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Minutes of the meeting of the **HOMELESSNESS PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 17 July 2019 at 5.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor S S Chandler

Councillors: S C Manion
H M Williams

Officers: Head of Finance and Housing
Strategic Housing Manager
Housing Development Manager
Senior Housing Options Officer
Democratic Services Officer

48 APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors P M Brivio and N S Kenton.

49 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that there were no substitute members appointed.

50 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

51 NOTES

The notes of the meeting held on 13 March 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52 HOMELESSNESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Senior Housing Options Officer (SHOO) presented the report, advising that, whilst there had been a high number of homeless applications in April 2019, these had tapered off in June when there had been a notable increase in the number of referrals from other agencies. Although the Government had stipulated which agencies could refer, essentially anyone could do so. The number of triage cases coming in from the website were high. She explained that care flag alerts had been introduced in December and incidents of threatened or actual violence were now recorded.

In response to Councillor H M Williams, it was clarified that homeless applications were assessed to establish whether the applicant was already homeless or would become so in the near future. If living in a property, a typical scenario was that applicants had been served a section 21 notice by the landlord who wished to sell the property. Their circumstances, such as children or a medical condition, would then determine whether they were given temporary accommodation. If applicants were already homeless, they would be placed into temporary accommodation while eligibility checks were carried out that would include looking at previous addresses, income, etc. In the case of juvenile applicants, Officers would try to mediate with the family. She commented that rough sleeping was often a lifestyle choice for

some, but continued engagement with rough sleepers was important as it sometimes produced positive results.

In respect of expenditure on temporary accommodation, there had been problems with recovering housing benefits. However, the situation was improving, not least because 45 units of Council-owned temporary accommodation were now available. It was confirmed that Officers worked closely with East Kent Housing on debt recovery.

Summarising the temporary accommodation statistics, the SHOO advised that 55 families had been in self-contained units at the time of the report. Housing families in such units was preferable to Bed and Breakfast accommodation but they were not always available. 89 families or single people were currently housed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Whilst occasionally people had to be housed outside the district, they were brought back to the district as soon as accommodation became available. Like neighbouring districts, the July figures were likely to be high, caused by the number of section 21 notices served by private landlords. She explained that in such cases applicants had often ignored notices and approached the Council at the last minute. To address the problem, Officers engaged with landlords and provided guidance on the website. Information was also disseminated through the Gateway office, Outreach and Citizens' Advice offices. It was agreed that a poster would be created and distributed.

It was agreed: (a) That an update on the poster and where it had been distributed would be provided at the next meeting.

(b) That the report be noted.

53 HOMELESS BID/FUNDING UPDATE

Members received the report that provided details of bids made for funding from central Government. The SHOO advised that funding allowed the Council to buy domestic goods and provide deposits for rough sleepers so as to allow them to move into private rented accommodation. Officers met other agencies on a fortnightly basis to discuss individual cases of rough-sleeping and devise action plans for them. Discussions also took place with private landlords to encourage them to take in rough sleepers. In addition, two outreach workers were already in post and going out daily to interact with rough sleepers.

Using Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding, four new members of staff had been recruited, including two who were working with vulnerable women and those with drug and alcohol problems. The Private Rented Sector Access Scheme was focused on families and the private rented sector, and was designed to provide top-ups where housing allowances did not meet the rent. The Chairman requested that progress reports on these funding streams be presented to future meetings.

It was agreed: (a) That progress reports on funding streams be presented to future meetings of the Homelessness Project Advisory Group.

(b) That the report be noted.

54 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 if the Act.

55 AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY PLAN UPDATE

The Housing Development Manager introduced the report which gave an update on the Council's delivery of affordable housing. It was clarified that the definition of affordable housing was as per the legislation and consisted of two types – social or affordable rent which was usually 80% of the market rent (or whatever was prescribed by the Section 106 agreement and often limited to the Local Housing Allowance rate) or shared ownership where people bought a share of the property and paid rent on the remainder. Councillor Chandler advised that when planning permission was granted developers would usually sell the units of affordable housing on to a registered social landlord which would find tenants and manage the lettings.

Members agreed that it would be useful for the report to include a column on the actual budget allocation and a breakdown of how each project was being financed.

It was agreed: (a) That future reports be altered as agreed.

(b) That the report be noted.

56 PROJECTS UPDATE

The Housing Development Manager presented the report which updated Members on current projects. Councillor Chandler suggested that this and the previous report should be amalgamated into one. The Housing Development Manager advised that a project management company had been appointed and a project team established which was ready to procure surveys and design work for the projects. A report on The Ark project would be going to Cabinet in September. Seven properties had been purchased since the last meeting. In response to Councillor Chandler, it was clarified that properties offered to the Council for purchase were required to meet certain criteria.

It was agreed: (a) That the Affordable Housing and Projects update reports be amalgamated in future.

(b) That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 6.07 pm.