

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT PANEL: NORTH AREA**

**2.00pm 4 DECEMBER 2023**

**HOUSING CENTRE, CONFERENCE ROOM – EASTERGATE ROAD BN2 4QL**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillors Evans and Sheard

**Representatives:** Theresa Mackey (Highcroft Lodge Residents Association), Jim Hornsby (Mimosa Court Leaseholders Association), Heather Hayes (Coldean Independents), Donna James (Bates Estate Community Association), Ian Knowles (Bates Estate Community Association), Gordon Taylor (Parkmead Informal Group), Desmond Jones (Hollingdean Residents Association), Ian Beck (Hollingdean Residents Association), Catherine Lawrence (Hollingdean Tenants Association), Barney Miller (Sylvan Hall Residents Association)

**Officers:** Niall Breen (Democratic Services Apprentice), Geof Gage (Head of Housing Investment & Asset Management), Justine Harris (Head of Tenancy Services), Keely McDonald (Senior Community Engagement Officer), Martin Reid (Assistant Director Housing Management), Grant Ritchie (Head of Housing Repairs & Maintenance), Sam Warren (Community Engagement Manager), Sabrina Karabasic (Community Engagement Administrator), Janet Dowdell (Tenancy Services Operations Manager),

**Guests:** Sarah Booker-Lewis (Local Democracy Reporter),

**1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS & APOLOGIES**

- 1.1 Chair Theresa Mackey began the meeting by welcoming officers, residents, and visitors to the panel.
- 1.2 Apologies were made by the Councillor Chair Cllr Sheard for not attending in person.
- 1.3 The Chair reminded the panel and those in attendance of the Engagement Conduct Guidelines for the meeting and brought attention to the rules laid out in the document and expectations for the behaviour and involvement of those at the meeting and outlined their hope for communications and contributions to be given in a polite and respectful manner.

**2 ACTION LOG**

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**11 - 14**

- 2.1 The Chair noted the first action, regarding Tavistock Down and dealing with outstanding issues as being complete.

2.2 This was agreed unanimously and confirmed by the representatives of the Hollingdean Residents Association.

2.3 Barney Miller (Sylvan Hall Residents Association) noted that they raised this as an issue and added they had a meeting with officers from CityParks regarding grass cutting and overgrown areas, nothing that this remains to be addressed.

2.4 The Chair then moved to the next action, regarding refuse collection at Southmount and that this action was recorded as complete.

2.5 The Chair moved to the next item, with regards to leaseholders and access to the roof at Mimosa Court, noting that this action was listed as complete.

2.6 The Chair then raised the next item in the action log, regarding communications which are to be put out with regards to the installation of solar panels at Mimosa Court.

2.7 Jim Hornsby noted that whilst he had spoken with an officer, earlier in the day, and an agreement had been reached to see this action through, it remained incomplete and that the record was incorrect.

2.8 Keely McDonald also noted that they were drafting an article to be circulated with regards to this.

2.9 The Chair then moved to the next item in the action log; grass cutting and works in the hallway at Mimosa Court. Making note that the grass cutting remained outstanding and the works in the hallway had been completed.

2.10 The Chair then moved to item 8 regarding an EDB bid for for outstanding works for the youth club at Coldean, this was noted as being incomplete and unable to take place due to preliminary works required. Residents noted that this was an urgent issue for Coldean Forum as they are paying rent on the property.

2.11 The Chair noted item 9 regarding accessible showers had been actioned and that item 10 regarding signage on the Bates Estate had not been completed. A representative of the TRA confirmed this had been noted by officers and thanked them for their contributions.

### **3 MINUTES**

#### **3 MINUTES 15 – 18**

3.1 The Chair moved to confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the previous meeting.

3.2 Barney Miller brought to the Chairs attention that the wording of the previous minutes was inaccurate as they made it appear that the residents elected the councillor co-chair when in fact the case was that they were appointed by the administration.

3.3 The Chair agreed to have this changed in retrospect.

3.4 Barney Miller brought to the Chairs attention that the wording of services completed included only one example when in fact the service provided was wider ranging.

3.5 The Chair agreed to have this changed in retrospect.

3.6 A representative of a TRA brought the chairs attention to an inaccuracy in the recorded completion of works at Highcroft Lodge.

3.7 Keely McDonald informed the panel and attendees of the backlog in the Estate Development Budget Works and noted that there was an ongoing process being undertaken in collaboration and consultation with the procurement department to enable access to a selection of service providers that would be interested in taking on works, focusing on clearing the backlog. They also informed the panel and attendees that unfortunately to date, only one provider had come back to the department and that a meeting was being arranged with them to set out how to make the process work going forward.

3.8 Donna James brought the Chairs attention to item '4.18' of the previous meeting - works being listed as completed on the Bates Estate as including work to the cameras which had not actually taken place.

3.9 The Chair agreed to have this changed in retrospect and noted it as still required to be actioned.

3.10 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as otherwise taken.

## **4 HOUSING BUDGET REPORT**

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4.1 Martin Reid (Assistant Director, Housing Management) briefed the panel and the attendees on the Housing Budget Report for F/Y 24/25 as per the agenda item. This was an overview of the income and expenditure of the housing budget, a ringfenced fund, including the additional spend due to the extra week in the year.

4.2 Barney Miller asked a question regarding passive lighting on buildings and enquired as to whether or not the funding of their electricity bills was included in tenants rent or came from the ringfenced fund.

4.3 Martin Reid confirmed that they were currently funded through a mixed formula of both funding streams although this was being looked at with consideration being given to changing the funding system for common area electricity usage in the future.

4.4 Sam Warren asked Martin Reid to confirm and advise on the nature of 'disrepair costs', the risks posed by them and how they were being mitigated. Martin Reid moved to Geof Gage for a more in-depth brief which was then provided in detail to the panel and attendees including the commercial context behind the disrepair cost claims.

4.5 Several residents raised concerns over the communicated £70 million deficit that was being ran by B&HCC and whether or not this would impact on the housing budget. Martin Reid clarified that the housing revenue account was ringfenced outside of the general fund budget and would not be affected by any financial or spending implications related to the deficit of the authority.

4.6 Residents additionally raised concerns regarding the differences in contributions towards the HRA from those in social housing and those who were leaseholders, as well as raising concerns regarding examples of private litigation following a disagreement (examples were given both in the authority and in other authorities).

4.7 Martin Reid reassured the residents that the allocation of maintenance contributions and other charges would be an open process including residents and also reassured them that the authority was bound by legislation to make this an impartial process. The director went on to reassure residents that the best option for them was to contact the authority directly with regards to any issues rather than pursue private litigation which could come at personal expense.

4.8 Martin Reid went on to brief the panel and those in attendance of the individual funding pipelines in the capital expenditure programme. A figure of around 300 properties that could be categorised as new supply was given, and the Chair asked in what period of time had these new properties been brought into the housing stock. Martin Reid informed the chair that the 300 new supply homes figure was over a four-year period.

4.9 Barney Miller asked the director if the information was commercially sensitive or if the interest rates on loans taken against future rental income to invest in new supply could be divulged. The director confirmed that it was not commercially sensitive, and that the information could be provided.

4.10 The Chair thanked the director for their contribution and moved to the next agenda item.

## **5 HOUSING PERFORMANCE Q2 REPORT**

### **5 HOUSING PERFORMANCE Q2 REPORT**

**19 – 38**

5.1 Martin Reid then went on to advise the panel and attendees on the Housing Performance Q2 Report 2023/24, as per the agenda item. This included statistics on the levels of services being provided, the director made note of the increased efforts to clear the 'back log' of incomplete maintenance or other tasks that had been flagged or requested by residents.

5.2 Ian Knowles (Bates Estate Community Association) noted their disagreement with the director's statement regarding the that the repairs were being completed in good order and made note that emergency repairs were particularly bad considering their specific context.

5.3 Martin Reid made reassurances to both the Chair and representative that their situation and the overall situation of emergency maintenance was a core service and should always be available.

5.4 Donna James (Bates Estate Community Association) asked the officers to explain the difference between an emergency repair request and being categorised as vulnerable by the housing authority.

5.5 Grant Ritchie (Head of Housing Repairs & Maintenance) clarified that the authority would qualify a lack of heating and hot water as an emergency and that those who qualified as vulnerable would possibly have more situations which could be qualified as an emergency, and also noted that this should not affect the service provided for emergency repair requests.

5.6 Martin Reid noted that it was important that issues regarding oversight of maintenance and emergency maintenance repair requests were brought to the panel to be addressed and that the authority could learn from them. As well as that the current figures for Q2 Maintenance Repair Requests were at 95%. They also made note that boilers (heating and hot water) were now the operational responsibility of a contractor which the authority could engage in future discussions regarding current and future service delivery levels.

5.7 Ian Knowles noted that their emergency repair request was completed by a contractor who had only been given the job the same day, despite the emergency repair request being lodged several days prior.

5.8 Grant Ritchie clarified that emergency repair requests made on the weekend would usually be actioned the next working day and the cases lodged would be allocated as per their urgency.

5.9 The Chair referred to the representatives earlier point about emergency repairs and informed the attendants that they had also experienced a delay with emergency repairs on their own property recently. They also made further note that the temporary heaters when provided were electric and therefore at the expense of the tenant, but that they themselves had not been offered one.

## **6 CITYCLEAN, NEW PROCESS FOR PERSISTENT ISSUES**

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6.1 Sam Warren briefed the panel and attendees on the findings of the consultation period for city process, resulting in the 'new process of persistent issues' which had been circulated to relevant parties ahead of the meeting.

6.2 Sam Warren informed the panel that as a result of the new process, residents could now raise issues at their residents only meetings, contact their community engagement officer which will allow for a direct line of engagement with CityClean operational personnel regarding persistent issues.

6.3 Representatives of Tenancy Associations raised concerns that previous issues raised, and different forms of contact used had not lead to improvements in the past and persistent issues had remained in spite of their efforts to engage with the service.

6.4 Sam Warren reaffirmed the commitment by CityClean to the new process for persistent issues and reassured the intention of CityClean to increase their engagement and also noted that they were undergoing internal reforms to address issues raised by whistleblowers. The officer also noted that this new process was in fact a trial that would be informed going forward at future panels.

## **7 RESIDENT'S QUESTIONS - 2 & 3 STAR**

### **7 RESIDENT'S QUESTIONS - 2 & 3**

**39 - 70**

7.1 The Chair moved to the North Area Resident's Questions, the first issue raised was regarding CityClean, the panel agreed the wider issue had already been discussed and agreed to move to the next item.

7.2 The Chair moved to the next item, 'issues with the repairs service' regarding co-ordination of repairs, noting the item listed digital access to the service as a serious concern as it disenfranchised those unable to connect digitally.

7.3 A representative of a tenancy organisation raised that the authority should maintain multiple methods for residents to engage and raise potential issues to ensure all parties had an equal opportunity to contact the council.

7.4 Grant Ritchie seconded this and confirmed this was already the preferred option by the authority with an active call centre and no plans to reduce capacity. They also stated they were exploring the options for increased methods of contacting the authority and keeping track of the progress of repairs.

7.5 Barney Miller raised points regarding the use of common rooms and passageways in buildings and suggested their use be better regulated in addition to providing a more differentiated response to maintenance requests. The Chair seconded this, and Martin Reid agreed that the issue required further attention and would be resolved.

7.6 Grant Ritchie made a point that many questions could not be answered as directly using the format of area panels as the information being recorded and circulated was restricted in the inclusion of personal details. The Chair seconded this and went further to make the point that Area Panels were intended to be a wider meeting in response to policy proposals and more strategic issues.

7.7 Panel members discussed the benefits of the area panels to allow the representatives of tenancy associations to have contact with officers and access to resources they would otherwise be unable to. The Chair seconded this and made a point that the area panels were greatly appreciated by the wider community.

7.8 The panel members discussed possible solutions to the recurring issues with fly tipping in the North Area and the allocation of skips from the local authority to prevent this.

## **8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

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8.1 Keely McDonald notified those present that there were still remaining EDB funds and there would be another funding round application available before the end of the financial year.

8.2 No further discussion was held due to the meeting running over.

**9 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

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**71 – 84**

The meeting concluded at 16.18pm.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of