

3 Star Items from Central Residents Only meeting 7/9/16

1. Tenants right to safety and security in their homes

The Chairman reported that a response was given to this item at the recent Area Panel (first raised at the Residents Only meeting 4/5/17, item 12).

There was agreement that the response was insufficient and residents still have concerns about anti-social behaviour, the action taken to prevent problems and to resolve them when they arise. It was noted that anti-social behaviour has a significant impact on the whole community.

It was asked what systems are in place for residents to have control over who moves into a particular area. Several schemes were mentioned, and more information was requested on the following:

- The Local Housing solution
- The Limited Letting Scheme
- Sensitive Lets
- Social Services (for transfers within an estate)

Response from Emma Gilbert, Tenancy Services Operations Manager, tel: 01273 291704

The allocation of local authority housing stock is a Council responsibility and must comply with the relevant housing legislation as well as other key legislation including Human Rights and Equalities legislation. Therefore tenants do not have a role in deciding who can live where. In developing the new allocations policy on the 8th December 2016 the Council carried out a comprehensive consultation to seek the view of tenants and other stakeholder groups in the city.

The Allocations Policy defines the eligibility/qualification criteria in accordance with housing legislation and guidance and is agreed and reviewed by the Housing and New Homes Committee (most recently in December 2016). Eligibility is prescribed under the act and it is unlawful for the council to allocate to a person who is prescribed as ineligible under the Act. The council has the power to classify if a person is a qualifying person. The council has taken into account its equality duties in framing those that may not qualify to join the Housing Register. This policy has been drafted with reference to the Equality Act 2010 in particular to the council's Public Sector Equalities Duty. The Council has adopted the Commission for Racial Equality's Statutory Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing.

Allocation is based on need which is identified through the housing assessment process with individuals being "banded" accordingly and then qualified to bid on suitable properties within their banding via the Choice Based Lettings System "Homemove". The council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme aims to ensure that our services are fair and equitable for our customers. We want our services to be

accessible and useful to everyone regardless of age, disability, gender, race, colour, national origin, sexual orientation or any other factor that may cause disadvantage. A full equality impact assessment was carried out on the new policy and was published on the council's website.

The Allocations Policy contains an embedded allocation plan in order to address the specific priorities for the city in relation to homelessness and access to social and affordable housing stock for those most in need. This is reviewed annually at the Housing and New Homes Committee.

For more information visit the BHCC Website <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/brighton-hove.gov.uk/files/BHCC%20Allocations%20Policy%20Oct%202017.pdf>

Local Lettings Plans

Section 166A (6)(b) of the Housing Act 1996 enables Housing Authorities to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall within the reasonable preference categories, provided that overall the authority is able to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of s166A (3). This is the statutory basis for local lettings policies which may be used to achieve a wide variety of housing management policy objectives. The council policy in accepting the needs for local lettings plans is that in general there must be a demonstrable need for such a local lettings plan and that the local lettings plan must take into account the reasonable preference categories and cannot be used to include any person that does not qualify for inclusion under the allocations scheme. Any local lettings schemes should not discriminate directly or indirectly on any equalities ground.

We use local lettings plans for new build properties when they are first let to ensure a balanced community and the most appropriate use of council stock eg mobility rated properties.

Sensitive Let Request

Housing management can request a sensitive let for a particular property if there is sufficient grounds - this has to be an evidenced and considered decision and would be reviewed every time that property becomes vacant to see if it is still needed.

James Crane - Service Improvement & Interim Homemove Manager (Housing) will be attending this Area Panel meeting and will be able to answer additional questions you may have.

2. Support and encouragement for Residents Associations

It was noted that: -

- Several Residents Associations are not putting forward representatives to the Area Panel, which is in breach of the model constitution whereby RAs are recognised by B&HCC.
- Sloane Court RA and Ardingly Court RA both recently dissolved.

A number of concerns were raised about the role of the Resident Involvement Officers (RIOs), and whether there was more they could be doing to encourage and support Associations.

The following points were made:

- Phone calls and emails are often not replied to.
- EDB items agreed take a long time to be implemented, leaving Associations demoralised.
- Associations are often not consulted or kept informed about work.
- Association officers have been criticised for having unscheduled meetings and not checking with their RIO before organising a meeting.
- RIO's can seem dictatorial, making demands on resident representatives and telling Associations what to do.
- RIOs have appeared to encourage Associations to dissolve, even when some people are willing to continue.

Response from Hilary Edgar, Housing Services Operations Manager, tel:01273 293250

I am sorry that some representatives from the Central Area are unhappy with the support they receive from the Resident Involvement team. The team carries out a range of work to support tenants and resident associations, matching their input to the needs of the various groups. I have shared this item with officers who work with associations in the Central Area and they were surprised and disappointed to receive this feedback. In order to find out more about what isn't working and how the support provided by the team can be improved, I would like the representatives who made the comments above to let me know what has happened to give rise to them. Equally, I would like to hear from representatives who have positive experiences of working with the team, so these can be shared with officers and the Panel.

We do monitor attendance at Area Panel meetings and encourage deputies to attend where elected representatives can't. Sometimes, however, associations do fold and this can happen for a number of reasons, for example, members not wanting to continue or moving away from the area. Resident Involvement Officers always try to find new residents and often 'door knock', leaflet and follow up leads, to this end. However, it is not always possible for associations to continue. This is a problem that is not particular to Brighton & Hove City Council; it is reflective of a national trend as more council residents want to be involved through surveys, phone contact and on line engagement rather than attending meetings. As such, the team is looking to do more of this type of work to support resident involvement in the management of housing services.

