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Subject to approval at the next Housing & Customer Services Working Group meeting

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HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

16 March 2021 at 6.00 pm

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

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

Apologies: Councillors Mrs Catterson and Goodheart

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

25. MINUTES

The minutes of the Housing and Customer Services Working Group meeting held on 4 February 2021 were approved.

26. REPAIRS HANDBOOK

The Business Improvement Manager provided members with an overview of her a report. She then drew members attention to the Repairs Handbook being a guide to tenants outlining common repair issues and clarifying at a glance where repair responsibilities lay, that it was also an opportunity to provide home safety advice and detail around the Council's compliance responsibilities as a landlord and, as a tool for communicating with residents, was an addition to the Council's commitment to improving the service delivery details shared with each tenant.

Members then took part in a full debate and points raised included commendation to the people involved in drafting it, praise for the idea of checking ID of people before letting them in, the communication between contractors and householders when making arrangements for repair, whether guidelines are issued for how long to expect to wait before a repair is done and the possibility of making more explicit the fact that the illustrative lists of repairs in the handbook were indicative and not exhaustive so that tenants would be clear about theirs' and the Council's responsibilities.

The Business Improvement Manager and Group Head of Residential Services provided full answers to the points raised. It was confirmed that the timing of repairs was agreed between the contractor and householder at the time of arranging the appointment and that the illustrative list not being exhaustive was to be emphasised in the final version of the handbook in multiple locations including a clearly marked paragraph at the beginning of the guide.

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Based on members approving a revised version without having seen it and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman approving the final version before it went onto on the website,

The Working Group

RECOMMEND to Cabinet that:

- 1) the Tenants Repair Handbook be adopted; and
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services to approve changes to the handbook

27. INCOME RECOVERY POLICY

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided members with an overview of her report. She then drew members attention to recognising that rental income was the main source of income to the Housing Revenue Account and that maximising the collection of rent ensured that the Council was able to deliver essential services to tenants in terms of managing their tenancies and investing in the Council's properties. She explained the policy set out a robust approach to collecting rent but also recognised many residents required support and advice in making payments so that they could sustain their tenancies.

The Working Group

RECOMMEND to Cabinet that;

- 1) the Income Policy 2021 be adopted;
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services to make changes to the Policy.

28. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided members with an overview of her report. She drew members attention to section 218 of the Housing Act 2004 which required social landlords to publish a policy and procedure for dealing with reports of anti-social behaviour. She explained that the Council currently dealt with a very high level of anti-social behaviour, approximately 30 reports a month, the majority of which was drug related. She noted that it was important for staff and residents to have clear guidelines on how the Council will deal with any reports, and in particular how this policy would support victims in terms of making sure that the Council was very clear on the support it provided as well as how it investigated and dealt with anti-social behaviour.

The Working Group

RECOMMEND to Cabinet that;

- 1) the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy 2021 be adopted; and
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services to make changes to the Policy

29. DECANT POLICY

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided members with an overview of her report. She explained that a decant was when the Council needed to do work to a property but could not carry out the work with the tenant in situ, whether that be a tenant, a licence or a leaseholder in shared ownership, due to the work being extensive or because it would take a very long time so there would be significant disruption to the resident. She noted that the policy set out clearly for both staff and residents the stages of which a decant was considered permanent or temporary, and the support and advice offered in addition to any statutory payments to recompense the residents for having to move when ordinarily they would not have chosen to.

The Working Group

RECOMMEND to Cabinet;

- 1) the Decant Policy 2021 be adopted; and
- 2) delegated authority be given to the Group Head of Residential Services to make changes to the Policy.

30. ANNUAL TENANTS REPORT 2019/20

The Group Head of Residential Services provided members with an overview of her report. She drew members attention to Appendix 1, the Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders 2019/20, which detailed the range of activity across the housing service for that year.

The Working Group then noted the report.

31. REPORT BACK FROM CABINET/FULL COUNCIL

The Chairman confirmed to the Working Group that the recommendations made to Cabinet from the last meeting held on 4 February 2021 were yet to be reported to Cabinet. They were scheduled to be reported to Cabinet next week on 22 March 2021.

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32. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman confirmed to the Working Group that there was no Work Programme to review or approve, due to the change in Governance structure that would be implemented by the Council in May 2021. The Work Programme for the New Residential & Wellbeing Services Committee would be agreed at its first meeting on 3 June 2021, under the new Governance Structure.

The Chairman took the opportunity to thank everyone involved in the Working Group over the past 2 years he had been Chairman. He commented that the team had achieved a lot and that there was a lot to be very proud of. The Vice-Chairman added her thanks to the whole team and noted how well they had performed and how appreciated the amount of work they had put in was.

(The meeting concluded at 6.23 pm)