

Housing & Public Protection Policy Development Advisory Group
26 APRIL 2022

Present: Councillors: Tricia Youtan (Chairman), Chris Brown, Mike Morgan, Jon Olson, Kate Rowbottom, Claire Vickers and Belinda Walters

Apologies: Councillors: Louise Potter and Jack Saheid
Absent: Councillors: Liz Kitchen and Ian Stannard

Also Present:

21 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the meeting held on 29 March were received and agreed

22 **PROPOSED CHANGES TO HOUSING REGISTER AND NOMINATIONS POLICY**

The meeting received a presentation from the Head of Housing & Community Services updating on a number of aspects of the service response to Housing and Homelessness with a view to

- maximising access
- increasing choice, and
- focussing staff time on key areas

Specific proposals outlines were to :

- Prioritise transfer cases into new build properties
- Reduce verification visits for transfer cases
- Increase areas of choice, specifically within Horsham Town, from 2 to 5
- Change to one offer of accommodation
- Increase disqualification income criteria from £30k to £40k for individuals (The couples allowance of £60k remains unchanged)
- Extend opportunities for victims of domestic abuse to join the Housing Register without a demonstrable local connection
- Discharge the homeless relief duty into Part 6 accommodation

Discussion followed the presentation of each item and specific questions were addressed. Key clarifications and considerations included:

- Cases where domestic abuse is the primary factor will be addressed through the homeless process. Where a local Housing Association is involved this will be progressed through internal processes. For other cases, including those from outside the District, the Council will be the principal point of resolution.
- All properties are assessed on affordability for the individual case, subject to the disqualification income criteria, proposed for increase in response to rising costs of living. Associated financial assessments are based on costs and income, and this may on occasion indicate that a more costly property can be afforded by the resident and subsequent adjustments.
- The proposed reduction from the current 2 offers of accommodation to 1 was discussed at length. Noted that often the first offer is declined in anticipation of

the second being better, but all offers are suitable to the individual needs and reflect the housing available at that time. If refusal is for a genuine reason, there is an option for further review.

- Also clarified that the register is restricted to individuals and families that live or work within the District
- The increase in the disqualification threshold was recognised as a response to the rising cost of living but the meeting requested feedback on the impacts this has on waiting lists and availability of accommodation.
- Victims of Domestic Abuse with no connection to the District would be disqualified under the current provisions, but the proposed change would enable those fleeing abuse from anywhere in the country to be helped. Where they have assets that can be realised (such as a house) the initial accommodation would be on a temporary basis.

The Proposals were approved by the members of the PDAG. The next steps will now go ahead, with an Equality Impact Assessment and legal sign-off followed by consideration by the Cabinet on 21 July and by the full Council on 7 September.

23 **TURNING TIDES - OVERVIEW OF SERVICES FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS**

The meeting received an overview from the Head of Development and Quality at Turning Tides on provision for rough sleepers provided by the organisation. It was clarified that Turning Tides is a charity, with some government funding support and has developed considerably over recent years. A team of 8 outreach workers are currently employed and 95 people were assisted in the last year. TT also manages two dedicated buildings, including five-bedroom accommodation in Washington.

It was reported that there are currently 3 known rough sleepers in the District, mostly long standing cases, and there has been a rise in newly homeless people since the pandemic. The charity seeks to match provision and support to need, both geographical and mental (around 80% of rough sleepers have mental health issues).

The meeting was advised that current support for mental health issues is rather limited and, since homeless people are unlikely to be able to engage with digital inclusion, have no postal address and limited use of mobile phones, it is difficult to make and meet appointments for help. High support services are provided in Worthing and mobile provision, using a converted double decker bus, is due to be launched to improve rural access. More promising is ongoing work with West Sussex CC on mental Health discharge services which should improve safety and effective rehabilitation.

The meeting thanked the Director for her attendance, and welcomed and fully supported the work being undertaken by Turning Tides.

24 **UKRAINE SUPPORT IN HORSHAM DISTRICT AND WEST SUSSEX**

The Head of Housing and Community Services provided an update on activity in support of Ukrainian refugees. There are currently two schemes operating:

- Family Sponsorship, for people in the District with extended families in Ukraine
- Homes for Ukraine, through which sponsors and families in need of support are matched up, with appropriate DBS and other checks to minimise risk

District Council staff have been given the opportunity to help with West Sussex CC activity in support of refugees, and the Housing & Community Service are building on previous support to Afghan and Syrian refugees to help those now arriving from Ukraine. It was explained that the actual numbers being received and helped is not disclosable. An event was scheduled for the following week to enable experience and learning to be shared, and other events and activities are taking place to help integrate and acclimatise refugees.

25 **FORWARD PLAN EXTRACT FOR THE HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION PORTFOLIO**

The current Cabinet Forward Plan was reviewed and Item 3 on S106 / Commuted funding for The Cobblers in Slinfold, was noted specifically and will be considered by Cabinet in June.

The meeting closed at 7.00 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN