

Housing, Communities & Wellbeing Policy Development Advisory Group
9 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillors: Sam Raby (Chairman), Tony Bevis, Claudia Fisher, Liz Kitchen, Colin Minto and Tricia Youtan

Apologies: Councillors: Sam Bateman, Jon Campbell and Jay Mercer

Absent: Councillors: Philip Circus and Chris Franke

6 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the meeting of the PDAG held on 6 July were received.

7 **COMMUNITY SERVICES**

The Head of Housing & Community Services and the Community Services Manager briefed the Group on the work undertaken by the Community Services Team.

The first part of the presentation focussed on Community Development. Areas covered included:

Youth Provision: There were over 38,000 residents under 20 years old in the district and the Community Services Manager described support and advice available to them, both directly through HDC and through other organisations supported by the Council. Initiatives included iRock, an advice hub for 14 to 25-year-olds in Horsham Town. Officers engaged with parish councils in supporting local clubs and initiatives. Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) work included an Early Intervention Officer who liaised with schools.

Strategic Grants and Funding: HDC provided year on year funding for organisations offering key services, including Citizens Advice and Relate. The Head of Service stated that these were being reviewed and it was hoped there would be an uplift to grants in next year's budget.

The Cabinet Member advised that the application process for community grants was currently open until early December and voluntary organisations would benefit from contacting officers for advice on the application process.

The Group noted that a number of community transport initiatives were supported and funded by HDC. This was particularly important, given the rural nature of the district.

Voluntary Sector Support: The Community Services team worked closely with the voluntary sector, offering guidance on setting up and running charities, financial advice and help with placing volunteers. Training days to help with identified skills gaps had also been given.

HDC had a large number of partnerships with a range of community groups and initiatives, from larger organisations such as Citizens Advice and Horsham Matters, to many smaller projects where officers offered advice and support.

Refugee Support: The Community Services Manager advised that the Horsham Refugee Support Group had been set up to help Syrian families and now also supported Afghan and Ukrainian refugees. The Council helped the HRSG connect with community help. WSCC was involved in supporting refugees and worked together with HDC.

Cost of Living: Three tranches of government funding totalling £1.1m had helped the Council deliver support during the cost of living crisis. HDC worked with community partnerships offering foodbanks and those offering fuel advice. The introduction of LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) was proving successful in identifying those eligible for unclaimed benefits and was making a real difference.

Community Safety: Training for all Councillors on had taken place recently, so this topic was not covered in detail at the meeting. All staff, Councillors and volunteers needed to be aware of their duty to recognise and report safeguarding concerns, particularly for the young.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING:

The Health & Wellbeing Manager joined the meeting to brief the Group on the service provided by the Wellbeing team. The service was free to all adults (18+) in the district and was run in partnership with WSCC. There were nine members in the team offering specialist services and the Group were given details of services available.

Lifestyle intervention services included: health checks, quitting smoking, weight and dietary advice, physical activity, and alcohol consumption. There was also a falls prevention programme run in partnership with WSCC. Details of the services available are on the Council's website at [Health and Wellbeing](#).

In addition to the Wellbeing Hub in Swan Walk, the team ran drop-ins and workshops in some of the district's other towns and larger villages. Workplace visits to carry out health checks and offer advice were also given.

It was noted that GPs referred residents to the Wellbeing services and the extent of such referrals could be extended. The Health & Wellbeing Manager agreed that a presentation on the Wellbeing services would be arranged for Citizens Advice staff and volunteers.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the issue of vaping in schools was not handled by the team as its services were targeted at adults. It was confirmed that there were quarterly community safety meetings with WSCC schools, which would be a suitable forum to discuss how to tackle this national issue.

8 **HOUSING - UPDATE**

The Head of Housing & Community Services updated the Group on the current housing situation in the district since the update in July. Demand continued to outstrip supply. However, the Council was in a relatively good position compared to many local authorities. A review of the HDC Housing Register, additional staffing resource and a number of initiatives with WSCC were helping to improve the situation.

The Group noted that the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation, particularly for larger families, continued to be a challenge. This was a national problem with a 9% increase in local authority spending on B&Bs and HDC continued to have a relatively low expenditure compared to many local authorities. It was noted that Roffey Place, which provided support for single homeless people, had proved successful in reducing the number in B&Bs. It was also noted that S106 developer contribution funding was available to extend up to 10 homes to make them 5-bedroom homes, which would help get some larger families off the Housing Register.

The Head of Service advised that the current five objectives in the Housing Strategy were being reviewed and a report on delivery of the objectives and what needs to be achieved would be taken to a Cabinet meeting in 2024.

It was noted that rents charged for temporary accommodation by HDC were artificially low and other local authorities charged higher rents. The Head of Service stated that a reduction in the current subsidy of rents could generate further income for the next financial year and this would be considered when setting next year's budget.

This was the last PDAG attended by Rob Jarvis, Head of Housing & Communities, who was leaving HDC shortly. The meeting concluded with Cabinet Member Councillor Sam Raby and Councillor Tricia Youtan, previous Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities, thanking Rob for his dedication and innovative work over many years of service.

The meeting closed at 7.10 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN