

HOUSING AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE

10 September 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Birch (Chair), Butcher (Vice-Chair), Bicknell, Mrs Cooper, Gunner [substituting for English], Haywood, Long, Pendleton, Wiltshire, Miss Worne [substituting for Batley] and Yeates

Councillors May and Tandy were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

175. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Batley and English.

176. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

177. MINUTES

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 June 2024, were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chair.

178. 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 presented at the meeting.

The Chair advised that agenda Item 13 – Pets Policy had been withdrawn from the agenda by officers.

179. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

180. INVITATION TO SUSSEX POLICE TO DISCUSS CONTRIBUTION TO THE SAFER ARUN PARTNERSHIP

The Chair welcomed Chief Inspector Keating-Jones and Inspector Wickings to the meeting and invited them to give a general presentation on how the Police are contributing to the Safer Arun Partnership Plan 2023-2025 and local policing priorities.

Ch Insp Keating-Jones gave a presentation covering his areas of responsibility. He referred to the policing priorities in the Chichester and Arun District, which broadly reflected those set by Police headquarters and the wider police priorities. These included delivery of an outstanding service to victims and the public, to catch criminals

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and protect our communities, and the strategies of the headquarters that filter into the District as an overarching Police strategy. Divisional and District priorities were predominantly centred around domestic abuse increases and providing better safeguards for victims. Prioritisation was also given to residential burglaries and robberies, as well as the protection of women and girls and to reduce violence against them, and to increase reporting where possible. This was carried out mindfully and ethically in line with the Police Race Action Plan and to protect minority and underrepresented communities.

Referring to District level policing, priorities were in place to solve the more inquisitive crimes, particularly surrounding theft from shops, tackling youth violence and anti-social behaviour. A number of operations were in place under the leadership Insp Wickings and would be addressed under the questions submitted by members in advance of the meeting. A pressing priority was managing the Police response to unauthorised traveller encampments, which were encroaching more on Arun. He drew attention to the Chichester District that had a disproportionately higher number of unauthorised encampments advising that a great deal of work was being done to facilitate their way of life and to utilise Police powers where appropriate. However, the potential unintended consequences of moving the encampments on means they could move into other council areas instead. Insp Wickings was involved in the detail of the operation and would be able to answer questions on the subject as well.

The Committee then asked Ch Insp Keating-Jones and Insp Wickings a number of questions that had been submitted in advance.

**Cllr Cooper:** My ward in Rustington has seen successive month on month rises in crime (or reported crime) up to June 2024.

- I have checked a few other wards and have seen a similar picture.
- Is this a consistent picture across most Arun Wards, and has there been a comparable increase in available PCSO or Officers to deal with this rise?
- Would it also be possible to receive rates on crimes solved/dealt with on a local level?

Insp Wickings explained that the Police had undertaken research of their own. Arun District has had a slight increase in crime of approximately 7% year on year, which was not significantly higher than expected. In relation to solved crimes, Rustington has had a slight reduction of 1%. From a Police perspective there had not been a significant increase particularly when taking into account the number of crimes being reported. Rustington currently had a 12% solved crime rate, which although this did not sound a high amount it was a 4.5% increase. The Police had seen an increase in solved crimes, which may be linked to a recruitment drive over the last two years. The number of PCSOs was now almost at full establishment levels and, unlike some other police authorities, had almost a full complement of police constables who were utilised to target those crimes across the District.

**Cllr Cooper:** Referring to the 7% year on year crime increase, it was asked if this was compound growth. Whilst this did not look good if looked at in graph form,

following the Police response that crime rates were reducing this was looked forward to. It was considered that the crime increase was significant even if the Police felt that it was not.

Insp Wickings recognised that members may view the increase as significant and explained that perception in the community was important to the Police. A District Engagement Officer was now in place who would communicate to the public the action the Police were taking and crime prevention advice to alleviate fear and perception around crimes and anti-social behaviour.

**Chair:** Recently we have seen travellers moving onto public places in Arun. There has been considerable concern from members of the public as they have witnessed shoplifting and been made to feel unsafe on the parks that they normally use. Local shops and cafes have had to close, as there has been criminal activity. What approach has the police used and have there been any charges brought against any of the travellers?

Insp Wickings explained that encampments were dealt with by Police on a case by case basis and was aware that in Arun there had recently been a number of them. Both Arun and Chichester districts had experienced the most in Sussex over a season. In taking action, any current criminality was taken into account. The neighbourhood policing teams had a good direction of response in terms of the course of action they could take including engagement with businesses. He was not aware of any prosecutions that had taken place concerning encampments. When reviewing the Police powers he looked at the crimes that had been reported and his experience was that often people are not willing to support a Police investigation or there was not enough evidence. He provided details of the work taking place with the Council that included a post season review, a councillor questionnaire, assessment of the sites and locations that had been impacted this season by encampments to see what improvements can be made. A briefing will be provided to all parish councils in March 2025, in preparation for the new season, to explain the powers available to the Police and the action they are able to take.

Ch Insp Keating-Jones advised that he was unsure of the number of successful prosecutions. There was a need to strike balance with the communities wishing to move the travellers on, either by using Police powers or their moving on voluntarily, and wanting to successfully prosecute, which was often difficult to achieve simultaneously. However, when the Police did arrest a suspect, other family members often stayed in the area until the outcome was known and if a suspect has already left the District when they were returned this could risk another incursion. Therefore, a decision needed to be made whether or not to prosecute a crime, such as shoplifting theft, which although important had to be weighed up with allowing the group to move on without causing further issues or delays. He was happy to be guided by the communities' expectations on the action they would like taken. He raised the importance of working across districts and advised that as District Commander he had powers to remove encampments but a consequence of this could result in moving the issues to another District. Under his powers he had recently removed an encampment from the Cattle Market Car Park, Chichester following meetings with Chichester District Council and

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residents. Following their eviction the travellers relocated to other places where he also used his powers before they had settled at the Bognor Regis Rugby Club. He suggested that both Arun and Chichester district councils could do more to work together to manage the communities concerns and ease the pressure on the decision makers to use their powers by working collaboratively. He suggested that traveller groups could be contained in a hard standing car park if they are causing relatively little community tensions and crime, to prevent them causing further issues elsewhere.

The Chair commented that this was an interesting point and that she was sure that officers would take the issues away to consider.

**Cllr Cooper:** Rustington has suffered (along with other wards) from unauthorised encampments. With many local authorities carrying out preventative measures, partly due to the successful workshops held by Insp Wickings, to secure their land, the result has been that vulnerable elderly communities who own leasehold properties (managed by an agent) found themselves confronted with Antisocial Behaviour and large clean up costs in the aftermath. I am aware of the difficulties faced by Police in using their powers in these circumstances, which I am aware stay as your responsibility. However, understanding the SAP's responsibility for community safety what measures can be taken by the Police and the statutory partners of the partnership to assist in these cases that decimate quiet neighbourhoods and scare the elderly? For her that had resulted in her being called out at 8.00pm because a group of people were worried that travellers would move onto land in her Ward after being moved on from other land twice previously. She had provided advice to the group, who were primarily elderly, on how to deter the travellers. Details were provided of the issues that had occurred at The Martlets flats, Rustington caused by an unauthorised encampment.

Insp Wickings replied that the pre-season review and post season briefing included, wherever possible, briefings for private companies and agencies that owned land. The biggest challenge was encouraging private landowners to take action against unauthorised encampments and their lack of understanding of the processes. However, if we keep moving them on their final location may be a less suitable than where they were previously located. He acknowledged that the issues that had occurred at The Martlets flats, Rustington had not been very pleasant for the residents concerned. Local authorities were the lead agency for unauthorised encampments with support provided from the Police but the biggest issue was to educate people and to manage their fears. Some of the communities' fears were potentially heightened due to media uproar as opposed to the facts of the situation.

**Cllr Cooper:** I have recently seen very disturbing reports of witnesses who have seen shops being "looted" or largescale theft and staff unable to challenge. Can you advise if stores such as Tesco's/Co-op and garages have been reporting this type of incident across the District? It was difficult to know if the reports about issues on social media had been reported to the Police. Alarming suggestions are that because nothing can be done, they are not reported? It would be helpful to understand Sussex Police's view on this type of crime and how it can stop the public perception of lawlessness?

Insp Wickings replied that social media sites, such as Facebook, created an issue for the Police. Often comments were made online about incidents and the lack of a Police response, but if these incidents are not reported then no Police action can be taken, as it was difficult to understand the full picture. It was understandable that residents felt the Police were not doing anything about the issues. He referred to the Felpham playing field encampment which had resulted in shop lifting at the Tesco Express. These shoplifting incidences had been reported only because PCSOs had visited Tesco Express to check up on staff wellbeing and were advised there had been some incidences but not reported. So there was a challenge around the lack of reporting and this will be balanced with the needs of the community and moving travellers on. If a crime has been reported the Police will look to deal with it where they can. In relation to general opinion around shoplifting, Operation Precinct in Barnham and Yapton was introduced following significant crime reports received from Tesco Express and the Co-op. The operation had significantly reduced crime with individuals prosecuted, issued cautions and community resolutions, some had gone to court and their anti-social behaviour powers had been used. Businesses had a responsibility to protect their staff and should be encouraged to report crime, as for a long time a number of businesses had not done so for varying reasons. The Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner was a supporter of the Project Pegasus business crime scheme.

Cllr Cooper gave her thanks to Insp Wickings for his comments. She ran a local Facebook page where she encouraged people who posted about incidents on social media to report them to the Police and encouraged the media to do so as well. Referring to the issue of the lack of prosecutions, so as not to encourage a traveller to stay in the locality, it was suggested that the Safer Arun Partnership could take up this matter.

Insp Wickings confirmed that the gypsy and traveller transit site located in Stane Street, Chichester was still in operation. However, as it was a small site the Police had taken a policy decision not to split up larger family groups when using their powers, due to the distress this sometimes caused. Even though no prosecutions had taken place, the public should still report crimes as when carrying out the rationale for deciding to prosecute or not he reviewed all the related crime reports to build an intelligence picture of the impact on the local community.

**Chair:** In Arun, there are frequent incidents of bike theft. What is the approach being taken to tackle this type of crime?

Insp Wickings provided details of the bike marking schemes periodically offered to the public. Where a high number of thefts had been identified, they were tailored to the location, such as train stations. He reported a 14% decrease in bike thefts in Arun on a rolling year by year basis. The Police would continue working with partners, including the Council, to see what can be done to reduce this crime further.

**Chair:** County lines and other activity by drug gangs have been a problem across the UK. Could you outline the work currently being done to counter illegal distribution on drugs?

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Insp Wickings replied that search warrants were issued if intelligence received about drug related activity met the threshold. Sussex Police took part in the County Lines Intensification week that targeted known locations, working with other police authorities including the Metropolitan Police. A hub intelligence meeting took place fortnightly where individuals known to the Police were discussed concerning County Lines, which could result in cuckooing. A vulnerable persons check list was in place that assisted the Police to look out for their welfare.

Ch Insp Keating-Jones added that the county lines work inherently included covert tactics carried out by specialist units, such as regional organised crime units and the Sussex Police Community Investigation Team. He advised it was not possible to share publicly the work taking place within the District due to the specialist nature of the inquiries but confirmed that work was happening on a daily basis. Actions from the meetings were carried out by the most appropriate team, either locally or by the Serious Crime Unit or similar for more specialised crimes.

**Chair:** Violence against women and girls is a serious problem across Arun, what support is given to victims of these crimes in Arun?

Ch Insp Keating-Jones acknowledged that this type of crime was clearly a serious issue and a priority taken seriously. However, there was not a serious problem in Arun and asked the questioner if there were issues that she was aware of.

The Chair clarified that her question arose from the general number of domestic abuse incidents released and whether action was taken and victims had the confidence to report them.

Ch Insp Keating-Jones advised that people should have the confidence to report incidents. All victims were offered support by Victim Services with enhanced specialist support offered for victims of violence and sexual offences. He provided details of the Sussex Police Violence and Aggression Against Girls and Women Working Group, where particular hot spots were highlighted and the correct action undertaken. The force was also led by nationally identified themes. In particular following the nighttime economy decline the focus has changed with less time spent dealing with altercations outside pubs. Attention now focused on other vulnerabilities such as men and women walking home on their own. Sussex Police intended to increase solved rates involving domestic abuse. Details of intelligence information concerning rape and sexual offences with hot spots assessed and case studies discussed and actioned accordingly at the fortnightly hub intelligence meeting.

Insp Wickings provided details of Operation Soteria that involved the Police working with a charity concerning sex for gain crimes, as well as liaising with Arun District Council. The Neighbourhood Policing Team had received training on this issue to help their understanding when dealing with these crimes. This crime often also involved violence against girls and women in that industry.

The Chair invited members to ask any further questions:

**Cllr Pendleton:** Referring to residential burglaries, from her own experience personally and from talking with residents there had been non-attendance and little focus on this type of crime. She asked for details of improvements that had been made and what residents' expectations should be.

Ch Insp Keating-Jones said he was surprised to hear this information and would be interested in seeing the reporting details. Sussex Police had changed its policy following a national direction a year ago and will now attend all incidents. He explained that crime scene investigation work and crime prevention advice received from a PCSO could also class as attendance. However, in theory a warrant officer should take a statement in every residential incidence, although it may not include garages and non-primary residence buildings. He would be interested to see where they had fallen down.

**Cllr Pendleton:** It was agreed she would send him the details that included CCTV footage and the Police correspondence received.

Ch Insp Keating-Jones added that all victims had the right to make a complaint about the level of service received. Complaints were dealt with by the public confidence team, as well as himself and Insp Wickings and any necessary action would be taken.

**Cllr Bicknell:** He referred to the large area of his ward being located within the South Downs National Park and reduction of the PCSO service to 0.5 of a post in that area. He had previously worked closely with the PCSOs but no longer had any contact details for them. He asked if there was any assistance, such as the facilitation of a forum for farmers and owners of open land that could be accessed by travellers in the future, to provide them with protection and guidance.

Insp Wickings provided details of the Police Rural Crime Team who worked with landowners concerning rural crime, which was very different to urban crime. He advised that the PSCO team was back up to full employment and undertook to provide Cllr Bicknell with the Team's contact details.

**Cllr Gunner:** He referred to the cyber enabled fraud figure for 2021 of £1 million and asked if there were more up to date figures available. He was aware that his residents were increasingly fearful of this type of crime, which was becoming more sophisticated. He asked for details of what the Police were doing to protect residents.

Insp Wickings advised that talks about scams were provided to the public. A member of the Cyber Crime team attended engagement events distributing leaflets and providing advice, which included to Police staff so they could also cascade information to the public. He encouraged members to let him or the PCSO Team know if they were aware of vulnerable groups of people, so that prevention advice could be arranged.

**Cllr Butcher:** We have heard about the focus on the issues in Littlehampton town centre, which have helped resolve the problems, but there were still a large number of incidents. He sought reassurance that the work carried out so far to reduce

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the number of incidents in towns would be continued and given time to have an impact. He felt the issues were underreported but hoped that the work taking place would give confidence to the public. This was a blot on the town centres which had led to people not feeling safe in those areas and that the policing of these areas should form a large part of making people feel safe again.

Insp Wickings advised that this work related to Operation Sonar and the work of Sergeant Georgia Hudson who had been very involved in the Littlehampton Action Group. The project was initially for one year, allowing enough time to start making a difference due to it being a deep seated issue. Improvements had been made with a number of individuals removed from the area and officers were prepared for a recent influx of unknowns into the area. There was no intention to remove the project, which was still working to its end goal of reducing crime and making people feel safe in that area.

Ch Insp Keating-Jones confirmed that the town centre project had his full support. He reiterated the importance of reporting incidents and the reasons why people may not do so. He advised that the new 101 system had reduced caller waiting times and the online reporting system was relatively simple to use. There had been a great deal of time and effort to ensure the contact centre performed well and people needed to be encouraged to report incidents so that action can be taken.

**Cllr Yeates:** She referred to Station Square located outside Bognor Regis train station, which was a hotspot for anti-social behaviour. She was aware of social media postings commenting that the role of the public spaces protection order (PSPO) was too general and not strong enough and asked if there was any more that could be done.

Insp Wickings agreed the issues were a perpetual problem in Bognor Regis. Sergeant Sam Fenner had started working with partners to find a solution to the issues that had increased again. The PSPO could play a key role but he would have to liaise with both the Arun Community Safety Officer and Community and Wellbeing Manager and look at the contents of the PSPO for the Bognor Regis area to understand the comments made that it was not effective.

The Chair thanked both Ch Insp Keating-Jones and Insp Wickings for attending the meeting and for answering the variety of questions, which she thought would instil confidence in the public for answering them.

#### 181. BUDGET 2025/26 PROCESS

The Chair invited the Interim Financial Services Manager and Deputy S151 Officer to present the report to members, which provided a summary of the Council's budget process for 2025/26. He highlighted the key dates set out in paragraph 3.7 and confirmed that member briefings would take place for each of the service committees during the process.

The Chair then invited questions and comments from members. Further information was requested regarding the consultation that would take place with



members to enable members to feed into the budget process. The Interim Financial Services Manager and Deputy S151 Officer advised that the consultation report before members set out the budget timetable with the member consultation arrangements to be determined over the next two months. In response to a question on the latest position regarding the setting up of a Budget Working Party, as detailed in paragraph 4.2, the production of a draft terms of reference, he undertook to provide an update on the latest position outside of the meeting.

The Committee noted the Budget process for 2024/25 as outlined in the report.

182. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 30 JUNE 2024

The Chair invited the Interim Financial Services Manager and Deputy S151 Officer to present the report to members, which outlined the Committee's forecast outturn against the 2024/25 budget.

He highlighted Table 1 that set out the 2024/25 revenue outturn forecast as at Quarter 1, which highlighted an overspend risk of £95k. The variances predominantly related to 1) Homeless and Housing Advice following an increase in homelessness with a net forecast overspend of £425k offset by the receipt of grant funding; and 2) Revenues and Benefits offset by a salary underspend. Both of these areas were being monitored and would be realigned accordingly once the 2024/25 process had started. Table 2, set out progress made against approved savings targets and to paragraph 3.6 detailing the reasons for the £150k shortfall. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) balance was forecast to increase the reserve to £1.5m by the end of the financial year and indicated an in-year surplus of over £300k. He drew attention to financial pressures, at Table 4, relating to Supervision and Management, which was offset by a large saving in the repairs and maintenance budget since the service was brought in-house. The HRA Capital Programme forecast an underspend of £15.224 million, mainly relating to stock development, sheltered accommodation and the carried over Decarbonisation project. The figures contained in the report were subject to audit and were monitored on a monthly basis.

The Chair then invited questions and comments from members.

- The 'Revised 2024/25 Budget' column for Table's 3, 4 and 5 should read 'Original 2024/25 Budget'.
- Responding to a comment about the decarbonisation project, the Interim Financial Services Manager and Deputy S151 Officer the saving of £3 million was due to the budget not yet being spent.
- In response to a question concerning issues compounded by the unknowns from enhanced prisoner release schemes, the Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities replied that two out of three individuals had presented themselves. He undertook to find out the expected issues and additional numbers that the Council expected to face.
- Details were requested concerning the salary underspend and its relationship with the variants detailed within the HRA account. The Interim Financial Services Manager and Deputy S151 Officer advised these were not related

- and that the £335k revenues and benefits general fund underspend related to a one-off saving due to staff vacancies.
- Responding to clarification sought concerning the Quarter 1 slippage forecast in the HRA Capital Programme, the Interim Financial Services Manager and Deputy S151 Officer explained the figures were distorted by the previous year's slippage of £9m, the details of which were set out in the 2024/25 final outturn. The revised areas included stock development, sheltered accommodation and decarbonisation. The Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities referred to a review of sheltered housing member briefing held, where members were advised that although funding was available, as yet no schemes were available to come forward. Since the briefing, officers had been working on the outcomes, including the future of the Flaxmean House sheltered accommodation site. The decarbonisation slippage resulted from an unsuccessful funding bid to the social housing decarbonisation fund. Guidelines were currently awaited concerning stage three of the funding, which would be initialised if match funding was obtained.
  - A member remained concerned that each year the HRA Capital and the General Fund Capital programmes both included capital slippage, which did not reflect well on how the Council managed its budgets. It was requested that next year's budget should be more realistic and portray what the Council actually intended to provide and was aiming for.
  - The Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities provided an update on the latest position since the repairs and maintenance service was brought in-house. The new service was having a positive impact on the HRA account, along with capital treatment and service improvement initiations. Work was being undertaken to improve the service quality, which was going well with tenant satisfaction significantly improved. However, there was still a lot of work to do with pressures on the mobilisation of the new contract and some unexpected costs due to the timescale that officers had worked to.
  - A member thanked officers for providing the sheltered accommodation member briefing. Concern was expressed as to the Council's ability to manage its sheltered accommodation in terms of its Capital expenditure. It was disappointing that no schemes were coming forward, but acknowledged the work members were aware was taking place and reassurance was sought that these schemes would be moving forward in the near future. The Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities replied that the next steps were to commission updated feasibility studies and a detailed re-design scheme for Flaxmean House. He undertook to report back to the Committee with details of the timescales for the Flaxman House scheme.
  - The Interim Financial Services Manager and Deputy S151 Officer responded to a question concerning the supervision and management budget and the number of contracts involved and if stock development management was included. He advised that of the £947k overspend forecast at Quarter one, £500k was due to the cost of insourcing the repairs contract, including the cost of bringing TUPE staff into the service, and would be offset by an anticipated net saving of 700k. The Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities added that the supervision and management budget related to staffing across

the housing service in respect of HRA services and related expenditure budgets not otherwise itemised at table 4.

- Following a question regarding the TUPE process the Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities advised that the housing maintenance operatives were transferred into Arun's inhouse service, as per the legal agreement that provided a legal obligation. Those operatives were working in a different way resulting in less complaints being received.

The Committee noted the report.

183. DRAFT FINAL OUTTURN - 2023/24

The Chair invited Jason Stott, Interim Financial Services Manager and Deputy S151 Officer to present the report, setting out the draft final outturn position for the 2023/24 financial year, to members.

He drew attention to the Revenue Budget at Table 1 of the report that showed the movement from the forecast at Quarter 3 and the final outturn at Quarter 4. The forecast overspend of £158k against the budget of £5.937m had improved resulting in a variance of £20k. Due to the £133k homelessness temporary accommodation provision increase and revenues and benefits salaries reduced by £239k, as well as additional grants contributing, subject to audit. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturn 2023/24 position showed it was lower than forecast and a reserve opening balance of £608k. Whilst there had been an income overachievement for a number of service areas there were still significant expenditure pressures that had resulted in the original targets not being met. However, the HRA account was moving in the right direction with a forecasted increase to £1,471k expected by the end of 2024/25. The HRA Capital Programme 2023/24 slippage mainly related to stock development, decarbonisation, and sheltered accommodation. The home improvements and energy efficiency overspending was due to a backlog being addressed and statutory requirements to undertake some types of work.

The Chair invited questions and comments from members. A member commented on the high number of unbudgeted write-offs. The Interim Assistant Chief Financial Officer and S151 Officer explained the improved situation, following built up write-offs of £370K had enabled £270k to be released back into the HRA account. A member referred to the large amount of depreciation at Table 3 and asked how significantly adverse the final outturn was since first budgeted. He replied that this depreciation mostly related to repairs and maintenance capital spending with the £1.5m overspend resulting in a knock-on impact for depreciation. He drew attention to this financial year's pressure on depreciation and advised that officers held fortnightly meetings to reduce this amount, but still had some more work to do. Responding to clarification sought regarding write-offs, previously the unspent funds from the write-offs budget were added to a separate balance sheet providing a separate housing reserve. Responding to a question concerning sheltered accommodation voids the Group Head Of Housing, Wellbeing And Communities confirmed these were included in the long-term void losses.

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The Committee noted the report.

184. HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UPDATE – CIVICA CX HOUSING AND ABRITAS

The Chair invited the Business Improvement Manager to present the report to members, which provided an update on the go live of Civica CX Housing and the Arbitas choice based lettings system, as well as an update on the commencement of Phase 2. The internal and external project teams had done a good job in implementing Phase 1, which had gone smoothly with staff doing well to pick up the new system and who were now embedded in the new ways of working. The contractor and the case and task online portals go live day on 3 June 2024 went smoothly with limited issues and support provided for users of the system.

Details were provided of the benefits that included improved processing times, workflow tasks managed within the system resulting in a move away from spreadsheets and manual processes, and a contractor portal to modernise work with external contractors. The tenant portal would be rolled out at the end of autumn, delivering improved repairs reporting. The Housing Options Team had completed all re-registration applications ahead of the first bidding cycle and had gone well with customers using the Arun homefinder portal to bid on properties as they became available. Phase 2 was underway and reference was made to paragraph 4.10.1 of the report that set out the included modules.

The Chair invited questions and comments from members. A member expressed concerns that the budget for the Civica project had tripled after previously being advised that no extra budget was required and the project would be completed on time. He referred to a report considered by the Housing and Wellbeing Committee on 15 June 2022 stating that Phase 1 would be complete by August 2023 and Phase 2 by May 2024. Information was requested on the further budget required and the revised timings. In response the Business Improvement Manager advised that the additional budget for 2025/26 would enable Phase 2 to go live during Summer 2025. A report considered by this Committee during 2023 had set out the reasons for the Phase 1 project slippage, due to the asset management module not being ready for implementation during Phase 1. She undertook to provide details of the figures regarding the extra budget required, outside of the meeting.

A comment was made that it was pleasing to see a better management system and to see its implementation proceeding. Responding to a question concerning the possibility of a system failure, the Business Improvement Manager explained that Civica was a Cloud system hosted off site with business continuity planning in place with back-ups for services. Complaints handling would be built into a case management system. Task Pass had enabled staff to use step-by-step processes with housing staff given access to complaints, voids and anti-social behaviour information in a move to a full case and task-based system for all workflows. Residents were encouraged to use the online Portal with those without online access still having the facility to report repairs by telephone or face to face instead. Digital skills classes would be arranged to assist residents to access the portal. In response to a question about the digital skills work

undertaken by libraries, it was advised that the Community Wellbeing Manager was due to attend a meeting with West Sussex County Council to discuss digital inclusion and that the Council work with other partners.

It was advised that external contractors have been given sign in access to the External Contractor Portal, where they received their work orders. Details were provided of the out of hours service where it was explained that work orders were raised following calls made but the external contractors would not necessarily be accessing the Portal, as it would predominately be the In-house Team undertaking the works using the Council's In-house scheduling system. Previous issues had been resolved as call handling was now fully undertaken by Arun District Council staff who raise jobs directly with the night team.

With the agreement of the Committee Councillor Tandy addressed the Committee. He referred to digital literacy and the portal which would bring all services under one place. There was often a correlation amongst council housing and deprivation in terms of digital literacy and he asked if the Housing Team had capacity to offer training to councillors to encourage residents to use the Portal. The Business Improvement Manager would provide members with videos and guides, developed by the Resident and Engagement Manager, which would also be placed on the council's website.

#### The Committee

2.1.1 Noted the contents of the report.

2.1.2 Noted the timeline for Phase 2 of Civica CX asset management and Abrisas.

#### 185. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2024-2029

The Chair invited the Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities to present the report to members. The report provided the results of the public consultation that had taken place from 8 July 2024 to 4 August 2024 following approval by the Committee. The consultation had included a stakeholder event, parish and district councillor event and two public drop-in events, unfortunately only attended by one person. An online survey had taken place throughout the consultation, receiving 50 responses. Details of the consultation responses were provided at Appendix 1, resulting in minimal changes, one of which was the introduction of an objective to develop a plan for acquisitions and disposals to increase the council's stock and temporary accommodation.

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

The Chair invited members to ask questions or make comments. A member commented that this was an essential piece of work thanking officers for the effort that had gone into producing the Strategy. Whilst it was acknowledged that there were complex reasons for the delays, it was hoped that the issues raised would be taken

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forward and not forgotten. Reference was made to the Strategy's vision to reduce homelessness and the matter that some people saw homelessness as a way of life, which officers should note, as a lifestyle someone did not agree with should not be imposed on them. Referring to the officer explanatory comments "The necessity of drug and alcohol support services, alongside mental health funding is reiterated." to the action, Developing more permanent solutions to homelessness and rough sleeping, it was important that the Council did not lose sight of these findings.

In response to the thanks expressed by members for the work undertaken, the Group Head of Housing, Communities and Wellbeing advised that the to the thanks were due to the Business Improvement Manager and the Housing Options Manager for project managing the process.

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the outputs of the public consultation, and the amendments made to the final strategy as a result.
- 2.2 It is recommended that the Housing & Wellbeing Committee grant delegated authority to the Head of Housing Wellbeing & Communities to make minor amendments to approve the final version of the Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024-2029.

186. HOUSING STRATEGY 2024-2029

The Chair invited the Business Improvement Manager to present the report to members. The report provided details of the consultation undertaken with the Council's statutory partners following the Committee's approval at its previous meeting and set out the proposed changes to the Housing Strategy 2024-2024.

The recommendations were then proposed by Councillor Yeates and seconded by Councillor Butcher.

The Chair invited members to ask questions or make comments. A comment was made that the Strategy needed to be translated into policies to drive the Council's planning policy. It was suggested that the Strategy as a lever that would lead to the creation of homes in the right areas that needed affordable homes. A member referred to the difficulty in understanding if there was a demand for all the different types of retirement flats. Were the people expected to move into these flats the elderly living in the District, or would they be from outside the District due to the large numbers being developed without any controls. There was concern that affordable housing schemes were not included in retirement flat developments and that the Council did not receive CIL monies for this provision and was not convinced that the numbers being developed were required. It was commented that the recent legislation introduced concerning rent was likely to result in less people wanting to rent a home. Officers were thanked for the work undertaken in producing the Strategy, which was a good starting point. The

Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities thanked members for their comments advising that officers also saw the Strategy as a starting point, providing a framework for more detailed discussions on some of the issues the Council was facing.

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 2.1 Adopt the final version of the Council's Housing Strategy for the period 2024-2029
- 2.2 Give delegated authority to the Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities to make minor changes to the strategy and any amendments necessary to reflect legislative and regulatory changes.

187. PETS POLICY

This item was withdrawn by officers as advised by the Chair at the beginning of the meeting.

It was agreed that a member round table discussion would take place with members to express their views on the Pets Policy before being considered for adoption by the Committee.

188. HOUSING SERVICES COMPLAINTS PERFORMANCE AND DETERMINATIONS Q1

The Chair invited the Business Improvement Manager to introduce the report to members. Although response times during Quarter 1 had slightly decreased they remained within target levels and compared well with similar sized local housing authorities. Officers continued to take steps to ensure response times remained high. Following changes made to how the housing repairs service was delivered, complaints had decreased when compared to Quarter 1 2023. Officers continued to identify trends and root causes to address any issues. There had been an increase in staff complaints this quarter, primarily surrounding training and communication with action being taken to address this issue. It was noted that the Council had received more compliments than complaints this Quarter and that complaint satisfaction was at 53%, almost 20% more than other similar sized local authorities.

The Chair invited members to ask questions or to make comments. A member thanked officers for the report and was pleased to see that complaints were heading the right direction.

The Committee noted the report.

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189. PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR HOUSING SERVICES – QUARTER 1  
PERFORMANCE FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2024

The Chair invited the Business Improvement Manager to introduce the report, which set out the performance of Housing Services during Quarter 1, to members. It was explained that compared to the previous Quarter, seven performance measures had improved and seven had declined, with three of the declining measures remaining within target. Referring to overall repairs' satisfaction, this was high with May at 96% and June 2024 at 88% following the introduction of the In-house Team and remained at over 90%. However satisfaction had reduced in relation to other external contractors. Arrears had increased this quarter from 4.45% to 6.42%, partially attributed to an increase in June, impacted by IT system downtime due to the implementation of Civica. Officers would continue to focus their efforts on this area to deliver improvements during Quarter 2. The number of nightly paid emergency accommodation had either reduced or remained static and whilst the number of temporary accommodation stays had increased they remained below the West Sussex average. Performance in dealing with housing fraud activity, set out at appendix 2, remained high with four properties recovered during Quarter 1.

The Chair invited members to make comments or ask any questions. A member congratulated officers in achieving 96% satisfaction for overall repairs satisfaction during May.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

190. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2022-2026 – QUARTER 1  
PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2024 TO 30 JUNE  
2024

The Chair invited the Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities to introduce the report to members. An important new Indicator 'CP43 - Overall Tenant Satisfaction' had been included following a change in the methodology and frequency of data collection.

The Chair invited members to make comments or ask questions. The Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities confirmed that the tenant satisfaction survey was undertaken quarterly and continual transactional surveys for housing services were undertaken throughout the year on customer experience.

Members noted the report.

191. OUTSIDE BODIES - FEEDBACK

The Committee noted the report from Councillor Birch on the Police and Crime Panel.

Councillor Long advised that she would provide a report on the West Sussex County Council Adult Social Care Committee to the next meeting.



192. WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Head of Housing, Wellbeing and Communities advised of the following changes to the Work Programme 2024/25:

- Introductory Tenancy Policy and Tenancy & Lettings Policy: Moved from November 2024 to February 2025
- HRA Business Plan Update: Moved from November 2024 to February 2025
- ASB Policy: Moved from November 2024 to March 2025

These reports would now be considered next year, following consideration of national Government announcements due to take place at the end of October 2024 relating to housing, which could lead to a longer-term rent settlement in the budget. He explained that the Housing Service was undertaking an ambitious project and reports would only be brought to Committee for consideration following a robust review.

Members then noted the work programme for 2024/25.

(The meeting concluded at 8.06 pm)