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Minutes of the meeting of the **HOMELESSNESS PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 13 March 2019 at 4.16 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor J S Back

Councillors: P M Beresford
P M Brivio
M D Conolly
B Gardner (Minutes Nos 39-46 only)

Officers: Strategic Director (Corporate Resources)
Head of Strategic Housing
Housing Options Manager
Senior Housing Options Officer
Democratic Services Officer

39 APOLOGIES

It was noted that there were no apologies for absence.

40 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that there were no substitute members appointed.

41 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

42 NOTES

The notes of the meeting held on 18 December 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43 HOMELESSNESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Senior Housing Options Officer (SHOO) presented the report, advising that the report format had been amended to include statistics and information required for the Housing Revenue Account and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Members were reminded that the aim of the Homelessness Reduction Act was to intervene much earlier in order to try and keep people in their homes and prevent them from becoming homeless. She reported that, whilst there had been a high number of referrals in December, numbers had gone down in January and February as a result of discussions with providers. Whilst the average number of stays was rising, overall the numbers were heading in the right direction.

The SHOO reported that rent arrears were monitored on a monthly basis, and that where rent accounts were in arrears and notices had been issued, the Council had discharged its homelessness duty. Furthermore, the Council did not have a duty to re-house people who had made themselves intentionally homeless. In fact, the Act stated that there had to have been a 'significant' change in someone's circumstances before they could make a fresh application. She clarified that rental debts were not written off but reinstated when former tenants registered as homeless.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

44 ROUGH SLEEPING INITIATIVE - BID UPDATE

The Housing Options Manager reported that the Government had released funding to address rough sleeping. Whilst unsuccessful in its first bid, the Council was looking to submit a joint bid for monies released in the second round, in cooperation with Porchlight. Developing and submitting the bids had been challenging, with little time given to liaise with bid partners. An alternative bid, submitted in partnership with Folkestone & Hythe and Thanet District Councils for part of a £20 million Private Rented Access Fund had been successful. Having learned of an initiative by Southwark Borough Council who had bid for monies to set up an insurance product on behalf of 32 other councils, Officers were considering whether to use the funds for something similar. This would enable the Council to provide a rent guarantee of up to £15,000 to private landlords who were often reluctant to house 'public sector' tenants.

The Group was advised that there were approximately 20 'entrenched' rough sleepers in the District who were highly unlikely to ever move into accommodation. It was clarified that a night shelter was not provided all year round as this would discourage people from doing anything to help themselves.

It was agreed to note the report.

45 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 disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

46 PROJECTS UPDATE

The Head of Strategic Housing (HSH) advised that the Social Lettings Agency initiative had stalled for the time being whilst Ashford Borough Council (ABC) carried out a fundamental review of its lettings scheme. At the appropriate time, Officers would hold further discussions with ABC. Members were advised of a potential scheme to acquire additional interim housing in the form of volumetric units. The Council's Planning team had raised no objections regarding the size of the units and it was felt that the scheme had potential.

In response to Councillor J S Back who questioned the lack of progress, the HSH advised that progress was being made on all three sites. The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) added that the project managers would be able to progress the two Council-owned sites whilst negotiations on the Triangles site continued. Whilst the Council was intending to do the pre-planning work itself, the submission of the planning application would be the responsibility of the design and build contractor. Ground works would be needed but, once the pods had been delivered to site, construction would take a matter of weeks rather than months. The Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) reminded Members that, unlike the new Dover Leisure Centre project, the HSH was largely managing these projects on his own, without the support of a team.

The HSH advised that Cabinet approval would be needed for the Ark project which would be ready for Planning once some final surveys had been completed. As a result of property purchases made over the last 18 months, 43 units were now being used as interim accommodation. The Council's ambitious property purchase programme was partly a reflection of the pressure on the Council to spend 'Right to Buy 1-4-1' receipts within the prescribed time limits. Most of the receipts expected for the following year had already been allocated to the William Muge and Snelgrove House developments.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

47 AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY PLAN

The HSH introduced the report which set out details of 29 affordable housing projects.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm.