

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

3.00pm 19 DECEMBER 2011

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Wakefield (Chair); Duncan, Farrow, Mears, Pidgeon, Randall, Robins, Simson and Summers

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), Stewart Gover (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), David Avery (West Hove & Portslade Area Area Housing Management Panel), Beverley Weaver (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), John Melson (Hi Rise Action Group), Muriel Briault (Leaseholders Action Group), Tom Whiting (Sheltered Housing Action Group) and Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network)

Apologies: Jean Davis, Heather Hayes and Tina Urquhart.

PART ONE

54. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

54A Declarations of Substitute Members

54.1 Councillor Mears declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Peltzer Dunn. Councillor Simson declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Wells. Dave Avery declared that he was attending as a substitute for Tina Urquhart.

54B Declarations of Interests

54.2 Councillor Summers 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).

54C Exclusion of the Press and Public

54.3 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.

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

55. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

55.1 *Homemove in Community Centres – Item 42.4* – Councillor Simson asked which centres would receive copies of Homemove. She was informed that printed copies of Homemove were available in all sheltered units and at the Java Café in Woodingdean.

55.2 *Victoria Road Housing Office – Items 42.9, 42.10, 42.11* – Councillor Robins asked for an update. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion stated that a decision to move the office was made in March 2011. An email had been received from the Head of Property Services explaining the process for the move. The move was earmarked for 2013/2014. There was a commitment to involve the West Area Panel and residents in the west nearer the time.

55.3 *Dams in Bevendean – item 52.3* – Councillor Farrow asked for an update. The Head of Tenancy Services explained that officers were in contact with Property and Estates regarding the maintenance of dams. She assured Councillor Farrow that the risk to Bevendean was very low at the moment.

55.4 It was suggested that it would be useful for councillors if there could be a survey of potential flood areas across the city. Councillor Duncan reported that the feedback from civil contingency was that current water levels were low and there was more likely to be a water shortage.

55.5 *Access to the Whitehawk Hub – Paragraph 53.25* – John Melson stated that Chris Kift had made a trip to the Whitehawk Hub and had found it very different from the conclusion drawn from the minutes.

55.6 The Chair informed members that she had visited the hub along with the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion and Councillor Powell. They had walked from the car park to the hub and back. The Chair had noticed the points raised by Chris Kift and they were being taken seriously. For example, trees needed to be trimmed back.

55.7 Chris Kift reported that he had had trouble with traction on his chair due to the number of leaves in the narrow lane. Meanwhile, at the bottom of the slope there was a Y junction which had a strange camber. Chris noticed an old man with a stick having difficulty moving up from the wide junction as did Chris. If there were a bus service it would be a long slog up the hill. The hub was too far away from any bus stop for anyone with leg and chest problems or other disabilities.

55.8 The Chair had noticed the camber and pointed out that it was possible to turn right to the library at the top of the junction. She considered that there needed to be better signage. Meanwhile, she had stressed that in future the council needed to be involved with people like Chris at the beginning of a development. The Chair reported that she

had written letters to the Chief Executive regarding gritting and Roger French regarding the bus service to the hub as outlined in the minutes.

- 55.9 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion informed the Committee that the council considered that the site was accessible and wanted to continue to make improvements both before and after the move. Signage would be improved. There was no date for the move at present. Councillor Randall confirmed that signage would be dealt with as a matter of urgency.
- 55.10 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee Meeting held on 7 November 2011 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

56. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

Brian Balchin

- 56.1 The Chair reported the sad news that Brian Balchin died unexpectedly last week. Brian was a committed member of the tenant movement. Whether as part of the Jasmine Court Tenants Association, Sheltered Housing Action Group, Choice Based Lettings User Group or Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group, to name but a few, his contribution was greatly valued by residents and staff alike. Brian would be greatly missed and his death was a great loss. The funeral would take place on Friday 23 December 2013 at 11.15am at the North Chapel at Wood Vale Crematorium.
- 56.2 Tom Whiting stated that Brian was his friend. He was totally dedicated to other people and would be greatly missed.
- 56.3 The Committee held a minute silence in tribute to Brian.

City Assembly

- 56.4 The Chair thanked and congratulated everyone who was involved in the City Assembly last month. A record number of tenants attended and there were over 400 hits on the webcast with people viewing the debate online, and more than 100 taking part via twitter.
- 56.5 For the first time residents could bring children as a crèche was available. It was great to see some families and one or two teenagers taking part.
- 56.6 The Chair congratulated the City Assembly Chair, Chris Kift, and Vice Chair, Stewart Gover who were both re-elected.
- 56.7 The Chair stated that it was a great day and a great turnout. It demonstrated just how powerful using the internet and social media could be to involve residents more widely.
- 56.8 The Chair acknowledged that it was important to remember there were people who did not use computers or smart phones and would never tweet, text or log on to Facebook. The council were exploring ways of helping people to get on-line, but also to continue using traditional ways of involving people.

Closure of Public Toilets

56.9 The Chair referred to a paper that was circulated to Committee Members by Stewart Gover regarding the proposal to close several public toilets in the city. The Chair stated that a consultation process was in place and the administration welcomed the tenants' input. The Chair thanked Stewart for his paper.

Multi Agency Health and Care Working Party

56.10 Tom Whiting informed the Forum that it had come to his notice when looking at the budget proposals that there was a move by Adult Social Care to "improve the care of sheltered tenants". This had never been discussed at the HMCC and there had been a failure of consultation through the various groups including the Sheltered Housing Action Group.

56.11 Councillor Mears stated that the budget proposals would result in 30 units being lost to housing in 2012/2013. Tenants had not been consulted and this matter should be discussed at the Sheltered Housing Action Group.

56.12 Councillor Randall explained that the proposal was due to an increased need for extra care. This matter could be brought back for discussion. Councillor Randall stressed that the budget had been produced 2 months early in order to allow for consultation.

56.13 John Melson stressed that there was a shortage of housing. Properties should be being built.

56.14 The Chair stated that squatters were being moved from Ainsworth House to enable that development to take place.

57. CALLOVER

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

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

58. PETITIONS

58.1 There were none.

59. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

59.1 There were none.

60. DEPUTATIONS

60.1 There were none.

61. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

61.1 There were none.

62. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

62.1 There were none.

63. HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 2)

63.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion which set out the second quarter performance report for Housing & Social Inclusion for the financial year 2011-2012 and followed the format for presenting information agreed at the last meeting.

63.2 Councillor Mears stated that it had previously been agreed to have figures and not percentages in the report. Meanwhile she noted that asbestos removal was not mentioned. Councillor Mears referred to the delays in the Ainsworth House project. She understood that the delays to the development were not caused by asbestos but due to a problem with procurement. She requested a report on Ainsworth House.

63.3 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion informed Councillor Mears that he would send her a report on asbestos removal. Councillor Farrow asked for this to be sent to all councillors on the HMCC.

63.4 John Melson stated that there were 350 empty homes. He asked if they were included in the report. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that long term empty properties were not included in the calculations.

63.5 John Melson referred to paragraph 3.5.0 – Tenant satisfaction with repairs. This stated a 97.54% satisfaction. He asked why jobs were cancelled, and whether the jobs were wrongly raised. Mr Melson noted the improvement in the percentage for decent homes. He asked if the criteria for kitchens and bathrooms had moved to the Brighton & Hove standard.

63.6 The Chair stated that she would like to see more clarification on why more appointments were not kept.

63.7 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that future reports could include details on cancelled jobs. With regard to tenant satisfaction, he was aware that there was mistrust in the process. As a result, officers were looking at a number of ways of measuring satisfaction. This might involve using tenants or third party representatives to produce the figures. This matter would be discussed by the various groups in the New Year.

63.8 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that the standard on Decent Homes had not changed. The council was trying to communicate more clearly on this subject. He would be happy to circulate an explanation of the standard to all members of the HMCC.

- 63.9 Ted Harman expressed concern about the use of percentages which he felt did not give sufficient information. The Chair agreed that raw figures were needed.
- 63.10 Councillor Randall stated that progress on long term empty properties should be reported to the HMCC. He stressed that work needed to be carried out to see if there was asbestos at Ainsworth House. Meanwhile, the LDV was now beginning to deliver.
- 63.11 Stewart Gover was glad to hear that the squatters were being moved from Ainsworth House. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that a court hearing had issued a possession order for the squatters to leave. If they remained, bailiffs would remove them before Christmas.
- 63.12 Beverley Weaver reported that she had spoken to a Mears operative on 27 October. She was told that 500 tenant satisfaction surveys had to be completed by the end of the month, and that some of the surveys were not being completed accurately. She questioned how there could be a 97% satisfaction rate. Ms Weaver mentioned that her son had required some work and the job was cancelled. He had to wait another 3 weeks.
- 63.13 The Chair stated that she had requested a meeting with the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion and Mears Ltd. Tenant satisfaction would be discussed.
- 63.14 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion referred to the allegation made by Beverley Weaver. This was the first he had heard of it and it would need to be investigated.
- 63.15 James Crier from Mears Ltd reported that communal repairs such as jobs to communal blocks were excluded from the satisfaction survey. Customer surveys were carried out on PDA's (personal digital assistants). There would be a need to carry out an audit to ensure that the surveys were carried out properly. The Chair stated that it needed to be made clear whether the information collected on the PDA's was for Mears' records or for the council's records.
- 63.16 Councillor Simson asked for clarity regarding the percentage of empty properties passing right first time. She was not clear whether the decent homes percentage was measured on the national or local standard. Councillor Simson asked how properties renovated under the LDV were prioritised. She considered that family homes should be prioritised.
- 63.17 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that the percentage of empty properties passing right first time was 97.93%. This was slightly below the target but had not impacted much on the turn around time, which was currently 18 days. The council was still performing better than in previous years. Meanwhile, the council worked to the Brighton & Hove Standard which also applied to kitchens and bathrooms. The standard had not changed and could not be a lesser standard than the national standard.
- 63.18 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that there was an agreed business model with regard to properties renovated under the LDV. The council were trying to prioritise long term empty properties and were working with contractors to see how best

to prioritise. It might be done geographically. There would be a time scale for each batch of properties to ensure an income stream for Brighton & Hove Seaside Homes.

- 63.19 John Melson raised the issue of communal repairs. He asked why someone else other than Mears Ltd did not collect information on these repairs. He suggested that a representative from a local association could give feedback. Mr Melson wondered if the stock being transferred to the LDV was the least expensive property, in order to squeeze costs. Meanwhile, Mr Melson expressed concern that the Brighton & Hove Standards should be the very best standards and not the worst.
- 63.20 The Chair stated that she would like a report to be made available to all members setting out exactly what the decent home standards were, and providing information on specific standards for Brighton & Hove Seaside Homes Ltd.
- 63.21 Councillor Randall agreed with Mr Melson regarding the matter of judging tenants' satisfaction on communal blocks. He suggested that there could be a tenant representative for each block to look at the work that had been carried out. With regard to the LDV, it was not avoiding taking on the more expensive homes. There was a mixture of different homes. He asked for a presentation on this matter at the next meeting.
- 63.22 John Melson asked about progress on scooter storage. The Head of Property and Investment reported that the scooter storage programme was being rolled out. Tom Whiting confirmed that work was progressing.
- 63.23 John Melson stressed that officers had not visited individual blocks to discuss this matter. The Chair asked for the relevant officer to provide a report back to the next HMCC meeting on the progress with scooter storage.
- 63.24 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report and the above comments be noted.

64. REPAIRS & IMPROVEMENTS HANDBOOK

- 64.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which presented a proposal for a new and updated "Repairs and Improvements Handbook". The handbook gave details and advice to all tenants on repairs and improvements to their homes and had been designed to complement the existing tenant handbook.
- 64.2 The Chair reported that she had received a few emails from people who had expressed concern about the new repairs handbook. She had discussed the handbook at a meeting with Councillor Randall, the Head of Property and Investment and the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion. Although the handbook was clearly written, it had errors which would be corrected. There was also some ambiguity such as the section on floor coverings. There needed to be clarity on that issue. The handbook was not ready to publish yet and would be presented to the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group, the Area Panels and then back to the HMCC.
- 64.3 Stewart Gover referred to the bullet points on page 32 of the agenda. He stated that some of these were in the wrong columns. For example, a bullet point showed it was the responsibility of the tenant to deal with gas cooker repairs, including connections

and meters. It could not be responsibility of tenants to deal with connections and meters. It also stated that tenants were responsible for garage keys, and the maintenance of locks which was incorrect. He would take these issues to the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group.

- 64.4 The Chair stated that with regard to gas cookers, there needed to be an extra column. It was certainly not the tenants' responsibility to repair gas connections and meters. The company who supplied the gas had that responsibility. The tenants were responsible for contacting the company.
- 64.5 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that it had not been easy to clearly describe what was the responsibility of the tenant or landlord. The council wanted to look at these issues with the tenants.
- 64.6 Beverley Weaver noted that the report stated that WC seats and toilet chains were the tenants' responsibility. She asked if training would be given. Meanwhile, there was no mention of the council claiming for criminal damage.
- 64.7 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that there was information on rechargeable repairs in the tenants' handbook. Tenants should be given information about how to leave their properties.
- 64.8 David Murtagh referred to lost or stolen keys. He informed tenants that they could get cover for keys on their home contents insurance.
- 64.9 Councillor Simson referred to the section of the handbook which dealt with tenant alterations and improvements. She specifically referred to the paragraph which stated "please remember that any improvements that you do could affect your eligibility for planned work as part of the Brighton & Hove Standard. For example, if you replace your kitchen or bathroom to a high standard, your property may not then qualify for a replacement kitchen or bathroom." Councillor Simson felt this paragraph would be off putting to tenants who wanted to improve their properties. She felt it was a negative paragraph and she asked if it could be reworded.
- 64.10 John Melson referred to the section on Repair Responsibilities, specifically to internal decoration, including the inside of the front door. He asked if tenants were responsible if contractors damaged wallpaper. Surely it was the contractor's responsibility to make good. The Chair replied that this matter would be clarified.
- 64.11 Councillor Farrow stated that he felt that there should be mention of an asbestos register in the handbook. The Head of Property and Investment explained that there was an asbestos register. There was a reference to asbestos in the leaflet and there was a separate leaflet on asbestos.
- 64.12 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report be referred to the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group for consideration. It will then be referred to the Housing Area Panels before further consideration at the HMCC on 19 March 2012.

The meeting concluded at 5.30pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of