

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

6 February 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bennett (Chairman), Coster (Vice-Chair), Bicknell, B Blanchard-Cooper (Substitute for C Blanchard-Cooper), Chapman, Charles, Mrs Catterson, Hughes, Mrs Pendleton and Ms Thurston

Apologies: Councillors Mrs Cooper and Mrs Haywood

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

10. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2019 were approved as a correct record by the Working Group and signed by the Chairman.

11. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2019

The Group Head of Policy advised the Working Group that as part of the Council's performance framework the annual Residents Satisfaction Survey had been undertaken. 1800 residents had been randomly selected and sent the questionnaire and 579 had been returned, a 32% response rate. The results for 2019 had been grouped slightly differently based on feedback from Members in previous years, thus allowing for a more local picture to be captured from the results.

The report had been broken in to two sections; Living in Arun District and Customer Satisfaction with the Council and its services. It confirmed that the overall satisfaction levels were high, with 80% residents saying that they were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their local area, this is on par with the Local Government Association (LGA) national survey which had satisfaction levels of 81%. The data suggests that those who are satisfied with the cleanliness of the District were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the area as a place to live.

66% of residents were satisfied with the way that Arun District Council runs the things they are responsible for, this result was above the LGA survey result of 61% set by the LGA. There was some variation by area with Eastern residents saying they were considerably more satisfied than those living in the West of the District.

A number of questions and points were raised by Members of the Working Group and these have been summarised below:

- Discussion was had relating to the results from the Downland area as it showed a significant decrease in its results, Members gave consideration to the number of planning decisions that had recently been made in the area and could this have influenced the result. It was confirmed that

Planning decisions for this area were not made by Arun District Council however there could be confusion over the clarity of this for residents.

- Concern was raised regarding litter and fly tipping along the A27, feedback from a Member was that there was seemingly no clear ownership between Arun District Council (ADC), WSCC or Highways on who should be responsible for clearing the rubbish up. It was confirmed by the Chairman and the Director of Services that Arun District Council was not responsible for major trunk roads like the A27, the responsibility fell with Highways England.
- Concern was raised that the survey sent out may not have been specific enough in terms of ensuring that residents really understood what ADC does and was responsible for, this could then affect the how residents would answer their survey. The Group Head of Policy confirmed that a list of services provided by ADC was provided at the front of the survey for clarity.
- Several comments raised on Community Cohesion with discussion around if there was any correlation between the Western Area's highlighted issue most commonly identified as drug misuse. Members were directed to make contact with the Anti-Social Behaviour team at ADC for information on what steps were in place and would be taken to address these issues.

The Working Group noted the report.

12. ASBESTOS POLICY & MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Repairs & Maintenance Manager advised the Working Group that as a landlord of social housing Arun District Council (ADC) was responsible for managing the maintenance and repairs of our housing stock and that it included managing asbestos in each property as set out in the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. ADC's proposed Policy and management plan would ensure that the Council was able to meet the regulations and requirements.

A full discussion took place based on the report and update provided by the Repairs & Maintenance Manager and the Group Head of Residential Services. The Chairman thanked the team for their continued hard work.

The Working Group

RECOMMEND TO CABINET - That:

1. the Asbestos Policy 2020 be adopted
2. the Asbestos Management Plan be adopted
3. give delegated authority to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services to make minor changes to the policy and plan

13. TENANCY & LETTINGS POLICY

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised the Working Group that Tenancy and Lettings Policy presented to them was an amalgamation of the previous Tenancy Policy 2012 and Introductory Tenancy Policy 2016. The updated policy contained one main change, that being it would end the use of fixed term tenancies and reverts to the granting of secure tenancies. When it was assessed if there would be any disadvantages to not using fixed term tenancies, the Council considered how it would deal with under occupation, rent arrears and anti-social behaviour and it was satisfied that it had the right mechanisms in place to manage each of these scenarios in a timely manner avoiding the need to wait until the end of a fixed term for issues to be dealt with.

The main driver for the introduction of flexible fixed term tenancies was to make better use of the housing stock. 350 flexible tenancies have been issued since 2013, of which 155 had been on a 5-year fixed term and 196 on a 10-year fixed term. 22 of the 5-year fixed term had expired and these had now been extended by another 5 years. No tenancy had been brought to an end. The review process for each tenancy created a significant amount of work for officers and is not providing the benefits originally thought. Each tenancy that had been reviewed was estimated to take on average 3.5 hours of officer time.

A full discussion was had by the Working Group where it was agreed the amount of officer time spent on the tenancy reviews had been an extortionate amount of time. Members were also in agreement that the policy if adopted by Council would help raise satisfaction amongst tenants and improve their confidence in the ability of this Council to get things done.

The Working Group

RECOMMEND TO CABINET - That:

1. the Tenancy & Letting Policy April 2020 be adopted
2. all current flexible tenancies are converted to secure lifetime tenancies from April 2020
3. delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services to make minor changes to the policy.

14. PETS POLICY

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised the Working Group that the report requests that they make a recommendation to Cabinet to approve a Pets Policy in respect of the management of Council tenancies. As a landlord of social housing ADC is responsible for ensuring that pets kept in its properties are managed responsibly to ensure they do not cause a nuisance to other residents and or do not cause damage to its homes. The introduction of this policy would provide clear controls and guidance to residents and staff to prevent irresponsible pet ownership, that

historically had resulted in suffering to animals, nuisance to neighbours and damage to properties. As a Council it was recognised that there are benefits to keeping a pet, in particular for residents who have mental health issues, however there was a need to ensure that this was balanced with the rights of all residents to live in a peaceful environment.

A full debate was had by the Working Group, a summary of the points made are detailed below;

- Clarification was sought about how decisions would be made if the policy was adopted and would decisions be made retrospectively. It was confirmed that decisions would not be made retrospectively. For new tenants making a request, they would need to submit an application in writing. For existing tenants, the Council would continue to work on a reactive basis to any complaints made, however all tenants would be issued with the Policy should it be adopted.
- It was confirmed that should the policy be adopted that tenancy audits would be completed in order to help the Council record who and where there were pets being housed. It was felt that this way it would promote a working relationship with the Council and its tenants to work together, in particular should circumstance have found that a property had, had any damage caused by the pet.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager and the Group Head of Residential Services explained to the Working Group that each case would be dealt with based on individual circumstances. This policy was a starting point to enable the Council to manage any issues that were presented moving forward as well as ensuring that the Council was able to protect its housing stock where required.

There was some favour from Members to make an amendment to the wording set out in paragraph 4.5 (What we consider suitable in our properties) the second bullet point which currently reads as set out below;

“Flats, or Maisonettes, without private gardens; we will not give permission for cats and dogs. We may consider giving permission for smaller domestic pets in cages.”

It was felt by some that, not allowing residents without a private garden the ability to have a small cat or dog was unfair and should be reconsidered. The Group Head of Residential Services explained that whilst she understood where the Members concern was coming from in particular to elderly residents, that the Council needed to start somewhere in managing issues that were ongoing and could arise in the future. She also advised Members that she would be happy to relook at the wording for this point as well as reconfirming that each individuals' circumstances would be considered.

Councillor Mrs Pendleton put forward a proposal to change the wording at paragraph 4.5 set out below additions are shown in *italics* and deletions are shown using ~~strikethrough~~;

Flats, or Maisonettes, without private gardens; we ~~will not~~ *may* give permission for a domestic cats and dogs *depending on circumstances*. ~~We may consider giving permission for smaller domestic pets in cages."~~

This amendment was seconded by Councillor B Blanchard-Cooper.

On this being put to the vote it was declared LOST.

The Working Group therefore

RECOMMEND TO CABINET - That:

1. the Pets Policy April 2020 be adopted
2. delated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services to make minor changes to the policy.

15. EMPTY HOMES UPDATE

The Group Head of Technical Services reminded the Members that on 4 January 2018 this Working Group recommended to Cabinet that the Empty Homes Strategy 2018-2023 be adopted and today he was updating them on the work and achievements since the Strategy had been adopted by the Council. He confirmed that since 2014 the New Homes Bonus (NHB) had brought in around £1.6 million for the Council associated with the reoccupation of empty homes, in 2017/18 changes to the way the NHB was awarded saw a reduction in the amount of money earned by reducing the reward from 6 years to 4 years. Therefore, the work that the Empty Homes Officer carried out contributes to the amount of NHB the Council receives.

A full discussion was had by Members and consensus was that the team should be commended for their work. It was also discussed that would the Empty Homes Strategy include commercial buildings, the Group Head of Technical Services confirmed that the strategy was focused on residential properties rather than commercial units. However, where residential properties that comprise of commercial units (flats above shops) there had been examples of interventions by the Council resulting in refurbishment of the whole building, including the conversion of the empty commercial elements.

The Working Group noted the update on the empty homes work and;

RECOMMEND TO CABINET - That;

1. the updated Enforced Sale Procedure be adopted.
2. delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Technical Services to make changes to the Enforced Sale Procedure, with a review to take place by the end of 2022.

3. Approval of the use of existing revenue funds identified below for Empty Homes Assistance Programme with any unspent funds to be Earmarked at the end of the financial year:
 - a. £66k currently earmarked for Empty Homes
 - b. unspent receipts from discretionary housing grants repayments (current balance £20k)
 - c. unspent receipts up to £44k from disability facilities grant repayments

16. ENERGY EFFICIENCY STRATEGY

The Group Head of Technical Services advised the Working Group that the current trend expected that energy usage would rise, not fall, so tackling this trend was a challenge for the Council. The strategy addressed key areas to enable the Council to ensure that it was investing in the future and putting energy efficiency and support for those in fuel poverty at the heart of its decision making. This had also been supported by the recently adopted Council Strategic Targets, one of which was Climate and Environment Change.

Members of the Working Group were in agreement with the report and update from the Group Head of Technical Services therefore:

The Working Group

RECOMMEND TO CABINET - That:

1. The Energy Efficiency and fuel poverty strategy 2020-2025 be adopted.

17. REPORT BACK FROM CABINET/FULL COUNCIL

There were no items.

18. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020

The Working Group noted the updated programme.

(The meeting concluded at 20:23pm)