities which formed the basis of the work undertaken to try to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour across the District.

The Chair re-welcomed Sussex Police's Chief Inspector Jon Carter, District Commander for Chichester and Arun, to the meeting. The Chief Inspector highlighted four findings from the report – the significant rise in anti-social behaviour over the period the report looked at in part due to the Pandemic and the restrictions imposed, the significant proportion violent crime continued to play in crime reported in the District, domestic abuse still accounting for a worrying percentage of all reported crime at about 22% and its impacts particularly to children and young people and links to homicide, and drugs harm and successes in tackling and disrupting county lines activity though this tactic did not account for all drug supply in the area.

The Chair expressed her thanks to the whole Safer Arun Partnership team and stressed that tackling domestic abuse was also the responsibility of Members through their community involvement. Councillor Mrs Cooper as Chair of the Safer Arun Partnership also offered her thanks to the team for the work involved in producing the report and to the wider membership of the partnership for their continued engagement.

Members then took part in a full debate on the item where a number of points were raised including:

- whether more education was needed to tackle some of the underlying issues, particularly around domestic abuse and drugs
- positive trends in the report, reference made to drugs trafficking and supply in the Strategic Intelligence Assessment 2021 Key Findings [Appendix B in the Agenda Pack]

The recommendations were then proposed and seconded.

The Committee

RESOLVED – to

1. Endorse the work of the Safer Arun Partnership and the importance of partnership working in contributing to reducing anti-social behaviour and addressing crime and disorder in Arun.
2. Recognise the work of the Safer Arun Partnership in contributing to the delivery of the Council's strategic priority "supporting you if you need help".

317. MOTION

The Motion was referred to the Committee by Full Council on 15 September 2021. Upon the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Stanley as the Motion's original proposer explained some background to the Motion (including that across the country there were 98,000 homeless families, 100,000 families in temporary accommodation and 268,000 empty homes), the need to review Arun's approach to bringing empty homes back into use and whether the Council was committing appropriate resource to the issue.

Members then took part in a full debate on the item where a number of points were raised including:

- empty homes not contributing to the local economy
- the need to look at the holiday homes discount scheme
- the need for long-term tenancies that could be provided by making empty homes available again and the positive effects to local economies
- the negative impact empty homes in poor condition have on neighbourhoods, and associations with anti-social behaviour and vandalism
- support for and the impact on homeless members of the community

The motion was then proposed and seconded.

The Committee

RESOLVED – That

1. Council tax charged on Empty Homes be reviewed with a view to exploring a potential sliding scale increase over time. A similar system is currently being used in Brighton and Hove.
2. Council tax charged on Holiday Homes be reviewed with a view to encourage owners to utilise their properties on at least an annual basis.

The Committee

RECOMMEND TO ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE – That

1. A review be undertaken of the incentives and services we (could) offer property owners to increase engagement with our Empty Homes Team and support tenant management issues and misconceptions.
2. A review be undertaken of how we promote our Empty Homes service and how we communicate success stories.

318. BUDGET 2022/2023 PROCESS

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Interim Group Head for Corporate Support and Section 151 Officer presented her report explaining that under the newly adopted Committee structure it was important that all Members be fully aware of the budget process. The process was approved by the Corporate Policy and Performance Committee at its meeting on 1 September 2021. She further explained that the report recognised the need for some resource switching in order to progress the Council's priorities, and that projects brought forward must deliverable in 2022-23, must aim to be cost neutral and mindful of limited Officer time and support. It was also highlighted that the report was concerned with the General Fund as the Housing Revenue Account had a separate Business Plan which was being worked on alongside the budget.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To note the budget setting process for 2022/23.

319. EMPTY HOMES COUNCIL TAX PREMIUM

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Senior Revenues Assistant presented this report which asked Members to consider maximising the Council Tax premium for empty homes from April 2022, in line with legislation that came in in 2020 with an aim of getting empty properties back into use.

Members (and one non-Committee Member) then took part in a full debate on the item where a number of points were raised including:

- the benefits to residents rather than the Council as this was an incentive to get houses back into use
- questions around the logistics of policing the policy and how the Council knows about empty properties in the District
- specific types of property (retirement, for example) which could be difficult to sell but have restrictive criteria on purchasers
- which constituted 'furnished' in real and legislative terms

- whether other mechanisms, apart from homeowners applying for discounts, could be used for reporting empty homes, for example reporting by neighbours or whether utilities are connected
- not wanting to penalise those who have inherited a house but at the time having a finite cut-off that triggers them to act
- the importance of information in identifying opportunities to make houses available
- the leniency around exceptions and the importance of promoting the services the Council provides
- the shortness of timescales, particularly for houses vacant for a longer period of time that may require substantial work before being made available again
- the need to communicate effectively given the scale of the impact it could have on residents

The recommendations were then proposed and seconded.

The Committee

#### RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL - That

1. An increase to the premium on long term empty properties be approved as follows:
  - 100% premium from 1 April 2022 for those properties which are empty for 2 years and over
  - 200% premium from 1 April 2022 for those properties which are empty for 5 years and over
  - 300% premium from 1 April 2022 for those properties which are empty for 10 years and over
2. The Head of Residential Services be given delegated authority in exceptional circumstances to waive any premium on a case by case basis.

#### 320. COMPLIANCE POLICIES APPROVAL

The Chair welcomed the arrival of these policies and spoke of their benefit in ensuring residents could live safely in their homes and landlords met their legal and regulatory requirements. Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Interim Asset Manager presented his report explaining that the Council was under the regulatory notice of the Social Housing Regulator around compliance and building safety, that these policies aimed to be consistent and comprehensive and covered the Council's legal and regulatory obligations to its Social Housing tenants.

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Members (and one non-Committee Member) then took part in a full debate on the item where a number of points were raised including:

- the Fire Safety policy and rules around furniture in foyer areas in sheltered housing
- that these policies only applied where the Council was the landlord
- praise for these policies being easy to understand

The recommendations were then proposed and seconded.

The Committee

RESOLVED - that

1. The Fire Safety, Gas Safety, Electrical Safety, Lift Safety, Asbestos management and Legionella policies be approved for publication
2. Delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services to make minor changes to the policies.

321. APPROVAL TO APPOINT A ROOFING CONTRACTOR

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Interim Asset Manager presented his report.

The recommendation was then proposed and seconded.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To approve awarding a contract for roofing works for various properties and to approve the virement of £100,000 from the Kitchen and Bathroom programme budget to the Roofing budget to fund the project. Both of these budgets are in the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme.

322. OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Mrs Cooper provided a verbal update on the Sussex Police and Crime Panel. A written version was made available on the meeting's webpage after the meeting.

323. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

324. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Committee

RESOLVED

That under Section 100a (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified against the items.

325. APPROVAL TO APPOINT A ROOFING CONTRACTOR - EXEMPT

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Interim Asset Manager presented his report.

The recommendation was then proposed and seconded.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To approve awarding a contract for roofing works for various properties and to approve the virement of £100,000 from the Kitchen and Bathroom programme budget to the Roofing budget to fund the project. Both of these budgets are in the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme.

326. AWARD OF SECTION 44A BUSINESS RATES

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Senior Revenues Assistant presented this report which sought Members' approval to award Section 44A Business Rate relief.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That business rate relief of £2163.31 be awarded.

327. COUNCIL TAX INSOLVENCY WRITE OFFS OVER £5,001

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Senior Revenues Assistant presented this report which sought Members' approval to write off outstanding council tax charges which were subject to insolvency action.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That outstanding council tax charges totalling £42,766.51 which were subject to insolvency action, which prevented the Council from pursuing the debtor for payment, be written off.

328. BUSINESS RATES INSOLVENCY WRITE OFFS OVER £10,001

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Senior Revenues Assistant presented this report which sought Members' approval to write off outstanding business rate charges.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That outstanding business rates and BID charges totalling £83,669.91 which were subject to insolvency action, which prevented the Council from pursuing the debtor for payment, be written off.

(The meeting concluded at 7.56 pm)