

**Housing, Communities & Wellbeing Policy Development Advisory Group**  
**6 JULY 2023**

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

Apologies: Councillors: Jon Campbell, Philip Circus, Chris Franke, Jay Mercer and Colin Minto

1 **TO AGREE THE TIME OF MEETINGS OF THE PDAG FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

It was agreed that meetings of the PDAG will continue to be held at 5.30pm.

2 **NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the Housing & Communities PDAG held on 14 March were received.

3 **HOUSING**

The Head of Housing & Community Services briefed the Group on the work undertaken by the Housing Team and the current situation in the district. He advised that the five objectives in the Council's Housing and Homelessness Strategy were being reviewed, and any proposed amendments would be brought back to a future PDAG.

Areas covered in the presentation included:

**Housing Register and Allocations:** The Group were advised that the Council worked with a number of Registered Providers (Housing Associations) of varying sizes. When a property came available, it was cross-checked to ensure it was matched with the most appropriate household in accordance with the Housing Register & Nominations Policy. Demand outstripped supply: there were 700 households on the register and approximately 300 households placed each year. The Cabinet Member stated that compared to several other local authorities in the district, HDC's record was excellent. It was noted that a majority of those on the housing register were already in housing which may not be suitable (eg if a family grows in size). The Council was taking steps to provide larger family homes and disabled-adapted homes, both of which were in short supply.

**Homeless Service:** The Group noted the key responsibilities and duties of the Council, set out in the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 relating to homelessness prevention and relief. There had been an increase in demand for this service since the pandemic and the Homelessness Prevention Team had expanded to reflect this.

The Council had access to over 100 units of temporary accommodation, including some from registered providers. Officers worked in partnership with Turning Tides to support people into temporary accommodation and also provide outreach to those sleeping rough. B&B accommodation was used only when absolutely necessary and for as short a time as possible; at present there were 39 B&Bs in use, which was lower or similar to neighbouring local authorities.

In response to questions from the Group, it was confirmed that targeted support, both practical and emotional, was available to those sleeping rough and in temporary accommodation.

**Affordable Housing Delivery:** The Housing Team worked with registered providers and developers to encourage collaboration in the delivery of new affordable homes. There was also a fund of historical developer contributions (Section 106 funds) available to support the delivery of affordable homes across the district. This had, through the Council's affordable housing company, delivered a number of units already and two larger schemes for 10 and 12 units were progressing, and a scheme for 48 units was nearing completion with Saxon Weald. Horsham District Homes, the Council's housing company that was set up in 2019, had been responsible for delivering some of these units.

The Group discussed the potential of working with other local authorities in delivering well-insulated sustainable homes. The Head of Housing & Community Services agreed he would look into this and investigate potential grant funding.

**Local Authority Housing Fund:** In December 2022 the Council had received a government grant of £2.65m towards the provision of 16 homes for Ukrainian and Afghan refugees; to receive the grant the Council had been required to contribute £3.21m to the scheme. It was noted that LAHF funding was ring-fenced for this particular use, and in future the housing could be used for those on the housing register.

The government had recently announced a second Local Authority Housing Fund grant (LAHF 2) of £0.76m for three large properties and one temporary accommodation home for Afghan refugees. In order to receive the grant, the Council was required to contribute £1.02m. The Cabinet Member stated that the Council's good management of its finances gave the opportunity to accept the funding. The Group were supportive of the proposal to accept the LAHF 2 grant, which would be considered by Cabinet and Council on 20 July.

**Additional Housing Grants:** The Group were advised that two government grants had come available; the Homeless Prevention Grant top up of £271,911 and the Home Office Asylum Dispersal Grant of £72,000. Receiving these grants would increase the Housing Team's budget and therefore required Council approval. The Group noted that details of how this ring-fenced funding

could be spent was still to be decided. The Group fully supported the proposal to receive these grants.

4 **COST OF LIVING**

The Head of Housing & Community Services advised the Group on the financial support that had been identified by the Council in 2022, most of which had been used to give instant relief to those most financially vulnerable. Funding had also enabled the Council to give Horsham Matters a grant, and create and support warm spaces. The 2023 budget included funding to support foodbanks and community groups.

The Council had also invested in the analytics platform LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker), which would enable the Council to analyse existing data so that targeted support could be offered to households most at risk or in need of support. Additional staffing was being provided to ensure this powerful digital tool was used proactively to ensure people claim the benefits they are entitled to and to direct services where most needed.

The Group were advised that a Cost of Living summit was being planned for the autumn. The Cabinet Member stated that this would involve organisations including Horsham Matters, Citizens Advice, Age UK and Mind as well as service users, and would be an opportunity to inform how best to deliver services and shape campaigns.

5 **FORWARD PLAN EXTRACT FOR THE HOUSING, COMMUNITIES & WELLBEING PORTFOLIO**

The Forward Plan extract was noted.

*The meeting closed at 7.10 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm*

CHAIRMAN