

HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES WORKING GROUP

7 February 2019 at 6.00 p.m.

Present: - Councillors Hughes (Chairman), Mrs Porter (Vice Chairman), Bicknell, Mrs Harrison-Horn, Mrs Madeley, Oppler, Miss Rhodes and Mrs Rapnik.

The Cabinet Member for Residential Services Councillor Bence and The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing Councillor Clayden were also in attendance at the meeting.

14. APOLOGY

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Stanley.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

16. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2018 and 13 December 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. COMMUNITY SAFETY AND HOUSING PARTNERSHIP WORKING REVIEW 2016 – 2018

The Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing Councillor Clayden introduced this item to the Working Group.

The Community Manager provided Members with a detailed overview of the review report that set out the integrated working and achievements of the Arun District Council Community Safety and Housing teams between 2016/18.

The key points highlighted were;

- The joint working that was outlined in the report was directed through the priorities set by the Safer Arun Partnership (SAP), as it was outlined in its partnership plan.
- To ensure the team achieve the Vision, SAP agreed the following 18/19 strategic priorities, that encourage and support joint working;
 - Tackle & reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB)
 - Street Communities
 - Serious and Organised Crime with a specific focus on 'Cuckooing'
 - Neighbourhood Development

- 2016/17 saw ASB Caseworkers work with 367 individual perpetrators of nuisance in their communities and 245 in 2017/18. Over the two performance years an average of 97% success rate was achieved in effectively reducing and stopping ASB by identified perpetrators
- One of the key achievements for the ASB and Housing teams was with supporting statements from Sussex Police successfully obtained six partial Closure Orders in Littlehampton and Bognor for Council properties between December 2017 and August 2018. .
- Street community refers to a specific cohort of individuals who choose to congregate and conduct their social life in public areas, usually typified by consumption of alcohol and / or drugs which gives rise to public concerns and / or disorder. Street communities can be rough sleeping, insecurely housed or may have their own accommodation.
- Arun Street Community Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is where key partners regularly meet to discuss individual cases agreeing on delivering actions that would mitigate and or reduce risk factors.
- From April 2016 to September 2018 MARAC had proactively assessed risk and developed shared action plans for 148 individuals.
- Increases in the number of rough sleepers and the exponential increase of individuals using Class A drugs presents all partners including the Housing and Community Safety with complex challenges and underpins the importance of all teams working together
- Since April 2016 - to date 64 individuals have been discharged from MARAC meetings as they have sustained good progress in reducing risk factors.
- 43 individuals have also been re-housed – 8 within Arun District Council properties: 35 in RSL/private let or other.
- Cost benefit analysis shows that the project has delivered a cost saving of £471,657 to criminal justices agencies (in relation to reduced demand to address crime and anti-social behaviour) and a cost benefit of £129,075 by removing rough sleepers from the streets (source: Manchester Unit Cost Database 2015 v1.4).
- Serious and organised crime mainly relating to County drug lines is a major contributor to the violent crime experienced within Arun. This is a significant ongoing problem for the district.
- Associated with County lines, is cuckooing, this is a type of crime whereby a vulnerable individual or family are befriended by a drug dealer who goes on to take over their home in order to conduct illegal drug activity. There are currently over 70 known properties that have been cuckooed in the last year, resulting in joint interventions between the Police, ASB and Neighbourhood Housing team and local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Approximately 27% of these were ADC housing properties in 2017/18.

- Integrated working for this area is key to being successful – it is important to continue working in this way moving forward.

The following comments were made:-

- Confirmation was obtained from the Community Manager that the teams also work with Stone Pillow and Turning Tides in Littlehampton. The data from the report is from the Street Community and is not inclusive of the work Stone Pillow and Turning Tides complete.
- There was some concern raised regarding rough sleepers at The Sunken Gardens in Bognor. This had been seen as a reoccurring issue last summer but there seemed to be very little awareness about the problem at the time and thereafter. The Community Manager explained that the Council need people to report anti – social behaviour and / or any type of criminality. The Council and the Police have completed joint patrols however ongoing allocation of resources are driven by reports that are received from the local community and public. There is awareness of this issue and the Council and the Police resources permitting, will take proactive measures.
- Further concern for the Homelessness strategy surrounding the cuts that have been approved by WSCC were raised. The Council are working closely with parties involved to assess the impact and where possible to preserve this. However due to these discussions being ongoing it was not possible to comment further.

The Working Group agreed;

RECOMMEND TO CABINET – That

(1) the integrated working between the Council’s Community Safety and Housing teams is endorsed and the importance of partnership working in contributing to reducing anti-social behaviour, creating safe environments and addressing Street Community issues is recognised; and

(2) recognition is given to the work of Community Safety, Housing and the Safer Arun Partnership in contributing to the delivery of the Council’s strategic priority “supporting people in our district who need our help” and “serving our communities well by delivering the best services we can afford”.

18. STOCK CONDITION UPDATE

The Working Group was given a presentation by the Group Head of Residential Services.

The key points highlighted were;

- Just Housing are a consultancy dedicated to helping improve performance, reduce expenditure and deliver better services and were appointed in January 2017 to support ADC deliver better services for social housing.
- Field work started in Spring 2017 with qualified surveyors
- Data collection continued until September 2018, specifically external surveys for blocks and houses and internal surveys for flats and houses
- Over 90% of housing stock surveyed inside and out, including photographs and floor plans having been captured which will be a great benefit in future.
- There are ongoing discussions regarding how to extend surveys to 100%.
- All components have been in assessed in terms of life span/life expectancy and this has been recorded via a traffic light method – Red, Amber & Green.
- Survey findings were that the majority of properties are amber or green on roofing/doors and windows. The majority of properties are amber or red on soffits/fascias and guttering.
- A significant number of kitchens need replacing in 5-10 years (and again in 25-30 years).
- A significant number of bathrooms will need replacing in 5-15 years.
- External and internal expenditure had been broken down over a 30 year strategy
- The team is working closely with the Finance team and the business plan is able to withstand this type of expenditure. This has been detailed in a report that has gone to Cabinet which is set to be approved at the Special Council meeting on 20 February.
- It was explained that there will be an element of borrowing in the future and this is being planned out now.

The following comments were made:-

- The Cabinet Member for Residential Services Councillor Bence, explained to the Working Group that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) monies are ring-fenced for the HRA only. The work the team has had to complete, is vast and the achievements in this area vital. The benefits of this work mean that through to 2030 the Council are able to make informed decisions moving forward regarding costs for planned and reactive maintenance.

The Chairman thanked the Group Head of Residential Services for her presentation and the Working Group noted the updated.

19. SOCIAL HOUSING GREEN PAPER REPORT

The Group Head of Residential Services updated the Working Group with the proposed strategy for reforming social housing.

The tragic events at Grenfell have shone a spotlight on social housing and its residents. The proposed strategy for reforming social housing has five main themes:

1. Ensuring homes are safe and decent
2. Effective resolution of Complaints
3. Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
4. Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
5. Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

The key points highlighted were:

- Ensuring homes are safe and decent - The current standard we work too is out of date so a review is overdue.
- Effective resolution of Complaints - The Government have announced a new process for reviewing these complaints and this work is ongoing.
- Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator - This had come out of the learning since Grenfell and the role of the social housing regulator is vital to ensuring landlords are doing what they should be doing.
- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities – There should be celebration for social housing and the communities that live within them.
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership – alongside celebrating social housing there must be a drive for people towards home ownership options.
- Abolition of the housing revenue account and the settlement after the final year of the rent setting, Landlords would be able to increase rents by 1% (CPI)
- There does appear to be a lack of clarity and purpose of the role of social housing, the rhetoric on social housing as a 'springboard' to home ownership appears at odds with the desire to reduce stigma. A response from the Government is expected spring 2019.

The following comments were made:-

- The Cabinet Member for Residential Services Councillor Bence reassured the Working Group that on a monthly basis the Council is actively sending out Officers for walk arounds. He also elaborated on the phrase 'tenure blind' meaning that in future you won't be able to tell social housing from an ownership property. This can currently be seen in place in Yapton with 65 properties and the Local Plan supports this. He went on to express that he was very impressed with the Officers work and the speed in which they are reacting to what they find.

The Chairman thanked the Group Head of Residential Services for the report and the Working Group noted the updated.

20. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY UPDATE

On the 4 January 2018 the Working Group recommended to Cabinet that the Empty Homes Strategy 2018-2023 was adopted and this report provides an update on the work and achievements to date.

Empty homes represent a wasted resource and can have a negative impact on local communities. Long term empty properties can:

- Attract crime, vandalism, and anti-social behaviour
- Become a public health hazard and magnet to vermin
- Detract from the neighbourhood amenity
- Reduce the value of adjacent properties
- Cost the community for visits and action by Police and the Councils Private Sector

The Group Head of Technical Services highlighted the following:

- There were 416 empty homes in the district as of April 2018 based on Council Tax records
- There has been an increased amount of Officer time spent on this area which is why you can see much bigger improvement in terms of the number of properties brought back into use in 2018/19 in comparison with previous years
- In addition to the environmental benefits the work that the Empty Homes Officers carry out contributes to the amount of New Homes Bonus the Council receives and since 2014 this has equated to approximately £1 million.
- A presentation detailing work for a sample of properties that had been completed in 2018 and were either reoccupied or awaiting sale was also given to the Working Group.

The following comments were made by the Working Group:-

- Concerns were raised regarding the timescales from reporting empty homes, to them being brought back into use. It was explained to the Working Group that each property is unique and would be considered on its merits, different approaches are needed for different properties, but that referrals should be made and would be investigated in a timely fashion, accepting that seeing through enforcement actions can involve significant time scales. Confirmation from the Cabinet Member for Residential Services Councillor Bence was provided to the Working Group by stating he had followed the reporting process and found the timeframe to have been very speedy.
- Confirmation on the increased number of improvements detailed in the report was directly down to having more Officers on the team.

The Chairman thanked the Group Head of Technical Services for his report and the Working Group noted the updated.

21. RE - PROCUREMENT OF RESPONSIVE REPAIRS CONTRACT

The Group Head of Residential Services provided the Working Group with an update on the re-procurement of the Responsive Repairs Contract.

The key points highlighted were:

- Arun District Council (ADC) are currently engaged in a Term Partnering Contract with Mears Limited for the delivery of repairs, maintenance and associated works and services. This contract is due to expire in June 2020 and the current annual value of this contract is £2.5 million.
- The Council need to consider all the options available to them in relation to delivery of the contract moving forward and the method of procurement to enable a fair and transparent process. The services to be delivered under the new contract can include:
 - Responsive Repairs and Minor Voids
 - Major Voids
 - Aids and Adaptations
 - Planned Maintenance
- Faithhorn Farrell Timms LLP have been appointed as ADC's consultants to assist in the procurement of the new contract.

The following comments were made by the Working Group:-

- The Working Group wanted to know if Mears Limited would be able to resubmit to keep the contract. It was explained that, Mears Limited would be able to submit a bid for the new contract.

The Chairman thanked the Group Head of Residential Services for her report and the Working Group noted the updated.

22. COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK - HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE

The Group Head of Residential Services provided the Working Group with an update on the Health and Safety obligations Arun District Council has as a Landlord.

In August 2018 the regulator for Social Housing determined that Arun District Council (ADC) had breached the Home Standard. The breach was specifically in relation to ADC failing to meet statutory Health & Safety requirements in respect of fire and water hygiene.

The key points highlighted:

- ADC are working at pace to get this on track

- ADC anticipates being fully compliant across all Health & Safety areas by November 2019.

The Chairman thanked the Group Head of Residential Services for her report and the Working Group noted the updated.

23. REPORT BACK FROM CABINET/FULL COUNCIL

No queries or questions on recommendations that had been forwarded from the Working Group to Cabinet on 12 November 2018 were raised.

24. WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

The Work Programme for 2018/19 is still under construction and will be shared with the Working Group at a later date.

(The meeting concluded at 19.30 pm)