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Minutes of the meeting of the **HOMELESSNESS PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Thursday, 12 April 2018 at 5.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor J S Back

Councillors: P M Brivio
M D Conolly
B Gardner
K E Morris

Officers: Director of Finance, Housing and Community
Head of Strategic Housing
Housing Options Manager
Senior Housing Options Officer
Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance: Councillor S F Bannister

8 APOLOGIES

It was noted that there were no apologies for absence.

9 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that there were no substitute members appointed.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

11 MINUTES

The notes of the meeting of the Group held on 13 December 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12 TERMS OF REFERENCE

It was agreed that the Terms of Reference be noted.

13 HOMELESSNESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Senior Housing Options Officer (SHOO) referred Members to the paper that had been circulated, indicating a 29% reduction in the number of people in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) accommodation between November 2017 and March 2018. The reduction had been achieved through an increase in the number of Council-owned properties becoming available for interim accommodation. A further 18 people had since been housed via direct lettings so, assuming there were no new arrivals in the meantime, it was anticipated that the April figures would be even better.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor P M Brivio about the location of some B&B accommodation, the SHOO advised that one young person was currently being housed in Ashford and another in Folkestone. This was only a temporary

arrangement and they would be moved back to Dover when accommodation became available. The Head of Strategic Housing clarified that people housed in Council-owned, temporary accommodation were still counted as being homeless. In response to Councillor B Gardner, the Housing Options Manager (HOM) advised that some private temporary accommodation was not worth considering due to the very short leases being offered. Councillor K E Morris commended the work done on reducing the number of people in B&B accommodation.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

14 TASK LIST UPDATE

The HOM referred Members to the report which set out the progress that had been achieved since the last meeting. Members were advised that the landlords' forum had been well attended, with two rental properties added to the Council's books. An advisory support officer from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had visited the Council on 15 December due to concerns about the consistently high numbers of people being housed in temporary accommodation at Dover. A return visit had not proved necessary which was viewed positively.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

15 IMPLEMENTATION OF HOMELESS REDUCTION ACT

The SHOO introduced the report which set out the duties and implications of the Homeless Reduction Act, as well as the steps that had been taken by the housing team to prepare for the new legislation. In preparation for the introduction of the 'duty to refer' element, an agency awareness session would be held in the Council Chamber on 24 April, involving the advisory support officer from the DCLG, Porchlight, the police, etc.

It was clarified that the new legislation had introduced an on-line referrals system which allowed voluntary and statutory agencies to flag up a homeless issue direct with the Council. This then placed a requirement on the authority to draw up a personalised housing plan, following an interview with the 'applicant'. As a result, the length of interviews had increased which in turn had put pressure on the limited number of interview rooms. The Director of Finance, Housing and Community confirmed that there had been a surge in the number of applications since 3 April when the Act came into force, but it was not clear whether this would continue indefinitely or was just a reaction to the media publicity surrounding the new legislation.

In response to Councillor M D Conolly, the HOM advised that the increase in presentations was likely to be the result of agency referrals, Porchlight encouraging people to take advantage of the enhanced service and improved accessibility. Regardless of the new system, nothing much had changed in that the demand for social housing far outstripped the supply. The fact remained that applicants who did not meet the eligibility criteria would not be housed, and expectations therefore needed to be managed.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

16 HOMELESSNESS AUDIT

The Director of Finance, Housing and Community referred Members to the report, noting that the internal audit of homelessness and housing was well underway.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

17 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the remainder of the business on the grounds that the items to be considered involve the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

18 PROJECT UPDATE

The Head of Strategic Housing presented an update report on a number of projects being progressed by Officers. These included the use of ten former council flats to house homeless families in place of more costly nightly-paid, temporary accommodation. Following discussions, further proposals from Ashford Borough Council were awaited in respect of setting up a social lettings agency.

Members were updated on the progress of a project to provide modular homes at three sites in Deal and Dover. Access issues had led to a change in the type of units that would be used at all three sites. The project would be funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which would then benefit from the rental income. It was estimated that the rental income would pay back the capital investment within 30 years. In response to concerns raised by Councillor Gardner, Members were advised that, although fees would be payable to the contractor framework that would manage and deliver the project on behalf of Kent County Council, this was preferable to doing the work in-house as that presented capacity issues, hidden internal costs and would hinder progress. Whilst the procurement process was governed by OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) regulations, three of the contractors that belonged to the framework were based in Kent.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

19 DEVELOPMENT OF INTERIM HOUSING FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE

The Head of Strategic Housing circulated a draft report for Members' information on the development of interim housing for homeless people. The report would be presented to Cabinet on 14 May 2018.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.10 pm.