



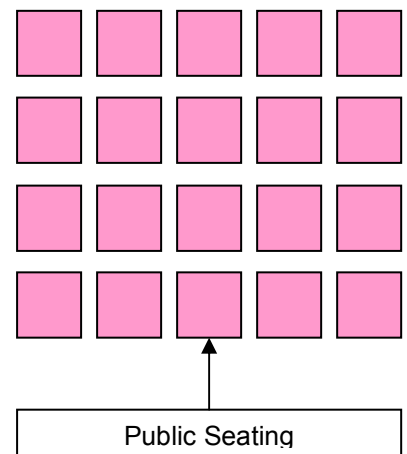
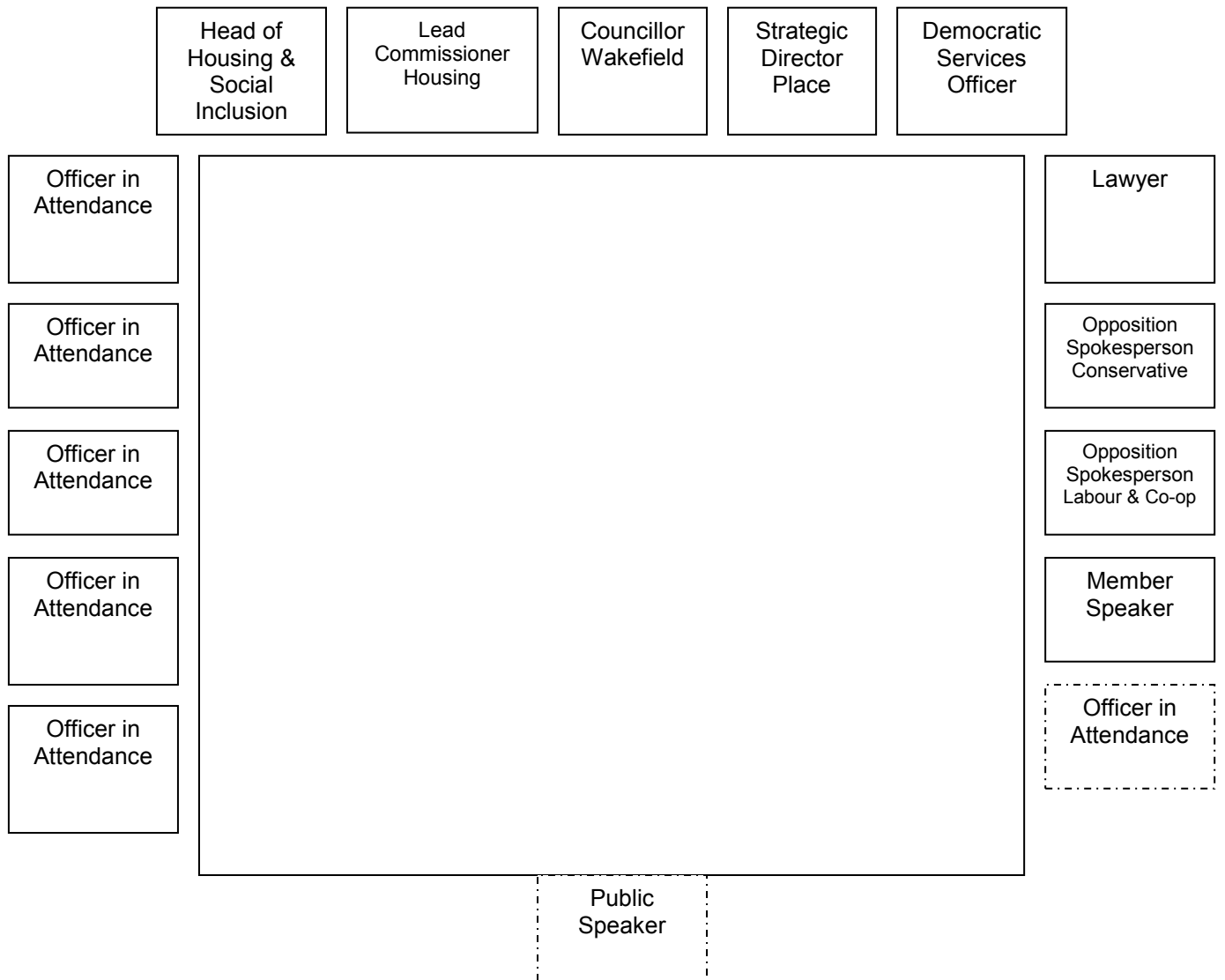
Brighton & Hove
City Council

Cabinet Member Meeting

Title:	Housing Cabinet Member Meeting
Date:	19 October 2011
Time:	4.00pm
Venue	Council Chamber, Hove Town Hall
Members:	Councillor: Wakefield (Cabinet Member)
Contact:	Caroline De Marco Democratic Services Officer 01273 291063 caroline.demarco@brighton-hove.gov.uk

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Democratic Services: Meeting Layout



AGENDA

29. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

- (a) Declarations of Interest by all Members present of any personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Members regard the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
- (b) Exclusion of Press and Public - To consider whether, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, or the nature of the proceedings, the press and public should be excluded from the meeting when any of the following items are under consideration.

NOTE: Any item appearing in Part 2 of the Agenda states in its heading either that it is confidential or the category under which the information disclosed in the report is exempt from disclosure and therefore not available to the public.

A list and description of the categories of exempt information is available for public inspection at Brighton and Hove Town Halls.

30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

1 - 4

Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 September 2011 (copy attached).

31. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS

32. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION

- (a) Items reserved by the Cabinet Member
- (b) Items reserved by the Opposition Spokespersons
- (c) Items reserved by Members, with the agreement of the Cabinet Member.

NOTE: Public Questions, Written Questions from Councillors, Petitions, Deputations, Letters from Councillors and Notices of Motion will be reserved automatically.

33. PETITIONS

No petitions have been received by the date of publication.

34. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

(The closing date for receipt of public questions is 12 noon on 12 October 2011)

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

No public questions have been received by date of publication.

35. DEPUTATIONS

(The closing date for receipt of deputations is 12 noon on 12 October 2011)

No deputations have been received by the date of publication.

36. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

No letters have been received.

37. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

No written questions have been received.

38. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

No Notices of Motion have been received by the date of publication.

39. MINUTES OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 5 - 10

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2011 (copy attached for noting).

40. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE 11 - 40

Minutes of the meetings held on 5 September and 26 September 2011 (copies attached for noting).

41. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 41 - 90

Contact Officer: Ododo Dafe Tel: 29-3201
Ward Affected: All Wards

42. CUSTOMER ACCESS PHASE 3 - CUSTOMER SERVICE & ACCESS STRATEGY FOR HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION 91 - 124

Contact Officer: Ododo Dafe Tel: 29-3201
Ward Affected: All Wards

43. ALLOCATIONS POLICY - REVIEW 125 - 128

Contact Officer: Verity Walker Tel: 01273 293130
Ward Affected: All Wards

44. EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY PANEL ON LETTINGS AGENTS 129 - 160

Contact Officer: Martin Reid Tel: 29-3321

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Ward Affected: All Wards

The City Council actively welcomes members of the public and the press to attend its meetings and holds as many of its meetings as possible in public. Provision is also made on the agendas for public questions to committees and details of how questions can be raised can be found on the website and/or on agendas for the meetings.

The closing date for receipt of public questions and deputations for the next meeting is 12 noon on the fifth working day before the meeting.

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Meeting papers can be provided, on request, in large print, in Braille, on audio tape or on disc, or translated into any other language as requested.

For further details and general enquiries about this meeting contact Caroline De Marco, (01273 291063, email caroline.demarco@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or email democratic.services@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Date of Publication - Tuesday, 11 October 2011

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

4.00pm 7 SEPTEMBER 2011

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Wakefield (Cabinet Member)

Also in attendance: Councillor Farrow (Opposition Spokesperson) and Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson)

PART ONE

16. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

16(a) Declarations of Interests

16.1 There were none.

16(b) Exclusion of Press and Public

16.2 In accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Cabinet Member considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during an item of business on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present during that item, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information (as defined in section 100A(3) of the Act) or exempt information (as defined in section 100I(1) of the Act).

16.3 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any items on the agenda.

17. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

17.1 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 relating to the cap on Housing Benefit. He had asked officers to investigate and report back on this matter. The Lead Commissioner reported that officers were in the process of preparing a report which would be presented to future meetings of the Housing Management Consultative Committee and Housing Cabinet Member Meeting to a future meeting.

17.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting held on 5 July 2011 be agreed and signed by the Cabinet Member.

18. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS

Maggie King

18.1 The Cabinet Member reported the sad news that Maggie King had died the previous night after a period of illness. Maggie had been a very active tenant in the council's tenant movement. The Cabinet Member, along with councillors and officers stood for one minutes silence as a mark of respect.

19. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION

19.1 **RESOLVED** – That item 28 be reserved for discussion.

20. PETITIONS

20.1 There were none.

21. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

21.1 There were none.

22. DEPUTATIONS

22.1 There were none.

23. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

23.1 There were none.

24. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

24.1 There were none.

25. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

25.1 There were none.

26. MINUTES OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26.1 The Cabinet Member considered the minutes of the Adult Social Care & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 28 June 2011.

26.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes be noted.

27. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

27.1 The Cabinet Member considered the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee meeting held on the 13 June 2011.

27.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes be noted.

28. ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS 2011

28.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which requested approval of the final draft annual report to all council tenants and leaseholders for the year ending 31 March 2011 at Appendix 1, for publication and distribution to all council tenants and leaseholders with Homing In later in the month.

28.2 The Housing Stock Review Manager tabled the final version, with outstanding photos and some small corrections from the version previously circulated.

28.3 As the first annual report last year was very well received, officers followed a similar plan and format for this year. On 24 January 2011 the Housing Management Consultative Committee agreed the plan and timetable for involving as many tenants and leaseholders as possible in producing and scrutinising the report. Details were included in the annual report itself and the cover report. Final scrutiny was provided by the Housing Management Consultative Committee on 5 September, when the report was warmly received by resident representatives.

28.4 The report included in their own words and in pictures tenants' and leaseholders' own perceptions of the council's performance and what resident working groups had achieved, working in partnership with members and officers. It set out how the council performed in 2010/2011, how the council met its commitments made to residents in last year's report and the council's improvement plans for this current year. Under the regulatory framework, landlords must meet the commitments they make to tenants in their annual report.

28.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn thanked officers who had worked in conjunction with tenants on producing an excellent report. He commented that people who were interested in the subject would read the report. However, he considered that the most members of the general public would not read the report in its current form. He hoped that a shorter and more readable version of the report could be produced in future.

28.6 The Chair welcomed this comment and agreed that the council wanted members of the public to access information. She suggested that in future, there could be two versions of the Annual Report. A full document and a briefer version possibly folded into A5.

28.7 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion agreed that this would be possible. He stressed the need to balance the requirements of the regulator whilst ensuring that the report was accessible. Officers would investigate ways of producing the report for future years.

- 28.8 **RESOLVED** (1) That the annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2011 as attached at Appendix 1, be approved for publication and distribution to all council tenants and leaseholders.

The meeting concluded at 4.18pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.00PM 8 SEPTEMBER 2011

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors K Norman (Chair); Phillips (Deputy Chair), Buckley, Gilbey, Jones, Peltzer Dunn, Turton and Wealls

Co-opted Members: Ms Averil Fuller (BHLINK)

PART ONE

12. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

13A Declaration of Substitutes

13.1 The Link was represented by Averil Fuller (rather than Mick Lister as listed on the agenda front sheet)

1B Declarations of Interest

13.2 Cllr Wealls declared a personal interest in regard to Item 19. Cllr Wealls is a trustee of 'Impact Initiatives' a group which receives funding via Supporting People.

1C Declarations of Party Whip

13.3 There were none.

1D Exclusion of Press and Public

13.4 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

13.5 **RESOLVED** – that the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

13. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 14.1 The Director of Adult Social Services explained to committee members that at point 5.2 of the draft minutes, the phrase “increasing the market of personal assistants” indicated that the council was working to increase the number of personal assistants available to work in the city and thereby give residents in receipt of personal care budget a greater choice of care provision.
- 14.2 The wording of point 5.6 of the draft minutes was amended, with t ‘would’ replaced with ‘will’ in the fourth paragraph of this point.
- 14.3 RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman.**

14. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 15.1 The Chair voiced the committee’s thanks for all the work undertaken by the ASCHOSC scrutiny support officer Kath Vlcek. Kath is currently taking maternity leave but is expected to return to work in early summer 2012.

15. PUBLIC QUESTIONS, LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS AND NOTICES OF MOTION

- 16.1 There were none.

16. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT SESSION - TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL CARE

- 17.1 This training session was presented by Denise D’Souza, Director of Adult Social Services and Lead Commissioner, People.
- 17.2 In answer to a question regarding how the council defined sustainability in terms of low level social care services, Ms D’Souza told members that this referred to the need to fund these services within the current funding envelope. This might potentially mean charging some users for services, although detailed modelling on aspects of this has not yet concluded.
- 17.3 The Chair thanked Ms D’Souza for her presentation.

**17. ACCOMMODATION & SUPPORT PLAN FOR PEOPLE WITH LEARNING
DISABILITIES**

- 18.1 This item was introduced by Diana Bernhardt, Lead Commissioner for Learning Disabilities.
- 18.2 In response to a question about the availability of data on where in the city learning disabled people actually lived, Ms Bernhardt told the committee that such information was not currently widely available, but work was ongoing with Housing to improve intelligence in this area.
- 18.3 In answer to a query as to why having an oversupply of certain types of supported housing might pose a financial risk to the council, members were informed that, if other

local authorities placed some of their residents in Brighton & Hove supported housing, the financial responsibility for supporting these people could pass to the city council. There was therefore a potential risk in having a surplus of certain types of supported housing – currently the city has a surplus in accommodation for under 25s.

- 18.4 In response to a question about how many additional supported housing places were required to meet the needs of learning disabled people, members were told that we probably needed an additional 45 places across the 3 years of the plan. However, this did not necessarily equate to an additional 45 properties, not least because a tweaking of current services might supply some of these places.
- 18.5 In answer to a question as to whether the plan included targets, members were informed that the plan, as a high-level strategic document, did not currently include firm performance targets, it being the intention to detail these targets at a more operational level via the Adult Social Care Performance Framework and the ongoing work of the Learning Disabilities Partnership. However, it was agreed that it might nonetheless be sensible to include some indicative targets in the high level plan, and officers agreed to consider this before submitting the plan for executive approval.
- 18.6 In response to a question about the relationship between the Learning Disability plan and the recently concluded scrutiny panel on services for adults with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC), members were told that the panel report had informed the plan. For example, the importance of looking at interactions with the criminal justice system (where a disproportionate percentage of both people with ASC and people with learning disabilities are typically represented) and in raising awareness and improving accessibility of mainstream services for people with ASC, something which had been taken on board when developing the Learning Disabilities plan.
- 18.7 The Director of Adult Social Services promised to consider all the committee's comments and, where appropriate, make amendments to the learning Disabilities plan before it was presented to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care for agreement.
- 18.8 The Chair thanked Ms Bernhardt for her contribution.
- 18.9 RESOLVED - That the report be noted and the minutes for this item be passed on to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care for information.**
- 18. HOUSING AND SUPPORT: PREVENTATIVE SERVICES TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL INCLUSION**
- 19.1 This item was introduced by Jugal Sharma, Lead Commissioner, Housing.
- 19.2 In response to a question about how the success of clients moving on from Supporting People support was measured (e.g. whether 'success' was measured as clients leaving supported housing or whether it was measured as clients leaving housing and then still not requiring support after a certain period of time), Mr Sharma promised to provide details of the methodology used in writing.

- 19.3 In answer to a query about what supported housing providers thought the council could do better, the committee was told that they generally sought more involvement in council decision-making, particularly in terms of budget-setting.
- 19.4 In response to a query from a member as to the exact amount of savings generated by Supporting People funding, Mr Sharma agreed to check his figures and amend if necessary. Mr Sharma explained that the figure for cost savings was reached by comparing the cost of Supporting People support against the cost of providing a positive alternative source of support from another source.
- 19.5 The Chair thanked Mr Sharma for his contribution.

19.6 RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

19. COMMUNITY MEALS

- 20.1 This item was introduced by Phillip Letchfield, ASC Head of Performance and Contracting.
- 20.2 In response to a question on the typical costs of supplying community meals, the committee was told that these were likely to vary little from authority to authority, although the level of subsidy did vary considerably.
- 20.3 In answer to a query as to whether the council should be subsidising the cost of meals, Mr Letchfield told members that this was not necessary as all individuals were expected to pay for the cost of food from their own income, benefits etc. However, it might be necessary to pay for the cost of having meals delivered, although here it was important to distinguish between people who wanted a community meals services and those genuinely in need of it.
- 20.4 In response to a question of where this item had originated, members were told that it had been put forward by officers in ASC with the knowledge of the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care.
- 20.4 Members debated whether holding a workshop on this issue was a valid scrutiny activity. It was agreed that it was, but that to be effective, members attending a workshop would need to be thoroughly briefed. Briefing material should include information gleaned from 'exit interviews' with clients who chose to discontinue their community meals service, and data on the effectiveness of the 'safe and well' element of the service.
- 20.5 The Chair thanked Mr Letchfield for his contribution.
- 20.6 RESOLVED – That a workshop be held on the issue of community meals**
- 20. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO CABINET OR THE RELEVANT CABINET MEMBER MEETING**
- 21.1 There were none, other than the minutes relating to Item 18.

21. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO COUNCIL

22.1 There were none.

The meeting concluded at 5.45pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

3.00pm 5 SEPTEMBER 2011

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Wakefield (Chair); Duncan, Farrow, Peltzer Dunn, Pidgeon, Robins, Summers and Wells

Tenant Representatives: Ted Harman (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), David Murtagh (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Trish Barnard (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Jean Davis (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Stewart Gover (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Heather Hayes (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Tina Urquhart (West Hove & Portslade Area Area Housing Management Panel), Beverley Weaver (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Chris Kift (Hi Rise Action Group), Tony Worsfold (Leaseholder Action Group), Tom Whiting (Sheltered Housing Action Group) and Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network)

Apologies: Councillor Randall and Chris El Shabba (substitute tenant representative).

PART ONE

14. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

14A Declarations of Substitute Members

14.1 Tony Worsfold declared that he was attending as a substitute for Muriel Briault.

14B Declarations of Interests

14.2 Councillor Summers, Councillor Wells, Heather Hayes and Ted Harman declared a personal interest in any discussion on the LDV as they are Board Members of Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes (the Local Delivery Vehicle).

14C Exclusion of the Press and Public

14.3 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of

the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

14.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

15.1 Tom Whiting asked for the second sentence of 11.6 to be amended as follows: "Tom Whiting stressed the need for sheltered housing. This was *more* financially viable *especially where care services are involved.*"

15.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee Meeting held on 13 June 2011 be agreed and signed as a correct record subject to the amendment above.

16. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

Resident Involvement and widening participation

16.1 The Chair explained that she was aware that there has been some recent concern that the administration might not value the involvement of residents in the way it did things. She wanted to clear up misunderstandings and hear peoples' concerns.

16.2 The Chair stressed that she wanted to be absolutely clear that she would place residents at the heart of everything that the administration did in relation to the management of council housing.

16.3 The Chair valued tenants' involvement and she would be attending as many tenant meetings as she could during the next few months up to Christmas, in order to observe, listen and answer questions. She stressed it was important for her to hear the tenants' concerns. If she was unable to attend a meeting she would send another councillor.

16.4 The Chair wanted a partnership with residents, working together to design, deliver and monitor housing services.

16.5 At the next round of Area Panels the Chair wanted to spend some time to consider how the administration could make a bigger difference to resident involvement and engage more people to support tenants' work, give their views, and help hold the council to account. The administration be not be foisting decisions on tenants and the Chair stressed that she fully recognised what her predecessors had put in place. She did however, think that participation could be widened to include more tenant involvement.

16.6 The Chair reported that the Administration had pledged to increase engagement and introduce a tenant-led scrutiny panel. Officers within the housing and democratic services have been exploring ways of introducing tenant scrutiny and would be bringing a report to the next HMCC at the end of the month. The Chair now wanted to directly involve residents in further developing ideas around introducing tenant scrutiny. At the next round of Area Panels she would be establishing a resident-led 'innovation group' to start some early work on this. She would chair this group as she wanted to be directly

involved in working with tenants. The group might also have ideas on how the administration could give tenants and leaseholders opportunities to be more involved, working on approaches that removed barriers and increased democracy, and the number and types of groups. It was likely that the group would work together between September and December 2011, and be made up of current tenant representatives, some tenants who are not currently engaged, councillors and officers.

- 16.7 The administration wanted to widen participation and encourage new tenants and leaseholders to get involved, but this did not mean that the administration did not value the input and valuable experience that long standing tenant representatives brought.
- 16.8 David Murtagh informed the Chair that he was annoyed with what he read in the press and would like to know how many tenants had been in discussions with Councillor Randall. Feedback from tenants was not good. Consultation had not been so good since the elections.
- 16.9 The Chair stated that the administration wanted to improve communications. She had spoken to councillors who wanted more information before meetings. She agreed with their view and was happy to share information. The Chair invited members to get in touch with her if they had any questions.
- 16.10 Chris Kift mentioned that it was minuted in the last Tenant Compact Monitoring Group meeting that some members wanted to write a letter to Councillor Randall about how few councillors were attending meetings. Councillor Randall responded straight away and councillors had attended a following meeting. This had been achieved informally by ringing Councillor Randall. When Chris had raised concerns about changes to the Area Panels, the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion had contacted him within 10 minutes. The matter was discussed at the last two City Assemblies and the only gaps needing re-election were where people had stood down. He could not see why this matter was causing problems.
- 16.11 Ted Harman informed the meeting that he had only found out about a letter sent to tenant representatives this morning. The last letter he received about Area Panels was in July 2011. He had not heard the outcome of a meeting with Councillor Randall. Chris Kift explained that he would be reporting on the outcome of that meeting at a meeting of the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group on Monday 12 September.
- 16.12 Councillor Robins referred to the Chair's comments about attending meetings. He asked if she was unable to attend, did she intend her substitutes to be Green councillors? The Chair explained that this was her intention but she was happy to work co-operatively with all councillors.
- 16.13 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the lack of communication with tenants and councillors. He accepted that this was not the fault of the Chair. It was the duty of officers to inform tenants and councillors. It was worrying that there were tenant representatives who had not been kept informed. He found it difficult when people phoned him and he was not able to advise them, as he had not been kept informed. He stressed that co-operation was the way forward. A platform of trust had been damaged by inaction.

- 16.14 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion acknowledged the concerns raised. A decision had been made to defer the elections at Area Panels for a few months in order to look at the various tenant groups. It was necessary to talk to 70 organisations. This was not possible on the phone, and it was decided that a letter should be sent out. The letter had been sent out in August as that was when the agendas were set for the Area Panels. He apologised for the lack of communication and acknowledged that the content of the letter could have been shared with members of the HMCC and the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group. However, the contents of the letter needed to be shared with constituents wider than this group. He apologised if the process was causing anxiety and concern.
- 16.15 Stewart Gover remarked that most people in the meeting room were paid to attend. However, tenants' representatives were in attendance for free. He referred to the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 as authority for the proposition that no-one in the country should interfere with tenant representation at the Area Panels. He considered that officers and councillors had no authority to interfere with the due process of an Area Panel Meeting.
- 16.16 Councillor Duncan stressed that the administration were trying to embed new structures and new ways of doing things, and wanted to ensure more voices were heard. He had been carrying out visits around the city to hear the views of residents. Democracy and listening were at the heart of what the administration wanted to do.
- 16.17 David Murtagh referred to a special meeting held last year that looked at this issue. He asked why the matter was being discussed again.
- 16.18 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion replied that officers were continuing that work. At the next meeting of the HMCC there would be a report on a Resident Involvement Strategy. The Localism Bill would be going through parliament and there was a legislative need for scrutiny. This would build on the work of the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group.
- 16.19 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to Stewart Gover's comments about the legality of the proposed changes to the Area Panels. He asked for the Senior Lawyer's view. The Senior Lawyer informed the Committee that what had been stated did not seem quite right. She would need to read the Act of Parliament and report back.
- 16.20 Tom Whiting considered the whole business to be a shambles. There was a need to start again to put things right.
- 16.21 The Chair stated that she was happy to have a fresh start and had taken on board the above comments regarding communications. She urged tenants to bring concerns to the administration.

Tenant Inspectors.

- 16.22 The Chair stated that some committee members might remember that tenants had previously expressed an interest in being trained to become Tenant Inspectors to evaluate the quality of service provision by Mears and the council's other repairs and

maintenance contractors. The Chair knew that this is something that David Murtagh had been requesting for some time.

16.23 Since the last meeting of HMCC, the Chair had met with Mears to discuss issues raised by residents. As part of this she had asked Mears to come up with some proposals for how the council could train a group of tenants to become tenant inspectors. To get this started, the Chair had asked Mears to arrange for some tenants to visit another social housing landlord to meet other tenant inspectors and learn how this works in their area. Mears would be discussing this at the next meetings of the Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group and Asset Management Panel. The Chair asked tenants to let her know if they would like to be involved. She requested that residents emailed her as this was likely to get the quickest response.

17. CALLOVER

17.1 The Chair asked the Committee to consider which items listed on the agenda it wished to debate and determine in full.

17.2 **RESOLVED** - That all items be reserved for debate and determination.

18. PETITIONS

18.1 There were none.

19. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

19.1 There were none.

20. DEPUTATIONS

20.1 There were none.

21. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

21.1 There were none.

22. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

22.1 There were none.

23. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2010/11 FINAL OUTTURN AND FORECAST OUTTURN FOR 2011/12 AS AT MONTH 4

23.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion which set out the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2010/11 final outturn and the forecast outturn for 2011/12 as at Month 4. The report was presented by the Head of Finance – Business Engagement. The 2010/11 outturn was a net underspend of £1.377 million compared to budget as shown in Appendix 1 to the report. The forecast outturn for 2011/12 was an underspend of £0.656 million as shown in Appendix 2.

- 23.2 Stewart Gover asked why the rent income from car parks and garages had fallen so drastically. The Head of Finance – Business Engagement explained that the drop in income related to St James’s House Car Park being closed for some time.
- 23.3 **RESOLVED** – (1) That it is noted that the final outturn for the HRA for 2010/11 was an underspend of £1.377 million. This represents a variance of 2.85% of the gross revenue budget of £48.294 million. General HRA revenue reserves have increased by £1.077 million to £4.700 million as at 31 March 2011.
- (2) That the forecast outturn position for 2011/12 as at Month 4, which is an underspend of £0.656 million, be noted.

24. ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS 2011

- 24.1 The Committee considered a report of Head of Housing and Social Inclusion requesting the Committee to consider the final draft annual report to all council tenants and leaseholders for the year ending 31 March 2011 at Appendix 1 and recommend that the Cabinet Member for Housing approve it for publication and distribution to all council tenants and leaseholders with Homing In later this month.
- 24.2 The Housing Stock Review Manager explained that she would outline the context and how the annual report was produced. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion would then report on the main highlights of the performance and improvement plans as set out in the report itself.
- 24.3 Members were informed that since April 2010 the council has come under the regulatory framework for social landlords of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), along with other council landlords and housing associations. This framework required social landlords to publish an annual performance report to their tenants and to reach a number of minimum standards.
- 24.4 The annual report was required to assess the council’s performance against the TSA’s standards and meet a very detailed brief, including setting out how tenants had been involved in producing and scrutinising the report and the ‘service offer’ and improvement plans for the current year. Landlords were required to meet the commitments they made to their tenants.
- 24.5 The first annual report last year was very well received, so officers followed a similar plan and format this year. On 24 January 2011, the HMCC noted the progress officers had already made in meeting the commitments in last year’s report and agreed the plan and timetable for involving council tenants and leaseholders in producing and scrutinising this year’s report.
- 24.6 Like last year’s report, officers were keen that the current Annual Report included in their own words and in pictures tenants’ and leaseholders’ own perceptions of the council’s performance and what resident working groups had achieved, working in partnership with members and officers.
- 24.7 Officers also wanted to give all residents the opportunity to tell the council what they wanted to say or see in the report. So officers asked everyone – in last year’s annual

report itself, in feedback and suggestion forms, on the council website, through Homing In and at Area Panels and the City Assembly:

- for feedback on last year's report and how it could be improved
- for comments and suggestions for this year's report
- and to send short quotes on the achievements of their groups.

- 24.8 Officers also, like last year, issued a consultation draft report for everyone to comment on, at the end of June. A copy was sent to all tenant and resident associations with a feedback form, copies were available at council offices and put it on the council website and the council's consultation portal. Officers emailed over 2,200 tenants and leaseholders that the council have email addresses for with a link to the report and asking them to have their say and put postings on Twitter and Facebook.
- 24.9 Officers arranged more publicity than last year and made sure every council tenant and leaseholder had the opportunity to be involved. Fewer responses were received than last year, but the final draft report reflected the feedback that was received. The council was very grateful to those residents and representatives who provided feedback and quotes and pictures for the report, which brought it alive and also gave residents' point of view.
- 24.10 This year the report also featured staff who made an exceptional contribution last year. The mix of photos and quotes reflected the partnership between residents and the council to achieve excellent performance.
- 24.11 Last year officers consulted a large number of tenants to see how they thought the council met the new TSA standards at that time. Officers used that information to outline in last year's annual report how they met the TSA standards, any gaps and what they planned to do by 31 March this year to improve the council's services.
- 24.12 The council continued with the same structure, following the TSA standards for the sections in this year's report. In each section officers had set out clearly how they met those commitments and the council's plans to improve further over this current year.
- 24.13 The final stage for residents to scrutinise the annual report was at this meeting, but officers were also grateful to have received some suggestions from the Homing In Tenant Editorial Board, such as a caption for the photo on the front cover.
- 24.14 The Tenant Services Authority would be abolished next year and a 'backstop' role to intervene on consumer matters was being transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency. The TSA would be consulting on changes to the regulatory framework later this autumn. In the meantime it had said that the council don't need to send them a copy of this year's annual report.
- 24.15 The requirement to produce an annual report to tenants was expected to continue. The government was currently consulting on new directions it proposed to make to the new regulator and those included requiring landlords to publish an annual report.

- 24.16 Accordingly, The Housing Stock Review Manager highlighted that officers were once again asking residents on the back cover of the Annual Report to let the council know what they think of it and what they would like in a future report.
- 24.17 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that the Annual Report documented improvements in service over the last year. It demonstrated that the council had listened to residents and met the promises made in last year's Annual Report.
- 24.18 It was not 100% good news – and there were areas where the council needed to improve. However, in every area tenants were involved in making improvements.
- 24.19 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion highlighted some of the achievements from the report. There had been good improvements to the website including the Customer Online System which had resulted in positive feedback. There had been a lot of work to streamline processes to improve customers' experience of the service. The City Assemblies were getting better each time and becoming more interactive.
- 24.20 74% of tenants' homes now met the Decent Homes Standard and the council was still on track to bring all tenants' homes up to Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2013/14. The Council remained in the top quartile for energy efficiency of housing stock. The repairs service had provided a challenge but 95% of the almost 6000 people surveyed last year were satisfied or very satisfied with repairs carried out. More work needed to be done to get this right.
- 24.21 A great deal of good work had been carried out with mystery shoppers and it was good news that lettings were quicker now. The Estate Service reported that there was now 80% satisfaction with the cleaning service. Officers were challenged to further improve this service. The council was continuing to carry out improvements in fire safety. There was increased resident satisfaction with anti social behaviour and with regard to Value for Money the council had achieved the highest ever level of rent collection rate. He thanked staff who worked in that area.
- 24.22 Finally, the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion thanked tenants for their involvement in the report. He also thanked the Housing Stock Review Manager for her hard work in producing the report.
- 24.23 Chris Kift reported that in relation to fire safety, a recent high rise fire drill had put to bed the myth that fire fighters could only reach the 5th floor. They had reached the 11th floor. He stressed that these drills should be carried out throughout the city, so that residents could see what the fire service could achieve.
- 24.24 The Chair reported that she was a member of the Fire Authority and that the council was already requesting that these drills should take place.
- 24.25 Jean Davis reported that automatic fire doors at Essex Place and other blocks were fitted but did not work. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion undertook to get a response to Jean on this matter.

- 24.26 Councillor Pidgeon reported that he was a member of the Fire Authority and expressed concern about the fire doors. He asked for a full report so that he could raise this issue with the people concerned.
- 24.27 Stewart Gover congratulated the Housing Stock Review Manager on the report. He asked about the current position regarding the Local Delivery Vehicle. He understood an offer had been made by Santander. He asked why progress had been stalled.
- 24.28 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that officers were in the final stages of looking at an offer from Santander. The council's lawyers were currently looking at the offer. It was still on track as far as he was aware.
- 24.29 Councillor Robins referred to the section of the report on Repairs and Maintenance. It reported that 95% of the 5,839 residents spoken to in 2010/11 being either satisfied or very satisfied with the repairs carried out. He asked how these people had been selected for the survey.
- 24.30 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that there were two methods, telephone surveys and satisfaction surveys tenants completed on the handheld devices of operatives. Satisfaction surveys were a proxy and not the full picture. The council did not rely on this information.
- 24.31 Councillor Robins queried whether Mears were asking people if they were satisfied and if so if they were paid for saying people were satisfied. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion confirmed that that Mears did ask if people were satisfied but they were monitored by a Core Group with residents on it. Mears were not paid to say people were satisfied. A high survey rate had been achieved and the results could be broken down to see where things are not so strong.
- 24.32 Ted Harman reported that he was on the Partnership Group. More complaints were taken to the group than reports of good work being carried out. He called for more balance in the report. The Chair replied that if something went wrong, more people mentioned it, but agreed that it would be useful to see both sides of the reporting.
- 24.33 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that officers did monitor complaints and looked at what could be learnt from the complaints. He agreed that the response time for complaints needed to improve.
- 24.34 David Murtagh made the point that tenants needed to be trained as inspectors. Chris Kift reported that the last City Assembly had agreed that problems with Mears needed to be investigated.
- 24.35 The Chair reported that she had requested bi-monthly meetings with Mears. She asked tenants to share problems with the council so they could be sorted.
- 24.36 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to one of the sections of the Annual Report "How will we continue to improve?" As the report was being sent to leaseholders he asked about the legal position regarding re-charging leaseholders for improvements. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion said he would reply in writing on this issue. However,

overcladding was an example of an improvement for which leaseholders would receive a service charge.

- 24.37 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if leaseholders had the right to object to improvements. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion replied that work charged to leaseholders must be reasonable and the improvements must be required for the building.
- 24.38 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked for a legal view on how an improvement could be required. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion responded by promising to investigate this matter and contacting Councillor Peltzer Dunn.
- 24.39 Beverley Weaver considered that Mears should not have been used for the survey. The council should be using their own tenant satisfaction survey. Meanwhile, leaseholders were not happy and were having to pay extra amounts. Beverley referred to the 95% satisfaction rate for repairs and said that this needed to be broken down. She considered 95% a ridiculous figure. People did not know where to go to complain. Beverley reported a case of a woman who she said had been forced to complete a survey, which she had only signed to get rid of the man from Mears.
- 24.40 The Chair stressed that she took this situation seriously and was concerned to hear of the case of a woman who said she was forced to complete a survey. She agreed that figures should be broken down.
- 24.41 Stewart Gover agreed with Beverley. He mentioned a case of a kitchen which had been fitted and then ripped out and fitted again. He stressed the importance of monitoring and Value for Money. The council should be better at monitoring quality.
- 24.42 Stewart Gover referred to the comments made by Councillor Peltzer Dunn regarding leaseholders and suggested that the more leaseholders in a building the less they paid. If there were fewer leaseholders they would pay more.
- 24.43 The Chair reported that when tenant inspectors were trained, it would be really useful in checking the work carried out by Mears.
- 24.44 Nick Hibberd stressed that leaseholders paid a proportion of the costs in a building. It was not the case that if there were fewer leaseholders they would pay more. They only paid a fair proportion of the total cost.
- 24.45 Barry Kent asked why leaseholders were asked to pay a percentage of the cost when repairs were carried out to the roof. He also asked why leaseholders were being charged for another person's front door. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion responded by stating that leaseholders should not be charged for work done on another person's flat. He suggested bringing back a report for discussion, which looked at how the council charged leaseholders. The Chair agreed to this suggestion and said she would welcome clarification on this issue.
- 24.46 Tom Whiting stated that improvements were measured against the Brighton & Hove Standards or Decent Home Standard. Anything below standard needed to be improved. He complimented the Housing Stock Review Manager on the report which he

considered very balanced. He suggested that the Annual Report should be sent out with the Tenant Compact brochure as a tool to encourage more tenant participation.

- 24.47 Councillor Robins asked who the council proposed to train as resident inspectors. He thought it would not be possible to train residents to inspect work in a matter of weeks. The Chair replied that there would be discussions with Mears about this matter. She suggested work could be inspected just after being completed, and again a few months later to check wear and tear. This information would be shared.
- 24.48 Councillor Robins did not think it possible to train residents to check gas fittings. He would like to see details of the training being put in place.
- 24.49 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that the starting point was to work with a group of interested tenants. It was very common across housing providers to invite tenants in assessing the quality of the service. However, tenants would not always be able to assess the more technical side of the service. There was a number of training courses available and information about the courses could be given to tenants. Some of these were organised by national tenants' organisations.
- 24.50 Ted Harman approved of the idea of having tenant inspectors and was thinking of becoming one himself. He considered it essential to get involved in this scheme.
- 24.51 David Murtagh stressed that tenants needed technical guidance when they were inspecting plumbing and central heating. There was no reason why experience could not be passed on. There were many tenants with experience in these trades who would be able to pass their knowledge on to other tenants.
- 24.52 Councillor Wells stated that he would not like tenants' representatives to be trained by Mears Ltd. People with experience in the construction industry should be involved in this scheme.
- 24.53 The Chair stated that she was sure that people with construction experience would be involved in the scheme but she would not want to exclude other people from becoming involved.
- 24.54 Chris Kift stressed the need for experience. There needed to be enough trades people involved who could be inspectors or trainers of inspectors.
- 24.55 Councillor Peltzer Dunn liked the idea of tenant inspectors and considered that there needed to be a range of training. However, he stressed that the council had a responsibility to the tenants and leaseholders. It was the council who should take responsibility, not semi retired amateurs with experience. He considered it wrong to rely on a voluntary service, although as an enhancement it would be helpful. Chris Kift objected to Councillor Peltzer Dunn's comments. He stressed that tenants worked extremely hard and did so because they wanted to.
- 24.56 The Chair stressed that the tenant inspectors would be in addition to any legal requirements for the council to check work carried out.

- 24.57 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if every job carried out by Mears was inspected by the council. The Chair replied that a cross section of jobs were checked.
- 24.58 Trish Barnard mentioned that when she had gas central heating installed the copper piping was visible on the walls. (This was not carried out by Mears). When she complained she was told she was lucky to have gas central heating as she was a council tenant.
- 24.59 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to approve the annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2011 at Appendix 1 for publication and distribution to all council tenants and leaseholders.

The meeting concluded at 4.51pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

3.00pm 26 SEPTEMBER 2011

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Wakefield (Chair); Duncan, Farrow, Jarrett, Mears, Peltzer Dunn, Pidgeon, Randall and Robins

Tenant Representatives: Ted Harman (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), David Murtagh (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Trish Barnard (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Jean Davis (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Stewart Gover (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Heather Hayes (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Tina Urquhart (West Hove & Portslade Area Area Housing Management Panel), Beverley Weaver (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Chris Kift (Hi Rise Action Group), Muriel Briault (Leaseholders Action Group), Tom Whiting (Sheltered Housing Action Group) and Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network)

PART ONE

25. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

25A Declarations of Substitute Members

25.1 Councillor Jarrett declared that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Summers. Councillor Mears declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Wells.

25B Declarations of Interests

25.2 Councillor Randall, Heather Hayes and Ted Harman declared a personal interest in any discussion on the LDV as they are Board Members of Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes (the Local Delivery Vehicle).

25C Exclusion of the Press and Public

25.3 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of

the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

25.4 **RESOLVED** – That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting.

26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 26.1 *Elections at Area Panels* – Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 16.14. This stated that it was necessary to talk to 70 organisations. However, in Item 36 - Establishing a Tenant Scrutiny Panel – paragraph 3.8, it stated that there were 72 associations. Councillor Mears asked for clarification on how many organisations officers were communicating with. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion replied that the numbers of organisations did vary from time to time, and it would have been more accurate to say *around 70*. Councillor Mears stressed that there needed to be work carried out with tenants to ascertain exactly how many organisations there were who should be consulted. The Chair agreed to this course of action.
- 26.2 *Satisfaction Survey* – Councillor Robins referred to paragraph 24.31. He stressed that he was asking if the contractors were the right people to be asking if people were satisfied or not. He was not asking if they were paid for saying people were satisfied.
- 26.3 Ted Harman questioned the satisfaction responses. If for example, only one fifth of residents completed the survey, then the percentage only reflected the views of a minority of tenants.
- 26.4 Stewart Gover referred to paragraph 24.39. There had been a discussion at the Housing Centre about the Satisfaction Survey. It appeared that the 95% satisfaction rating came from a 25% collation. If 25% were satisfied, then there may have been double the number who were not satisfied.
- 26.5 *Fire Doors* – Jean Davis referred to paragraph 24.25. She reported that she had been visited by an officer who had stated that Mears Ltd had not been doing their job. He had promised to get back to her. She had heard nothing. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that Mark Dennison, Contract Compliance Manager had visited Jean to discuss the problem with fire doors. He would check with Mark to see what action he was taking.
- 26.6 Tom Whiting reported that there was a schedule of works planned for fire doors.
- 26.7 Heather Hayes reported that fire doors had been fitted to Elwin Court. Frail and elderly people would not be able to open the doors. They were too heavy and stiff. Some of the doors needed attention. She asked for action to be taken. The Chair asked officers to ensure action was taken.
- 26.8 Chris Kift reported that he had difficulty opening fire doors. He had raised the matter with his Occupational Therapist, who was looking into the matter. He hoped that the problem would soon be resolved.

- 26.9 *Legal Position regarding re-charging leaseholders for improvements* – Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 24.36 – He thanked the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion for the information he had given on this matter. However, Councillor Peltzer Dunn still felt that it was a grey area. Some improvements might weaken the council's position in asking for a re-charge (for example, providing a damp course to a property that had never had a damp course before). He considered that the leaseholder should not have to rely on appealing against the council's decision.
- 26.10 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee Meeting held on 5 September 2011 be agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the amendments.

27. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes Limited (the Local Delivery Vehicle).

- 27.1 The Chair explained that she had no communications for this meeting as it was a full agenda. However, she invited Ted Harman to speak about recent developments with the LDV.
- 27.2 Ted Harman reported that on Friday 23 September, the leases for Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes Limited were approved and signed in London. The LDV was finally open for business.
- 27.3 The Chair welcomed this good news and congratulated LDV Board members and Cllr Mears for getting the project off the ground. She recognised the work of the previous administration
- 27.4 Councillor Randall also thanked Councillor Mears for her work on this project along with councillors and tenants on the LDV Board. He thanked them all and particularly thanked the officers who had worked on the project. He hoped that the work of the LDV would be of benefit to everyone in the city.
- 27.5 Stewart Gover also thanked Councillor Mears for thinking of the project. The Board was a council inspired, arms length organisation and was not like any other RSL.
- 27.6 Tom Whiting congratulated councillors previous and present. The Board was now open for business. He had been assured that there would be a good standard of communication with Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes Ltd. The Chair agreed that she would expect that to happen.
- 27.7 Councillor Mears thanked officers but particularly wanted to thank the tenants. They had kept their nerve and seen this through. She would watch developments with interest, particularly with regard to funding. She stressed that profits should be invested in the housing stock.

28. CALLOVER

- 28.1 The Chair asked the Committee to consider which items listed on the agenda it wished to debate and determine in full.
- 28.2 **RESOLVED** - That all items be reserved for debate and determination.

29. PETITIONS

- 29.1 There were none.

30. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 30.1 There were none.

31. DEPUTATIONS

- 31.1 There were none.

32. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 32.1 The Committee considered a letter from Councillor Mears in which she expressed the view that there had been a lack of openness and transparency in the attitude of the administration towards council tenants. She expressed concern about the decision to delay the elections for the area panels due to the introduction of an "innovation group". She further expressed concern about a decision to replace the Council's Homemove Magazine with a largely internet-based service for property bidding.
- 32.2 Councillor Mears referred to a recent letter sent to tenants which had caused many concerns. She considered that the matter of delaying Area Panel elections should have been raised at the Area Panel meetings. Councillor Mears considered that there were equality issues to consider. There appeared to be no choice in this matter.
- 32.3 Councillor Mears stated that it appeared tenants were being sidelined. She referred to an email sent to councillors earlier in the afternoon regarding rent reviews from 7 October. She was concerned at the way issues were being communicated.
- 32.4 Chris Kift agreed that the letter to tenants about changes to the Area Panel elections should not have been sent out. However, since that time, tenants had discussed this matter. Having carried out research, it appeared that nothing had changed. He did not think that there would be a lack of choice. Tenants had received apologies about the letter.
- 32.5 The Chair stated that she was very happy to receive any suggestions. She shared the concerns expressed. The council was a large organisation and occasionally a letter could be sent out which caused concern.
- 32.6 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the delay of the elections to Area Panels. He was very perturbed by the unilateral action taken. He had questioned the legality of this

action at the last meeting. The Senior Lawyer had advised him on the legal position after the meeting. He gave a copy of the email to the Chair.

- 32.7 Tom Whiting stated there had been a failure of communication but he considered that that the matter had now been sorted out to some extent.
- 32.8 Chris Kift stated that at the City Assembly last year it had been agreed that in future the Area Panels would elect city wide groups for a two year period. This would allow time for representatives to gain expertise. He could not see the delay in the elections to be a great problem. Meanwhile, elections were taking place where there were vacancies due to retirement. There had been a lot of discussion about this matter at the Area Panels as well as the City Assembly.
- 32.9 Ted Harman stressed that although the proposal had taken place last year, the policy should not have changed half way during the year.
- 32.10 Stewart Gover agreed with Ted. The matter had been discussed at the four Area Panels and been voted on at the City Assembly. The matter should now be presented to all four Area Panels for formal ratification.
- 32.11 At this point the Chair suggested that it would be helpful if the tenants could get together and put all these concerns onto one or two pages of A4.
- 32.12 Beverley Weaver stated that she had been a tenant for 10 years. There had been an election every year. At the City Assembly she had voted for elections every two years. She had not expected this to take place this November.
- 32.13 Chris Kift stressed that no-one was trying to stop the elections. They were being postponed for a three month period to enable an Innovation Group to be set up. He stressed that it was essential to encourage new people to participate in the tenants' movement.
- 32.14 The Chair stated that tenants were concerned that people were leaving the tenant movement and that there was a need for new people to become involved. There was no hidden agenda. Rumours could circulate which led to misunderstanding. She encouraged tenants to talk to the administration if they had concerns.
- 32.15 The Chair thanked Councillor Mears for presenting her letter.
- 32.16 **RESOLVED** – That the letter be noted.

33. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 33.1 There were none.

34. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

- 34.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place regarding the progress made in the delivery of the Housing Services Improvement Plan and proposals

for the next phase of the programme. The improvement programme was the way that the council managed and organised work to improve services.

- 34.2 The Senior Project Manager explained that Phase One of the programme was detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the report and had been successfully completed. There would be many opportunities for residents to be involved in Phase 2 of the programme.
- 34.3 Chris Kift spoke about improvements in St James's House. The block now had a Resident Liaison Officer and an on site manager. All workmen had high visibility jackets. There was a regular newsletter and coffee mornings were organised. Everyone knew when major works would take place. Mears Ltd were getting things right.
- 34.4 Councillor Mears was please to note the key priorities set out in 3.6, which she felt followed on from the work of the previous administration. Councillor Mears had some concern at the range of projects set out in paragraph 3.7. She stressed that not everyone had access to the internet and that it was necessary to engage with all tenants in the city. With regard to the Accommodation Strategy, Councillor Mears made the point that should some of the housing offices close, it would then be necessary to be clear with tenants where they could communicate with officers. She asked if it was known how many staff would be leaving. Meanwhile Councillor Mears was concerned that the number of apprenticeships was not being achieved. It was set in the contract to look for 200 apprenticeships. There were currently 25. A clear plan needed to be brought back to HMCC.
- 34.5 The Chair thanked Councillor Mears and stated that the administration were actively encouraging apprenticeships. She asked the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion to answer the question about staff.
- 34.6 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion replied to explain that it was too early to tell how many staff were leaving. There was a voluntary severance scheme in progress. There would be no impact in terms of front line services. The aim was to improve services and access for tenants.
- 34.7 Councillor Randall thanked Councillor Mears for raising the matter of internet access. This matter would not be forgotten. It was a matter of concern and it would be followed up. Meanwhile, there would be apprenticeships and training through the partnership with Mears Ltd and Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes. Councillor Randall also wished to see apprenticeships extended to businesses in the city such as firms of lawyers and architects.
- 34.8 Councillor Randall stated that in future there would be more hubs in buildings such as libraries and officers would spend more time on estates rather than in offices.
- 34.9 Ted Harman made the point that although tenants were getting on well with officers on the group, there were still issues with shoddy work. Workers were letting companies and the council down. He was not happy with a door which he had fitted on Friday. He had lodged a complaint.

34.10 The Chair replied that she would be holding regular meetings with Mears Ltd and she would raise this matter. Meanwhile she made a formal proposal to add a further bullet point to 3.7 of the report, with regard to apprenticeships, learning and skills as follows:

- Provision of Apprenticeship and Training through the city partnership with Mears Ltd and Brighton and Hove Seaside Homes.

34.11 Councillor Farrow expressed concern about residents' involvement. Less than 40% of his residents had access to social media. There was a need to work with different residents. With regard to carbon reduction, he was all in favour of solar panels but noted that there were plans to fit panels in a further 1,600 properties. He asked what happened to other tenants who did not have access to cheaper electricity. That was an equality issue.

34.12 The Chair replied that solar panels and cheaper electricity would be discussed on item 39. of the agenda.

34.13 Stewart Gover referred to paragraphs 3.6, tackling inequality and 3.7 residents' involvement. Urgent section 20 work needed to be carried out and there were a whole group of residents who received massive bills.

34.14 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the progress made in Phase 1 and the preparations for Phase 2 of the Improvement Programme be noted.

(2) That the following bullet point be added to paragraph 3.7 of the report.

- Provision of Apprenticeship and Training through the city partnership with Mears Ltd and Brighton and Hove Seaside Homes.

35. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

35.1 The Committee considered a report of Strategic Director Place which concluded the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group's (TCMG) current round of work on the Resident Involvement Strategy and presented the revised and recommended document.

35.2 The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement thanked the Tenants' Compact Monitoring Group and the wider tenant movement and participation officers for the production of the strategy. A shorter summary would be available once the strategy was endorsed. The strategy would be a live document.

35.3 The Committee received a presentation from members of the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group.

35.4 Ann Ewings spoke about Objective 1 (Provide a wide range of opportunities for residents to be involved in their housing). She stressed the importance of communication by such methods as posters and more modern methods such as Facebook, Twitter, and texting. Meanwhile in order to help more tenants to become involved in the tenants' movement it was necessary to gain their confidence and help them develop skills. The Resource Centre provided training and guidance. Ann stated that tenant only meetings were very effective and there was a need to publicise the City Assembly better.

- 35.5 Muriel Briault explained that in her area, it was necessary to have social items in a newsletter in order to engage interest. Therefore newsletters had recipes, poetry and pet stories. More serious matters could also be added. It was important to be approachable when communicating with tenants.
- 35.6 Muriel went on to present objective 2 (Develop a framework for agreeing local offers and priorities with residents). Tenants wanted to concentrate on locally based issues. There was a need to get more residents to put their views forward. When tenants had decided on their priorities these should be carried out. For example, tenants wanted to make sure that what they requested from the Estate Development Budget could be done. They wanted more help before bids went in. They wanted housing officers to visit people more regularly.
- 35.7 Where areas did not have an association, tenants wanted to be able to represent them so they were not left out. Tenants wanted more staff presence at local meetings and activities. There needed to be better co-ordination between different working groups.
- 35.8 Muriel stated that her wish was to get more leaseholders involved. Those that were involved wanted to make a difference in their local area. Issues in Muriel's area of Portslade included grass cutting on banks, anti social behaviour, play areas for the children and bus shelters. Muriel stressed that people in Portslade felt left out. They wanted more information about the Housing Centre, and how it could help people in Portslade. They hoped the strategy would change that by involving all the areas equally.
- 35.9 Linda Shaw presented Objective 3 (Involving residents in the development of housing policy and the design and delivery of housing services).
- 35.10 Linda explained that she had been involved in the tenants' movement for about 20 years. In order to get more involvement tenants and leaseholders needed to feel that consultation was genuine and not just a paper exercise. Whilst looking for new people it was necessary to keep hold of people already involved. Involving residents in the direct testing of services encouraged the maintenance of a constant level of performance.
- 35.11 Linda stressed that there needed to be a clear process for enquiries or complaints, and involvement in all aspects of budget setting. People with a financial background might want to get involved. They would need training but could be of great help. There needed to be a code of conduct that encouraged mutual respect. For example the Leaseholders Action Group had moved from confrontation to collaboration with positive results. It was important to provide more choice over the services delivered and to compare performance with other Local Authorities.
- 35.12 It was recognised that some people might be excluded from the consultation process due to language and culture. The dynamics of the estates was changing and there was a need to engage with BME residents. Tenants wanted to be more creative about how they engaged. Questions to ask were how to get more people to use the online services and social media. The more information was shared about consultation and resident involvement the more the process had credibility.

- 35.13 The Chair stated that comparing performance with other local authorities and involving tenants in all aspects of budget setting was key.
- 35.14 Faith Matyszak presented Objective 4 (Involve residents in monitoring and scrutinising performance in delivering housing services). Faith stressed that one of the issues tenants and leaseholders would like was a scrutiny panel. Tenants wanted new people sitting with more experience representatives to scrutinise work, and training to enable tenants to have the skills to scrutinise and judge performance.
- 35.15 Tenants wanted to decide on the information collected and to be able to collate their own information. They wanted to decide what to present to other tenants and leaseholders, and to present their work to the city.
- 35.16 In addition to work already carried out tenants wished to develop how performance reports were monitored, and decide how annual reports were presented. They wanted a link with the regulators' website so they were able to compare standards of achievement and compare the city with other organisations of a similar size.
- 35.17 Faith stated that in her personal experience some elderly people struggled with reading English and other languages. There needed to be a way of telling everyone what tenants were doing. For example a pictorial page in news letters.
- 35.18 Faith suggested encouraging more young people to become involved by utilising the computer. There could be a game in which young people could be asked to design a solution to housing and environmental issues and to discuss issues such as fly tipping, anti social behaviour and their neighbourhood. Faith suggested running a competition about housing by young people. A prize could be given to the winner and a donation to their club or charity.
- 35.19 The Chair thanked Ann, Muriel, Linda and Faith for their presentations. She thought the suggestion of developing a game for young people was an innovative and brilliant idea. Schools and youth clubs could have a competition to come up with an idea for a game. Faith stressed that young people needed to be encouraged.
- 35.20 Stewart Gover mentioned a visit he had made to the Crew Club. He had been very impressed and had never seen a club like it.
- 35.21 Ted Harman thought the report was good and thanked everyone for taking part.
- 35.22 Tom Whiting thanked the Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement and everyone who presented the report.
- 35.23 The Chair also thanked the Head of Customer Access and Business Improvement and the tenants who had worked on the report.
- 35.24 Councillor Randall stated that the report demonstrated that tenants were a valuable resource. There was a need for better communications and a need to include ethnic monitoring. He too thanked officers and residents involved in presenting the report.
- 35.25 **RESOLVED** - That the Resident Involvement Strategy be endorsed.

36. ESTABLISHING A TENANT SCRUTINY PANEL

- 36.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which described how, and why, a tenant scrutiny panel was being developed as a requirement for registered social landlords and outlined the proposed model and timetable for introducing it to Brighton & Hove.
- 36.2 The report followed the development of the Resident Involvement Strategy and outlined proposals for involving tenants and leaseholders in the further development and implementation of the scrutiny arrangements. Paragraph 3.10 of the report set out how tenant scrutiny could operate in Brighton & Hove. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion stated that a further report would be brought to the HMCC early next year.
- 36.3 Councillor Mears made the point that scrutiny panels scrutinised decisions that had already been taken. She supported any tenant involvement in housing but was concerned that the report did not say if the HMCC or Area Panels would continue. With the HMCC and the Area Panels tenants had the opportunity to have their say before decisions were taken. She wanted assurance that HMCC and Area Panels would continue.
- 36.4 The Chair replied that HMCC and the Area Panels would remain. In addition, there could be involvement at scrutiny level. There was no intention of watering down the current mechanism of tenant involvement.
- 36.5 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that scrutiny could take place both before and after decisions were made.
- 36.6 Councillor Mears stated she would be reassured if the minute stated that there would be no watering down or change in the structure tenants set up. She considered that it would have been helpful to have this set out in the report.
- 36.7 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 3.7, third bullet point (power to effect change). He considered this to be ultra vires. It was not for any councillor or committee to abdicate legal responsibility. This was not legally correct.
- 36.8 Tom Whiting suggested that the sentence should be changed to “power to *recommend* change”.
- 36.9 The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion accepted Councillor Peltzer Dunn’s comments. He had been quoting the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH). He accepted Tom’s suggestion was more appropriate for a local authority.
- 36.10 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 4.2 and asked when the innovation group would be established. The Chair replied that the process was commencing in September 2011. The intention was to take this matter to the Area Panels in September and October.
- 36.11 Stewart Gover was pleased that the scrutiny process had been re-introduced. An important consideration would be who convened the Panel and how it was convened.

- 36.12 **RESOLVED** - the progress made towards establishing a tenant scrutiny panel, and the timetable for involving tenants in its further development, be noted.
- 37. CUSTOMER ACCESS PHASE 3 - CUSTOMER SERVICE & ACCESS STRATEGY FOR HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION**
- 37.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which updated members on the review of customer access arrangements for the Housing Management Service and presented the Housing & Social Inclusion Customer Service and Access Strategy for consideration.
- 37.2 The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement presented the report and asked members to comment upon the Customer Service and Access Strategy that was presented with the report as Phase 3 of the Customer Access Review.
- 37.3 Chris Kift stated that he had looked at the hub in Bartholomew House. He had found it easy to access and it was comfortable, welcoming and very cheerful. However, he had noted that there were a lot of empty spaces and people waiting to be seen by a member of staff.
- 37.4 Councillor Robins referred to recommendation (3) in relation to Victoria Road Housing Office. He asked what was meant by “best future use”. The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion replied that a decision had been made at Cabinet in March 2011, under the previous administration, to market the Victoria Road Housing Office. The proposal was to re-locate the office to the newly refurbished Portslade Town Hall which was just across the car park. Staff were looking to work with residents to ensure a smooth transition to the new hub.
- 37.5 Councillor Robins stressed that this proposal would involve taking away car park spaces. He stated that there was no bus route to the office and he asked how residents could be expected to get to the office if there was no car parking.
- 37.6 The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion stated that he could not comment about the car park but accepted that Councillor Robins had made an important point. Many residents to the west of the city wanted face to face access in other areas of the city as well as Portslade. There were plans to allow these residents additional access to an office in the Hangleton & Knoll area.
- 37.7 Chris Kift made the point that not everyone had cars. There was no car parking at Lavender Street or Oxford Street. He had been able to get to the Portslade office recently. If he had been able to get there in a wheelchair, then most people would be able to get there.
- 37.8 The Chair shared Councillor Robin’s concerns. The office was not on a bus route.
- 37.9 Tina Urquhart expressed concern about access to the office without a car. She had not heard about the proposal before.
- 37.10 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that the decision to market the property had been taken in March 2011. It might be a long time before the property was

marketed. The report was flagging it up. The council wanted to involve tenants on refurbishment to Portslade Town Hall.

- 37.11 Councillor Mears expressed concern with the emphasis on social media in the report. She felt that the council should ensure that it communicated with residents who could not, or did not want to access the internet.
- 37.12 David Murtagh referred to the free paper sent out with the Brighton & Hove Leader. He stressed that the Leader was not delivered to certain areas of the city. However, he reported that communication with council officers had improved in Moulsecoomb.
- 37.13 Trish Barnard questioned how the proposals could be communicated to people who did not speak English. The Chair replied that the council were aware of this issue and did have access to interpreters.
- 37.14 Councillor Mears referred to the proposed move of the Manor Place Housing Office. The office was currently in a level area in the lower part of Whitehawk. She was concerned that moving the office to Whitehawk Library could cause problems. The twitten leading to the library was icy in winter and elderly people would find have difficulty accessing the office.
- 37.15 The Chair explained that she had held discussions with the bus company regarding the possibility of getting a bus re-directed to the library. She was also talking to the Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement regarding access. The aim was to find solutions to these issues.
- 37.16 Beverley Weaver stated that she was very concerned about the proposal for the Portslade office. She asked if the service would be the same after the move. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reaffirmed that issues regarding the move would be addressed. Meanwhile, the strategy would provide more time for officers to spend on the estates.
- 37.17 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the section of the strategy titled "Optimising existing channels". The figures quoted underlined the need for balanced change. It would be helpful to have a more detailed report to a future meeting.
- 37.18 Barry Kent referred to table 1, "Transaction costs for different channels." He asked how officers could put a value on communication. The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement explained that the table was not just about cost. The idea was to show that the cost of dealing with customers face to face was high. If the internet was used it would save money and officers could use the reserve to help people who needed face to face contact.
- 37.19 Councillor Pidgeon made the point that although the needs of disabled people had been discussed, he had not heard any discussion about the needs of totally blind people. He questioned how many blind people would want to walk through a library to get to the housing centre.
- 37.20 The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement stated that officers had thought about residents with a range of disabilities. She mentioned that BrowseAloud was used

by people who were blind/short sighted. The technology allowed print on the screen to talk back to users.

- 37.21 Councillor Pidgeon made the point that most people went blind between the ages of 65-70. He considered that they were too old to use a computer.
- 37.22 Jean Davis mentioned that Beryl Snelling would love to come to the meetings of HMCC, but was unable to attend as there were no wheelchairs in Hove Town Hall. The Chair stated that this matter would be investigated. She felt that it should be considered in relation to the council's equalities policy. She thanked Jean for raising this matter.
- 37.23 Councillor Jarrett raised the issue of elderly people and the use of computers. He reported that Age Concern had run pilots regarding the use of computers. There had been a significant uptake, and this needed encouragement. There was a wide range of related technology used by people with sensory and visual impairments.
- 37.24 Councillor Pidgeon explained that he had had to deal with a blind person for 44 years. He stressed that not all people could cope with the technology. The Chair thanked Councillor Pidgeon for raising this issue and suggested meeting with him to discuss the issue further.
- 37.25 Chris Kift mentioned that he used to be an IT tutor. One of his students was 86 years old. He had gained basic qualifications. Another student was a war veteran who had lost his eyes. He had got on well and had received a Braille certificate.
- 37.26 The Chair thanked Chris but stressed that Councillor Pidgeon's point was that not everyone could use the internet.
- 37.27 **RESOLVED** - (1) That the Customer Service and Access Strategy be approved.
- (2) That members' comments on the strategy be noted, and that it be further noted that key areas for action within the strategy include:
- (a) Promotion and support for customers to use more effective methods for accessing housing information and services in line with council-wide 'Improving Customer Experience' work and our corporate Channel Shift Strategy.
- (b) Consultations with staff on staffing structure to support proposed new customer access arrangements and service improvement.
- (c) Consideration of opportunities for further office moves and best future use of some housing offices – notably Manor Place Housing Office and Victoria Road Housing Office.

38. ALLOCATIONS POLICY

- 38.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which asked members to consider a review of the Allocations Policy including consultation with the city. A further report would then be brought back to HMCC and the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting with final proposals, following the consultation.

- 38.2 The current Housing Register Allocations Policy was implemented in early May 2011. Under the new policy, Care leavers were not automatically awarded priority for housing, but were assessed for housing depending on their housing need in the same way as other applicants are assessed. The Children & Young People's Trust, care leavers and their representatives had raised concerns over the new approach and, in the view of the Council's significant responsibilities as Corporate Parent, this report proposed a further review of the Allocations Policy.
- 38.3 In undertaking the review, officers wanted to use the opportunity to consult on the anticipated changes to allocations following the Localism Bill.
- 38.4 Councillor Mears stated that the Children and Young People's Trust had a duty of care to care leavers. She considered that the proposal of taking care leavers out of CYPT and into the housing allocation to be a budget shift. There was a funding issue that needed to be addressed. Tenants needed assurance and needed to be aware of the budget configuration. Councillor Mears stated that there were no financial implications detailed in the report. The report did not state what would happen to the CYPT budget. Tenants needed to totally understand what was being proposed.
- 38.5 The Lead Commissioner Housing explained that when the full consultation document was released it would include all relevant information, including financial information. Councillor Mears replied that that information should have been supplied for today's meeting.
- 38.6 Councillor Randall stressed that the current report was asking for an in principle recommendation. He hoped that the proposals would show the success rate of young people who had tenancies. The responsibility for young people would be maintained.
- 38.7 Stewart Gover considered that the Committee had no right to make any recommendations today. There was not sufficient information as to what was ring fenced and what was not ring fenced. There was no information about budgets. He commented that the reasons people were put into care could vary and that some had been involved in anti-social behaviour.
- 38.8 The Chair stated that she had worked with children who had left care, and most were very pleasant individuals who needed a chance in life.
- 38.9 Ted Harman agreed with Stewart Gover and Councillor Mears. The Committee had not heard the full facts or figures.
- 38.10 Councillor Randall stated that there were 483 children in care in the City. 43 were under the age of 1 year due to their parents being involved in substance misuse. A great number of these children came from the city's estates. The council had a duty of care. He noted the concerns raised but stressed that a report would come back to the HMCC with all the facts and figures and recommendations.
- 38.11 The Lead Commissioner Housing stressed that the report in front of members was saying that there would be a 12 week consultation process. It was asking members to be involved in that process. During that period, members would be given a host of information. No decision would be taken today; it was simply the start of the process.

- 38.12 Councillor Mears considered it was insulting to bring a flimsy report to the HMCC. There could have been a more detailed report for consultation. Children in care, came under the responsibility of the CYPT. There was still a need to see the funding implications on the CYPT.
- 38.13 Tom Whiting suggested changing recommendation 2.1 to add “for final approval” at the end. Chris Kift concurred. After a discussion over wording it was agreed to change the recommendation to “That the HMCC consider and commend for approval to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting the undertaking of a Review of the current Allocation Policy. Following the review, proposals would be brought back to HMCC and Housing CMM for final approval”.
- 38.14 The Lead Commissioner Housing stated that there would be a 12 week consultation process. A detailed report would come back to HMCC for discussion before being submitted to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting.
- 38.15 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the undertaking of a Review of the current Allocation Policy be commended for approval to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting. Following the Review, proposals will be brought back to HMCC and Housing CMM for final approval.

Note: Councillor Mears asked for her name to be recorded as not agreeing to the above recommendation, as she was not happy with the process.

39. HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY INVESTMENT OPTIONS - INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS TO COUNCIL OWNED HOMES

- 39.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which reported that the Council had the opportunity to install solar PV panels onto its Council-owned residential properties. This had arisen out of the Government’s Feed-in-Tariff incentive scheme. Housing Commissioning had been working with tenants, the procured Energy Managing Partner (Climate Energy) and other local authority partners to investigate and maximise home energy efficiency investment options for tenants and residents from Feed-in Tariffs (FITs). The recommendations in the report were agreed by Cabinet on 22 September 2011.
- 39.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn pointed out that there were a number of instances where there was a mix of tenants and leaseholders in a block. He asked if paragraph 1.3, bullet point 5 (allow some Council tenants to lower their fuel bills) was open to all residents of blocks. The Head of Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing replied that it was the intention to share the benefit throughout the block.
- 39.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 7.2 of the report “Approval is required now to realise the benefits of CO2 reductions and the provision of free or cheap electricity to tenants who may be living in, or at risk of, fuel poverty”. He considered that all tenants living in a block should benefit and that there was a lack of equality in this statement. The Head of Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing replied that there could be a mechanism to distribute the money more widely across the city.
- 39.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if all residents within these properties would benefit from cheaper electricity. The Lead Commissioner Housing replied that the feed in tariffs were

split into two. Panels on a roof provided cheaper rates. Meanwhile, the Government guaranteed a further amount of money to the local authority to invest in the scheme. Everyone who lived in the block would get an equal share of the benefit. A discussion was taking place with the company to see if the pooled amount could be recycled and targeted to people in greatest need.

- 39.5 Councillor Robins asked if solar panels were tried and tested, and maintenance free. The Chair confirmed that it was tried and tested technology. The Lead Commissioner Housing explained that the solar panels were not maintenance free, but the government was guaranteeing the funding over 25 years. The scheme was underwritten by the government. It was an opportunity to tackle fuel poverty, especially amongst the most deprived estates and families.
- 39.6 Councillor Jarrett informed the Committee that the technology was about 50 years old. Technology was evolving and maintenance was low. Cleaning might be an issue but the panels would create a significant amount of electricity. There would be a slight degradation after 15 years. It was very stable, very reliable technology which should give long, ongoing benefit to residents.
- 39.7 Chris Kift believed that there was a need to start work on this project. Solar Panels placed on St James's House would generate electricity all day, due to the position of the block.
- 39.8 Councillor Mears stated that she was pleased to see the administration carry on an initiative started by her administration. She was concerned at paragraph 3.2 in relation to overcladding projects. She was disappointed to see Essex Place removed from the list which she considered was a backward step.
- 39.9 **RESOLVED** - (1) That it is noted that Cabinet on the 22 September agreed the following recommendations.
- (a) That Cabinet approves a capital programme budget up to a maximum of £15.0 million for Solar Photovoltaic Panels on council housing stock to be financed through unsupported borrowing in the Housing Revenue Account, which will only be drawn against subject to the approval of the Strategic Director for Place and the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to proceed with the scheme.
 - (2) That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director for Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to approve the planning, supply, installation and maintenance of the panels via an approved framework agreement and a call off contract or contracts under an approved framework agreement.
 - (3) That Cabinet notes the outcome of the initial options appraisal undertaken by Climate Energy, indicating that there is an outline business case to support delivery of a solar photovoltaic scheme across the council housing stock and to meet strategic housing and other council priorities, including private sector housing renewal, reducing fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions.
 - (4) That Cabinet notes the procurement exercise to establish the Solar Bourne framework agreement undertaken by Eastbourne Borough Council with involvement from partners in

the BEST consortium, and that the costs identified through the above procurement further support an outline business case as indicated by the initial options appraisal work.

40. HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 1)

- 40.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion which set out the first quarter (April to June) performance report for Housing & Social Inclusion for the financial year 2011-2012. It adopted a new format for presenting information more clearly than before, and also reported on the service pledge commitments agreed for service areas.
- 40.2 The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement presented the report and highlighted some of the achievements.
- 40.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn welcomed the new way of reporting. He referred to paragraph 3.1.1 in the report. The % of rechargeable repair debt collected was 4.52%. However the target was 20%. He asked why this figure was so poor. The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement explained that debt arose when some residents moved out of properties leaving damage and unauthorised works. Officers were trying to put different measures in place to stop people who had caused damage from moving out of properties. The money was difficult to collect from people on housing benefits. Officers were trying to stop the damage happening in the first place. Meanwhile, it was stressed that the figures were for the first quarter and officers were working hard to prevent a build up of debt.
- 40.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn accepted the explanation and suggested that the figure should say "not year end".
- 40.5 Councillor Mears remarked that she could not see any reference to asbestos removal. She also noted that the report did not have detail about rent collection across the city.
- 40.6 The Chair confirmed that asbestos removal would be added to the next performance report.
- 40.7 Stewart Gover reported that performance had been discussed at a meeting with Mears Ltd this morning (26/9/11). The only matter that he argued about was the satisfaction rate. A 95% satisfaction rate was recorded from a response of 25%. It could be said that 70% were not satisfied. He had asked for this matter to be sorted out.
- 40.8 Ted Harman referred to tenant satisfaction with repairs in paragraph 3.3.0 of the report. He stressed that not all tenants were satisfied. The report did not state how many people were surveyed. The same applied to percentage of repairs completed right first time.
- 40.9 The Chair suggested that raw figures should be put in an appendix in the future.
- 40.10 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report and the above comments be noted.

The meeting concluded at 6.27pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 41

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Resident Involvement Strategy		
Date of Meeting:	19 October 2011		
Report of:	Strategic Director, Place		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Ododo Dafé	Tel: 29-3201
	Email:	Ododo.dafe@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report concludes the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group's (TCMG) current round of work on the Resident Involvement Strategy and presents the revised and recommended document to the Cabinet Member. The Strategy was endorsed by the HMCC on 26 September 2011.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Housing approves the Resident Involvement Strategy.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 This report follows on from two previous reports to Housing Management Consultative Committee (HMCC) that were presented on 14 June 2010 and 27 September 2010. These reports outlined the consultation process and the considerable number of responses that had been collected from the consultation process on the Resident Involvement Strategy.
- 3.2 At HMCC, on 27 September last year, the report presented stated that the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group had met on 13 August 2010 to consider the large variety of suggestions for further amendment or additional items for inclusion that had been received from the consultation with tenants and other stakeholders. Having looked at a number of options the TCMG concluded that, while the Resident Involvement Strategy was approved as a broad, strategic framework, further development was needed to ensure that the document remained live and accessible to all who might wish to read it and use it.
- 3.3 It was through this process that the TCMG decided on an approach that would see the creation of four tenant-led working groups, one for each of four established objectives. These groups would be able to consider all comments and be open to exploring some of the points raised, in more detail, if this seemed

appropriate. The consequence would be to ensure that the Resident Involvement Strategy remained under constant review and open to further development in the light of experience and policy development at national and local level.

- 3.4 The TCMG expressed its desire to be free from officer or councillor influence and therefore recommended that the working groups should be “Tenant/Leaseholder Only” with officers attending by invitation. This was accepted by the HMCC.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 As an outcome of the above, the TCMG resolved to base their consideration around objectives suggested by the Tenant Services Authority. These were seen as central and appropriate to the inclusion of customers. The four Objective Groups looked at how to:

- Provide a wide range of opportunities for residents to be involved in developing and commenting on policies and practices affecting their housing and communities. The method of involvement would need to recognise the variety of ways customers might wish to become involved, in addition to attending meetings.
- Develop a framework for agreeing local offers and priorities resulting in a series of pledges covering a range of service areas.
- Involve residents in the development of housing policy and the design and delivery of housing services.
- Involve residents in monitoring and scrutinising our performance in delivering housing services.

- 4.2 Members of each group considered the suggestions and amendments suggested, through the consultation process, and amended the draft document accordingly. A number of meetings took place and each suggestion, obtained during the consultation process, was considered in turn. These were then brought together and presented to the TCMG for approval. At their meeting of 18 April 2011 the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group approved the collected changes to the Resident Involvement Strategy document and agreed that it could be presented, by the TCMG, back to the September HMCC meeting as a consulted and approved document. In addition it was agreed to produce a shorter, summary version of the document to support the full version. A glossary of terms was also added to assist better understanding of the full document.

- 4.3 Group members considered that certain parts of the document spoke to tenants and leaseholders as a whole whilst other parts of the strategy appeared to address only the tenant reps. As a consequence, the wording was altered to make the distinction clear.

- 4.4 The term ‘residents’ rather than ‘tenants and leaseholders’ was kept but the distinction is explained in the glossary. Members wanted to reach out to other members of the community who are not tenants or leaseholders. It was suggested it was essential to emphasise that the work of the Resident

Involvement Strategy took place within a broad and complex web of relationships that included health, safety, education and environmental issues in addition to numerous other relationships that went across housing tenure, age, ethnicity, faith, disability and sexuality, race, sex and gender reassignment. The current Strategy, before HMCC, should not be seen as referencing only issues of tenancy but as representative of residents involved in this broader complex set of community relationships.

- 4.5 The working groups wished to emphasise their desire to retain the current system of Area Panels where local associations could meet to discuss relevant area based issues. There was also a wish to retain the City Assembly as a means of discussing and communicating issues of citywide importance.
- 4.6 It was acknowledged that the governance of the national housing sector was going through a period of change and that considerable uncertainty remained around the future of the Tenant Services Authority. As a consequence a decision was taken to refer to the regulator in generic terms rather than specific.
- 4.7 As a result of the process an additional set of requests were made. These included:
- Contact names and numbers of officers of association committees should be made available to residents on all association notice boards.
 - A continually updated list of all associations should be published in Homing in and on the council website.
 - Minutes of association meetings should be made available on the council website, where individual associations made such available.
 - Younger members of households should be targeted when conducting consultation by questionnaire, by including in the questionnaires specific questions for younger members of households where relevant.
 - More detailed and local information on the improvement works and maintenance programmes should be made available to help with estate development budget bid planning. Ideally this would also include direct involvement in other areas of council spend.
- 4.8 The fourth objective group proposed a residents scrutiny panel and met with the chief executive during the course of their deliberations to discuss options. The need for such an option is included in the strategy as a consequence of that meeting but also in expectation that progress will be made in this area in the near future.
- 4.9 The authors of the Strategy recognise that in a changing and developing service it is essential to keep documents such as this one live and open to further consideration. The TCMG therefore suggest that this, revised, version should also be placed on the council website for continuous comment. This will allow the document to remain live and open to future evolution and development, in recognition of the fast changing world of involvement and influence in service delivery.

- 4.10 The Cabinet Member for Housing has made clear her commitment to building on the excellent work of everyone currently involved in community participation by seeking further opportunities to extend involvement in ways and on matters that residents prefer. This is as part of the new Administrations manifesto commitment to widen engagement. The Cabinet Member for Housing will establish an 'Innovation Group', working with residents to see how we can make an even bigger difference to engagement, and enabling residents to play a part in helping monitor and improve their housing services. Work will also include using technology to widen participation, listening to a range of ideas for how we can remove any current barriers to involvement, and establishing with residents the type of scrutiny arrangements they would like to see in place.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 Any costs associated with the completion of the Resident Involvement Strategy have been contained within the 2010/11 and 2011/12 Housing Revenue Account budgets. It is anticipated that any costs arising from the work of the 'Innovation Group' can be contained within current budgets and will be monitored as part of the monthly system of budgetary control (TBM). Any work arising that required significant financial resources would need to be the subject of a further report to this Committee.

Finance Officer Consulted: Name Monica Brooks Date: 31/08/11

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 As this is one in a series of reports on the Resident Involvement Strategy, there are no specific legal or Human Rights Act implications to draw to the Cabinet Member's attention.

Lawyer Consulted: Name Liz Woodley Date: 14/09/11

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed for this Strategy and is attached as an appendix for the report. The Tenant Compact Monitoring Group remains acutely aware how essential it is that the Resident Involvement Strategy is and remains a beacon for equality and inclusion. In this way there can be an assurance that the strategy genuinely reaches out to involve residents in a way, a manner and at a time and place to suit the individual resident.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 As with all our activities, any area in which we involve residents will invariably focus on issues of sustainability whether that be environmental, economic or social aspects of sustainability. This strategy seeks to place resident involvement on a sustainable footing for at least the next five years, and ensure greater representation of all groups within our tenant profile.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 The Resident Involvement Strategy emphasises the importance of communities taking responsibility for all aspects of their environment, not only those concerned with structural aspects of the buildings.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 The tenant and leaseholder representatives who were responsible for developing this strategy were mindful of the need to expand and develop residents' involvement and finding new ways of engaging with them as citizens. The risk of failing to do this in the most appropriate way is that the representative voice will be limited and significantly reduced. The opportunity rests in further developing expanded options of involvement and communication that the Resident Involvement Strategy affords.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 There are no significant direct public health implications arising from this report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The Resident Involvement Strategy maintains Brighton & Hove Council tenants in the vanguard of active involvement in the community. It also demonstrates the commitment of those involved to continue reaching out to those parts of the community not involved in an effort to include them in ways appropriate to their needs. This work also sits in the context of the Council's Community Engagement Framework.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The consultation process outlined at section 4 above, sets out the method by which alternative options were considered which resulted in the resident involvement strategy proposed.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To provide a framework within which innovations in resident involvement can be made, building on the existing Tenant Compact.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Resident Involvement Strategy (revised version following consultation).
2. Equalities Impact Assessment

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None

Housing & Social Inclusion

Resident Involvement Strategy

2011-2016



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

Foreword

I am delighted to present the Resident Involvement Strategy. What follows, in this document, will act as a framework for maintaining and increasing resident involvement over the next five years and will ensure that the council maintains its commitment to supporting, developing and increasing the ways tenants and leaseholders influence the services they receive.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many residents who have contributed to the development of this document.

Brighton & Hove City Council has remained at the forefront of including residents in the decision making process for many decades. This document maintains the forward thinking ideals by recognising the difficulty some people have in attending meetings and the need to consider how to find ways of including under-represented groups such as those from the black and minority ethnic communities, younger people and young families in the decision making and opinion setting process.

The strategy sets out clear ways that we can seek to include and involve individual residents in ways and at times to suit them. The strategy also introduces the idea of a tenant led Scrutiny Panel that will take an overview of decisions and actions taken and make suggestions as to how improvements might be made.

New technology and different forms of social media will have a part to play, for example enabling people to take part in citywide meetings, such as the City Assembly through Twitter and Facebook, even though they might not be able to attend in person.

The result of all this will be to make sure that as many residents as possible can be involved at a time and in a way that suits them, and that we continue to work together on developing and growing new ways of involving you in your service.

Liz Wakefield,
Cabinet Member for Housing

Introduction

This Resident involvement Strategy sets out to build on the existing resident participation system, among the council's tenants and leaseholders, seeking to present new opportunities for increasing the number of residents who get involved, whilst also encouraging those that don't normally engage with us to do so. The strategy works within the council's existing Community Engagement Framework and the city's Sustainable Community Strategy.

Our vision for achieving excellence in Housing Management

The Housing Management Service Improvement Plan 2009-2012 aims to '**achieve excellence in housing management with residents at the heart of everything we do**'. The priorities of the plan are to:

- Improve services to an excellent standard, with residents at the heart of everything we do
- Improve the quality and sustainability of our homes and neighbourhoods
- Deliver Value for Money services and maintain a sustainable 30 year business plan
- Make best use of our housing stock to address housing need
- Ensure that social housing provides a platform for reducing inequality and creating opportunity.

Our guiding principles for involving residents

During the development of the Resident Involvement Strategy we agreed with residents the following guiding principles that underpin everything we do when involving residents in the management of their housing:

- Every tenant and leaseholder matters and should be able to have a say in how their housing is managed
- We will offer residents support to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered

- We are committed to equal opportunities and social inclusion in how we deliver services, provide information and involve residents
- We will treat all residents with fairness and respect and expect residents to do the same with staff
- We are committed to openness and transparency with our residents in reaching decisions about our housing stock and providing information about our performance
- We will ensure we meet regulatory requirements on tenant involvement and empowerment and fully involve our tenants in co-regulating our housing management services
- We will increase the areas in which tenants are fully involved by for example introducing tenant led scrutiny and participatory budget setting.

How tenants and leaseholders have been involved in developing this resident involvement strategy

The Tenant Compact Monitoring Group (TCMG) is carrying out a review of the Tenant Compact and has had a key role in developing this strategy. A resident involvement workshop was held by the group, who identified issues that would lead to better resident involvement. This group identified the key themes they want to see reflected in the strategy. These themes form the key objectives of this document, and include an agreement that the development of the strategy is tenant led which will result in a proactive resident involvement network. The outcome from implementing the strategy should deliver more residents getting involved, and clear evidence of how residents contribute to policy development, service delivery and performance improvement.

The TCMG have identified that residents need to be empowered through training and education. Building resident's capacity to be fully engaged was a central theme. This is to include training of all residents that want to get involved, making sure that special provision is made for encouraging younger residents gain the skills and enthusiasm to become fully engaged. Group members seek to change perceptions around resident involvement, and want to raise the expectations of those that do volunteer. They want to have more influence on decision making, and also be in a position

to demonstrate this. Good communication is seen as central to the success of the Strategy. The TCMG want the council to become excellent at this, whilst accepting that resident representatives will need to develop their communication skills as well. The members of the group want the strategy to focus on ways of providing more information, both to residents from the council and from resident representatives to their resident members. They also want to see more front line staff being trained on resident involvement. Caring for other residents was a central theme identified and one that the group members felt would lead to the encouragement of more respect within the involvement system.

As well as developments from the TCMG workshop, resident representatives' were invited and responded to a communications and profile survey in April 2009. Their priorities are reflected in this document. Residents responded to an involvement survey sent to all tenants and leaseholders in December 2009. The results were encouraging as over 15% responded. 95% of those that responded want their names retained in a database of those that would want to become further involved in a number of ways.

The TCMG then took each strategy as identified in the draft document and set up four working groups to look at each one in detail. Each group also considered and made changes to the rest of the document taking into account residents and staff responses to the involvement survey. The 'objectives groups' work was presented to the full TCMG to approve.

Our Resident Involvement Strategy objectives

Through our consultation with residents we have agreed the following objectives for delivering the Resident Involvement Strategy 2011 – 2016

- Objective 1** **Provide a wide range of opportunities for residents to be involved in their housing**

- Objective 2** **Develop, a framework for agreeing local offers and priorities with our residents**

- Objective 3** **Involve residents in the development of housing policy and the design and delivery of housing services**

- Objective 4** **Involve residents in monitoring and scrutinising our performance in delivering housing services**

Objective 1

Provide a wide range of opportunities for residents to be involved in their housing

You have told us that you would like:

- To be more involved in decisions that affect you or your local area
- An extended menu of ways to get involved, from serving on formal groups and answering questionnaires, to other less formal ways like personal visits by officers and joining in to social networks to make your views known, helping to bring about improvements in your neighbourhood (see table showing involvement commitment on page 19)
- To be supported through training and workshops to develop the confidence, skills and capacity to engage with housing services in a way that is right for you
- To broaden the opportunity for involvement to encourage participation from sections of the resident population not currently as involved.
- Regular city-wide gatherings and for as many residents as possible to be invited to the City Assembly; the twice yearly forum where all residents' associations meet and debate issues of interest to residents across the city
- To see a high level of flexibility in the timing of meetings and methods of contact by officers. To make sure that all meetings (including tenant and leaseholders only meetings) are reflected in the community participation calendar through one officer
- All residents to be given the contact name and phone number of the Chair of their local association. This contact information should be on all association notice boards and on housing offices notice boards
- To see a continually updated list of all tenants and leaseholders groups and the roles of each officer published in Homing in and on the council website
- To see minutes of all groups on the council website
- Opportunities to be involved in the management of your homes.

Our strategic actions to deliver this objective are:

- Help associations to adopt a surgery approach allowing members to discuss problems with committee members
- Encourage younger members of each household to join in with consultation activities by including in appropriate questionnaires to the household specific questions designed for younger members
- To make more use of social media and emerging technologies to provide more opportunities for communication and involvement
- Make clear to residents who can get travel and or child care support to meetings
- Provide all residents with the contact information for out of hours service
- Continue to ask all tenants and leaseholders how they would like to be involved in the management of their housing and record their preferences in our new database.
- Use tenant preference information to invite interested residents to participate in their preferred ways and preferred topic areas
- Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved
- Improve the training and development programme for residents who wish to become involved by continuing to utilise the Resource Centre, and providing coaching and support by the Housing Management Community Participation Officers
- Provide training workshops to resident groups to look for ways to increase involvement
- Publicise opportunities and arrangements for resident involvement and empowerment
- Work with partners to engage a broader range of residents, eg Children's & Families to develop links with groups representing young people
- Provide tenants with a range of opportunities to scrutinise our performance against agreed standards
- Provide on the council's website a list of all groups with the responsibility of their officers and an opportunity for each group to post their minutes on the website.

Objective 2

Develop a framework for agreeing local offers and priorities with our residents

You have told us you would like:

- Area Housing Management Panel meetings to be focused on issues that affect the local area, and City Assembly meetings to be concerned with city-wide issues
- Locally based issues identified by residents to be resolved locally (either through the local tenants association working with Housing Officers or by individuals not working in a group who make contact with the housing officer or tenant association rep)
- Housing Officers to spend less time on administration and more time engaging with the residents who live in their neighbourhood. Housing management advisers to take over the administration role in the office
- More detailed and local information on what maintenance and improvement works are planned to help you decide what additional improvements to use your Estate Development Budget (which you control and very much value) to bid for each year
- Tenant's profile information which is recorded on the council's computer system to be used to support tenants and leaseholders who want to be involved in setting local priorities.

Also you would like to be involved in:

- Agreeing priorities and standards of service delivery that reflect what is important to you at a local, neighbourhood and city-wide level
- Prioritising local improvements to your estates and neighbourhoods (through regular estate inspections carried out to the standard of the 'rate your estate' pilot in Moulsecoomb that detail work needing to be done, utilising the estate development budget and capital investment programme).

Our strategic actions to deliver this objective to you are:

- Provide a quarterly timetable of local estate inspections by residents, Housing Officers, and Councillors that must be adhered to:
 - Identify what is important to residents in their estate or neighbourhood and agree local priorities
 - Identify specific items of work needing to be completed. You have indicated that repairs and maintenance, issues affecting your tenancy or property, and anti social behaviour are high in your consideration of work to be done
 - Resolve issues locally as far as possible
 - Report back on agreed actions
 - Evaluate the quality of the local service
- Encourage all residents who wish to, to take part in their local estates inspections
- Housing officers and community wardens will increase their engagement and communication with resident associations and individual residents
- Increase the local focus of Area Panels by presenting outcome feedback reports that summarise the work done at local level over the last quarter, leading to agreement on neighbourhood priorities and the setting of local offers
- Build local priorities into service plans and involve residents in the development of the capital investment programme through the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group and Asset Management Panel working together
- Involve residents in the follow up and management of city wide long term issues agreed at the City Assembly through feedback based on agreed actions
- Work with residents to continually improve neighbourhoods
- Through our local offers we will offer commitments to tenants on
 - Local standards of performance
 - How performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by tenants
 - Outline what will happen if we do not meet our local offers
 - Have in place arrangements for reviewing local offers on a periodic basis.

Objective 3

Involve residents in the development of housing policy and the design and delivery of housing services

You have told us you value:

- Your representative's involvement in developing housing policy and influencing our strategic priorities at Housing Management Consultative Committee. You also value the role and influence of your representatives at Area Panels and other resident groups such as the Sheltered Housing Action Group and the Estates Service Review Group in reviewing and shaping housing services
- Your representative's full involvement at every stage of the procurement of the new repairs, maintenance and improvement partnership; the laundry equipment contract; and choice of contractors
- Your representative's involvement in developing a Brighton & Hove standard for improvements to tenants' homes.

You also want to be more involved in:

- Developing and delivering change and improvement
- Developing housing services you can access easily
- Establishing the strategic priorities of the service
- The direct testing of the services you receive (for example, mystery shopping) and giving feedback on your experiences
- Developing a clear and accessible policy for responding to complaints and using the policy to improve services and receive regular reports on how improvements have been made.

You would like:

- To have more choice over the services you receive
- Tenants and leaseholders with additional support needs, to be involved in the design of housing services and to be provided with facilities to help them do that
- To be part of an involvement system that considers equality issues and the diversity of residents
- A clear line of communication to responsible officers when things go wrong, and an undertaking that officers will always make contact with you or your representatives to address the issues that concern you.

Our strategic actions to deliver this objective to you are:

- Work with you to strengthen the tenant participation structure for consultation on policy and plans. This will be done through a tenant compact review
- Continue to involve you in all aspects of the service, including adopting new approaches for deeper involvement in budget setting
- Continue the work of the Asset Management Panel (AMP) and the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group (RMMG) in the long term planning and operational delivery of the 10 year repairs, maintenance and improvement partnering contract
- Manage and operate resident involvement by mutual respect and trust through for example the code of conduct agreement governing resident involvement and the powers of the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group (TCMG)
- To use your views obtained through focus groups, panels, mystery shopping questionnaires, telephone surveys, on-line forums and other ways as appropriate, to review and improve performance in areas such as:
 - Cleaning of common areas and grounds maintenance
 - Health and safety
 - Security in the neighbourhoods, including dealing effectively with anti social behaviour

- Continue to involve you when we are considering making a significant change in how we manage of our housing stock
- Feedback how your individual or group responses to consultation has impacted on decisions or services by having regular ‘You said, we did’ feedback in our resident magazine *Homing in*
- Develop and add to the range of ways that make it easier for you to express a complaint, and give details about what to do if you are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint
- Develop, agree and monitor service pledges for complaints with you and make sure that complaints and other feedback are managed and resolved promptly, politely and fairly
- Develop a way for reporting good and bad performance to focus on all services provided by the council
- Continue to involve you in the planning, delivery and management of the new repairs and improvement partnership.

Objective 4

Involve residents in the monitoring and scrutinising our performance in delivering housing services

You have told us that you would like:

- To be involved in developing how performance is monitored, is communicated, and how you will be able to scrutinise it
- Performance reports that are presented to you to include comparisons with performances of other social housing landlords, particularly top performers
- Performance measurements to be outcome focused and based on what is of value to you, in addition to the performance measures set by government

- Independent access to facilities that will allow you to compare performance with other landlords
- Independent access to regulatory body if performance is consistently below what you want
- To be involved in reviewing of local offers
- To be involved in the monitoring of the quality and performance of the new repairs and improvement partnership.

Our strategic actions to deliver this objective are:

- Increase the range of opportunities for you to inspect our performance carefully through resident led scrutiny
- Adopt a co-regulation approach. We will provide training and support to help increase local skills and involvement to make co-regulation effective
- Report on our performance monitoring plan which will include information to residents on
 - Definition of each performance indicator
 - The source, method, frequency and schedule of performance reports
 - The office, team, or individual responsible for ensuring performance reports are available on schedule
- Involve you in what performance information is reviewed and presented and how it is used to inform decisions
- Provide you with links to the regulator's web portal and benchmarking organisations, so you can independently compare our performance with other landlords and contact the regulator about our performance
- Produce an annual report with you and for tenants setting out
 - Our performance against our regulator's standards in the previous year
 - Our performance against local offers in the previous year
 - How you have been involved in scrutinising our performance
 - How we have used external validation, peer review and benchmarking, where appropriate to gauge the impact of our actions
- Develop training in performance monitoring and scrutiny as an opportunity for you to be

effectively engaged

- Maintain residents on the Core Group monitoring the quality and performance of the new repairs and improvement partnership
- Ensure you have the opportunity to measure and scrutinise how effective this Resident Involvement Strategy is
- Involve you in any review of democratic arrangements to ensure we are involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the housing management service in the best way.

Glossary of terms

- Strategy – The planning of our vision. Identifying our objectives and how we aim to achieve them.
- Service pledges – The commitments residents have identified as most important and Housing Management Consultative Committee have pledged to deliver.
- Local offers – These are the service pledges identified by you.
- Residents – Includes all tenants and leaseholders.
- BME – Those tenants and leaseholders from a Black and minority ethnic background.
- TCMG – Tenant compact monitoring group, these members elected at area panels, oversee the running of the tenant and leaseholder's participation structure.
- Housing Management Consultative Committee (HMCC) – Tenants sit on this group with councillors. It is where policies and policy changes are discussed and taken forward to cabinet for final decision making.

Appendix 2 Future development options

- Maintain and build on the 'community focus' of the participation system, emphasising stronger communities as well as resident involvement, working with groups and companies that are already working in a particular community or subject area we are interested in
- Forge closer links between resident groups and existing community ethnic organisations that residents belong to. This would help with initial contacts and consultation opportunities of residents from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, as residents are drawn by the cultural and faith based activities of these groups
- Some residents from BME backgrounds would prefer the use of less written communication whilst using the phone more to contact and involve residents. There are some issues to do with language and others to do with literacy that are barriers to effective involvement. So continuing to develop accessibility for all is a main priority
- The TCMG would like a residents forum for BME residents to be set up
- Involve vulnerable residents that are being supported to maintain their tenancies by developing a peer led project to encourage other residents in this group to join in
- Target the involvement of younger residents by developing the 'sign post of ideas' presented in 'Successfully engaging young people in participation'. This considers the present barriers to participation, communicating with young people and encouraging combined staff and residents associations
- Encourage residents to become members of frontline teams within the participation system to build team work towards service delivery goals. This is an opportunity to get involved and will lead to opportunities for personal development
- Organise a recognition day for achievements in participation during the year. This will be celebrated at a yearly 'golden lunch' where awards will be given out in recognition of volunteering
- Set up a marketing and communication central resident and staff group to develop and promote strategic activities for the year. The group will devise marketing plans in relation to the resources available.

Equalities Impact Assessment Template

EIA Title:	Resident Involvement Strategy	Reference Number:	HM 32
<p>Aim of Policy or Scope of Service:</p>	<p>To build on the existing resident participation system amongst the council’s tenants and leaseholders, seeking to present new opportunities for increasing the number of residents who get involved whilst also encouraging those that don’t normally engage with us to do so.</p>		
<p>Approach to the Impact Assessment:</p>	<p>The purpose of this EIA is to consider the possible positive or negative impact introduction of this strategy may have on the council’s tenants, leaseholders and Housing Management staff.</p>		

Scope of the Assessment

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obtain missing data & info • minimise negative impacts • maximise positive impacts
<p>All (impacts that apply to all groups)</p>	<p>(-) Changing the established practices for engaging with individuals and groups may prove challenging.</p> <p>(-) Changes to the way officers engage with residents over service delivery may be challenging for housing management staff.</p> <p>(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them.</p> <p>(+) A clear commitment to value for money in service provision.</p> <p>(+) A clear commitment to put tenants and leaseholders at the heart of all aspects of</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p> <p>Age Regulation 2006</p> <p>United Nations Convention on the rights of the child – Article 12</p> <p>Children Act 1989</p> <p>Equality Act 2010</p> <p>Tenant Census 2006</p> <p>20/20 Engagement Framework</p> <p>Joining In Project</p> <p>2009 resident representatives Communications & Profile Survey</p>	<p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p> <p>Housing Management Service Improvement Plan 2009-12</p> <p>Tenant Compact</p>	<p>Improve training and development programme for residents and groups that wish to become involved in the decision making process.</p> <p>Staff training on resident involvement.</p> <p>Agree local priorities.</p> <p>Regular city-wide gatherings of residents, representatives and officers.</p> <p>An extended menu of ways to get involved, from serving on formal groups and answering questionnaires to other less formal ways which include social networks, widely publicised and fully accessible.</p> <p>Review Tenant Compact.</p> <p>Continued use of tenant and leaseholder involvement</p>

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obtain missing data & info • minimise negative impacts • maximise positive impacts
<p>All (impacts that apply to all groups) cont.</p>	<p>Housing's service provision.</p> <p>(+) provides tenants with a range of opportunities to scrutinise our performance against agreed standards.</p>			<p>questionnaire and regular review of information gathered.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents to develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p> <p>Regularly report back on local performance and objectives set and evaluate the quality of the local service.</p> <p>Use residents' views to regularly review and improve performance.</p> <p>Independent access to facilities that will allow residents to compare performance with other landlords.</p> <p>Building capacity for residents to be fully involved.</p>

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts
<p>Race (BME people, asylum seekers/refugees)</p>	<p>(-) Potential for those who are not confident in reading or speaking English to be excluded from consultation or from influencing service delivery.</p> <p>(-) Lack of understanding of cultural differences that could exclude tenants from being able to influence service delivery.</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Joining In Project</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p> <p>Equality Act 2010</p>	<p>Interpreters</p> <p>Translating information.</p> <p>Information on OHMS</p> <p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p> <p>Housing Management Service Improvement Plan 2009-12</p> <p>Tenant Compact</p>	<p>Equalities awareness training for tenant representatives.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p> <p>Offer residents support to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered.</p> <p>Provide training workshops to resident groups to look for ways to increase involvement.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>
<p>Gender (men, women)</p>	<p>(+) Residents will be presented with a wide range of opportunities to be involved in shaping and agreeing local offers.</p> <p>(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p>	<p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p> <p>Housing Management Service Improvement Plan 2009-12</p>	<p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>

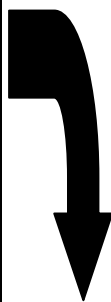
Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts
Gender Reassignment	channel that best suits them. (+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them. (+) Residents will be presented with a wide range of opportunities to be involved in shaping and agreeing local offers.	Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire Tenant profiling data	Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.	Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.
Marriage	No specific impact identified	-	-	-
Civil Partnership	(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them. (+) Residents will be presented with a wide range of opportunities to be involved in shaping and agreeing local offers.	Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire Equality Act 2010	Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.	Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to:
Pregnancy & Maternity	No specific impact identified	-	-	-
Disability (people with a physical or mental health issue, long term limiting illness, learning disability, or physical/sensory impairment)	(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them.	Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire Tenant profiling data Equality Act 2010	Documents translated into Braille. Fully accessible meeting venues and DDA works undertaken and completed on all community rooms across housing. Regularly reviewed to ensure still meeting requirements. Use of sign language interpreters. Information on OHMS. Work of the Tenant Disability Network. Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.	Equalities training for tenant representatives. Tenants and leaseholders with additional support needs to be involved in the design of housing services and to be provided with facilities to assist them in this. Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.
Age (older, younger people)	(+) Encourage younger members of each household to join in with consultation activities by	Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire	Work of the Sheltered Housing Action Group Tenant and leaseholder	Use tenant profiling data to engage directly with younger residents in ways that they have indicated they would like

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts
<p>Age (older, younger people) cont.</p>	<p>including in all questionnaires to the household specific questions designed for younger members.</p> <p>(+) Work with Children & Young Peoples Trust to develop links with groups representing young people.</p> <p>(-) extending the use of social media and other electronic methods of communication may be challenging for older residents.</p>	<p>Equality Act 2010</p> <p>United Nations Convention on the rights of the child – Article 12</p> <p>Children Act 1989</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p>	<p>involvement questionnaire.</p>	<p>to be involved.</p> <p>Extend social media to encourage involvement from younger residents, publicise widely.</p> <p>Special provision to be made for encouraging younger residents to gain the skills and enthusiasm to become fully engaged.</p> <p>Provide support and training for older residents to enable them to participate through social media.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obtain missing data & info • minimise negative impacts • maximise positive impacts
<p>Religion or belief (faith communities, including no belief)</p>	<p>(-) Lack of understanding could exclude tenants from being able to influence service delivery.</p> <p>(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them.</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p>	<p>Faith Awareness information</p> <p>Information on OHMS.</p> <p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p>	<p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p> <p>Faith awareness training for staff and tenant reps.</p>
<p>Sexual orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual and unsure people)</p>	<p>(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service in a way that that best suits them.</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p>	<p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p>	<p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>
<p>Other groups (carers, homeless people, socially or financially excluded people, people experiencing domestic violence or abuse, etc)</p>		<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data.</p>	<p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p>	<p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to:
Staff	(-) Changes to the way officers engage with residents over service delivery may be challenging for housing management staff.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts Provide training in resident involvement for Housing Management staff.



New actions to be transferred to Action Plan

Consultation

What consultation has been used or taken?	Date	Methods used	Findings
Tenant Compact Monitoring Group.	2010/11	Group workshops to discuss in detail the four objectives set out in the resident involvement strategy. This information then taken back to full TCMG for approval.	Feedback from these groups used to develop the strategy.
Resident Representatives	2009	Communication and profiles survey sent out to all resident representatives.	Priorities identified through this survey reflected in the strategy.
Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire	December 2009	Questionnaire sent to every tenant and leaseholder.	15% response to this questionnaire. 95% of those responding wanted their names retained in a database to become further involved in a number of ways.
Draft resident involvement strategy document sent to staff.	August 2010	Copy of consultation document sent to staff members inviting comment	Feedback from staff incorporated in final draft document.

Action Plan

Agreed action	Timescale	Lead officer	Review date
Improve training and development programme for residents and groups that wish to become involved in the decision making process.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Staff training on resident involvement.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Faith awareness training for staff and tenant representatives.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Provide training workshops to resident groups to look for ways to increase involvement.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Building capacity for residents to be fully involved.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Equalities awareness training for tenant representatives.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Offer residents support to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Special provision to be made for encouraging younger residents to gain the skills and enthusiasm to become fully engaged.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Provide support and training for older residents to enable them to participate through social media.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Regular city-wide gatherings of residents, representatives and officers.	TBC	TBC	TBC
An extended menu of ways to get involved, from serving on formal groups and answering questionnaires to other less formal ways which include social networks, widely publicised and fully accessible.	TBC	TBC	TBC

Review Tenant Compact.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Continued use of tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire and regular review of information gathered.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents to develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Regularly report back on local performance and objectives set and evaluate the quality of the local service.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Use residents' views to regularly review and improve performance.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Independent access to facilities that will allow residents to compare performance with other landlords.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Tenants and leaseholders with additional support needs to be involved in the design of housing services and to be provided with facilities to assist them in this.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Use tenant profiling data to engage directly with younger residents in ways that they have indicated they would like to be involved.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Extend use of social media to encourage involvement from younger residents, publicise widely.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Agree local priorities	TBC	TBC	TBC

Sign Off / Approval

Lead Equality Impact Assessment Officer:

Date:

Departmental Equalities Lead:

Date:

Head of Delivery Unit / Lead Commissioner:

Date:

Communities & Equalities Team:

Date:

(NB: Actions must now be transferred to service or business plans)

Equality Impact Assessment Summary Template

Name of review:	Resident Involvement Strategy	Reference number: HM32
Period of review:	January 2010 – July 2011	
Date review signed off:		
Scope of the review:	The scope of this EIA is to assess the impact to residents and staff of the introduction of the Resident Involvement Strategy.	
Review team:	Jane White Community Participation Officer John Austin Locke Policy, Performance and Community Participation Manager	
Relevant data and research:	This EIA builds on the previous one for resident involvement and takes account of the Tenant Compact, profiling data and the Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire.	
Consultation: indicate who was consulted and how they were consulted	Tenant Compact Monitoring Group and staff were consulted on this document through workshops, group meetings and circulation of draft document.	
Assessment of impact, outcomes and key follow up actions:	<p>The EIA has identified a variety of actions and methods by which resident involvement can be extended to include those groups not currently engaged or fully represented.</p> <p>This will include training opportunities for residents and staff as well as the continued monitoring of tenant profiling data to support engagement.</p>	
Name and contact details of lead officer responsible for follow-up action:	John Austin Locke: john.austin-locke@brighton-hove.gov.uk Tel: 01273 291008 Blackberry: 077 953 362 75 www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing	
For full report contact:	Jane White: jane.white@brighton-hove.gov.uk Tel: 01273 293265 Fax: 01273 293289 www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council housing	

Equalities Impact Assessment Template

EIA Title:	Resident Involvement Strategy	Reference Number:	HM 32
<p>Aim of Policy or Scope of Service:</p>	<p>To build on the existing resident participation system amongst the council’s tenants and leaseholders, seeking to present new opportunities for increasing the number of residents who get involved whilst also encouraging those that don’t normally engage with us to do so.</p>		
<p>Approach to the Impact Assessment:</p>	<p>The purpose of this EIA is to consider the possible positive or negative impact introduction of this strategy may have on the council’s tenants, leaseholders and Housing Management staff.</p>		

Scope of the Assessment

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obtain missing data & info • minimise negative impacts • maximise positive impacts
<p>All (impacts that apply to all groups)</p>	<p>(-) Changing the established practices for engaging with individuals and groups may prove challenging.</p> <p>(-) Changes to the way officers engage with residents over service delivery may be challenging for housing management staff.</p> <p>(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them.</p> <p>(+) A clear commitment to value for money in service provision.</p> <p>(+) A clear commitment to put tenants and leaseholders at the heart of all aspects of</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p> <p>Age Regulation 2006</p> <p>United Nations Convention on the rights of the child – Article 12</p> <p>Children Act 1989</p> <p>Equality Act 2010</p> <p>Tenant Census 2006</p> <p>20/20 Engagement Framework</p> <p>Joining In Project</p> <p>2009 resident representatives Communications & Profile Survey</p>	<p>Improve training and development programme for residents and groups that wish to become involved in the decision making process.</p> <p>Staff training on resident involvement.</p> <p>Agree local priorities.</p> <p>Regular city-wide gatherings of residents, representatives and officers.</p> <p>An extended menu of ways to get involved, from serving on formal groups and answering questionnaires to other less formal ways which include social networks, widely publicised and fully accessible.</p> <p>Review Tenant Compact.</p> <p>Continued use of tenant and leaseholder involvement</p>	<p>Improve training and development programme for residents and groups that wish to become involved in the decision making process.</p> <p>Staff training on resident involvement.</p> <p>Agree local priorities.</p> <p>Regular city-wide gatherings of residents, representatives and officers.</p> <p>An extended menu of ways to get involved, from serving on formal groups and answering questionnaires to other less formal ways which include social networks, widely publicised and fully accessible.</p> <p>Review Tenant Compact.</p> <p>Continued use of tenant and leaseholder involvement</p>

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obtain missing data & info • minimise negative impacts • maximise positive impacts
<p>All (impacts that apply to all groups) cont.</p>	<p>Housing's service provision.</p> <p>(+) provides tenants with a range of opportunities to scrutinise our performance against agreed standards.</p>			<p>questionnaire and regular review of information gathered.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents to develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p> <p>Regularly report back on local performance and objectives set and evaluate the quality of the local service.</p> <p>Use residents' views to regularly review and improve performance.</p> <p>Independent access to facilities that will allow residents to compare performance with other landlords.</p> <p>Building capacity for residents to be fully involved.</p>

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts
<p>Race (BME people, asylum seekers/refugees)</p>	<p>(-) Potential for those who are not confident in reading or speaking English to be excluded from consultation or from influencing service delivery.</p> <p>(-) Lack of understanding of cultural differences that could exclude tenants from being able to influence service delivery.</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Joining In Project</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p> <p>Equality Act 2010</p>	<p>Interpreters</p> <p>Translating information.</p> <p>Information on OHMS</p> <p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p> <p>Housing Management Service Improvement Plan 2009-12</p> <p>Tenant Compact</p>	<p>Equalities awareness training for tenant representatives.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p> <p>Offer residents support to be effectively engaged, involved and empowered.</p> <p>Provide training workshops to resident groups to look for ways to increase involvement.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>
<p>Gender (men, women)</p>	<p>(+) Residents will be presented with a wide range of opportunities to be involved in shaping and agreeing local offers.</p> <p>(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p>	<p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p> <p>Housing Management Service Improvement Plan 2009-12</p>	<p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>

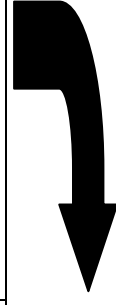
Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts
Gender Reassignment	channel that best suits them. (+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them. (+) Residents will be presented with a wide range of opportunities to be involved in shaping and agreeing local offers.	Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire Tenant profiling data	Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.	Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.
Marriage	No specific impact identified	-	-	-
Civil Partnership	(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them. (+) Residents will be presented with a wide range of opportunities to be involved in shaping and agreeing local offers.	Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire Equality Act 2010	Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.	Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts
Pregnancy & Maternity	No specific impact identified	-	-	-
Disability (people with a physical or mental health issue, long term limiting illness, learning disability, or physical/sensory impairment)	<p>(+) Individual tenants and leaseholders will be able to directly influence service delivery through a channel that best suits them.</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p> <p>Equality Act 2010</p>	<p>Documents translated into Braille.</p> <p>Fully accessible meeting venues and DDA works undertaken and completed on all community rooms across housing. Regularly reviewed to ensure still meeting requirements.</p> <p>Use of sign language interpreters.</p> <p>Information on OHMS.</p> <p>Work of the Tenant Disability Network.</p> <p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p>	<p>Equalities training for tenant representatives.</p> <p>Tenants and leaseholders with additional support needs to be involved in the design of housing services and to be provided with facilities to assist them in this.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>
Age (older, younger people)	<p>(+) Encourage younger members of each household to join in with consultation activities by</p>	<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p>	<p>Work of the Sheltered Housing Action Group</p> <p>Tenant and leaseholder</p>	<p>Use tenant profiling data to engage directly with younger residents in ways that they have indicated they would like</p>

Different groups included in scope	Potential impacts (positive and negative) on this group	Existing data / information (inc. relevant legislation)	Current action to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts	Potential new actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts
<p>Age (older, younger people) cont.</p>	<p>including in all questionnaires to the household specific questions designed for younger members.</p> <p>(+) Work with Children & Young Peoples Trust to develop links with groups representing young people.</p> <p>(-) extending the use of social media and other electronic methods of communication may be challenging for older residents.</p>	<p>Equality Act 2010</p> <p>United Nations Convention on the rights of the child – Article 12</p> <p>Children Act 1989</p> <p>Tenant profiling data</p>	<p>involvement questionnaire.</p>	<p>to be involved.</p> <p>Extend social media to encourage involvement from younger residents, publicise widely.</p> <p>Special provision to be made for encouraging younger residents to gain the skills and enthusiasm to become fully engaged.</p> <p>Provide support and training for older residents to enable them to participate through social media.</p> <p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>

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Other groups (carers, homeless people, socially or financially excluded people, people experiencing domestic violence or abuse, etc)		<p>Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire</p> <p>Tenant profiling data.</p>	<p>Tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire.</p>	<p>Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents and develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.</p>

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Staff	(-) Changes to the way officers engage with residents over service delivery may be challenging for housing management staff.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtain missing data & info minimise negative impacts maximise positive impacts Provide training in resident involvement for Housing Management staff.



New actions to be transferred to Action Plan

Consultation

What consultation has been used or taken?	Date	Methods used	Findings
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Draft resident involvement strategy document sent to staff.	August 2010	Copy of consultation document sent to staff members inviting comment	Feedback from staff incorporated in final draft document.

Action Plan

Agreed action	Timescale	Lead officer	Review date
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Faith awareness training for staff and tenant representatives.	TBC	TBC	TBC
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Regular city-wide gatherings of residents, representatives and officers.	TBC	TBC	TBC
An extended menu of ways to get involved, from serving on formal groups and answering questionnaires to other less formal ways which include social networks, widely publicised and fully accessible.	TBC	TBC	TBC

Review Tenant Compact.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Continued use of tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire and regular review of information gathered.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Monitor the profile of residents who are involved in the management of their housing against the profile of all our residents to develop methods of participation that encourage residents from under represented groups to get involved.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Regularly report back on local performance and objectives set and evaluate the quality of the local service.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Use residents' views to regularly review and improve performance.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Independent access to facilities that will allow residents to compare performance with other landlords.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Tenants and leaseholders with additional support needs to be involved in the design of housing services and to be provided with facilities to assist them in this.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Use tenant profiling data to engage directly with younger residents in ways that they have indicated they would like to be involved.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Extend use of social media to encourage involvement from younger residents, publicise widely.	TBC	TBC	TBC
Agree local priorities	TBC	TBC	TBC

Sign Off / Approval

Lead Equality Impact Assessment Officer:

Date:

Departmental Equalities Lead:

Date:

Head of Delivery Unit / Lead Commissioner:

Date:

Communities & Equalities Team:

Date:

(NB: Actions must now be transferred to service or business plans)

Equality Impact Assessment Summary Template

Name of review:	Resident Involvement Strategy	Reference number: HM32
Period of review:	January 2010 – July 2011	
Date review signed off:		
Scope of the review:	The scope of this EIA is to assess the impact to residents and staff of the introduction of the Resident Involvement Strategy.	
Review team:	Jane White Community Participation Officer John Austin Locke Policy, Performance and Community Participation Manager	
Relevant data and research:	This EIA builds on the previous one for resident involvement and takes account of the Tenant Compact, profiling data and the Tenant & Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire.	
Consultation: indicate who was consulted and how they were consulted	Tenant Compact Monitoring Group and staff were consulted on this document through workshops, group meetings and circulation of draft document.	
Assessment of impact, outcomes and key follow up actions:	<p>The EIA has identified a variety of actions and methods by which resident involvement can be extended to include those groups not currently engaged or fully represented.</p> <p>This will include training opportunities for residents and staff as well as the continued monitoring of tenant profiling data to support engagement.</p>	
Name and contact details of lead officer responsible for follow-up action:	John Austin Locke: john.austin-locke@brighton-hove.gov.uk Tel: 01273 291008 Blackberry: 077 953 362 75 www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing	
For full report contact:	Jane White: jane.white@brighton-hove.gov.uk Tel: 01273 293265 Fax: 01273 293289 www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council housing	

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 42

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Customer Access Phase 3 – Customer Service and Access Strategy for Housing & Social Inclusion		
Date of Meeting:	19 October 2011		
Report of:	Strategic Director, Place		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Ododo Dafé	Tel: 29-3201
	Email:	Ododo.dafe@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the review of customer access arrangements for the Housing Management Service and presents the Housing & Social Inclusion Customer Service and Access Strategy for consideration by the Cabinet Member.
- 1.2 A report detailing the customer access review and proposals for taking the review forward was considered by HMCC on 12 October 2009. A second report, agreed on 8 February 2010, included 10 'Broad Principles' on which improvements to customer access should be based. Following that, a third report on Phase 2 of the customer access review was agreed at the 27 September 2010 HMCC considering the establishment of a single point of contact for tenancy management enquiries; the co-location of Children and Young People's Trust colleagues at the Lavender Street Housing Office; and enabling access to housing services via community contact points at libraries.
- 1.3 The Housing & Social Inclusion Delivery Unit prides itself on placing its customers at the heart of everything it does, and its considerations for customer access are set out in the attached draft strategy. The strategy outlines actions to support the provision of excellent customer focussed services through a range of channels that increase customer choice.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Housing Cabinet Member approves the Customer Service and Access Strategy that is presented with this report as Phase 3 of the Customer Access Review. Key areas for action within the strategy include:

(1) Promotion and support for customers to use more effective methods for accessing housing information and services in line with council-wide 'Improving Customer Experience' work and our corporate Channel Shift Strategy.

(2) Consultations with staff on staffing structure to support proposed new customer access arrangements and service improvement.

(3) Consideration of opportunities for further office moves and best future use of some housing offices – notably Manor Place Housing Office and Victoria Road Housing Office.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

Customer Access - Broad Principles

3.1 The Broad Principles for reviewing customer access, as presented to HMCC on 10 February 2010 centred on the need for change to provide more accessible, efficient, preventative and better value for money services. It also covered areas of increasing choice, minimising waste, better use of staff resources targeted at where the need sits, and the involvement of staff and residents in the changes.

Lavender Street Housing Office co-location

3.2 Temporary staff moves to Oxford St Housing Office facilitated the co-location of Children and Young People's Trust teams at the Lavender Street Housing Office. The co-location has proved very successful, and customers have not been impacted by the new service model at this office.

Housing Centre

3.3 The Housing Centre was completed within target timescales and was available for staff to move into from April 2011.

3.4 Since then a number of teams have been relocated to the Housing Centre. They are:

- Mears Group
- Property and Investment
- Lettings
- Car Parks & Garages
- Estate Services
- Right to Buy & Leasehold
- Rent Accounting

3.5 Staff report that they are really happy with the office space and working environment afforded by the Housing Office, and are realising the benefits of working in close proximity to other teams within the service and Mears.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

4.1 Residents will be involved in the development of customer access improvements in a variety of ways. Examples include through feedback on our strategy via eg the internet and Homing In; joint working on aspects of service reviews – eg doing customer journey maps around the new tenancy process; Mystery Shopping our customer service; discussions at meetings; and face-to-face

surveys on the potential impact of moving staff at the Manor Place Housing Office.

- 4.2 Focus group work and satisfaction survey results have informed the development of the strategy.
- 4.3 Staff feedback has informed some aspects of the strategy, and staff, and their trade unions, will be formally consulted about relevant changes arising from the adoption of the strategy.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The costs and savings associated with the Customer Service and Access Strategy will be included within the HRA budget strategy for 2012/13 which will be reported to HMCC by February 2012.

Finance Officer Consulted: Name Monica Brooks Date: 31/08/11

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 There are no specific legal or Human Rights Act implications which need to be drawn to the Cabinet Member's attention at this stage.

Lawyer Consulted: Name Liz Woodley Date: 14/09/11

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 A summary of our draft Equalities Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix 2. It will be finalised in light of the adoption or otherwise of the strategy, and before any proposals are implemented. Equalities implications have been considered throughout the strategy, as changing and improving customer access has the potential to affect a range of people including those with disabilities, people for whom English is not a first language, and others who can find it difficult to access services eg with no access to the internet.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Sustainability implications of any changes to customer access have been considered within the strategy. They include the potential to reduce the service's carbon emissions, reduce travelling, reduced use of paper in our operations, and increased use of access channels with the lowest environmental impact.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Rethinking the way we work and streamlining processes will free up officers' time, enabling them to spend more time with our most vulnerable tenants or out on our estates which may reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and the perception of crime.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 A risk analysis will be undertaken to identify key risks and their mitigation.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 There are no direct public health implications arising from this report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 Changes and improvements to customer service and access arrangements have been considered in a corporate context. Council wide work on eg Smartspace, Workstyles, systems thinking, web development had had, and will continue to have an impact on the actions within the strategy.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The strategy sets a framework within which we can consider different options for improving customer service and access within Housing & Social Inclusion.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To enable approval of the Customer Service and Access Strategy, and obtain feedback on its general direction and the actions within it.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Draft Housing & Social Inclusion Customer Service and Access Strategy
2. Draft summary equalities impact assessment

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. None

Housing & Social Inclusion

**Customer
Service &
Access Strategy**

2011-2014



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. What the strategy will achieve
4. Current customer access arrangements
5. Offering choice of access channel to improve customer service
6. Knowing our customers better to improve customer service and access (customer profiling)
7. Using technology to improve customer service and access
8. Transforming how we work and developing our workforce to improve customer service and access
9. Sustainable customer service and access
10. Monitoring and review

Appendix 1 Broad principles for changes needed to improve our customers' experience of our service

1. Introduction

Housing & Social Inclusion is responsible for providing landlord services to approximately 12,200 tenants, and 2,300 leaseholders across the city. This customer service and access strategy is designed to support our service delivery priorities which place customers at the heart of everything we do.

It provides information on things that need to be considered in making sure our customers have a full range of methods for accessing our services in ways and at times that suit them - and that are efficient and cost effective.

The scope of this strategy is broad in that it relates to tenants, leaseholders, and members of the public - anyone who seeks information or a service from us. They will all expect excellent, timely, considered, responsive and consistent responses, regardless of the method they use - be it by email, telephone, face-to-face, letter or other new and emerging media.

It is not a stand alone strategy. It complements other council-wide or Housing & Social Inclusion strategies, plans and commitments - for example those on resident involvement, customer access and improving the customer experience, diversity and equalities, value for money, ICT, workforce development, Workstyles and use of assets. As a living document, it will evolve as demands and expectations of our customers change, or as it is informed by service reviews, technological and other changes.

Council's customer promise

As part of the council's 'Improving the Customer Experience' programme, we have developed the following council-wide customer promise, which also provides a backdrop for this strategy:

- We will be easy to reach
- We will be clear and treat you with respect
- We will listen and act to get things done.

We pride ourselves on our customers being central to everything we do, and have produced a series of service pledges that outline our commitments to them. We want customers to have easy access to our services, and receive great customer service at times and in ways that offer choice. Our customer service and access arrangements are also designed to be suitable for a variety of individual needs.

2. Background

National perspective

The report by Sir David Varney on 'Service Transformation' in 2006 recommended that public service organisations should improve customer services by aiming to resolve customer enquiries at their first point of contact, and develop more self-service and online services - while at the same time achieving a balance of access channels for all customers.

As far back as 2001, the Cabinet Office and UK Online report '**Framework for channel strategies**' urged organisations to look at how customers contact them, how much each method costs, and then increase choice to customers but with an eye on ultimately moving to cheaper methods where possible, while maintaining excellent customer service.

Local considerations

We are aware that we'll only be successful in encouraging customers to use efficient and cheaper access channels by making it worthwhile and effective for them - eg quicker service, access to all the information they need, and transactions done at a time and pace to suit them. Over time, the more we are able to do this, the more likely we are to see an increased shift from the more traditional and costly channels to the use of cheaper and newer service channels.

The development of this strategy has enabled us to take a closer look at how, why and when customers currently contact us, how effective and efficient we are at responding - and to look at the costs involved.

A range of information has helped to shape this strategy, examples are:

- Government reports
- Customer feedback
- Learning from high performing organisations
- External assessment of our work
- Focused discussions with residents and staff
- Council-wide work on 'Improving the Customer Experience' and the council's three overarching customer promises
- The Audit Commission's 'Access and Customer Care' key lines of enquiry (KLOEs)
- Tenant Services Authority (TSA) standards
- Council-wide Workstyles programme looking at the best use of office space
- Work by staff groups looking at customer access and customer experiences of our service
- Intelligence about our business.

There were important messages from our external assessment work that have shaped this strategy. They centre around our processes being resource and administration heavy and not always delivering what our customers need; how there is a need to change to provide easier access to our services, target our services to people who most need them, reduce waste, and intervene at earlier stages where needed; and the continued need to involve residents and staff. The full list of the broad principles can be found at Appendix 1.

While seeking to improve convenience to customers, their access to and experience of our services, it is clear that in the current economic climate we also have to achieve value for money from tenants' rents, and to the tax-payer paying for the services that support housing eg Housing Benefit and council tax benefit. We are striving to achieve a balance between both the customers' needs, keeping our customers at the heart of everything we do, and our business needs. This strategy is advantageous to both.

We are also looking to better understand our customer in the context of their everyday experiences in receiving services from other organisations and businesses they come into contact with, and how this is most likely to have changed over the past ten years.

3. What the strategy will achieve

Aims of the customer service and access strategy

We have an ongoing desire, commitment and responsibility to deliver the best possible service for our customers, in line with what they've told us, and in a way that is sustainable. The main outcomes we will achieve from this strategy are set out under the following four broad categories:

1. Excellent, positive customer experiences

- using customer information to tailor services and meet individual needs
- engaging with and listening to our customers
- keeping customers informed
- customers feeling valued and respected
- increased customer satisfaction

2. Improved choice and flexibility in accessing services

- working with our customers to identify and reduce barriers
- knowing our customers better
- expanding options and supporting preference
- promoting more effective and cheaper channels

3. 'Right first time' approach

- speedy resolution
- reducing 'avoidable' contact
- value for money
- service review
- lower overall service costs

4. Staff enabled and empowered to make a difference

- changing how we think and work
- redesigning our processes
- sharing learning
- working collaboratively
- high performance working

4. Current customer access arrangements

Current access model

Housing offices

The central focus of our current access model is our five housing offices that have been in operation since the creation of Brighton & Hove Council in 1997, and where customer contact arrangements are replicated in each of them. This consists of having someone at reception for face-to-face visitors, people staffing the telephones similar to a mini contact centre at each office, and a cashier at each office for accepting rent, council tax, tenants' contents insurance and other payments.

We have a number of specialist teams traditionally located at housing offices – for example those responsible for capital works, managing our repairs contracts, lettings, supporting vulnerable tenants and tenancies, reducing anti-social behaviour, and providing older people's housing and services.

Other offices

The Housing Income Management Team are located in a separate town centre location and essentially operate a further mini contact centre where much of their work is telephone based, although they do also offer office appointments and carry out home visits.

Telephone access to services through our offices

There are 14 published telephone numbers for contacting our service, with customers also having direct dial extension numbers for up to 80 individual officers.

From each of these offices, customers can use the free public direct dial phone to access the Mears Repairs Helpdesk, Housing Benefits, Council Tax, Homemove, our gas contractor, the Housing Income Management Team, the complaints line and Cityclean.

The Mears Repairs Helpdesk is accessible on a freephone number (with a local number available for mobile phone users) from 8am to 8pm on weekdays and through an out of hours service at other times.

Home visits through our offices

We also enable access to our services through a range of home visits carried out by staff based in the offices.

Effectiveness of our current model

The profile of services delivered from our housing offices has changed significantly in the last 14 years. Many services customers used to come in for are no longer based at each of these offices - and for example repairs reporting, housing benefits advice, rent arrears support, lettings, serious antisocial behaviour management, and tenancy sustainment are dealt with by specialist, centrally located teams. However, some are accessible through the free direct dial phone at each office. Despite this change in services available, we have kept the same traditional delivery model over the years and

this has resulted in its reduced cost effectiveness and ability to deliver value for money. We now need to modernise our approach.

Data capture exercises in recent years eg iMPower work in 2009 and Customer Access Review Group of Officers (CARGO) work in 2010 revealed that up to 40% of visitors to housing offices enquire about services that are either not provided at the offices (eg repairs) or are not provided by Housing & Social Inclusion (eg Housing Benefits, refuse and recycling).

In addition, some offices are not located close to where our customers live (eg the one in Victoria Road) or they have a low daily footfall (eg the one in Selsfield Drive), being used only by small proportions of our tenants, who are mainly visiting for services that need to be referred elsewhere or to pay rent.

Council wide, colleagues have been looking at the use made of council office space under a programme called Workstyles, to help us become as efficient as possible. Some offices have already been redesigned to make best use of space, using ICT solutions for data storage and communications to reduce the incidence of valuable space being used for housing paper files. This has enabled staff to move from unsuitable or costly accommodation, achieving savings. The Workstyles programme incorporates different technologies, work locations and patterns of work that enable staff to adopt creative and flexible approaches to how they work and deliver services.

We do not feel that we are making optimum use of our housing offices with regard to customer access and customer service, and are therefore looking at what we can do to improve.

What we've done

- As part of the council's Workstyles programme we've changed the use of Lavender Street Housing Office by moving staff who did not provide services solely to residents in that area to free up space for Children & Families staff to be located there. This has improved access for local people needing that service and provided better value for money.
- CARGO (a group of officers looking at customer access) have undertaken a study looking at telephone, face-to-face, email, and letter access channels to better understand what customers contact us about, and the extent to which the contact has added any value to the customer.
- Another group of officers has also looked at a few typical customer requests and carried out customer journey mapping to see how effective we are in responding to them in a streamlined way.
- We've completed a total refurbishment of the previous Allen West industrial building in Moulsecoomb to establish a modern, energy efficient office space large enough to accommodate a number of Housing & Social Inclusion teams as well as our repairs partner, Mears. Teams have moved into the building in a

phased programme since May this year, and are already reaping the benefits of being co-located with colleagues in other teams.

- We have increased the number of contact points where customers can get information or help about housing services through the introduction of a new service across our libraries from March 2011 'Council Connect'. This service is supported by trained volunteers who are able to guide customers to access information or carry out service transactions online. It is part of our council-wide 'Improving the Customer Experience' work, and fits very well with our work on increasing choice in customers' access to services.

Actions we will take

- Enable more teams within or outside our service to move into the Housing Centre – especially after we have followed 'smart space' principles and are able to use technology to reduce the amount of space needed for paper based filing.
- Manor Place - consult on plans to move staff to the new Whitehawk Hub where they will be co-located with other local services including a library, children's services and health centre. Also plans to use our 'Our Neighbourhood' local base in North Whitehawk for a wider range of services.
- Selsfield Drive - in time, transferring tenancy management and targeted interventions staff to the Housing Centre, where they will be co-located with a range of other Housing & Social Inclusion teams.
- Victoria Rd - relocating tenancy management staff into the refurbished Portslade Town Hall, and consideration of customers accessing housing services at a local community library.
- Customers needing to see someone in person will have the same level of access to appointments at their home – or at an increasing number of council locations/hubs than just the current number of housing offices.
- Look at opportunities for locating our services with other council services – eg libraries, and possibly sharing use of our buildings with other organisations.
- Carry out a review of our accommodation needs and costs.

5. Offering choice of access channels to improve customer service

This strategy is essentially about enhancing all access channels so that no matter how customers contact us they can expect an excellent resolution to their enquiry. People will only start to use more cost effective channels if they are easy to use and repeatedly offer a good route to a solution.

The more expensive options are face-to-face, letter and even telephone, while the cheaper ones are those that offer a large element of self service eg self service on the website, interactive voice recognition systems - ie those that do not require staff input at the point of contact or transaction.

A further consideration is that whatever channel is chosen, our service offer needs to minimise the need for further chase up or complaint – elements of ‘avoidable contact’.

As well as having services online, we need to promote their availability, and encourage and support people to access them. The process of putting things in place that help our customers make the transition to get the information they need or carry out the transactions they want using less costly and more streamlined options is known as ‘channel shift’. Where we can achieve this, it frees up increased staff time and resources to support those people or situations that require higher levels of staff interaction.

The table below shows the industry standard costs per transaction incurred by local authorities for different contact channels.

Table 1 Transaction costs for different channels

Channel	Cost	£ saving for each transaction shifted from face-to-face	% saving shifting from face-to-face	% saving shifting from telephone
Face-to-face	£3.76	-	-	-
Telephone	£3.06	£0.70	19%	-
Web	£0.08	£3.68	98%	97%

NB: Average costs based on data gathered by SOCITM in 2011

For our customers, availability, choice and speed of resolution are all important. So for example someone working might want to simply report an incidence of anti-social behaviour (ASB) – if they try to do this in their lunch break, they might do it on the phone – and if so they’ll certainly want to get through quickly. However, they might prefer to do this online in the evening. Someone else might prefer to report ASB face-to-face or by telephone. It is also possible that the same person might prefer one or other method depending on the severity of the ASB and the need, or not, for immediate reassurance. Whichever method is used, assurity that the report has been made to the right place, it has been received, advice on the next steps is available, or pointers for further information are available should be the same.

To encourage our customers to use the range of channels available, we need to be sure that each channel is suitably resourced and that they are all connected so that it gives a consistent response - regardless of the customer’s chosen channel.

Where people prefer or need to access our services using traditional channels, this strategy supports improved telephone answering and freeing up officer time for personal visits and other face-to-face contacts eg at locations that might be more convenient for our customers.

Optimising existing channels

We want to make the best use of the service channels available to customers, and that means assessing whether we are optimising the use of our housing offices that provide face to face services/home visits, and our telephone, email and other services.

To help with this, around a dozen members of staff from a number of housing teams formed the Customer Access Review Group of Officers (CARGO) last year to look at our current access channels. They focussed on office visits, telephone calls, letters and emails to look at the reasons customers contacted us, and some of our internal processes for responding to the queries that came in. Their work was mainly qualitative so there was not a high number of statistics arising from it, however some of the key findings of the CARGO work were:

- 17% of the contacts observed could have been avoided (ie 'avoidable contact')
- A proportion of visits to housing offices were requests for services that are provided by other teams in other locations eg repairs, Homemove, Cityclean, explanation of housing benefit letters
- Some service requests were not from council tenants or leaseholders
- Of all the service requests coming in by mail, email, face-to-face and telephone, approximately 50% needed to be passed to another officer, team or service.
- Areas of work that would benefit from reviewing the processes from the stage at which the customer contacts the service to where the customer receives the service (end-to-end process) were identified. They were Lettings, Homemove enquiries, rent advice and complaints.

Some staff have also since spent a day doing 'Customer journey mapping' work looking at ways that some of our back-office processes could be simplified. Once we have implemented the first stage of our staffing framework to deliver transformational services and service improvements we will be in a better position to apply the suggested changes to our work practices and carry out further reviews.

Reducing avoidable contact and getting it 'right first time'

If we can resolve enquiries when they are first raised it provides a better service for customers and is more efficient for the council. We will continue reducing the number of people contacting us to chase the response to an enquiry, or contacting us because we either haven't done something we should have done, or have done something that we shouldn't have. This is one key plank for overall success in achieving more efficient customer service as it throws up areas that are ripe for service improvements. The national indicator **NI14**, measuring avoidable contact, is no longer a statutory requirement to collect. However, it has been useful in making us focus some attention on understanding how time, and therefore money, is easily wasted on putting right things that could have been done better the first time around.

The resources that we save by reducing avoidable contact can be used for preventative work. For example when we carried out some focus groups looking at how we're performing against some of the TSA standards, residents felt that we do not have a strong enough emphasis on preventative measures for anti-social behaviour (ASB), and that complaints take a long time to sort out. Staff time could be re-allocated to make further improvements in these service areas.

Although some of the older participants in these focus groups said they did not use computers, many participants would like to receive information on the website or by email. This shows that there is an appetite for using different channels, and that we have an opportunity to better meet the needs of certain groups of customers. Our staff will have an important role to play in supporting residents' access to the internet.

What we've done

- Worked jointly with library service colleagues to develop the new 'Council Connect' service.
- Included our website and 'Do it now' details on our out of hours recorded messages.
- Introduced the housing Customer online system enabling tenants to have secure access to their account details.
- Made sure that there are clear advantages to customers when they access services online - ie a speedy response, or their transaction completed end-to-end immediately.
- Ensured that all our customer access points have facilities for customers to use the internet to reach services.

Actions we will take

Examples of things we'll be doing up to 2014 are:

- Work with local training establishments to enable residents and groups to gain confidence and skills in using technology and new media.
- Use the training room at our Housing Centre to support tenants to develop their IT skills
- Ensure that all our outgoing letters and emails prominently display links to the council housing landing page on our website. In the longer term this should be more prominently displayed than telephone numbers to encourage channel shift away from telephones too.
- Have a message promoting our website, our 'Do it now' pages, and/or our Customer online system for callers waiting for a call to be answered.
- Amend our email auto-replies to include links to our website.
- Let customers know when their enquiry could have been resolved online and spend time to explain how to do it if help is needed, or send information for future reference.

- Promote our website on our Estates Service and Mears partnership vehicles.
- Carry out process mapping of our various communication and access channels to see that they all deliver a prompt and efficient service, and that staff are fully supported to respond 'right first time'.

6. Knowing our customers better to improve customer service and access (customer profiling)

It is only through knowing our customers better, knowing what they want and need from us, and knowing what their expectations are that we are able to improve the services we offer to them.

While our customers comprise many different groups, they broadly fit into three access groups:

1. A very large group who we rarely have any contact with. Their rent is paid regularly and they are generally very independent - perhaps requiring the occasional repair from us.
2. Another large group of residents have slightly more contact with us, seeking information on a range of services, contacting us for rent payments and queries, and for repairs.
3. A much smaller proportion who have a high need for contact with us, often because they are vulnerable in some way. They are most likely to prefer face-to-face contact.

This strategy aims to achieve reduced service costs, while keeping customers central to what we do, by:

- managing contacts more effectively
- reducing avoidable contacts
- making good use of the opportunities offered by technological developments, and
- providing a gentle nudge and supporting customers to shift some of their contacts from high cost-to-serve channels (eg mail, office visits and telephone) to cheaper self serve options – mainly through online services.

In doing this, our website becomes the linchpin to how we make information available and how some of our services are provided. It becomes a central resource not only for customers who wish to, and are able to, be quite self-sufficient in their transactions with us, but also for staff who will be using it as the main resource for helping customers with their enquiries.

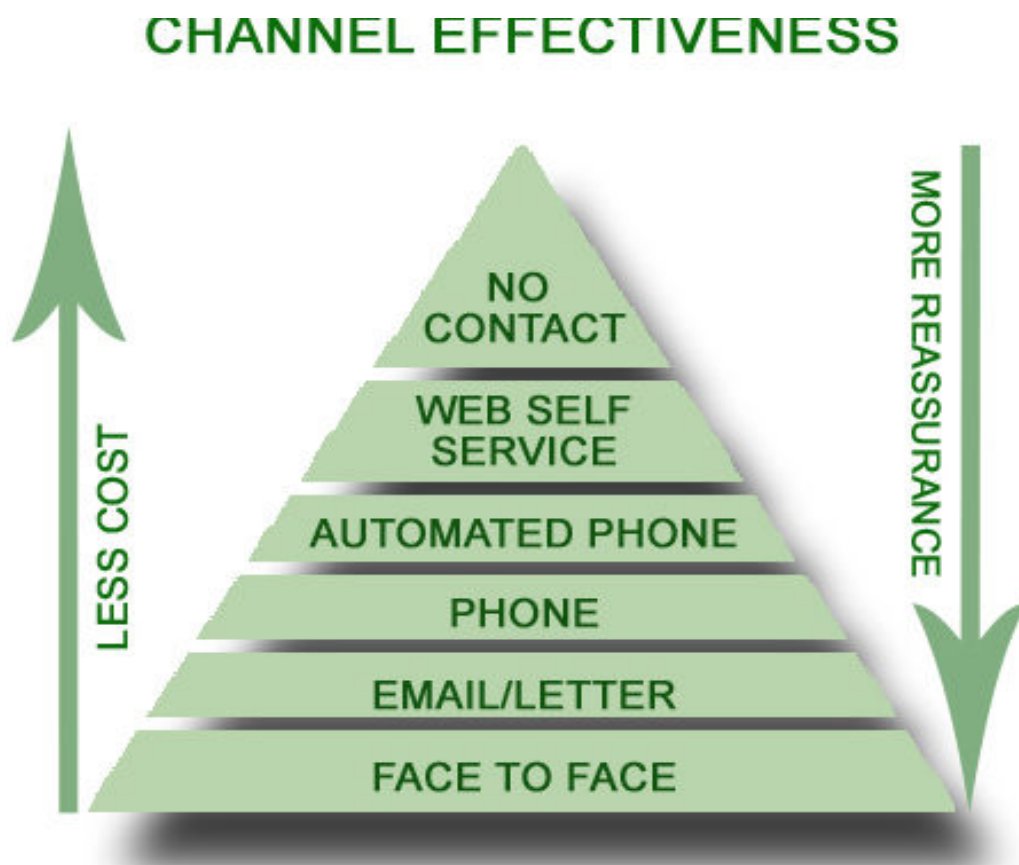
For example, during inclement weather or where we have a lift breakdown, having customers who can access information on regularly updated web-pages will free up officer time to respond to, or initiate contact with, those customers who might not have internet access. Staff in various locations can easily see the latest information about any

situation on their screens, and in this way are able to provide more consistent responses to customers - regardless of the method of contact they prefer to use.

This does not mean that we simply transfer all services to the internet. We know that would not provide excellent and accessible services to people who are currently unable to interact with us or get the information or services they need via a website. What it does mean though, is that we recognise the benefits to our customers, and to our costs, of looking at how technology can help large numbers of people in a whole range of situations.

We anticipate that as the online, self service channel is developed further and gets used more, we'll see a decrease in for example office visits and telephone contacts. Our intention is to increase service satisfaction for all customers, and by making our online and telephone services more attractive to our customers in the first two groups (access groups 1 and 2 above), it enables us to focus more attention on the third group of customers who have higher service needs and/or prefer face-to-face contact.

The diagram below shows how different access channels reduce in cost as they rise up the pyramid, and the preferred channels customers are likely to want depending on the level of reassurance they need.



The website is very effective for obtaining information (eg finding out how to report bulk rubbish) and then doing so, and for simple transactions (eg making a rent payment). Whereas face-to-face contact will be important in cases where a high level of detailed

information, sensitivity and/or reassurance is needed eg serious anti-social behaviour, failing tenancies, or tenancy concerns following a bereavement.

Customer contact channels

During 2010/11 we had approximately 218,000 contacts with customers. The breakdown for how they accessed our service is provided in the table below.

Table 2 Current access proportions across the range of our services

Channel	Percentage
Telephone	60%
Office visit	25%
Home visit	8%
Emails	4.5%
Letters	2.5%

The percentages are of the total contacts by these methods alone. We know that an increasing number of customers are self serving online although we do not have exact figures, but are aware that the proportions are currently low.

Our intention is to support channel shift so that the figures presented in the table above move in the direction indicated below.

Table 3 Target access model with channel shift

Channel	Current percentage	Channel shift direction	2014 Target
Telephone	59%	↓	50%
Office visit	25%	↓	15%
Home visit	8%	↑	10%
Emails	4.5%	↑	8%
Letters	2.5%	↓	2%
Self service - eg website	1%	↑	15%

It is anticipated that initially telephone contact will increase, while customers who want to, are supported in being able to access the information or service aspect they need through our website. Over a two to three year period the percentages of contact made via the telephone is expected to decrease.

What we've done

- We have been working to develop better insight into who our customers are, their needs and their preferences. This has already helped us anticipate some of their needs and will enable us to better provide tailored services, rather than using a one size fits all approach.
- Officers have been carrying out home visits for a considerable time, with an increased focus over the past year, to gather information that improves our knowledge of our customers. So as well as having more insight of our customer profile in terms of age, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, and whether someone in the household has a disability, we are also aware of eg how some tenants would like to be more involved in decisions that affect them and their neighbourhood, and which formats they prefer to receive information – and we've been able to send them their new tenancy agreement in their preferred format of tape, large print, Braille or a more easy read pictorial version.
- Introduced the customer online system that enables tenants to securely update their own contact details, as well as check their accounts.

Actions we will take

- Continue our customer profiling work, ensuring we have good information about all our tenants, including eg their email address, whether they are interested in receiving energy saving advice or information about household contents insurance, and whether they need support to access other services in the city. We will do this through campaigns, personal visits or telephone contacts.
- Use our profiling data to make sure that all our customers have excellent and equal access to our services.
- Capture more information about the reasons for customers contacting us, when and how they do so, so that we can use it to strengthen our customer profiles, identify trends, and improve services.

7. Using technology to improve customer service and access

There are so many ways that different or better use of longstanding and emerging technologies and new media can enormously improve customer service and access, and help us achieve our council and service objectives.

This section will use some examples from this ever expanding range of technologies that include telephones, mobile phones, smartphones, social media, hand-held devices, You Tube, Twitter, data sharing, social networking, Skype and Facebook.

Access to the internet and digital inclusion

In 2008 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey confirmed that 30% of social housing tenants use the internet. We do not have updated figures from ONS, but from our own statistics we know that over one sixth of our tenants, or 2,300 residents, have an email account. Other organisations have noted that there's been a rapid change – especially with the increasing popularity of Smartphones such as Android, iPhone and Blackberry. For example, Southern Housing Trust found that their internet access figures matched those of ONS in 2008 at around 30%; and that by 2010 the percentage of their tenants on the internet had increased to between 55% and 65%.

As well as knowing that at least 2,200 of our residents have email accounts, we know that during a one month period to 7 August 2011 we had 890 unique views of our council housing landing page, and 212 unique views of our Housing 'Do it now' pages. In addition, 93% of all bids made on the council's Homemove scheme have been placed via the internet

Our traditional methods of providing services have not necessarily been convenient for all customers. For example:

- people whose working hours are the same as our office opening
- people who'd have difficulty making phone calls in the daytime at work, and prefer to do so in the evening
- people with particular disabilities who'd find it hard to access services face-to-face, and others who'd have difficulty using the telephone. Internet based provision could give people greater independence, not having to rely on other people - especially with tools such as script readers on the internet, and the ability to increase font sizes and tailor web pages to suit
- people whose first language is not English and might find it easier to get a wealth of information on our website translated into their language at the click of a mouse
- consultations and involvement primarily being through attending meetings that not everyone is interested in doing
- some people with literacy skills find it difficult to read the plethora of information we send. Again they could use the screen reader facility on our website or watch video clips on the website similar to the one Cityclean have produced about recycling.

The benefits of competent online services are that they are quick, easy to use, available 24 hours a day, convenient, and carry low administrative costs.

Potential customer cost savings through using the internet

It's worth noting here how access to the internet can result in not only easier access to services, but also cheaper services or products – and therefore reduced financial outgoings for our customers. For example:

- Skype enables free national and international calls
- There is a wealth of free information on the internet
- Internet shopping can reduce grocery bills
- Increasingly job vacancies are advertised only on the internet
- Online billing from service suppliers usually attract discounts
- Internet sourced energy, insurance and other services offer 'self-serve' discounts
- Emails enable messages, photos and attached documents to be freely sent to anywhere in the world

Supporting residents to access the internet can therefore also assist with tackling inequality and supporting financial inclusion. It also helps improve IT skills for seeking work and learning opportunities.

Using social media

There are many definitions of social media, but as distilled by Wikipedia, a common thread running through all of them is 'a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value'. It's about the social provision of information that enables people to interact and comment upon it - so it's more like a conversation, a dialogue, rather than information which remains static the way newsprint or a webpage generally does.

It also takes many forms for example blogs, social networking, photo and video sharing. For the purpose of this paper, our main focus is on the social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and video and photo sharing sites such as Youtube and Flickr respectively.

Why use it?

The reasons we want to use social media essentially echo our reasons for resident involvement generally. Some are:

- Give residents the opportunity to engage with us and their neighbours
- Hear their voice
- Quick way to report issues or give their views
- Give them the option of doing this at a time, and a way that suits them
- Potentially strengthens communities and community spirit
- Enables us to be more easily accountable to our customers
- Helps us deliver services that are more relevant to what customers need or aspire to
- Demonstrates a flexible and adaptable approach to service delivery
- Harnesses the resourcefulness of our customers and communities.

Benefits for residents and other stakeholders

In addition to the above bullet points, the benefits of social media for our customers are that:

- It's quick
- Can be fun
- They can have their views heard without having to attend a meeting with the time, financial, childcare and travel costs that entails
- They can comment on things in their own time, at their own pace - on their terms
- It's less formal and bureaucratic than many of our meetings
- Our customers can interact with each other
- It's friendly

Benefits for us

In addition to some of the two sets of bullet points above, the benefits for us include:

- Shows a more human side of our organisation – especially as the relevant staff find their social media 'voice' and are able to confidently engage in/respond to the dialogue
- Real time feedback
- Less paperwork
- Less cost
- Opportunity to hear from anyone who wants to comment – especially those who wouldn't normally do so using other channels, and about what they're interested in
- It's innovative
- Helps us build relationships with our customers
- Enables less formal ways to co-design and improve our services

Our use of social media, and getting our service offer correct on our website, could play a role in increasing digital inclusion by encouraging people to take part. There are people who believe they are not on the 'internet' even though they use Facebook and Twitter from computers or phones. Also they might not visit our website, but might engage with us through social media. If this is their introduction to the internet, there could be later spin-offs for them - eg gaining employment skills, and accessing cheaper products and/or services online.

In addition, some internet providers carry out a full credit check on potential customers, and if people have a poor credit history they may find it difficult to secure a home broadband contract and are more likely to have internet access on their phones – or would find eg a 3G dongle (as offered for loan by our library service now) very useful.

How we might use it

This is not an exhaustive list, but examples of potential usage include:

Flickr

- Estate inspection actions needed
- For tenants to report areas needing attention
- Estate Development Budget (EDB) – share consultation photos for bidding process, and encourage wider participation in EDB spend decisions - people could perhaps then lodge their vote for schemes on our website or via text vote!
- Sharing before and after photos of EDB projects

Youtube video clips

- Introduction to our housing service
- Rent payment options
- Reporting repairs
- Managing anti-social behaviour
- Starting a tenancy
- Ending a tenancy
- Difficulties paying your rent?
- Information for leaseholders - eg payment support
- Being a great neighbour
- Getting involved
- Celebrating initiatives such as estate clean-ups

Twitter

- Giving daily updates on a live issue
- Regular (daily) posting on topics residents following us on Twitter will find useful
- Resident involvement - this affords a really quick, easy and effective way to get views, comment, feedback on an issue, for example at City Assembly for people unable to attend
- Quick and informal reporting and feedback

80% of people who use Twitter do so from their mobile phone. (Source: Acceleris PR and communications agency)

Facebook

- Again, regular news on topical issues eg decent homes updates
- Information we're keen to get feedback on
- Responding to our 'fans'
- Promote events
- Organise quizzes and promotions
- EDB votes
- Reporting issues and commenting on neighbourhoods

Excellent accessible services for everyone

We want to maintain choice for our customers in how they contact us or access our services. Their preferred method will be decided by factors such as:

- Their knowledge of options available
- The complexity of the issue
- Their preferences
- Their access to the internet
- The confidence they have using the internet and their abilities
- The speed within which they need confirmation of an issue
- The extent to which they need assurance of an issue

We are mindful of social, financial and digital inclusion issues, and we will maintain a mix of channels, ensuring no-one is disadvantaged by our service offer. Additionally we will continue to sign-post customers to local and national resources to support them getting online if they wish to do that.

What we've done

- Residents were consulted and involved in changes made to areas of our website
- Our website has recently been developed to improve our customer service, support improved access and support channel shift, with a new landing page www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing for easier access (including use of icons), and many more transactional services and online forms available on our 'Do it now' pages, eg:
 - ✓ pay rent, leaseholder, garage, household contents insurance and other charges online
 - ✓ use the housing benefits and council tax online calculator
 - ✓ report anti-social behaviour
 - ✓ report repairs, estate issues (eg bulk rubbish), housing and housing benefit fraud
 - ✓ make Homemove choice based lettings bids
 - ✓ take part in consultations
- From August 2011 our 'Customer Online System' enables customers to eg view their rent accounts, make payments or arrangements, and access or amend their personal information
- One housing office has transferred all its paper files and many paper-based ways of working onto our computerised IDOX system - speeding up processes especially by saving 'double entering', but saving a huge amount of paper
- Free internet access at any of the city's libraries, with enhanced support available from the council's 'Council Connect' volunteers.
- Two of our households were the first to be loaned a laptop computer with internet access as part of our new 'Council Connect' service at all city libraries.
- Tenant association groups have been assisted in setting up their own social media accounts.

Actions we will take

Examples of things we'll be doing up to 2014 are:

- Capture more information on internet access, understand barriers to the internet and seek out opportunities to overcome them.
- Continue to make improvements to our website, also developing it as the first port of call for staff responding to customer queries. In this way it would ensure that advice is consistent and that information on it is kept up to date as staff will be referring to it constantly.
- Develop a series of short You Tube video clips providing information that our customers will find useful - eg on how to report anti-social behaviour, how to get involved, and rent payment options.
- Increase our use of group text messaging to keep customers notified of issues they'll be interested in.
- Look into the potential to use Digital Switchover and digital technology to access services via televisions at home.
- Use technology to record levels of avoidable contact – and use this information when reviewing and streamlining our processes.
- Explore the use of 0300 non-geographical numbers reserved for public organisations and charities – and included in landline and mobile phone free minutes.
- Develop open data principles to help make us more accountable, and shift from customers being passive recipients of information we provide, to them being able to engage with the data and use it for a range of purposes. Examples are residents associations using local data on a range of issues (not only housing) to help them work co-productively with us on setting local priorities and budget priorities; capacity building for involvement in city-wide issues; mapping a range of issues – eg EDB spend, land available for growing, and repairs information; and groups working on anti-social behaviour having access to a range of statistics.

Any changes we make will be about broadening our service offer, and therefore extending the choices all our customers have for accessing our services.

8. Transforming how we work and developing our workforce to improve customer service and access

Organisations often talk of their staff being their most valuable asset. This is particularly true here, where officers value their interactions with customers, and are the main source of service provision to them.

We recognise that good people management lies behind the creation of successful, productive, high performing and happy work environments – the exact environment we need for delivering customer excellence and positive outcomes for our customers.

Our Workforce Development Strategy (2009 – 2012) took an organisational development approach, combining management and human resource interventions to support our ambition to make Housing & Social Inclusion a great place to work - delivering service outcomes that both staff and customers can remain proud. The key themes of that strategy are:

- ❶ Recruitment, induction and retention
- ❷ Rethinking management – and strengthening management skills
- ❸ Skilled workforce - identifying skills gaps and developing staff, growing talent
- ❹ 'Big idea' - shared vision, values and sense of purpose
- ❺ Performance management - and celebrating good performance
- ❻ Agile workforce flexible to change
- ❼ Staff engagement and commitment
- ❽ Autonomy over work, with accountability
- ❾ Improved work design and team working

We are currently carrying out a big piece of work looking at how we will transform our service model and work processes to increase staff fulfilment and improve our services to residents. The workforce development strategy will be reviewed and updated in line with the outcomes of this work.

What we've done

- Got a feel from staff about some improvements they would like to see through the iMPower, CARGO, and customer journey mapping and other work.
- Held staff workshops on 'systems thinking' to provide a good overview of how we can change our thinking about service delivery to provide better outcomes for customers through more streamlined and less wasteful processes.
- Undertaken value for money reviews of our services, and developed action plans for making improvements to how we work.
- Staff workshops with specific teams to harness ideas about future service model.

Actions we will take

- Continue engaging with staff to develop and then formally consult on a proposal for service transformation.
- Set up a Customer Service Hub consisting of a front-line team who will be located together and responsible for the majority of our customer contacts by phone, email and letter. The team will also be responsible for staffing our reception points or service hubs, as well as responding to complaints. The team will strive to deal with 80% of its contacts 'right first time'.
- Devise new staff training and induction to ensure officers have the skills and abilities to provide improved and memorable customer service.

- Develop partnership working with eg Health Trainers, Community Workers, the Whitehawk Inn adult IT trainers etc, and ensure staff have increased knowledge to pass onto customers about the services across the city that support eg learning and skills development, access to work and training, life skills and healthy eating, and computer literacy.
- Carry out a series of in depth reviews, using ‘systems thinking’ or ‘lean’ principles, to design the way we work around what our customers need from us.
- Investigate the use mobile devices to support staff effectively deal with business when they carry out home visits, enabling them to deliver a more complete customer service.
- Review and update our Workforce Development Strategy.
- Carry out self assessment (eg using the Cabinet Office Customer Service Excellence scheme) to understand and bridge any gaps in our staff and customer focus.
- Develop internal communication, leadership and management styles, workforce development programmes, and other organisational development practices that reflect a ‘high performance working’ organisation.

9. Sustainable customer service and access

There are several areas within the strategy where consideration has been given to sustainability issues. For ease of reference they are briefly outlined here:

- Increased numbers of staff located at the Housing Centre which is a very energy efficient office, and means less travel between offices for meetings etc.
- Environmental benefits of reduced travel to housing offices through excellent telephone and self-service channels.
- Ease of rent payments through other methods, potentially reducing unnecessary journeys and saving paper – eg paperless direct debit.
- Time, and therefore cost, savings of dealing with queries right first time.
- Officer use of the website for easy access to information saving paper and costs of printing policies and procedural changes.
- Increased self-serve access to internet based services will reduce our reliance on leaflets and other printed materials, with its associated cost and use of paper.
- Potentially eliminating the need for universal paper quarterly rent statements, and rent cards, as customers can view their accounts anytime they like through our Customer online system.

As we work through our transformation with staff and residents, we will be actively encouraging ideas for further improvements to the environmental, economic and social sustainability of our service.

10. Monitoring and review

The actions within this strategy will be monitored throughout the year through our Business Plans, and the strategy reviewed annually.

Appendix 1

Broad principles for changes needed to improve our customers' experience of our service

The findings from the 2009 iMPower review of customer access to tenancy management services were formed into 10 broad principles which provide a basis for the service to change and develop. The aims are to improve the experience of customers contacting the service and ensure that enquiries are resolved 'right first time'.

These principles are:

- 1 Housing management should provide an effective and efficient service that meets residents' needs
- 2 Current ways of working need to change as they are resource intensive and do not always deliver what residents want
- 3 All residents should be able to easily access the service
- 4 There should be a range of ways for residents to contact the service
- 5 Administrative functions should be organised to reduce waste and avoid duplication
- 6 Housing Officers should have a proactive role focused on providing support and tackling problems as early as possible
- 7 Housing Officers should spend less time on administration and more time with residents and taking care of their neighbourhood
- 8 Support should be targeted at those who need it most
- 9 It is possible to improve service delivery whilst reducing costs
- 10 Residents and staff should be involved in developing and delivering change and improvement

Customer Access Review - Equality Impact Assessment (Summary)

Name of review:	Housing Management Customer Access Review	Reference number:
Period of review:	Current – this EIA is continuously reviewed as work progresses within the customer access review	HM 31
Date review signed off:		
Scope of the review:	The purpose of this EIA is to assess the potential impact of introducing the key elements of the Customer Access Review on the council's tenants and leaseholders and housing management staff	
Review team:	Hilary Edgar Business Improvement Manager , Sam Smith Programme Manager, Ododo Dafe, Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement	
Relevant data and research:	Demographic data from OHMS, the main housing database Links with other projects in the Access & Customer Care work stream in the Housing Improvement Programme	
Consultation: indicate who was consulted and how they were consulted	Reports on the Customer Access Review were presented at Housing Management Consultative Committee and Area Panels (February and September 2010) Further consultation will take place as the review progresses	
Assessment of impact, outcomes and key follow up actions:	<p>Involve residents and staff in planning changes to services, share information on current access arrangements, highlighting any inequalities around these</p> <p>Provide residents with support to use new access channels through working with partners eg library service Support staff through operational and cultural changes to customer access within the service through information sharing, service planning, visits to other organisations and workforce development</p> <p>Promote the positive aspects of widening the range of access channels and times of access eg web, e-forms and contact centre will provide new and additional opportunities for residents to receive info</p> <p>Carry out review of all public literature to ensure full publicity for all access channels</p> <p>Promote the tenant checklist at start of tenancy and home visits to encourage register of residents' communication needs.</p>	

<p>Assessment of impact, outcomes and key follow up actions cont:</p>	<p>Use profile data to target specific communications about any changes to current access arrangements</p> <p>Explore installation of ‘readspeaker’ on website, which reads text and is aimed at helping not only those with visual impairment, but those who may not have English as their first language, but are able to understand spoken English</p> <p>If an automated phone service is introduced retain the ability to speak to a member of staff so residents with specialised needs eg translation, will be able to access the service they require.</p> <p>Use tenant profile information to target explanations of changes and ensure residents with disabilities are supported through the range of access channels</p> <p>Review public communications to ensure they are in plain English, and where possible are available in easy to read formats.</p> <p>Involve the Tenant Disability Network to test run any changes and suggest improvements, particularly in relation to the single point of contact</p> <p>Ensure any change of working practices and location involves a risk assessment for staff with disabilities and special needs</p> <p>Ensure any free phone numbers that are introduced are also ‘29’ numbers to reduce costs for mobile phone users</p> <p>Free up staff resources to focus on high need rather than high demand cases – tenancy management staff should be focused on understanding and providing support to the neighbourhood in which they work – by taking actions to support residents and tackle problems at an early stage they can prevent problems becoming major issues in the future</p>
<p>Name and contact details of lead officer responsible for follow-up action:</p>	<p>Hilary Edgar, Business Improvement Manager, 01273 293250</p>
<p>For full report contact:</p>	<p>Hilary Edgar, Business Improvement Manager, 01273 293250</p>

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 43

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Allocations Policy		
Date of Meeting:	19 October 2011		
Report of:	Geoff Raw, Strategic Director - Place Terry Parkin, Strategic Director - People		
Contact	Sylvia Peckham	Tel:	293318
Officers:	Verity Walker		290274
E-Mail:	E-mail:	Sylvia.peckham@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
		Verity.walker@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Key Decision:	No		
Wards	All		
Affected:			

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The current Housing Register Allocations Policy was approved by Housing Cabinet on 22nd March 2011 and implemented in early May 2011.
- 1.2 Under the new policy, Care leavers are not automatically awarded priority for housing, but are assessed for housing depending on their housing need in the same way as other applicants are assessed. CYPT (Children & Young Persons Trust), care leavers and their representatives have raised concerns over the new approach and, in view of the Council's significant responsibilities as Corporate Parent, this report proposes a further review of the Allocations Policy.
- 1.3 In undertaking the Review we would also like to use the opportunity to consult on the anticipated changes to Allocations following the Localism Bill. Therefore this report is to consider a review of the Allocation policy including consultation with the City. A further report will then be brought back to HMCC and Housing Cabinet with final recommendations for implementation following this Consultation

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to approve the undertaking of a Review of the current Allocation Policy. Following the Review, proposals will be brought back to HMCC and Housing CMM for final approval.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1.1 Housing & support for care leavers is a key strategic priority for Housing Commissioning encompassed in Housing Strategy, Supporting People Commissioning Strategy & Homelessness Strategy.

- 3.1.2 A Joint Protocol has been in place for some years between Housing and CYPT to assess and provide for the housing needs of Care leavers. A large proportion of Care leavers are not ready for independent accommodation and are referred into one of several supported housing projects for young people that we have developed.
- 3.1.3 When Care leavers are assessed as ready for independent accommodation either following a stay in supported accommodation or direct from Care, under the new policy they are banded according to their housing need and so could be in any of the bands A-D.
- 3.1.4 The current concern is that since the revised policy came into force, this change in banding may disadvantage care leavers and a review has been requested to consider reinstating the position under the previous Allocation Policy for Care leavers to be awarded Band A priority for Social Housing once they have been assessed as ready for independent accommodation.
- 3.1.5 It is proposed that consultation is undertaken with our partner RSLs (registered Social Landlords) in accordance with the legal requirements and also with those bodies recommended to be consulted under the Code of Guidance, namely Social Services departments, health departments, supporting people teams, Connexions partnerships, relevant voluntary sector organisations and other recognised referral bodies should be consulted. In addition, following the Council's Community Engagement Framework, we will be carrying out full consultation with all our Communities of interest and will include care leavers and their representatives.
- 3.1.6 A final Report for decision on recommended changes following consultation will be brought back to HMCC and Housing Cabinet Member Meeting. allowing for the recognised standard minimum consultation period of 12 weeks.
- 3.1.7 Pending the outcome of the Review, the Lead Commissioner Housing, in consultation with the Strategic Director People and Strategic Director Place, will consider exercising his discretion in relation to the banding for care leavers as they arise on a case by case basis. This will be reported to HMCC and Housing Cabinet as per the current policy.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 There is a legal requirement to consult with partner RSLs on major changes to an Allocation policy, and the Code of Guidance suggests that in addition Social Services departments, health departments, supporting people teams etc are consulted. To comply with the Community Engagement Framework, we will also consult with all our communities of interest, including care leavers and their representatives. This consultation will take a minimum of 12 weeks to ensure the Consultation is robust. Full details of the consultation and the responses will be contained in the final report.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 Financial Implications.

There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendation made in this report. The recommended changes as highlighted in appendix 1 will be managed within existing budgets

Finance officer Consulted: Neil J Smith Senior- Finance Officer Date: 24.06.11

5.2 Legal Implications

Under section 167 Housing Act 1996, the council as a local housing authority is required to have an allocations scheme for determining priorities and as to the procedure to be followed, in allocating housing accommodation. Local housing authorities must not allocate housing accommodation otherwise than in accordance with their allocation scheme. Although there is no specific right to housing under the European Convention on Human Rights or Human Rights Act 1998, there is within the Court system an increasing focus on Human rights issues.

The Leaving Care Act 2000 provides for specific duties to children leaving the care of local authorities. The Act provides that it is the duty of local authorities to give care leavers "assistance of any kind to the extent that his welfare requires it". It is clear in law that this includes accommodation and that, as corporate parents, the authority's responsibilities for the welfare of care leavers are high. The proposed review will specifically consider the Council's support for care leavers.

Under the Housing Act 1996 there is a legal requirement to consult with partner RSLs on major changes to an allocation policy, and the accompanying code of guidance recommends that Social Services departments, health departments, supporting people teams, Connexions partnerships, relevant voluntary sector organisations and other recognised referral bodies should be consulted. In addition, it is proposed that the review will also include consultation with care leavers and their representatives. The review of the allocations policy as set out in this report will need to be informed by the consultation responses.

Equalities must also be considered in any service provided by a public body. This consideration will be assisted by the Equalities Impact Assessment.

Legal officer Consulted:– Elizabeth Culbert 29th June 2011 #1515

5.3 Equalities Implications

Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out for the proposed changes to the Policy (Appendix 3).

5.4 Sustainability Implications

The proposals will ensure that better use is made of the housing stock and will contribute to sustainable housing solutions.

5.5 Crime & Disorder Implications

None.

5.6 Risk and Opportunity Management Implications

There are risks that careleavers placed in Council flats will not be able to manage a tenancy, resulting in Anti Social behaviour and /or the tenancy failing. This can be mitigated as CYPT are required to provide on-going support to Careleavers.

5.7 Corporate / Citywide Implications

Limited social housing stock will be used to house vulnerable young people in areas where there are high concentrations of multiple deprivation.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The alternative to the amendments would be for the policy to remain as per the current policy. This would mean that Careleavers would be assessed for housing in the same way as everyone else and not afforded high priority purely based on their status as Careleavers. They would then be assisted to obtain accommodation in the private rented market when they are ready to manage independent accommodation. This option does not address the concerns that have been raised in relation to the Council fully meeting its duties as a Corporate Parent.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The recommendations have been made so that we can review the Allocations Policy with regard to Careleavers in particular, who have been assessed as able to manage a tenancy, can be afforded the highest priority for Social housing.
- 7.2 We will also take opportunity of this Review to consult on potential changes to Allocations contained in the forthcoming Localism Bill.

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 44

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Response to the report of the Scrutiny Panel on Lettings Agents		
Date of Meeting:	19 October 2011		
Report of:	Strategic Director - Place		
Contact Officer:	Name: Martin Reid	Tel: 29-3321	
	E-mail: martin.reid@brighton-hove.gov.uk		
Key Decision:	No		
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 A cross party Scrutiny Panel consisting Councillors Paul Elgood, Bill Randall & Christine Simpson, considered the following issues in relation to the activities of lettings agents in the City:

- Dissatisfaction with lettings agents' services, including difficulties in contacting agents, delays in getting repairs carried out, inadequacies in the protection of clients' money and the frequency with which additional charges were made;
- Charges imposed by lettings agents in addition to the tenancy deposit and rent in advance.

The panel made 6 recommendations which are detailed in this report and appendix.

1.2 This Executive response welcomes the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel on Lettings Agents, recommends their acceptance in principle & where appropriate and updates on progress on implementation to date.

1.3 This Executive response also recommends that the Scrutiny Report is considered in full at the next meeting of the Strategic Housing Partnership prior to a further report on progress to a future Housing Cabinet Member Meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That Housing Cabinet Member notes the evidence, findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel on Lettings Agents (see Appendix 2).

2.2 That Housing Cabinet Member approves the responses summarised in Appendix 1 to this report subject to further report on progress to a future Housing Cabinet Member Meeting. following consideration of the Panel's recommendations at the next meeting of the Strategic Housing Partnership.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1 The Scrutiny Panel on Lettings Agents was established by the Adult Social Care & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Brighton and Hove has one of the largest private rented sectors in the country, comprising 28,000 homes: almost a quarter (23%) of the entire city's housing stock. The City faces several challenges in terms of the private rented sector, including problems of supply, of high rents, of poorer than average housing quality and of pockets of overcrowding.

National Context: Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) report "Let Down"

The national CAB report "Let Down" was published in 2009. Focusing on letting agents' fees and charges, the report made the following recommendations:

- The licensing of letting agents – who should be required to demonstrate professional competence, have adequate client money protection arrangements and operate a system for handling complaints and redress;
- The introduction of regulations specifying that no additional charges should be made to tenants for activities that are part of the routine letting and management process.

Local Context: Brighton & Hove City Council Notice of Motion

On 18 March 2010, the Council considered a Notice of Motion relating to the CAB report. Members agreed that the council's Chief Executive should be asked to:

1. Write to the Government and the major political parties seeking their support for the Citizen's Advice proposals; and
2. Ask the Office of Fair Trading to carry out an investigation into the activities of letting agents.

Members also agreed that a working group should be established to examine the issue in more detail. The working group decided to refer the matter to Scrutiny. (There was a caveat to this referral: that Scrutiny should not seek to duplicate the extensive work already undertaken by the Strategic Housing Partnership in terms of the city's student accommodation market.)

3.2 Scrutiny Panel Members agreed to concentrate on the following issues:

- Dissatisfaction with letting agents' services, including difficulties in contacting agents, delays in getting repairs carried out, inadequacies in the protection of clients' money and the frequency with which additional charges were made.
- Charges imposed by letting agents in addition to the tenancy deposit and rent in advance.

- 3.3 The Scrutiny Review took into account the feedback gathered from two evidence gathering meetings in public and one meeting in private (for tenants who did not wish to speak publicly). Panel members also met with the Cabinet Member for Housing.

Witnesses included representatives from the Brighton & Hove Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB); Brighton Housing Trust (BHT), Environmental Health Officers; Housing Officers – from Acquisitions & Accreditations and from Housing Options; the Southern Landlords' Association and Trading Standards. A number of letting agents were invited to come and speak at the meetings, and two accepted: Bonett's and Leaders. A tenant also gave evidence in person.

There were 25 written submissions from tenants, as well as information in writing from the University of Brighton, Brighton & Hove CAB, Brighton Housing Trust and city letting agents. Where the report quotes from tenant submissions, the names of individuals and of specific letting agencies have been omitted.

- 3.4 The Scrutiny report (included at Appendix 2 to this report) describes the scrutiny process and summarises evidence, findings and recommendations.
- 3.5 It was endorsed at the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee Adult Social Care & Housing on 10 March 2011 and it passes to the Executive to consider what action if any to take in response.
- 3.6 The Scrutiny Panel on Lettings Agents has been welcomed.
- 3.7 The Panel made a series of practical recommendations summarised below:
- The Council should develop a local letting agents' accreditation scheme
 - The Council should launch an information pack for private sector tenants, highlighting letting agent good practice and procedure
 - The Council should ensure that the current landlords' accreditation scheme provides advice on choosing letting agents
 - The Council should support Brighton Housing Trust in developing a "social letting agency" as a social enterprise
 - The Council should consider including details of homes to let by accredited letting agents in its Homemove lettings scheme web pages/ magazine alongside council and housing association properties
 - The Council should continue to lobby government for better regulation of the private rental market
- 3.8 A summary of the Scrutiny Recommendations, with Executive Response and named contact appears as Appendix 1 to this report.

4. THE SCRUTINY PROCESS

- 4.1 Recommendations of Scrutiny reviews should be considered by the Executive following endorsement by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Executive should either agree or reject each recommendation.
- 4.2 The report of the Scrutiny review and response from the decision-makers are then reported together to full Council for information. The parent Overview and Scrutiny usually receives a report of progress against the agreed recommendations, six months after this.
- 4.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Commission will at that stage determine if any further monitoring is required; whether a progress report is required after a further six months or one year. Otherwise the Committee/Commission may resolve that no more monitoring is necessary.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The scrutiny review undertook extensive consultation with interested parties. Details of those consulted can be found in the appendix 2.
- 5.2 The Strategic Housing Partnership will be consulted in full on this report.

6. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The financial implications of any future proposals will be detailed in the relevant report to be submitted in due course.”

Finance Officer Consulted: Michelle Herrington... Date: (10/10/11)

Legal Implications:

- 6.2 At this stage we have only the general principals, so it is not prudent to give any significant legal advice. The principals are acceptable and the authority to carry out many of the recommendations exists either directly or through use of the well being powers.

Caution should be exercised in the manner that the recommendations are executed. There should be significant consultation with our insurance department.

Further legal advice will be required when more detail is available.

Lawyer Consulted: Simon Court Date: 10.10.11

Equalities Implications:

- 6.3 Scrutiny Panel Recommendations support equality of access to well managed private rented homes.

Sustainability Implications:

- 6.4 Given the size and importance of the private rented sector in the City the Scrutiny Panel recommendations support the supply of good quality well managed private rented homes.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 6.5 There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 6.6 There are no risk and opportunity management implications arising directly from this report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 6.7 The City-Wide Housing Strategy 2009 – 14: healthy homes, healthy lives, healthy city recognises the importance of the private rented sector to the City. The Scrutiny Panel recommendations support the aims of improving housing quality and improving housing supply.

7. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 7.1 No alternative opportunities have been explored at this stage that are not set out in this report and the appendix.

8. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The recommendations for which approval is sought are as a result of a detailed scrutiny process. In forming their recommendations the scrutiny panel considered evidence as set out in the appendices of the panel report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Summary of Executive Response to Scrutiny Recommendations
2. Scrutiny Report

Documents In Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Previously published reports
2. Volume 2 of the Scrutiny Review

APPENDIX 1

Executive Response to the report of the Scrutiny Panel on Lettings Agents

Rec #	Recommendation	Recommendation accepted (Yes/No/In Principle)	If not accepted; reason why not	If accepted; action taken or likely date of action	Contact officer responsible to implement agreed action
	Council should develop a local lettings agent accreditation scheme.	Accepted in principle.		We are in the process of developing a Letting Agent Accreditation Scheme in conjunction with Letting Agents, including the Student's Agency. This work has been undertaken over recent months and is subject to approval at a future Housing Cabinet Member prior to any launch.	Sylvia Peckham
	The Council should launch an information pack for private sector tenants, highlighting letting agent good practice and procedure.	Accepted in principle.		We have developed an information pack and a "how to." guide which is aimed at those tenants and landlords we assist and work with through our Deposit Guarantee Scheme. We are	Sylvia Peckham

				considering options for extending this to other private sector tenants, landlords and Letting Agents.	
	The Council should ensure that the current landlord accreditation scheme provides advice on choosing lettings agents.	Accepted in principle.		We are developing a Letting Agents Accreditation Scheme. We propose to recommend that people choose Accredited letting agents. We are hoping to obtain the support of the Universities, and industry groups representing estate agents & lettings agents to back the scheme and recommend it.	Sylvia Peckham
	The Council should work with BHT in developing 'social lettings agency' as a social enterprise.	Accepted in principle.		We have an existing social letting agency (Brighton and Hove Landlord solutions) working in partnership with the Universities. We are happy to work with BHT on development of their proposals and to share good practice/ get landlords accredited/ ensure we aren't	Sylvia Peckham

				competing for the same properties which would drive up costs.	
	The Council should consider including details of homes to let by accredited lettings agents on Homemove.	Accepted in principle.		We are currently looking at this option and will review schemes elsewhere in the country where this occurs. While this option is welcomed our work on this to date has raised an issue over whether our Homemove system is responsive enough to the pace of private sector lettings. We propose to review in partnership with agents and report back on progress.	Sylvia Peckham
	The Council should continue to lobby govt for better regulation of private rented market.	Accept in principle		The Administration to take forward any lobbying via Housing Cabinet Member.	Housing Cabinet Member



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

**Report of the Adult Social Care & Housing
Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

March 2011

Scrutiny Panel on Letting Agents

Panel Members

**Councillor Paul Elgood (Chairman)
Councillor Bill Randall
Councillor Christine Simpson**

Chair's Foreword

This has been an incredibly interesting and rewarding scrutiny panel which has been a privilege for me to chair.

Our city has a unique rental property market where the demand for homes is particularly high. The vast increase in buy to let properties has led to an upsurge of letting agents in the past few years: this can clearly be seen by the number of lettings agents on Church Road and Western Road. There is intense competition between letting agents within our city, which has led to agents reducing their fees to attract landlords, but then charging tenants for a range of services. The Panel agreed that, with the limited time available, these fees would form the focus of our enquiry.

The most useful and interesting part of the scrutiny process were the public and private meetings where witnesses gave evidence concerning their businesses. We heard about lots of excellent practice, with witnesses speaking constructively and passionately about their work and experiences.

Equally we received private written submissions from tenants which often offered a very different point of view. The Panel had a difficult challenge making recommendations with no government regulations to back them. However, the Panel agreed six recommendations to support tenants on a local level and to assist in the trying to eradicate unfair practices.

I would like to finish by expressing my gratitude to the other members of the Panel: Councillors Bill Randall and Christine Simpson. I know that the Panel was most grateful for the time of all the people who gave evidence, including: tenants, Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau, Brighton Housing Trust, local letting agents, officers from the council's Housing and Trading Standards teams, the Chair of the Southern Landlords Association, and the council's Cabinet Member for Housing.



Paul Elgood

Councillor Paul Elgood
Chair of the Letting Agents Scrutiny Panel

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	page 4
List of Recommendations	page 7
Introduction	page 9
Recommendations:	
Recommendation 1: Accreditation	page 10
Recommendation 2: Information Pack	page 13
Recommendation 3: Information for Landlords	page 16
Recommendation 4: A Social letting Agency	page 18
Recommendation 5: Homemove webpage/magazine	page 19
Recommendation 6: Lobbying Government	page 20

Executive Summary

Brighton & Hove's Private Rented Sector

Brighton and Hove has one of the largest private rented sectors in the country, comprising 28,000 homes: almost a quarter (23%) of the entire city's housing stock. The city faces several challenges in terms of the private rented sector, including problems of supply, of high rents, of poorer than average housing quality and of pockets of overcrowding.

Rental market and market trends

The national expansion of the private lettings market was driven, in part, by the Housing Act (1988) which encouraged the growth of small-scale private landlords. In later years the emergence of 'buy to let' as an investment vehicle, the expansion of the city's two universities, and increasingly unaffordable property purchase prices gave further local impetus to this trend. The growing number of rental properties in the city presented an opportunity for more letting agents to enter the market, which they rapidly did: there are now over 70 letting agents operating in Brighton & Hove, many of them recently established concerns.

Letting Agent Regulation

There is currently no statutory regulation of letting or property management companies, and the Government has recently stated that it does not plan to introduce regulation. This means that anyone can open a letting or property management business without any qualification or accreditation.

Additional Charges

Traditionally, letting agents made their money by charging landlords a 'management fee' – typically a fixed percentage of the rent – for finding tenants and administering the tenancy. However, there is intense competition for business between agencies and a number of agents have responded by offering to manage properties for very low rates, a move which has proved understandably popular with landlords. Agencies charging relatively low fees to landlords need to generate additional income to ensure they remain profitable. They typically do this by charging tenants 'additional' fees – for checking references and credit status, for taking property inventories, for renewing or ending contracts etc.

This practice of imposing additional charges has proved controversial for several reasons:

- Because the charges for services often seem wholly out of proportion with the service provided – e.g. up to £200 to renew a tenancy, when the only apparent work involved is to print out a new standard tenancy agreement and get it signed.
- Because tenants are being charged for services which would more logically be charged to the landlord – e.g. it seems reasonable for

landlords to request references if they so choose, but why should prospective tenants pay for these references to be checked?

- Because it is often not clear to new tenants that they will be expected to pay significant fees (in addition to rent/deposit) to secure the property and at various points through the tenancy – e.g. fees to check references, to check credit worthiness, to provide a property inventory, to end a tenancy etc.
- Because letting agent charges would appear to act as a perverse incentive for agents to act in ways counter to the interests of both tenants and landlords – e.g. many landlords want long term tenants and many tenants want long term lets; but will agents who stand to gain more from bringing in new tenants work to encourage long term landlord-tenant relationships?

National Context: Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) report "Let Down"

The national CAB report "Let Down"¹ was published in 2009. Focusing on letting agents' fees and charges, the report made the following recommendations:

- The licensing of letting agents – who should be required to demonstrate professional competence, have adequate client money protection arrangements and operate a system for handling complaints and redress;
- The introduction of regulations specifying that no additional charges should be made to tenants for activities that are part of the routine letting and management process.

Local Context: Brighton & Hove City Council Notice of Motion

On 18 March 2010, the Council considered a Notice of Motion² relating to the CAB report. Members agreed that the council's Chief Executive should be asked to:

1. Write to the Government and the major political parties seeking their support for the Citizen's Advice proposals; and
2. Ask the Office of Fair Trading to carry out an investigation into the activities of letting agents.

Members also agreed that a working group should be established to examine the issue in more detail. The working group decided to refer the matter to Scrutiny. (There was a caveat to this referral: that Scrutiny should not seek to duplicate the extensive work already undertaken by the Strategic Housing Partnership in terms of the city's student accommodation market.)

¹ www.citizensadvice.org.uk/let_down

² Notice of Motion – Appendix 4

Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference

Members agreed to concentrate on the following issues:

- Dissatisfaction with letting agents' services, including difficulties in contacting agents, delays in getting repairs carried out, inadequacies in the protection of clients' money and the frequency with which additional charges were made
- Charges imposed by letting agents in addition to the tenancy deposit and rent in advance. (The size and nature of these charges can vary hugely from agent to agent, with the fee for checking references ranging from £10 to £275 and the fee for renewing a tenancy ranging from £12 to £200. In some cases additional charges for arranging and managing a tenancy may amount to over £600.)

Matters not Considered: Quality of Stock

There is a significant problem in the city in terms of the quality of some private rented housing stock, perhaps exacerbated by the large student housing market – student housing is often characterised by its poor quality, and its dominant role in the local market may effectively 'set the trend' for the private rental market in general.³ However, Panel members were conscious that this important issue is already being actively addressed by the council, and decided not to make it a focus of this review.

Meetings

The Panel held two evidence gathering meetings in public and one meeting in private (for tenants who did not wish to speak publicly). Panel members also met with the Cabinet Member for Housing.

Witnesses

Witnesses included representatives from the Brighton & Hove Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB); Brighton Housing Trust (BHT)⁴; Environmental Health Officers; Housing Officers – from Acquisitions & Accreditations and from Housing Options; the Southern Landlords' Association and Trading Standards. A number of letting agents were invited to come and speak at the meetings, and two accepted: Bonett's and Leaders. A tenant also gave evidence in person.

Written Submissions

There were 25 written submissions from tenants, as well as information in writing from the University of Brighton, Brighton & Hove CAB, Brighton Housing Trust and city letting agents. Where this report quotes from tenant submissions, the names of individuals and of specific letting agencies have been omitted.

³ See evidence from Cllr Maria Caulfield, Brighton & Hove City Council Cabinet Member for Housing, 10/2/2011, Appendix 3.

⁴ BHT's mission is to combat homelessness, create opportunities and promote change

List of Recommendations

As a general point, Panel members agreed with the Citizen's Advice Bureau that it was hard to see how the practice of letting agents charging tenants additional fees was justifiable. However, there would probably be limited value in a Scrutiny Panel recommending to city letting agents that they refrain from making additional charges to tenants. Therefore the Panel has made a series of more practical recommendations:

1. The council should develop a local letting agents' accreditation scheme (with an official logo) which focuses on:
 - a. providing transparent charging structures for tenants;
 - b. information on 'good practice' in terms of charging fees (including reasonable fee levels);
 - c. providing an efficient repairs and maintenance service;
 - d. training on housing and equalities issues.
2. The council should launch an information pack for private sector tenants, highlighting letting agent good practice and procedure. This should be made available on the council's website and via libraries, CityDirect centres etc. The web pages should include information on letting agent accreditation and a list of agents signed up to the scheme.
3. The council should ensure that the current landlords' accreditation scheme provides advice on choosing letting agents. This should include explaining that letting agents deriving most of their income from tenant charges may not be acting in the best interests of landlords.
4. The council should support Brighton Housing Trust in developing a "social letting agency" as a social enterprise
5. The council should consider including details of homes to let by accredited letting agents in its Homemove lettings scheme web pages/ magazine alongside council and housing association properties.
6. The council should continue to lobby government for better regulation of the private rental market. Specifically:
 - a. that tenants should not be faced with 'hidden' additional charges at the beginning of their tenancy;
 - b. that all tenants' fees are fair and transparent;
 - c. that letting agents should be licensed;
 - d. that letting agents should be able to charge fees only for a prescribed range of services, and that fees levied should only cover the reasonable cost of performing particular tasks (e.g. checking references etc).

Monitoring of these recommendations

Once agreed by the Adult Social Care and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee (ASCHOSC), the report will be considered by the council's Executive and will then go to Full Council for information. The implementation

of the agreed recommendations will be monitored at 6 monthly intervals for the first year. After the first year, the recommendations will be monitored annually until the relevant Scrutiny committee is satisfied that all the agreed recommendations have been implemented.

Introduction

Brighton & Hove had a fast moving rental market in which demand typically outstrips supply. The 'buy to let' boom had increased the number of letting agents and property management agencies in the city, and this has created stiff competition amongst agents. City agents charge landlords between 4% and 12.5% of property rental prices for their services. Letting agents charging lower fees typically top up their income by charging tenants for a range of 'additional services'. It is clear that there is a widespread belief amongst tenants that some of these charges are unjustified. For instance, a witness informed the Panel that *"the charging seemed arbitrary as there were no explanations of what this consisted of and tenants would not receive any extended level of service for these additional charges"*.

After considering evidence from a range of witnesses, the Panel agreed on six recommendations to support tenants, to raise awareness amongst letting agents of industry best practice, and to educate landlords about the implications for them of additional charges. Details of each of the recommendations and the evidence underpinning them are given below.

Recommendation 1: Accreditation

Brighton Housing Trust (BHT)

- 1.1 BHT proposed that the council should take a lead on promoting a local accreditation scheme for letting agents. The promotion of such a scheme in the 'Latest Homes' property magazine and in other places may encourage tenants to use agencies within the scheme. However, BHT's proposal would involve the council vigorously monitoring agents to ensure compliance; realistically the monitoring of agents would need to be prioritised alongside other work.

Witnesses' views

- 1.2 Witnesses who attended the Panel's meetings supported a local accreditation scheme. These witnesses included council housing officers, the Chair of the Southern Landlords Association, BHT and letting agents.

Trading Standards told the Panel that the accreditation scheme could be advertised on their "Buy with Confidence" webpage⁵.

Sussex Landlord Accreditation Scheme (SLAS)

- 1.3 The SLAS is an initiative via which Brighton & Hove City Council signposts available private sector properties for people in need of housing (e.g. people who have applied for local social housing). To join the scheme, landlords must undergo a day's training course and agree to have their properties inspected. The aim of the scheme is to improve the standard, condition and management of private rental stock in the city and to help people with housing need access suitable accommodation when social housing is unavailable. The Panel was impressed by the SLAS and thought that a similar scheme could potentially be introduced for letting agents.

Cabinet Member for Housing

- 1.4 Cllr Caulfield told members that she was in favour of accreditation as renters currently had few means of telling whether a particular agent was reputable or not. Accreditation might therefore help in identifying untrustworthy 'fly by night' operators.

Government

- 1.5 The CAB informed the Panel that a response to its request for statutory legislation of letting agents had been received. This stated that the Government does not currently favour regulation, preferring instead to encourage prospective tenants to check that agents belonged to a trade body or accredited scheme⁶.

⁵ See evidence from Jo Player, BHCC Acting Head of Trading Standards, BHCC, 13/1/2011, Appendix 2

⁶ See evidence from the Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1

Letting Agents

- 1.6 Agents who gave evidence to the Panel spoke about how some letting agents charged very low fees to landlords in order to gain custom. It was felt that landlords were generally unaware that these low cost agents would typically impose a range of additional charges on tenants.

The letting agents who gave evidence to the Panel supported a local accreditation scheme. These agents charged higher fees to landlords which ranged from 10% to 12.5%. They believed that it would be fairer if landlords selected agents on experience and service quality rather than on the competitive fees of agents. They also felt that a local accreditation scheme would raise industry standards⁷.

Tenants

- 1.7 The Panel heard from a witness who thought that transparent charges would be useful, ensuring that tenants were aware from the beginning of the tenancy what costs they were expected to pay⁸.

Other Matters Considered: Training day

- 1.8 The Panel was aware that an effective agent accreditation scheme would have to offer some benefits to letting agents in order to encourage them to join. Members felt that the 'sell' should be that, via a training opportunity, agents could gain a better knowledge of how the council operated, and hence, potentially, a better chance of building advantageous working relationships with the council. Training could include advice from Trading Standards on ensuring that contracts were fair and Office of Fair Trading (OFT) legislation was complied with, as well as advice from Housing officers on which departments/ officers to contact in relation to specific tenants' issues and information on housing benefits.

Other Matters Considered: Logo

- 1.9 A witness felt that accreditation schemes and their logos were not really considered when people were selecting a property, as the property was the prospective tenant's focus rather than which agent managed it⁹.
- 1.10 The Southern Landlords' Association (SLA) told the Panel that prospective tenants might be better placed to react to a single, universal logo rather than having to deal with several different accreditation schemes. Something similar to the "Scores on the Doors" restaurant star rating scheme might be particularly useful.

⁷ See evidence from letting agents, 17/12/2011, Appendix 1

⁸ Evidence from private minutes 20/1/2011

⁹ Evidence from private minutes 20/1/2011

1.11 After hearing all the evidence the Panel decided to recommend that:

The council should develop a local letting agents' accreditation scheme (with an official logo) which focuses on:

- **providing transparent charging structures for tenants;**
- **information on 'good practice' in terms of charging fees (including reasonable fee levels);**
- **providing an efficient repairs and maintenance service;**
- **providing training on housing and equalities issues.**

Recommendation 2: Information Pack

Tenants

- 2.1 From the written evidence submitted to the Panel from tenants it was evident that many renters were unaware of their rights in relation to their tenancy. Some tenants wanted legal advice about how much letting agents could charge and whether it was legal for letting agents to charge for tenancy renewals¹⁰.

Tenant comments included:

“Charges that were listed and displayed were useful”

“We were told the reason for the name change charges (£188) was that we had to be referenced - which is fair enough for someone new moving in - but I had to pay to be re-referenced even though I’d been living there a year and six months which I think is completely ridiculous and unfair”

“Each time my rent is increased, the letting agents charge a £25 admin fee which had to be paid within seven days or the fee goes up to £90”

“For a 6 month contract renewal I have been asked to pay just under £60, which seems extortionate”

“I understand that they may need to charge something in the way of administration fees, but I am also sure the landlord himself will be paying fees etc. so I am not sure they can justify what they charge”

“I have not found them particularly helpful or organised... it took them 25 days to respond to an email regarding tenancy renewal”

“I really don’t know how some of them justify what they charge: how does printing out the same tenancy agreement again with different dates justify £60.00?!!”

“They have all charged me a fee to renew my tenancy. Is this not right?”

“I had to pay an admin fee of around £150 on top of my deposit and rent. I honestly can’t understand how this amount is justified. Letting agents say it’s for processing references, forms, etc. Isn’t this their normal day to day job?”

- 2.2 It may also be the case that some private sector tenants are reluctant to complain directly to their letting agents or landlords for fear of jeopardising their tenancy. Unsurprisingly, the Panel did not directly

¹⁰ Private evidence from tenants

receive evidence to this effect, but it is something that all panel members have encountered in their work as ward Councillors.

Students

- 2.3 Both city universities have Housing Advice services which provide information and support to students living in private lettings¹¹.

Trading Standards

- 2.4 Many tenants would find it useful to have information on where to go if they have an issue with regard to unfair contractual terms. Trading Standards (TS) may be able to support tenants with such an issue. However, the Panel heard that tenants with housing issues tend not to go to TS very often¹². A survey was carried out by TS on letting agent's contractual terms, it was found that 72% of agents were found to be fair to consumers, whilst another 13% were reasonably compliant and 15% were unsatisfactory.

Cabinet Member

- 2.5 Cllr Caulfield told members that she supported the idea of providing tenants with information on renting, potentially including details on long term lets, minimum standards of accommodation, reasonable levels of agent charges and the national deposit protection scheme.

Other Matters Considered: Landlords' details

- 2.6 A witness told the Panel that they always tried to get their landlord's contact details when renting, as they had found that it was often easier and quicker to deal directly with landlords rather than via the letting agents¹³. Letting agents often have no particular interest in making a repair or resolving a problem promptly, whereas the property owners may have.
- 2.7 Tenants would find it useful to know their landlords' contact details so that they could resolve issues sooner rather than later. Although some landlords would prefer tenants to deal with the agents rather than themselves, other landlords are happy to deal with the tenant directly.

Other Matters Considered: Accreditation schemes

- 2.8 Organisations such as BHT and Citizen's Advice Bureau would typically advise renters to use agents belonging to accredited schemes such as the Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA) or the Institute of Chartered Surveyors (ICS). These agents should be credible and should have working practices that comply with the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) regulations.¹⁴.

¹¹ Private evidence from a University

¹² See evidence from Jo Player, BHCC Acting Head of Trading Standards, 13/1/2011,

Appendix 2

¹³ Evidence from private minutes 20/1/2011

¹⁴ See evidence from letting agent, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1

- 2.9 Agents who are members of schemes covered by ARLA, ICS and the Property Ombudsman can be struck off the scheme and fined if there is evidence of any malpractice¹⁵. Once again this could be potentially useful information for tenants to be aware of when selecting a property.

Other Matters Considered: Good practice

- 2.11 An agent gave evidence as to how his business did not charge tenancy renewal fees or make other additional charges, but had a single, set fee for obtaining references and setting up the initial tenancy agreement.

Another letting agent showed members a list of charges which was given to prospective tenants before they signed contracts.

Another agent told the Panel that they made a single charge for tenancy renewal – i.e. for the first renewal, with renewals being free of charge thereafter. The Panel and the CAB considered all of the above to be examples of good practice¹⁶.

Other Matters Considered: Council Housing Advice Services

- 2.12 The council's Housing team is currently developing a pack for tenants with housing needs who are placed in private rented accommodation. This pack will explain tenant rights and obligations in clear English, provide advice on how to maintain and renew a tenancy etc. However, this pack will be specifically targeted at a particular group of renters and may not therefore be relevant to people in the broader private rental market.¹⁷

- 2.13 After hearing all the evidence the Panel decided to recommend that:

The council should launch an information pack for private sector tenants, highlighting letting agent good practice and procedure. This should be made available on the council's website and via libraries, CityDirect centres etc. The web pages should include information on letting agent accreditation and a list of agents signed up to the scheme.

¹⁵ See evidence from letting agent, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1 & John Macquire, Acquisitions & Accreditations Manager, 13/1/2011, Appendix 2

¹⁶ See evidence from the Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau on Social Policy, 17/12/010, and letting agents, Appendix 1 & Appendix 7

¹⁷ See evidence from John Macquire, Acquisitions & Accreditations Manager, 13/1/2011, Appendix 2

Recommendation 3: Information for Landlords

CAB

- 3.1 The Panel heard from the CAB¹⁸ that agents charged varying fees for referencing, administration and the renewal of tenancy agreements. These were the most common fees charged to tenants.
- 3.2 The CAB argued that tenants should not be charged fees by letting agents, as these fees, if they need to be levied at all, should be paid by landlords. The CAB also provided the Panel with the following statistics:
- From April 2010 to 17 December 2010 out of 875 enquiries on private rented sector (PRS) accommodation, 112 were in relation to rent and other charges;
 - In 2009/2010 out of 995 enquiries on PRS accommodation, 118 were in relation to rent and other charges.

Tenants

- 3.3 Tenants made the following comments:

“Basically they keep creating obstacles between different departments. I am unable to talk to my landlord. The agents don’t interact with their renewals team, so I’m left being threatened with eviction whilst I’m trying to claim compensation from another department”

“Agents also get a fee from their owner/landlord to ‘administrate’ the property...this means that the agents maybe ‘double charging’”

“The administration fee the agent charged was £176.25 each, and I am still unclear as to what this is for.”

“To renew the tenancy at a cost of £50 each...at the time I argued with the agent that £100 was a very costly administrative charge. We had no choice but to accept it in the end or we would lose the tenancy”

Southern Landlords Association (SLA)

- 3.4 A survey undertaken by the SLA found that landlords were generally unaware of whether letting agents charged tenants fees or of what the costs were. Of the landlords who took part in the survey, only three were aware of their letting agents charging tenants.
- 3.5 The Panel heard that tenants who moved into properties that were owned by landlords within the association (i.e. properties directly managed by their owners rather than letting agents) would typically have just one charge to pay to cover obtaining references and the

¹⁸ See evidence from the the Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1

provision of a tenancy agreement. This would generally be around £100¹⁹.

BHT

- 3.6 The Panel heard that BHT was planning to work closely with landlords, to explain to them the potential issues relating to the use of letting agents, including making landlords aware that agents might be imposing additional charges on tenants.
- 3.7 After hearing all the evidence, the Panel decided to make the following recommendation:

The council should ensure that the current landlords' accreditation scheme provides advice on choosing letting agents. This should include explaining that letting agents deriving most of their income from tenant charges may not be acting in the best interests of their landlord clients.

¹⁹ See evidence from Mike Stimpson, Chair of the Southern Landlords Association, 13/1/2011, Appendix 2

Recommendation 4: A Social Letting Agency

Brighton Housing Trust (BHT)

4.1 The Panel heard a proposal from BHT²⁰ relating to the establishment of a 'Tenancy Centre'. The service would be run by BHT Enterprises Ltd (a social enterprise subsidiary of the Trust). It would provide an alternative letting service which could generate income to fund BHT's work with homelessness of all types in the city.

4.3 The aims of the centre would include providing/enabling:

- Improved access to PRS accommodation for those reliant on benefits or on limited incomes;
- A more equitable market for both landlords and tenants;
- Promotion of best practice in housing and tenancy management;
- Improved tenancy sustainability;
- Reductions in homelessness and demand on homelessness services.

Letting agents

4.4 The Panel heard how agents charged landlords between 4% - 12% for managing their property. Agents who offered lower fees to landlords typically imposed charges on tenants to make up their income²¹.

Cabinet Member

4.5 Cllr Caulfield told the Panel that she supported the idea of a city social letting agent. The council could support this initiative by directing landlords and prospective tenants to the service. Cllr Caulfield thought there might be a particular opportunity here for a social letting agent to work with landlords to encourage them to accept tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit or people who were unable to provide references etc.

Tenants

4.6 The Panel heard from the CAB that tenants were often dissatisfied with the additional charges that were imposed on them by letting agents.

4.7 After hearing all the evidence the Panel decided to recommend that:

The council should support Brighton Housing Trust in developing a "social letting agency" as a social enterprise.

²⁰ See evidence from Brighton Housing Trust, 17/12/2010 Appendix 1 & Appendix 6

²¹ See evidence from a letting agent, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1

Recommendation 5: Homemove webpage/magazine

Tenants

- 5.1 The Panel heard evidence that tenants effectively had limited choice as the market was property-led rather than agency-led. A prospective tenant would choose a property to view rather than an agency to let from. Tenants had to move quickly to acquire a rental property, as demand was high. Some tenants felt that letting agents knew this and deliberately offered a limited service.
- 5.2 The main issue that tenants had was the fact that they paid additional charges on top of their tenancy deposit and rent/rent in advance. These charges were typically for checking references, tenancy renewals and administration fees²².

Homemove

- 5.3 Panel members agreed that tenants did have a very limited choice when selecting a property to let, which led to the Panel asking whether there were any other resources available that could be used to advertise private lettings.
- 5.4 The Panel was aware that the council already operates “Homemove”, a choice-based lettings system for council and housing association properties in Brighton & Hove. This allows tenants and prospective tenants to bid for the available properties that they are interested in. All available properties are advertised in a fortnightly free magazine and on the Homemove website.
- 5.5 The Panel agreed that, to increase the choice of where private lettings were advertised for tenants, the council could investigate whether it was possible to advertise approved private lets on their Homemove webpage, or another similar site, and to investigate good practice from other authorities.
- 5.6 The Panel decided to recommend that:

The council should consider including details of homes to let by accredited letting agents in its Homemove lettings scheme web pages/magazine alongside council and housing association lets.

²² See evidence from the the Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1 and private minutes.

Recommendation 6: Lobbying Government

Citizens Advice Bureau's national "Let Down" report

- 6.1 The Let Down report²³ calls for the licensing of letting agents so that agents are required to demonstrate professional competence, have adequate client protection arrangements and operate a system for handling complaints and redress.

Further to this, CAB recommends that no additional charges should be made to tenants for activities that are part of the routine letting and management process. The cost of this work should be included in the rent paid by the tenant and/or the landlords' management fee. The sanction for breaching such regulations should be the withdrawal of the letting agents' licence to operate.

- 6.2 The Let Down report points out that, with no statutory regulations for letting agents, using an agent can be very costly for tenants. 73% of tenants (from a total of 1,330 surveyed) were dissatisfied with the service received from letting agents; one of the common issues was the frequency of which additional charges were made. Out of 424 letting agents, 94% imposed additional charges on tenants. The charges varied from £10 to £275 for checking references and tenancy renewals costing from £12 to 200. In some cases additional charges amounted to over £600.

Notice of Motion

- 6.3 The recent Notice of Motion to Council²⁴ requested that the council's Chief Executive write to the Government and the major political parties seeking their support for the CAB proposals and asking the Office of Fair Trading to investigate the activities of letting agents. A response supportive of the CAB proposals was received from the previous Government. However, this stance has altered following the May 2010 General Election, and the Government does not now favour regulation.

Brighton & Hove CAB

- 6.4 The Panel heard that the Brighton & Hove CAB carried out a survey of 11 letting agents in 2008 which was updated in November 2010. The findings²⁵ were that tenants had to pay the following charges:

1. *Holding deposit: to secure the property, which was paid in advance, and was non-refundable if the prospective tenant decided not to proceed with the tenancy. If the tenant did proceed with the tenancy then the holding deposit was taken from the fees charged. The amount charged was from £79 - £400.*

²³ www.citizensadvice.org.uk/let_down

²⁴ NOM - Appendix 4

²⁵ See evidence from the Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice Bureau Social Policy – Letting Agents- Fees & Services Report 17 December 2010, Appendix 1

2. *Administration fee: a charge for the initial tenancy agreement and typically charged per person (although sometimes at a reduced rate for multiple tenancies). The amount charged was from £110 - £245 per person. Some agents only had this one charge and no other fees.*
 3. *Credit reference fee: a charge for carrying out credit references per person. The charges were from £110 plus £45 for checking a guarantor to £165 plus £45 per additional person.*
 4. *Renewal of tenancy agreement: an additional charge to renew the tenancy, ranging from £15 to £100.*
 5. *Checkout fee: a charge that tenants had to pay at the end of their contract which was for inspecting the property so as to release the tenant's deposit. This fee was around £50 +VAT*
 6. *Late payment fee: a charge for sending out a letter notifying that the tenant's rent was overdue, with fees varying from £20-25.*
- 6.5 Brighton & Hove CAB emphasised to the Panel that additional charges paid by tenants and also the varying levels of charges imposed by letting agents to tenants were significant local issues.

Response from Government

- 6.6 Brighton & Hove CAB wrote to the Minister for Housing asking for statutory regulation of letting agents. However the response was that national regulation was not the only answer and that work was being progressed with partners on how best to counter poor performance of letting and managing agents.

The CAB and Panel found this information disappointing as they both felt strongly that national regulation was required to cap letting agents' fees to tenants.

Letting Agents

- 6.7 Evidence heard from letting agents who attended the public meetings was that their charges were competitive but fair²⁶.

A letting agent also spoke about how they worked with tenants who had genuine financial difficulties and how there had been cases of successful renegotiations²⁷.

- 6.8 Letting agents told the Panel it was important for agents to have a good relationship with their landlord clients. It was in the interest of the landlord to find long term tenants and a good letting agent should facilitate this.

²⁶ See evidence from a letting agent, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1

²⁷ See evidence from a letting agent, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1

- 6.9 Letting agents' fees to landlords varied from 4% to 12.5% and it was argued that agents who charged lower fees might find it more lucrative to have new tenants rather than renewing tenancies (as these agents derive a large percentage of their income from charges made to tenants when setting up a contract, but receive relatively little income from managing long term lets). It was also argued that letting agents who charged higher fees to landlords were likely to be more established agents offering a high degree of service, and relying on a clientele who were eager to have their properties well maintained and to encourage long term tenancies²⁸.

Southern Landlords Association (SLA)

- 6.10 Landlords who had responded to the SLA survey were not aware of and did not ask whether letting agents charged tenants fees or at what level. One landlord had agreed with his letting agent that there should be no additional charges to the tenant.
- 6.11 The Panel felt that most landlords would probably not want tenants being charged additional fees and would probably question why both they and the tenant were being charged for the same administration work.
- 6.12 Charges to landlords within the association ranged from 6% -10%; some landlords were satisfied with the service whilst others felt that other than collecting the rent and completing tenancy renewals, the agents didn't provide any other services.
- 6.13 Feedback from landlords who had responded to the survey was that inexperienced letting agents did not have good knowledge of housing law; agents who were experienced and understood the regulations had higher fees that reflected the quality of their service²⁹.

Cabinet Member

- 6.14 Cllr Caulfield told the Panel that she would support a tighter regulatory regime for letting agents, particularly if it included measures to enable tenants and other local residents to communicate directly with property owners rather than communicating solely via letting agents.

Tenants' views

- 6.15 Witnesses who submitted evidence to the Panel commented that letting agents were powerful and could charge what they wanted to. Charges varied enormously from agent to agent and tenants felt that they had little but to pay these.

²⁸ See evidence from letting agents, 17/12/2010, Appendix 1

²⁹ See evidence from Mike Stimpson, Chair of the Southern Landlords Association, 13/1/2011, Appendix 2

6.16 Tenant comments included:

“The charging seemed arbitrary as there were no explanations of what this consisted of and tenants would not receive any extended level of service for these additional fees”

“It would be fairer if letting agents charged just one fee”

“There should be better and more transparent practices in place for tenants “

“Agents should be regulated as tenants had no redress if they were dissatisfied”

“I think there is also an issue with transparency on fees ...Agents charge varying amounts and in my case, it wasn't clear exactly what costs the fees covered”

“These fees were only pointed out to us once we had already sent a (forfeitable) holding deposit to the letting agents to secure the property”

“I'm left wondering if letting agents charge this for the sake of making additional revenue”

6.17 The Panel felt that the consequences of having unregulated letting agents were that many tenants found their letting agents' services and charges unsatisfactory and unfair. Evidence from the SLA showed that most landlords were not aware of tenants' additional charges and therefore the tenant was not protected by the landlord either. Action is required by the government to introduce statutory regulation to protect the interests of tenants and landlords.

6.18 After hearing all the evidence the Panel decided to recommend that:

The council should continue to lobby government for better regulation of the private rental market. Specifically:

- a. that tenants should not be faced with 'hidden' additional charges at the beginning of their tenancy;
- b. that all tenants' fees are fair and transparent;
- c. that letting agents should be licensed;
- d. that letting agents should be able to charge fees only for a prescribed range of services, and that fees levied should only cover the reasonable cost of performing particular tasks (e.g. checking references etc).

