

HOUSING AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE

26 March 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Birch (Chair), Haywood (Vice-Chair), Bence, Bicknell, Butcher, J English, Long, Wiltshire, Dr Walsh, Yeates and Turner

Councillor Tandy was also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

738. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pendelton who was substituted by Councillor Turner.

739. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bence declared a Personal Interest in agenda item 6 as a member of West Sussex County Council.

740. MINUTES

The minutes of the Housing and Wellbeing Committee held on 25 January 2024 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

741. 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

There were no urgent items for consideration.

742. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

743. SAFER ARUN PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY REPORT

Councillor Bence redeclared his personal interest in this item as a member of West Sussex County Council.

The Community Safety Officer was invited to present the report, which provided the latest update on the performance of the Safer Arun Partnership (SAP) and the results of the residents' community safety consultation. He advised that the top five issues raised were at the heart of the SAP Plan 2023-2025. He reported an error on page 17, first line of the report, which should read "...as the main response is unacceptable...". Following the consultation the SAP had undertaken a campaign to increase the reporting of incidents and who to report to, to help agencies improve their responses to anti-social behaviour and crime. The Council's campaign had been

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shared with other community safety partnerships in West Sussex and cited as an example of best practice. Referring to appendix B, in future the SAP partners would also provide updates on the work they are doing in relation to the SAP Plan and report to the Housing and Wellbeing Committee.

The Chair invited questions and comments from members. During the discussion comments were made surrounding increases in anti-social behaviour and shoplifting from youths occurring in some towns and parishes in the District, with examples of recent incidents in Barnham provided. Concern was raised about the limited responses to such incidents by Sussex Police and the restrictions on action other officers, such as store security staff and community safety officers were able to take and of the limited response received from the West Sussex County Council Community Safety Team. These youths were becoming increasingly brazen as they were aware the Police often did not attend these incidents.

A request was made that officers draw the issues raised by members to the attention of Sussex Police in the hope that they would take more effective action and asked officers to keep the Committee informed of the progress of the work being carried out to deal with anti-social behaviour. The Community Safety Officer provided details of the amount of work taking place between the multi-agencies to address anti-social behaviour in Barnham and undertook to provide the Committee with a written update on progress outside of the meeting. The Chair advised that the Arun Safety Partnership was working hard with Sussex Police and other agencies to deal with this serious situation.

During the remainder of the discussion, details of further antisocial behaviour across the District, including Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, were discussed in particular an increase in shoplifting. There were reports of shoplifters telling the public they could not refrain them and shop staff told not to engage with shop lifters, take or display photographs of them. Staff needed to feel safe while working in these shops. Store or community officers had been observed not taking action when anti-social behaviour was observed and it was asked if there more that could be done to help them protect the public? Concern was raised that the Arcade, Littlehampton was used as an escape route for drug dealers and it was reported there was a proposal to block one entrance. It was asked if it was the previous owners or the current owners who had asked for CCTV to be installed there?

The Community Safety Officer responded that the new owners of the Arcade had requested CCTV and was being match funded by the Safer Arun Partnership. The decision to block one entrance to the Arcade would be taken by West Sussex County Council as it was a public right of way. Shoplifting was a crime dealt with by the Police whilst anti-social behaviour came under different powers. Officers could have discussions with Sussex Police in terms of enforcement and members were reminded that the Committee could ask representatives from Sussex Police to attend this Committee to hear how they were resolving these issues and to answer members' questions. Community warden powers allowed them to stop and ask for a person's name and address, but the person could refuse to stop or supply officers with the

information. It was confirmed that the community wardens fully carried out their powers and would call the Police when necessary and provide witness statements if required.

The Chair informed the Committee about discussions with the Community and Wellbeing Manager to invite Sussex Police to a meeting of the Housing and Wellbeing Committee to enable members to ask questions about their concerns and ask how the issues will be resolved. The Chair confirmed that the Community and Well-being Team were taking the issues very seriously.

Members commented that shoplifting had got out of hand and urgent action was needed, with a member suggesting the Police should attend the Committee on a regular basis to be scrutinised. A member advised that both the public and door security staff had the same common law powers of arrest. The issues had been going on a long time and despite promises from Sussex Police nothing had improved. A member advised that representatives from Sussex Police regularly attended all parish meetings. A member referred to the number of daily observed incidents of drug dealing reported in the Community Safety Consultation results and asked where the police were who should be dealing with this criminal and increasing activity.

Responding to members questions, the Community Safety Officer confirmed that parish and town councils in the District had received a press release and an anti-social reporting guide to display. He explained that the survey had previously been undertaken by West Sussex County Council but was now carried out by each community partnership themselves, with slightly different questions. Therefore, he confirmed that it would be possible to compare future surveys year on year. Changes would also be made to the report to make it clearer to read. If members wanted the results divided into parishes this could be done, but as respondents were only asked to provide the first four digits of their postcode this would need to be done manually.

The Committee noted that:

1. There are no recommendations put forward with this report. It is an “information only” paper which provides detail from which the committee can scrutinise the performance of the Safer Arun Partnership. It should be noted that SAP is an outside body.
2. However, when undertaking scrutiny of the Safer Arun Partnership, the committee does have authority to make its own recommendations back to the partnership in relation to any performance and reporting elements it deems appropriate.

744. SWIMMING POOL SUPPORT FUND PHASE 2 GRANT

The Chair invited the Wellbeing Business Manager to introduce the report following the council’s successful application for grant funding from the Swimming Pool Support Fund Phase 2. He informed the Committee that recommendation 2.1 had been amended to read ‘2.1 Approve the distribution of project costs (£135,470) to Freedom Leisure (£45,070) & Arundel and Downlands Community Leisure Trust

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(£90,400) for the identified projects and subsequent draw down of the Phase 2 swimming pool support fund grant (£135,470)'.

The Housing and Wellbeing Committee were made aware of the application within the Freedom Leisure annual report at its previous meeting held on 26 January 2024. The report sought approval of the project costs and approval for the Council to enter into the grant funding agreement between Arun District Council and Sport England. Delays would impact future energy savings for both leisure operators and approval would allow the Council's Legal Service Team to finalise the grant agreements. He explained that an urgent report had been considered by the Policy and Finance Committee on 7 March 2024 and a recommendation made to Full Council on 13 March 2024 that the funding of £135,470 from the Swimming Pool Support Fund to be added to the Council's capital programme for 2024-2025, which was approved. The success of the Council in achieving the grant was noted, given the high number of 726 applications received by Sport England. The grant must be claimed retrospectively by March 2025 following delivery of the project by the swimming pool operators.

The recommendations, as amended by officers, were proposed by Councillor Walsh and seconded by Councillor Bence.

The Wellbeing Business Manager confirmed that the PV panels at the Arun Leisure Centre had been installed (as part of a separate previous project) and whilst there were benefits it would take a while longer before they were quantifiable.

The Committee:

RESOLVED to

1. Approve the distribution of project costs (£135,470) to Freedom Leisure (£45,070) & Arundel and Downlands Community Leisure Trust (£90,400) for the identified projects and subsequent draw down of the phase 2 swimming pool support fund grant (£135,470)
2. Approval for the Council to enter into the grant funding agreement between Arun District Council and Sport England
3. To note the addition to the capital programme in order that we can fund the two organisations prior to claiming the cost back retrospectively through the grant.

745. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND

The Group Head of Housing was invited by the Chair to introduce the report. He provided details of the further grant funding received for four 3 bedroom homes of which three would be for the provision of temporary accommodation and one for the provision of accommodation for the Afghan Resettlement Scheme. The Council would fund 60% of the costs and £400k of Section 106 commuted sums had been acquired towards the scheme. The purchase price of the properties was not known at this

stage. The scheme would only go ahead and the money released with a positive financial appraisal.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Walsh and seconded by Councillor Bence.

The Chair invited members to make comment or ask any questions. The Group Head of Housing advised that the Council was still proceeding with LAHF funding and a report would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee and confirmed that there was flexibility in the scheme for the Council to use the scheme for use wholly as temporary accommodation if no families from the Afghan Resettlement Scheme were put forward by West Sussex County Council. A number of options concerning potential properties were being looked into, which he was unable to provide further details due to confidentiality, but was confident that the scheme would be completed by August 2024.

RESOLVED

The Committee:

- a) Approves progression of the LAHF award of £624,000 to acquire three additional homes for use as temporary accommodation and one for the Afghan Resettlement Scheme.
- b) Approves allocation of a combination of unallocated commuted sums (circa £400,000) and the use of HRA borrowing (circa £536,000) as match funding of a minimum 60% (up to £936,000).
- c) Subject to recommendation (d), approves the acquisition of four new homes for up to a maximum total cost of £1,560,000 for use as temporary accommodation and for the Afghan Resettlement Scheme and in accordance with the LAHF grant conditions; and
- d) Delegates authority to the Group Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer), in consultation with the Leader, Opposition Leader and Chair of this Committee, to provide final written approval of the acquisition subject to the Group Head of Finance being in receipt of a positive financial appraisal.
- e) Notes that an appraisal of the LAHF scheme will be brought to this committee once it is completed and in use.
- f) Request that Policy & Finance Committee include this scheme within the Council's capital programme at a total cost of £1,560,000, with £624,000 to be funded from central government grant and £936,000 to be funded by the Council through a combination of unallocated commuted sums and additional borrowing.

746. HOUSING POLICY & STRATEGY REVIEW

The Group Head of Housing was invited by the Chair to introduce the report. He explained the rationale for the Housing policy and strategy review was to support the overall effectiveness of the Housing Service and to consider the amount of time currently taken up by Committee members in dealing with strategic issues. He referred to the comments made by members at previous meetings of the Committee raising issues about some of the policies. The intention was to align them with both member and customer expectations, best practice, as well as legal and regulatory requirements. He explained that the Business Improvement Team had undertaken work to develop a comprehensive review framework to identify areas for improvement and to establish a programme to review current policies and to introduce new policies where gaps existed. It was noted that the draft Housing Strategy and Homeless Strategy would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee. He drew attention to Appendix 1 that set out the high level strategic functions the Committee should be focusing on and suggested those that should be dealt with under delegated authority. He believed the proposal struck a balance allowing officers to carry out their day to day work. He referred to discussions with CMT since the report had been published and advised of an amendment to Appendix 1 of the Voids Policy, which would now be subject to resident engagement.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Yeates and seconded by Councillor Bence.

The Chair invited members to make comment or ask any questions.

It was proposed by Councillor Walsh that the Pets Policy should be considered by the Housing and Wellbeing Committee for approval when reviewed, due to the number of approaches members received from residents on this emotive matter, and not under delegated authority, this was seconded by Councillor Yeates and upon completion of a vote was declared CARRIED.

During the discussion congratulations were expressed to the Group Head of Housing for the steps being taken to review the housing policies and strategies. A member asked about keeping stock condition surveys up to date. Instances of blocked gutters were given which could cause mould issues in properties in the council's housing stock. The Group Head of Housing advised that the Asset Management Strategy would deal with the collection of stock condition data. To a certain extent gutter clearance would be included within either the Asset Management Policy or the Repairs Policy. He advised that the Housing Services budget for 2024-25 included an allocation for gutter clearance, which he confirmed would take place and therefore a separate policy was not considered necessary. In response to a suggestion that the Tenancy Audit and Tenancy Fraud should be considered by the Committee, he advised that this was a new policy setting out the procedures in respect of work that officers were already carrying out. If there were any issues with the work officers were carrying out then members would have the opportunity to request that a report is considered by the committee. The Interim Business Improvement Manager explained that the policy was listed as 'n/a' under Committee Date/Delegated Authority as it was not due for

renewal this year having recently been adopted by the Committee. In future the policies and strategies would be made available for viewing on the council's website. Responding to comments made concerning the voids policy, work was due to commence during quarter 1 and considered by the Committee on 16 June 2024, would now include resident engagement around the voids standards part of the policy. With regards to the issue of asbestos, he explained the approach to this existing policy and that the council was up to date with its compliance requirements over the past 12 to 18 months. As regards to the Council's stock condition survey due to take place during 2024-25, he confirmed each property would be assessed individually.

The Committee

RESOLVED

To approve the programme of policy reviews for 2024-25, as detailed in Appendix 1, which identifies those of most importance to bring through the committee process (high-level/strategic) and those which can be delivered through delegated authority to the Group Head of Housing (operational).

747. TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES ACTION PLAN

The Business Improvement Manager was invited to present the report to members. Details were given of the process and the actions taken following the Tenant Satisfaction Survey that included fortnightly review meetings to ensure progress was being made. Following today's meeting the Action Plan would be placed on the Council's website for residents to view. Details were provided of a session attended by 14 residents to answer questions concerning how well they were kept involved. Of the 135 responses received 12 were positive, 61 neutral and 61 negative. It was acknowledged that the responses were not a surprise as officers were aware that the Housing Service needed to improve its communication with tenants by getting back to the basics and carrying out the functions of the service well. The outcomes from the Survey and the way forward would be communicated to residents. It was anticipated that officers would be able to report to a future Committee meeting the improvements made.

The Committee welcomed the excellent work that had taken place which officers were commended.

The Committee noted the report.

748. PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR HOUSING SERVICES - QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE FOR THE PERIOD 1 OCTOBER TO 31 DECEMBER 2023

The Business Improvement Manager was invited to present the report. Since the previous report housing performance had improved in ten areas and declined in six areas. Gas compliance had reached its target of 100% placing it within the top quartile and electrical inspections had also improved and was now within the second quartile. Although average relet times had not improved as much as expected this was due to

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the impact of a number of long-term voids, now relet. It was confirmed that the current contractors were performing well. The Housing Options Team continued to be impacted by a high demand for services, which had increased waiting times for emergency and temporary accommodation. Arrears levels remained high and the Neighbourhood Services Manager was working with their team to improve recovery levels. With regards to housing fraud, eight properties had been recovered up to 31 December 2023. Higher cases of abandonment and non-occupation were being seen, which were thoroughly investigated by the Fraud Officer.

The Chair then invited members to make comments or ask any questions and congratulated offices on achieving 100% gas compliance. A member requested information on the right to buy scheme in respect of the number of properties sold under this scheme, the revenue raised and how it was spent. The Business Improvement Manager undertook to provide the information antidotally within future reports. It was noted that whilst there had been a steady number of RTB applications most were not reaching completion, which may be impacted by higher mortgage rates. In response to a question asking if there was a sign off process in place that allowed residents to provide feedback on work undertaken on their property, the Group Head of Housing advised that transactional surveys would be introduced to find out if residents were happy with the works undertaken. It was noted that due to completion of approximately 10,000 jobs each year a sample survey of the works would take place. A member asked that the voids figures be split into long-term and short-term figures. The Group Head of Housing advised that officers were able to provide this information, which was already collected for operational purposes. He explained that the KPI's methodology was constructed to enable benchmarking against other housing authorities. Whilst he would not suggest moving away from how this KPI was reported he advised that a report on the KPIs for 2024-25 would be considered at the next Committee meeting concerning target setting to ensure they drove improvements. He explained that officers were looking to move away from upper quartiles as a target and would instead set targets to drive improvements year on year. A question was asked with regards to housing fraud and the total value of savings to the Council and if the estimated cost to the Council, of £93,000, was the Government's recommended figure and if so could a more realistic figure be used? The Business Improvement Manager confirmed that the Council used the Government figure of £93k per property. She undertook to discuss with the Neighbourhood Services Manager to see if it was possible to provide a different consistent methodology other than that provided by the Government.

The Committee noted the improved performance in complaint response times during Quarter 3.

749. HOUSING SERVICES COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND DETERMINATIONS Q3

The Business Improvement Manager was invited to present the report on the performance measures for Housing Services during Quarter 3. There had been no Ombudsman complaint decisions received for this Quarter. Since the report had first been brought to this Committee, performance had increased each quarter with 83% of Stage 1 and 60% of Stage 2 complaints dealt with during Quarter 3. This upward trend

was continuing with 100% of Stage 1 and 92% of Stage 2 complaints had been dealt with on time during February 2024. The improvements had resulted from changes to processes, improvements to the monitoring and recording of complaints and having a dedicated complaints officer in the Housing Service. The report highlighted the work being done in respect of the volume of complaints received and address the root causes of these complaints. Officers were hopeful that the actions being taken to improve satisfaction and the decision to bring the call handling for repairs back in house will have a positive impact on the number of complaints received, although it should be noted that the impact will not be felt immediately.

The Chair invited members to make comment or ask any questions. A member asked if the number of unfounded complaints received was recorded? The Business Improvement Manager replied that details of those complaints not upheld were captured within the statistics.

The Committee expressed their gratitude to officers for the improvements that had been made to the figures.

The Committee noted the report.

750. RESPONSIVE REPAIRS CONTRACT UPDATE

The Chair advised members of the Committee that they should be mindful of the guidance given in the advisory note ahead of the meeting to members when discussing this item.

The Chair invited the Group Head of Housing to present the report, who provided an update following the termination of the agreement on 29 January 2024 to end the Council's current responsive repairs contract with Osborne Property Services Limited (OPSL). He explained that the parties involved agreed that the contract no longer served the best interests of both parties. He reminded members of the briefing session that had taken place for members of the Committee on the matter. Following the termination a risk register, business continuity plan and a stakeholder communications plan had been developed. Two letters had been sent out to the Council's tenants providing an update on the situation and sessions had taken place with those staff most affected by the changes. The Council had entered into demobilisation of the contract and was considering all the steps that needed to be taken and since the report had been written the council had entered into a tendering process for a new contractor had been completed through the dynamic purchasing system. The Council had reached the stage where it was about to award the contract. Further information on the contract with the new contractor would be provided to members once it had been agreed and further updates would be provided to the Committee once a contract had been entered into and throughout the length of the contract in terms of performance. The Council had entered into talks with OPSL regarding its TUPE obligations and advised that only one member of staff from OPSL would now transfer to the Council under, as the second staff member had left OPSL's employment, in respect of the Council taking call handling back in house. He report that additional resources had been put in place and approval had been given to employ temporary staff on a

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short-term basis call handling support to ensure a good service was provided to tenants due to start on 2 April 2024. He was confident that the Housing Service would be able to deliver a standard of service expected by residents.

The Chair invited questions and comments from the Committee and a question was asked about the schedule of rates for work carried out from the potential contractors. The Group Head of Housing advised that as the Council and OPSL were still in contract the Council was currently paying the rates set by OPSL. The impact of these costs in respect of a new contractor remained to be seen and advised that discussions were taking place regarding cost control to enable officers to manage and plan the responsive repairs budget to ensure budget repairs were dealt with in a more linear way. He was confident that the Housing service would be able to deliver services within the budget set for 2024-25.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

751. OUTSIDE BODIES - FEEDBACK FROM MEETINGS

The Committee received a report from Councillor Long giving an update on the West Sussex Health and Audit Social Care Committee.

752. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the work programme for 2023-24.

(The meeting concluded at 7.38 pm)