

HOUSING AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE

17 March 2022 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Pendleton (Chair), Gregory (Vice-Chair), Mrs Cooper, Mrs English, Goodheart (Substituting for Daniells), Hamilton, Hughes, Madeley, Thurston (Substituting for Catterson) and Yeates.

Councillor Gunner was also in attendance for part of the meeting.

747. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

748. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

749. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 24 January 2022 were approved and signed by the Chair.

750. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions submitted for the meeting.

751. ARUN INSPIRES PROGRAMME

Becky East from the Artswork charity provided members with a detailed presentation on the Arun Inspires Programme.

After the presentation members then took the opportunity to ask questions. There was overwhelming support and endorsement from members and recognition that the programme was extremely important in terms of the support it provided to children and young people of the district.

The Leader of the Council was also invited to make comment and he expressed his thanks for the hard work that the Artswork Charity and Becky had undertaken.

An amendment was then proposed by Becky and this amended recommendation was proposed by Councillor Hughes and seconded by Councillor Cooper.

This amendment is set out below:

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That the funding of **£15,000 for the Arun Inspires Programme (Phase 2) until March 2026 for 2022/23 and endorsements of future funding** subject to satisfactory reviews, in line with Arun District Council's Priorities and the availability of funding be approved.

On this amendment being put to the vote it was declared CARRIED.

The Chair then returned to the substantive recommendation and the Committee

RESOLVED

That the funding of £15,000 for the Arun Inspires Programme (Phase 2) for 2022/23 and endorsements of future funding subject to satisfactory reviews, in line with Arun District Council's Priorities and the availability of funding be approved.

752. CONTINUATION OF THE LOCAL COUNCIL TAX HARDSHIP SCHEME FOR 2022/23

The Interim Financial Services Manager provided members with an overview of the report and drew members attention to section 2.16 where it outlined the discretionary payments of £150 to those homes in bands E-H that the council had been requested to implement to provide additional support.

Members then took part in a debate where a number of comments were made in support of the report, in particular the additional discretionary payments for homes in bands E-H. Some members queried how residents could ensure they received a support payment if they were eligible for one. The Interim Financial Services Manager advised that the council would make every effort to find all those residents who would benefit from these payments, but advised that the quickest way for residents to have this confirmed would be for them to make contact with the Council. Those who paid their Council Tax Bill by Direct Debit would have the payment transferred directly into the bank account their Direct Debit was paid from. Those who paid by others means would need to either make contact with the council or wait to hear from the council regarding their payment.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor Thurston.

The Committee

RESOLVED - That

(1) That the urgent decision to continue the Hardship Fund for claimants of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) for 2022/23, which constitutes an additional discretionary discount of up to £150 per household for working age claimants in the district be endorsed and supported; and

(2) Authority be given to the Chief Executive to agree the County Wide discretionary rebate scheme being negotiated for households not eligible for the mandatory scheme.

753. GRANT FUNDED HOMELESSNESS EXPENDITURE

The Housing Options Manager provided members with an overview of her report explaining that the committee was being requested to provide its approval for the expenditure detailed within the report.

Members then took part in a debate. This saw several members of the committee thanking the Housing Options Manager and her team for the work they had done particularly during the pandemic. It was commented that the grants were welcome as they helped to assist the council in preventing homelessness and rough sleeping. It was also highlighted that as a result of the Omicron variant, and its particularly high transmission, rate the council had to quickly offer everyone who was rough sleeping accommodation. All bar two of those approached took up the offer of accommodation during this time. There were also some questions asked regarding what the council would do should there be another increase in covid cases, where it was confirmed that the council would be led by the government in terms of restriction and directions in terms of managing a response to covid.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Cooper and seconded by Councillor Thurston.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To approve the expenditure of the following grants:

- a) Homelessness prevention grant (2nd Tranche)
- b) Accommodation for Ex-Offenders Grant
- c) Covid Management Fund (COMF) d) Protect & Vaccinate Fund

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754. HOUSING COMPENSATION POLICY

The Repairs and Maintenance Manager provided an overview of her report explaining that the policy set out the mandatory and the discretionary compensation detail. It was confirmed that the discretionary compensation claims would be where members would see the council being more involved and that each case would be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Members took part in a debate where there was discussion surrounding what policy meant when it referred to 'right to buy' and what was the process the council would follow should an investigation find that the council was not at fault, but a contractor used by the council was, would the council then claim the costs back from the contractor.

A slight amendment to the recommendation was required to update the delegated authority being requested from the Group Head of Residential Services to the Interim Head of Housing.

The amended recommendation was then proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor Goodheart.

The Committee

RESOLVED - That

- (1) the adoption of the Compensation Policy be approved; and
- (2) delegated authority be given to the Interim Head of Housing to make minor changes to the policy and any amendments necessary to reflect legislative changes.

755. DEVELOPMENT OF NEW COUNCIL HOUSING

The Chair explained that it had been previously agreed with the Vice-Chair and Director of Services that this item would be withdrawn from tonight's meeting without discussion, to allow for the new Interim Head of Housing who started with the council last week to review before presenting to Committee.

756. LOCAL MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT - PROPOSAL FOR NIGHTINGALES SHELTERED SCHEME, FINDON

The Resident Engagement Officer provided an overview of her report explaining to members the difference between a Local Tenancy Agreement and a Tenant Management Organisation.

Before members took part in a debate, the Chair confirmed that a vote that took place with the residents directly involved, and the vote result was overwhelmingly supportive of this agreement. In turning to the debate, a number of questions were raised and answered. A summary of questions asked is below:

- How detailed would the training for Officers be? It was confirmed that the team of officers had already completed some bespoke training courses e.g. equality & diversity, Health & Safety as examples. Further training would be completed, and this would be in line with any other training undertaken by the council and or managing agents.
- If those residents who were involved in the management of this agreement decided to 'step back', could they do this easily? It was confirmed that yes, should anyone decide to take a 'step back' this would be managed carefully and closely to ensure that the arrangement continued to work for the residents.
- Would the council make other multiple living schemes aware of this option? It was confirmed that although this was the first agreement of its kind at Arun District Council, the Resident Engagement Officer saw no reason why the council would not share the success of this arrangement with others.

A slight amendment to Recommendation (2) was required to ensure that the delegated authority being requested was provided to the new Interim Head of Housing and not the Group Head of Residential Services. The recommendations as amended were then proposed by Councillor Madeley and seconded by Councillor Hughes.

The Committee

RESOLVED - That

- (1) The proposal to enter into a Local Management Agreement with the Nightingales Tenants Association be approved, and;
- (2) Delegated authority be given to the Interim Head of Housing to sign and enter into a Local Management Agreement.

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757. NEW HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM PROJECT UPDATE

The Interim Head of Housing explained to members that the report before them provided an update on the implementation of the new system Civica CX and on the changed financial projections for delivering the system.

Before members took part in a debate, the Chair stated that the need for the new system had been proven from the work undertaken so far, however she expressed concern regarding the escalating cost of the project. Other members were in agreement with the concern raised and the Interim Head of Housing advised the Committee that given the very limited time he had had available since joining the council, he did not yet have an understanding as to why the costs had escalated as they had. However, moving forward he would keep the project risks and dates under close review. The Director of Services was then invited to make comment where she explained that some of the issues the project had faced had been detailed in the report at section 1.5. The need for the new system was clear and that having had early discussion with the Interim Head of Housing she was confident that he would be looking at the project carefully moving forward.

In turning to the debate, members were in agreement that reviewing the project and its lessons learnt was needed so that future project costs would not escalate further. There was also discussion on the importance of data cleansing before transferring data into a new management system and that this was a huge task for the project team to complete. The Chair was in agreement that data cleansing was a huge part of the project, however she stated that the council should have been better at estimating the size of the tasks needed to complete the project and its costings in its earliest stages.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Madeley and seconded by Councillor Gregory.

The Committee

RESOLVED - That

(1) the financial projections and virements undertaken for delivery of the project be agreed; and

(2) the progress of the project to date and delivery risks be noted.

758. LEISURE OPERATING CONTRACT UPDATE

The Group Head of Community Wellbeing provided an overview of his report highlighting the following points to members during his introduction. He explained that the report focused on the financial matters for the current year and that the leisure contract provided a valuable income for the council. It was evident that Covid had had a significant impact, officers had met with Freedom Leisure's directors each month for the past 2 years to review income and expenditure and the overall performance of the contract. There had been a steady increase in visitor numbers for the current year and the financial performance was up to approximately 88% of where it was prior to the pandemic. He referred members to table 1 on page 158 of the agenda where the recovery was best illustrated. In summing up he explained in detail why the committee was being asked to recommend a virement from the Covid-19 contingency budget be approved by the Policy and Finance Committee.

Members then took part in a debate where they discussed the benefits of the council supporting its leisure facilities during the pandemic and the many benefits these facilities provided to the residents of the district. Members were encouraged by the figures that had been reported.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Cooper and seconded by Councillor Gregory.

The Committee

RESOLVED - That

- (1) £289,127 of COVID-19 contingency budget be used to offset the anticipated income shortfall for 2021/22 from the Leisure Management contract, subject to approval by the Policy and Finance Committee;
- (2) The Council's contribution be subject to Freedom Leisure paying the remaining balance of £432,090 due for 2021/22 as per the contract;
- (3) From 2022/23, invoicing reverted to the arrangements in place before restrictions due to the pandemic were introduced.

The Committee also

RECOMMEND TO THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

That it approves a virement of £289,127 from the COVID-19 contingency budget for 2021/22.

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759. PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT - PUBLIC HEALTH WELLBEING PROGRAMME

The Communities & Wellbeing Manager provided an overview of her report to members and drew members attention appendix A which detailed the council's wellbeing business plan for 2022-2027.

Members then took part in a debate where they asked a number of questions and received answers on the business plan. A summary of the points raised is below;

- Clarity on targeting workplaces
- What was the Falls Prevention Programme and how would someone be able to access this support
- Would the Committee be provided with a further report to review performance at a later date

Members were supportive of this programme, and it was stated that members should talk about it with residents of the district to ensure the programme was known to them.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Cooper and seconded by Councillor Thurston.

The Committee

RESOLVED - That

- (1) Agreement be given to enter into the Partnership Arrangement Agreement to deliver the Public Health Wellbeing Programme in Arun for the period April 2022 to March 2027 with West Sussex County Council;
- (2) The financial contribution of £414,024 from West Sussex County Council per annum for the duration of the five-year agreement to deliver the Arun Wellbeing Programme be noted; and
- (3) Agreement be given to allocate from the financial contribution of £30,000 grant funding per year to deliver a Falls Prevention programme with local partners Age UK and Freedom Leisure and £10,000 to freedom Leisure to deliver an activities programme per annum, subject to satisfactory performance and available funding.

760. COMMUNITY WARDENS

The Chair confirmed that this report had been brought to Committee due to previous discussions that had taken place at its last meeting held on 24 January 2022. The task today was for the Committee to ratify the report. The Chair then handed over to the Communities & Wellbeing Manager who provided members with a detailed overview referring to appendix A which was explained and was there to assist members with their decision making.

There was a short discussion regarding the funding for the Bognor Regis Project where it was confirmed by the Chair that the budget for the project had been confirmed.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Madeley and seconded by Councillor Cooper.

The Committee

RESOLVED - That

1. The delivery model for the Littlehampton Community Warden project within the approved budget be approved.
2. Authorisation be given to the Group Head of Community Wellbeing to scope and agree the implementation of a Bognor Regis Community Warden project.

761. OUTSIDE BODIES UPDATE

The Chair asked if any members had any questions, they wished to ask regarding her feedback report from her attendance at the last meeting of the Sussex Police & Crime Panel held on 28 January 2022.

A request was made for the Chair to consider obtaining more detail on the SPACE project at the next meeting. It was agreed that before the Chair could confirm this, she would need more information and would discuss with the member outside of the meeting.

762. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/23

The Committee received its work programme. In considering it, the Chair queried why it did not contain an item regarding Flaxmean or sheltered housing accommodation. She strongly felt that this be included. It was confirmed by the Director of Services that development of the work programme was still progressing and that she was waiting for the opportunity to run through the work programme for 2022/23 with the new Interim Head of Housing and the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee. Despite

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this, it was estimated a report would be brought to the Committee for the June 2022 meeting.

It was clarified that item 10 of today's agenda [Development of new Council Housing] would be brought back to committee at some point. The Chair confirmed that further work with officers was required before a decision was made on this matter.

763. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The recommendation to move into exempt business was proposed by Councillor Hughes and seconded by Councillor Cooper.

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 item 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.

764. COUNCIL TAX WRITE OFFS OVER £5,001

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor Thurston.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That agreement be given to write off the outstanding council tax charges totalling £57,626.09 which were subject to insolvency action, which prevented the Council from pursuing the debtor for payment.

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

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor Thurston.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That agreement be given to write off the outstanding council tax charges totalling £11,278.39 which have been subject to recovery action as the Council have been unable to locate the debtor to pursue for payment.

766. BUSINESS RATES WRITE OFFS OVER £10,001

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor Thurston.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That agreement be given to write off the outstanding Business Rates and BID charges totalling £30,604.20.

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

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Gregory and seconded by Councillor Thurston.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That agreement be given to write off the outstanding Business Rates and BID charges totalling £37,930.52 which are subject to insolvency action, which prevents the Council from pursuing the debtor for payment.

(The meeting concluded at 8.10 pm)