

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING MANAGEMENT PANEL: EAST AREA

7.00pm 3 DECEMBER 2018

BRISTOL ESTATE - COMMUNITY ROOM

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Platts

Representatives: Alan Cooke (Craven Vale), Janet Gearing (Woodingdean), Chris El-Shabba (Robert Lodge)

Officers: Justine Harris (Head of Tenancy Services) Glyn Huelin (Business & Performance Manager), Hilary Edgar (Housing Service Operations Manager) and Kat Hoare (Democratic Services Officer)

42 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

42.1 Chris El-Shabba substituted as Chair for Councillor Mears.

43 APOLOGIES

43.1 Apologies were received from: Councillors Mears, Mitchell and Morgan, Ododo Dafe (Head of Income, Inclusion & Improvement), Keely McDonald (Resident Involvement Officer), Eddie Wilson (Mears General Manager), Lyn Bennett (M.F.R.T.A Rep)

44 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

44.1 The Chair communicated the following:

“At the recent citywide conference, residents expressed an interest in learning more about recycling. In response to this, we would like to offer residents the opportunity to visit the material recovery facility at Hollingdean. Please let Hilary Edgar know if you are interested. There are lots of steps in the building, so please bear that in mind when deciding whether this is something you would like to do.”

The Chair confirmed that she had already visited this recycling facility and Hilary Edgar confirmed that up to 20 people could attend at one visit. There was a discussion on which kinds of materials could be recycled. Alan Cooke and Councillor Platts confirmed that they were interested in attending and after a suggestion by Janet Gearing, Glyn Huelin confirmed that he would suggest this is publicised in the Homing In magazine.

45 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

There were several matters arising from the Minutes of the previous meeting which were discussed:

- 45.1 Hilary Edgar circulated a list from the Community Team regarding communal spaces and rooms for hire in Whitehawk, as noted on page 7 of the Minutes.
- 45.2 Alan Cooke requested an update on the Field Officers (FOs) item and the Chair confirmed that the FOs had just been launched officially in the previous week and that she had invited the FO team to a Due East meeting in order to make contact with them. Janet Gearing asked if certain officers were allocated to certain districts and Hilary confirmed that they were not allocated by area but were citywide. Councillor Platts asked for a full list of the type of work that the FOs covered to be re-circulated as she queried whether FOs could remove estate agent boards and deal with anti-social behaviour. Janet Gearing suggested that there should be an article on the Field Officer team in the next issue of Homing In with photos of team members in order to introduce them to residents and that the article should be duplicated in local newsletters with the FO contact details, so that all residents could contact them, when required. The Chair confirmed that photographs would be useful since all FOs wore a recognisable uniform and that Annie Sparks, Regulatory Services Manager could be interviewed in the article.
- 45.3 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes were an exact record of the meeting held on the 15th October 2018.

46 RESIDENTS QUESTION TIME

Two of the four items were discussed by the Panel and Officers:

Item 1 – p. 13 – Future arrangements for repairs & maintenance of council housing

- 46.1 Alan Cooke stated that he thought that there should have been more consultation on these issues than the four meetings and one thousand door-to-door surveys that were undertaken. Glyn Huelin confirmed that his team had also consulted with residents at three rounds of Area Panel meetings and that they had received a large amount of feedback through this.
- 46.2 Alan Cooke asked whether there would be sufficient scrutiny of the service and whether the Council might in future let questionable issues through without being challenged about them. Glyn Huelin stated that the Council had set up three different ways of checking the future service : firstly, the Home Service Improvement Group would receive indicators on how the new service would work, secondly there would be a continuation of resident inspectors work and thirdly a review paper would be produced after three and then five years in order to assess and appraise the new service.
- 46.3 Janet Gearing asked if the Apprenticeship scheme would continue and Glyn Huelin confirmed that it would be continuing with exactly the same level of investment in apprentices.

46.4 The Chair stated that in the past, there had been complaints about Council operatives' work and she questioned whether employees' work records were looked at. Glyn Huelin replied that employees were dealt with in exactly the same way by Mears as by the Council and both followed the probationary period system. He confirmed that quality assurance was important to the Council and that they would work with the internal audit team to check in-house services. He also confirmed that if residents had concerns there was a multi-stage process to work through to ensure that these were dealt with.

Item 2 - Cash rent payments for pensioners

46.5 Alan Cooke stated that although he had nominated this item, he could not see the point of this now in hindsight, since he was disappointed that Post Offices would not install paypoints which he felt was an important factor for pensioners.

46.6 **RESOLVED** – that the Panel agreed to note the report.

47 TENANCY MANAGEMENT - A PRESENTATION ON HOW CASES ARE ALLOCATED AND MANAGED WITHIN THE EAST AREA HOUSING TEAM

47.1 Justine Harris introduced this discussion and circulated the paper entitled "ASB Working with Perpetrators."

47.2 Janet Gearing confirmed that she wanted Reps to find out more regarding the enforcement workshops in the New Year and was keen to arrange for residents to attend.

47.3 The Chair praised the Council and police for dealing with her current harassment case and she confirmed that the perpetrator had now been sentenced. She confirmed that she had felt very supported by her Housing Officer and that she wanted to encourage other people not to feel afraid of reporting harassment and to understand that they did not necessarily have to go to court on these matters. Her only query on the Council's handling of the issue, was that she had been told that the perpetrator could possibly lose their home over the case.

47.4 Justine Harris confirmed that she would feed back this valuable input to Janet Dowdell and the Chair also confirmed that she would promote the workshops at the next Robert Lodge residents meeting.

47.5 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agreed to note the report.

48 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGET

48.1 Hilary Edgar introduced the report, which had been discussed at the Housing and New Homes Committee and had been well received by members. She confirmed that Ododo Dafe had been given further feedback from residents and that this would be included in a report to the Housing & New Homes Committee in January 2019.

48.2 Hilary Edgar stated that the EDB Budget would continue to exist and would remain separate from this budget.

- 48.3 Alan Cooke stated that he was unsure when applying for grants, whether to contact the EDB or those involved with this new Environmental Budget. Hilary Edgar answered that the details of how the Environmental Budget would be allocated were being worked out and that there would be more information in January 2019.
- 48.4 Janet Gearing stated that in the past, fencing had been the only area that Woodingdean residents had been able to apply for EDB funding for she was concerned that this may also apply to this Environmental Improvement Budget. Hilary Edgar stated that Simon Bannister and Matt Easteal had a great deal of experience of working with residents in the past on bids and the Chair stated that it would be worthwhile inviting them to a future residents meeting.
- 48.5 Alan Cooke stated that there was a problem with funding for verges, since residents had been unable to get funding for this area in the past, since they had been told that verges were not a part of Housing land. Janet Gearing also stated that in the past, residents had requested grasscrete for certain areas and had also been told it was not Housing land, and that this was a particular problem for the Woodingdean area, since they had no communal areas and therefore had not been able to apply for EDB grants. Justine Harris stated that this Budget was created to sort out problems like this and try to resolve them.
- 48.6 Hilary Edgar stated that Simon Bannister worked across different kinds of land and therefore he was a very useful source of help for residents on these issues. The Chair confirmed that within blocks of flats it could be difficult to find areas which qualified for funding but that Simon Bannister and Matt Easteal had already worked with residents on gates at Robert Lodge and on planters in Whitehawk and both had really persevered and worked hard to get projects finished and could assist residents in this area.
- 48.7 Janet Gearing stated that there had also been problems previously with light improvements being judged as too expensive. Glyn Huelin confirmed that there was some flexibility this area and that Janet Gearing should contact Simon Bannister to assist with future bids.
- 48.8 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agreed to note the report.

49 HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2 2018 / 19

- 49.1 Justine Harris introduced the report and confirmed that the key performance indicators on p.59 should be on the front page. Justine asked residents for their input on the presentation of the report and whether they would like this information in a different format in the future.
- 49.2 The Chair asked if the statistics used on page 36 were from before or after the time that Universal Credit was introduced. Justine Harris stated that 40 per cent of tenants in rent arrears were claiming Universal Credit and she confirmed that there were now ten Support Officers who were assisting tenants with Universal Credit arrears problems.
- 49.3 Alan Cooke stated that the problem with Universal Credit was that tenants had to pay rent themselves out of their benefit and it was easy to get into arrears when the Universal Credit payments were delayed. Janet Gearing confirmed that often rent

might be the last priority for families at times such as Christmas, and she hoped that these claimants would not get penalised for late payments.

49.4 Councillor Platts stated that a young mother in her Ward who had accrued debt problems due to the delay in receiving Universal Credit, now found that her credit history was affected. Councillor Platts confirmed that the local Credit Union, based at Hove Town Hall was a place where residents could access loans at a better rate, and that this information should be publicised in the Homing In magazine. Janet Gearing said that she had been unaware of the Credit Union and that this was probably a much better alternative to payday loans for many residents. The Chair suggested that the Credit Union could be invited to speak at resident meetings about the services they offered. Councillor Platts confirmed that she would find out more about Universal Credit claimants and rent arrears and report back on this. Hilary Edgar confirmed that information on the Credit Union could be submitted to a future issue of Homing In.

49.5 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agreed to note the report.

50 CITY WIDE REPORTS

The residents did not have any discussion or points to make on the reports.

50.1 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agreed to note the reports.

51 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

51.1 Alan Cooke raised the issue that he was unsure which department to contact regarding a caravan parked in the resident's car park with no number plate. Councillor Platts confirmed that residents needed to know whether it was a matter for the Council or police, as this was unclear. She also commented that if it was difficult for people to report their neighbour's vehicles, then tenants could contact her and she could contact the Council on their behalf. Janet Gearing confirmed that similar problems with untaxed vehicles had occurred in Woodingdean and that often the problem had been passed from the police to the DVLA and then on to the Council and had not been resolved properly. Hilary Edgar confirmed that this issue should be reported to Housing Customer Services on tel: 01273 293030.

52 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

52.1 The date of the next meeting will be 18th February 2019.

The meeting concluded at 8.13 pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of