

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

5 November 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bennett (Chairman), Mrs Pendleton (Vice-Chair), Bicknell, Mrs Cooper, Mrs Haywood, Hughes and Ms Thurston

Apologies: None

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

11. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2020 were approved as a correct record by the Working Group and will be signed by the Chairman as soon as practicably possible.

12. ADDITIONAL AND SELECTIVE LICENSING SCHEMES FOR HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION

The Group Head of Technical Services advised Members of the Working Group that the report presented to them was as a result of a motion that was approved at the Full Council Meeting on 25 February 2020 that requested Officers to explore what options existed to introduce further controls on the number and quality of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). He advised that the report set out options to introduce an additional licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation or a selective licensing scheme for the private rented sector as a means of addressing the quality of houses in multiple occupation. A separate report is being taken to Development Control Committee in relation to the potential controls for managing the quantity of HMOs. The Principal Environmental Officer then drew members attention to the following points contained within the report:

- Currently operate a mandatory Licensing scheme that is shared nationally across England that currently works with the criteria of:
 - 5 or more people sharing facilities
 - ensuring the licence holder is a fit and proper person
 - property inspected to ensure it meets minimum standards
 - the licence is up to maximum of 5 years at a time
- Additional Licensing schemes could be brought in where a local authority is aware that there are significant problems. The authority would need to expand the description of HMO's to be broader. The regime would be similar, and the advantages are outlined within the report it would enable us to inspect properties ensuring that they are brought up to standard and puts the onus on the landlord.

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- If we were to take this route there would be a 10-week consultation period
- Selective licensing scheme would apply to the entire private rented sector not just HMOs and applies to areas with significant issues such as migration, high levels of deprivation or an increase in crime rates, these issues would need to be evidenced in these areas in order to introduce this option. If such a scheme was to apply to the entire district, then it would require approval from the secretary of state. The Selective licensing scheme does have a larger scope.

The Group head then reminded Members that funding was required to research, if there was sufficient evidence of the criteria being met for either an Additional Licensing or Selective Licensing.

The Chairman then invited questions from Members of the Working Group a summary of the points raised is detailed below:

- Why had there not been more frequent inspections since 2012? It was explained that since 2012 proactive inspections of the private rented sector had only taken place in licensed HMOs, though other inspections had been undertaken where problems had been brought to the attention of the Council.
- Are there other seaside towns we could share best practices with? It was confirmed that Arun had been in contact with Brighton and Hove Council and could link up with them to learn more about their best practice process, however it was also highlighted that every district was different and while lessons could definitely be learnt the difference between districts would mean a bespoke approach.
- Were Officers confident that £20,000 would make a difference to the residents of Arun district? It was explained that there was no certainty that the research would conclude that the criteria to introduce either licensing regime had been met. However, if the criteria was met and the Council decided to introduce one of the licensing regimes, there would be significant benefit. The main benefit is that the licensing regime would allow the resourcing of an expanded inspection programme that would identify deficiencies in the quality/standard of housing, enabling the Council to require landlords to rectify.
- Could the extra cost of overseeing HMO's be recouped from landlords as they would be making a financial advantage from renting out their properties in this way? It was confirmed that, that would be the intention by bringing in the licensing regime.
- It was confirmed that there were a several different channels in which complaints regarding anti-social behaviour are received inclusive of work with the Community Team at Arun. It was hoped that from the research carried out it would be able to pinpoint much more clearly the root cause of these issues and the ability to evidence and track these would ultimately help the residents of Arun District.
- It was confirmed that the modelling would inform whether either regime criteria would be met and that the Council was not preferencing one over the other at this time.

The Working Group RECOMMEND THAT CABINET:

- 1) Agree officers continue to research and gather further evidence to help support whether additional HMO licensing (Housing Act 2004, s.56-60) or selective licensing of the private rented sector (Housing Act 2004, s.80-84) is justified. And;
- 2) Ask Full Council approves a supplementary estimate of up to £20,000 (which equates to a band D equivalent of £0.32) to commission the services and expertise to undertake the appropriate research and collation of data in order to support whether additional HMO Licensing or selective licensing of the private rented sector is justified.

13. CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY

The Group Head of Neighbourhood Services provided Members of the Working Party with an overview of his report. It was explained that the strategy also included the addition of a customer charter. He then highlighted that a reoccurring theme throughout the strategy was the importance of obtaining and acting on feedback to drive the strategy forward. An action plan had been included to help embed the strategy. He then explained that the pandemic had really highlighted the importance and significance of the role that a digital service provides for customers. In Summing up he advised Members that consultation had been sought with both senior management and staff and that the next step was to take the strategy to Cabinet once the draft had been finalised.

The Working Group noted the contents of the report.

14. WATER HYGIENE POLICY & MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Group Head of Residential Services provided Members with an overview of her report. She explained that the Water Hygiene Policy had been compiled to ensure that the Council could comply with regulations and manage any risks for all its properties as well as clearly setting out the Councils responsibilities and its Contractors responsibilities.

The Chairman then invited comments from Members and a summary of key points raised is below:

- It was advised that an electrical safety policy would be brought to the Working Group in February 2021 and it was confirmed that a specialist contractor was used to identify any risks and undertake work. Some further questions were asked in relation to the removal of lead piping being removed and replaced with plastic. Advice was given that this level of detail is covered within the terms and conditions during the procurement of the contractor and would be documented within their risk assessments which would be separate from the policy.

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- It was asked if anyone had contracted any of the illnesses detailed within the policy and could it be proven that it was from the water. It was confirmed that there had certainly not been any cases during the Group Head of Residential Services time with the Council, she further explained that weekly and monthly testing was completed by contractors and so the Council would be aware very quickly should there be an outbreak, that would require action to be taken.

The Working Group RECOMMEND TO CABINET that:

- 2) the Water Safety Policy 2020 be adopted
- 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 and plan

15. GAS SAFETY POLICY & MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Group Head of Residential Services provided Members of the Working Group with an overview of her report. It was explained that the policy had been compiled to ensure that the Council could comply with the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England and that the request of the Working Group was for them to recommend to Cabinet this policy for approval to allow managers to implement with Council contractors and staff.

The Chairman then invited comments from Members where it was discussed that under section 2.5 of the policy it referred to monitors to be fitted by 2021 and could that be extended to also dictate that batteries would be changed on an annual basis. Also, at section 2.6 it states that the Council would remove and isolate gas fires by December 2021, the question was asked if this meant all gas fires would be removed? It was confirmed that the Group Head of Residential Services would need to check but it was her understanding that all gas fires would be removed and in reference to the request to document an annual change for batteries that it was already included in the safety checks.

The Chairman then put forward a proposal which was seconded for the wording for part 2 of the recommendation to be amended to read as:

- 2) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the H&CS Working Group to make minor changes to the policy

After a short discussion this proposal was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

The Working Group then returned to the substantive recommendation and RECOMMEND TO CABINET that:

- 1) The Gas Safety Policy October 2020 be approved
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Residential Services and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the H&CS Working Group to make minor changes to the policy

16. REPORT BACK FROM CABINET/FULL COUNCIL

The Chairman confirmed that the recommendations made at the Working Groups last meeting on 21 July 2020, were approved by Cabinet at their meeting on 21 September 2020.

The working Group noted this update.

17. WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021

The Group Head of Residential Services presented the work programme to Members advising that the electrical safety policy and the repairs policy would be brought to the Working Group in February 2021. Further to this she advised that the Income Recovery Policy was subject to a corporate review due to the breathing space policy that has been recently introduced.

The Working Group noted the update.

(The meeting concluded at 6.58 pm)