

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

ABERDEEN, 9th September 2014. Minute of Meeting of the HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY WORKING GROUP. Present:- Councillor Cooney, Chairperson; and Councillors Finlayson, Kiddie and Jean Morrison MBE; Mary Annal (Aberdeen Foyer), Matt Lock (Shelter) and Zara Strange (Citizens Advice Bureau).

Officers in attendance:- Aoife Deery (Housing Graduate Trainee); Graeme Gardner (Development Team Leader, Support Services); Kate MacDonald (Support Services Manager); Edward Thomas (Housing Access manager).

APOLOGIES

1. The Clerk advised that apologies had been received on behalf of Councillor Dickson, David Lappin (Castlehill Housing Association) and Susan Devlin (Head of Children's Services).

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

2. The Working Group had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 8th May 2014.

There followed some discussion in connection with article 6 of the minute insofar as this related to Victoria House. Kate MacDonald advised that members were able to visit the site by contacting Kenny Paterson, Project Manager. The completion date for the build had now moved into 2015 and this was the subject of on going discussion with the contractor.

The Working Group resolved:-

to approve the minute as a correct record.

PRESENTATION FROM SPECIAL HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY OPERATIONS GROUP AUGUST 2014

3. The Working Group had before it, for its information, the slides from the Special Homelessness Strategy Operations Group meeting of 14 August 2014.

Kate Paterson spoke in furtherance of the slides which provided a summary of the Housing Support Project and the Project Team. The "go live" date for the project was 3rd November. Members were given an opportunity to ask questions on the content of the slides.

The Working Group resolved:-

- (i) to note the information provided; and
- (ii) thank officers for their work.

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HOMELESS ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

4. The Working Group had before it, for its information, a report on homeless electoral registration.

The report set out practical steps which Council personnel and partner agencies are following to raise awareness with homeless persons of their eligibility to be registered to vote prior to the deadline for the forthcoming referendum, and to provide assistance where appropriate.

The Working Group resolved:-

to note the report.

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

5. The Working Group had before it, for its information, performance information provided by the Housing Access and Homelessness Services for the period from April 2014 to August 2014. The performance information provided to the Working Group related to homeless applications; homeless assessments; homeless outcomes and housing advice cases and outcomes.

The members of the Working Group proceeded to ask questions of the officers in attendance in relation to the performance information presented, including:-

- the increase in the number of people presenting at homeless as a result of abandonment, particularly families which was of particular concern;
- the reasons cited for client outcomes, particularly whether health reasons were taken into account in recording file closures, whether there had been a rise in the citation of health reasons, and whether a breakdown of health reasons could be produced.

The Working Group resolved:-

- (i) to note the information provided; and
- (ii) to request officers to report on the matters raised during discussion to a future meeting of the Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee; and
- (iii) to request a report be prepared on health and mental health and what impact it has on homelessness for the next Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee meeting.

HOUSING ACCESS AND HOMELESSNESS SERVICE UPDATE

6. The Working Group had before it, for its information, a report that provided an update on the Housing Access Service and the Homelessness Service.

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The purpose of the report was to provide an update on developments/actions since the last Working Group meeting on 30 April 2014.

The members of the Working Group then proceeded to ask questions of the officers in attendance in relation to the report. Kate Paterson advised that a peer review on the services was to be undertaken with other local authorities.

The Working Group resolved:-

to note the information.

CASE STUDIES ARISING FROM THE EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOUSING BENEFIT (HABITUAL RESIDENCE) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2014

7. The Working Group had before it, for information, an update on case studies arising from the early implementation of the Housing Benefit (Habitual Residence) Amendment Regulations 2014.

The members of the Working Group then proceeded to ask questions of the officers in attendance in relation to the case studies. Edward Thomas explained measures which were being taken by the service to address cases of high rent arrears, including use of Homeless Prevention Fund, discretionary homeless payments, close work with Finance colleagues on debt recovery, and reviewing provisions for debt write-off.

The Working Group resolved:-

to note the information provided.

CLOSING REMARKS BY CHAIRPERSON

8. The Chairperson thanked all members for their contributions during the lifetime of the Working Group, which had made a vital contribution to improving the systems and processes around homelessness and was a good example of partnership working. Members of the Group joined with the Chairperson in thanking staff for all their efforts.

- **NEIL COONEY, Chairperson**.