

Residents' Question Time

Questions from the West Resident Association Meeting 16/4/19

68 to 70 Godwin Road drain clearance

Despite monthly reports to the repairs help desk no action has been taken to clear the drains at 68-70 Godwin Road.

At the West Residents meeting 11/9/18 a request was made for regular maintenance of drains in order to prevent blockages and reduce the risk of flooding and expensive, disruptive clean-ups. The response given at the Area Panel on 16th October 2018 was that this was not cost effective, and issues on drainage would be rectified as soon as they arose. Residents were advised to report issues to the repairs help desk.

It was agreed to feedback that the system residents have been advised to follow is not working effectively.

Response

I am sorry to hear that this has been an ongoing problem. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find a record of a drain repair being reported at these properties. I have therefore arranged for a visual inspection of the drains. I will advise the Community Engagement Officer of the outcome of this inspection, who will give an update at the June Area Panel meeting.

Adrian Day, Mechanical & Electrical Engineer, tel: 01273 293453

New door entry system at Ingram Court

There have been major problems with the installation of new door entry systems at some blocks in Ingram Court. The Residents Association have been following this up with the Council, but it raises issues of city-wide concern.

The concerns raised by Ingram Court were:

- a) Piecemeal and inadequate consultation*
- b) What door entry replacement systems are chosen and why?*
- c) Removal of trade buttons*

Piecemeal and inadequate consultation:

- Some, but not all, of the people in the blocks affected were contacted by letter, asking for feed-back. This letter was received on 4th September, with a deadline for responses of 6th September.*
- Some, but not all, leaseholders received Section 20 notices. It is not clear how many, or which, tenants were consulted. All residents affected should be equally involved.*
- The Council have apologised for the lack of consultation, but it has meant that residents' concerns and opinions were not taken into account before work was done.*

What replacement systems are chosen and why?

- In some blocks door entry systems that were functioning perfectly well have been replaced.*
- The new door entry systems are huge, industrial strength units. As well as being inappropriate for small low-rise flats they involve large, unsightly stainless steel piping in the newly re-decorated corridors and common ways.*
- If re-fitting is done as a result of residents' complaints, who will pay for this?*

Removal of trade buttons:

The new door entry systems do not have trade buttons. This is a central issue that needed careful consultation, with the preferences of residents in each block taken into account.

Many residents have concerns about the lack of trade buttons because:

- Access to the blocks is needed for deliveries, post and distribution of council information as well as access for care and other support workers.*
- To allow access to everyone who needs it, key fobs would become widely available – this is potentially more of a security risk than having a trade button.*
- Residents in flats on the ground floor are pestered by people needing access.*

The following questions were raised for discussion at a city-wide level:

- *What are the plans city-wide for installing new door entry systems in low-rise blocks?*
- *How is the necessity for this work assessed? Why is work being done in cases where the present systems are functioning well?*
- *What new systems are being installed? Who decides what is appropriate?*
- *What consultation is taking place about these plans?*
- *How will the lessons learnt from the experience of Ingram Crescent be fed into this process?*

Response

Thank you for raising your concerns at the West Area Panel. I would like to apologise to residents who do not feel we have undertaken consultation on the door entry programme, in particular, on removal of 'trade buttons'.

We have undertaken our statutory (section 20) consultation with leaseholders on proposed door entry system works. However, concerns have been raised that those living on the estate do not feel our consultation has been early enough in the process to allow for enough dialogue or agreement on our proposed approach and that not all residents have been involved.

As a result we have met with residents at Ingram Crescent and agreed a series of actions that we will take to both address the issues raised and to change how we deliver the programme and engage with residents.

Over the coming months we will be preparing a report to Area Panels, Leaseholder Action Group and Housing & New Homes Committee to consider our strategy for the future delivery of our Mechanical and Electrical service contracts including door entry systems. The concerns raised here and in resident meetings will be factored into these discussions, this report and then future projects.

From this point on we have changed our consultation process for installing new door entry systems and will carry out engagement with tenants and leaseholders through letters ahead of any formal consultation. This is in place with immediate effect.

We will also work with residents to share our city-wide plan for door entry system replacement for 2019/20.

In terms of what systems and doors are installed there are a number of factors that need to be considered, moving forwards we are committed to doing this openly with tenants and leaseholders at the early stages of looking at a project. These will include the condition of systems, availability of spare parts should a fault develop and the security requirements of each block. We agree that a “one size fits all approach” is not suitable and we will work with residents to engage on particular solutions for each block.

We recognise there is a need to improve engagement on these and other projects and the service is developing processes and monitoring to ensure this is in place for future projects.

**Response from Glyn Huelin – Head of Housing – Repairs & Improvements -
01273 293306**

Questions from the East Residents' Only meeting 4/4/19

Estate Development Budget 2020/21

A report on the Estate Development Budget was presented to the Area Panel, with a request for feedback.

The meeting was very concerned about Section 3.2, Item 5 of the report which states that bids for fencing will be restricted to communal areas from 2020/21. The meeting recognised that the EDB review team needed to consider the issue of fencing, but was unhappy with its analysis and conclusions. It was felt that a decision to restrict fencing to communal areas is unfair to areas such as Woodingdean, where all the council properties are houses and there is very little communal housing land.

The meeting agreed to raise this at Area Panel with the proposal that Section 3.2 item 5 be reconsidered so that fencing replacement for individual properties is still included in the EDB programme.

Response

Thank you for your feedback on the changes to the Estate Development Budget (EDB). EDB can no longer be used to fund fencing to individual properties. There were two main reasons for making this change:

- Fencing to individual properties does not lead to an environmental improvement for the benefit of a community, the main criteria of EDB bids, as they are often dispersed throughout an area.
- Fencing is the responsibility of tenants. Applications by associations for fencing to individual properties via EDB did not take account of the individual's need for fencing or explain why one property rather than another was being put forward.

Funding individual fences through EDB therefore led to a situation where the council could not demonstrate that best and fair use was being made of its resources. A project will run later this year to develop a scheme to provide fencing for tenants who need this type of work but are unable to pay for it. This will set out the criteria for application and assessment so that funding is carried out in a transparent, fair and accessible way from April 2020.

EDB can still be used to fund communal fencing projects. Groups are encouraged to discuss potential EDB bids with their Community Engagement Officer who can help develop ideas for funding.

Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, tel: 01273 293250

Estate Development Budget 2019/20

There was concern about the way EDB fencing work is currently restricted for tenants living in houses. Any tenants with arrears, no matter how small, are not entitled to have fencing work done under the EDB scheme. The meeting felt this was unfair for two reasons:

- It is easy for people to fall into small amounts of arrears, particularly with the introduction of Universal Credit.*
- If new fencing is required between two properties, and one of them has a tenant in arrears, the other tenant is effectively penalised.*

The meeting felt that a threshold of 1 month's arrears would be a fairer basis for deciding whether a tenant can have EDB fencing work done.

The meeting agreed to raise this at Area Panel to request that the policy of restricting EDB fencing work to tenants who have zero rent arrears be reviewed. It is proposed that the restriction be applied only to those who have more than 1 month's arrears.

Response

The response above advises why fencing to individual properties can no longer be funded from EDB.

When they were, and applications received from tenants in arrears, there were no fixed rules on the amount of arrears a tenant was in before they could be considered for fencing. The crucial point was whether they had made a repayment arrangement with the Housing Income Management Team to clear their arrears and kept to it for a period.

When the deadline for EDB applications was November, bids for individual fencing for tenants in arrears were referred to the HIMT. They would advise if a repayment agreement was in place, and if not, make one with the tenant. This would give the tenant at least four months to reduce their arrears before the EDB voting panel.

Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, tel: 01273 293250

Weeds and debris in guttering

Craven Vale Residents Association has identified 20 different gutters in the low-rise blocks that need clearing because there are plants and grass growing in them. They have recorded these and reported to housing to request action.

In Manor Farm there are also a lot of houses with plant growth in the guttering.

The Repairs and Improvements Handbook clearly states that clearing gutters is the responsibility of the council, but when tenants ring up to request this work they are often told that it cannot be done.

The meeting felt that the council are trying to save money in the short term by not clearing gutters, but that this will cause damage to properties, such as damp, that will cost more to fix in the long term.

The meeting agreed to raise this at Area Panel to request clarification on the policies and procedures for clearing blocked gutters in houses and blocks of flats.

Response

Thank you for this information. I am sorry to hear that residents in Craven Vale and Manor Farm have blocked guttering. A list of blocks on the estate that have had, or are due to have, their gutters cleared has been sent to the Chair of Craven Vale Association. Other blocks can be added to the list, if found to have blocked gutters.

Guttering does need to be kept clear to prevent damage to properties. I have discussed this with Mears and they advise that when residents contact the Repairs' Helpdesk with this sort of problem, arrangements are made to clear the blockage. Likewise when council officers or Mears staff report the problem in the course of their work.

Mears also undertake this type of work on bungalows and houses. Ladders can be used up to two stories. Beyond that tower scaffolding is used to access the roof area.

I would encourage residents to report any concerns to Mears using the details below. Maintenance and specifically clearance of gutters has been a key part of the feedback from residents as we prepare for the delivery of repairs following the end of the Mears contract in 2020. We will be working to develop a programme for proactive maintenance of gutters over the course of this year.

Repairs should be reported on BHCC.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk or 0800 0526140.

Gareth Williams - Surveyor & Contract Manager Property & Investment Team - 01273 291502

Window replacements in Woodingdean

The windows to houses in Bexhill Road have now been replaced and it has made a big difference to tenants. However, it was expected that the remaining properties in Woodingdean would also have their windows replaced in 2018/19.

The meeting agreed to raise this at Area Panel to request a full list of window replacement work that has been completed in Woodingdean and a full schedule of work that is still planned, with details of when it is due to be done.

Response

A list of window replacements completed in Woodingdean during the 2017/18 window replacement programme has been sent to the Area Panel representative from Woodingdean.

We do not have any current planned window replacements for Woodingdean in 2019/20, but we are working on programmes for the delivery of planned works from April 2020. As part of our planning and preparation for this, we are having some asset stock information gathered across the city, which will help identify properties for inclusion in the programmes.

When we have finalised the programmes and timetables for carrying out future window replacement work, we will share this with residents.

If there are particular properties that residents have concerns with please contact me and we can arrange to survey them.

Gareth Williams - Surveyor & Contract Manager Property & Investment Team - 01273 291502

Questions from the Central Residents Only Meeting 25/4/19

Knightguard contract

Concerns were raised about the recent renewal of the contract with Knightguard for replacing door entry systems and doors in flats.

- *There were serious problems with the work done by Knightguard at Sylvan Hall, especially the replacement of doors with expensive, heavy duty systems not suitable for low-rise flats.*
- *Door entry systems are also being replaced with unnecessarily heavy duty systems.
At Hampshire Court, large steel conduits were being installed until this was challenged by residents.*
- *On-going work at Malthouse Court shows that Knightguard have not improved on their practice.*
- *The default is always to replace rather than repair, at a greater expense to tenants and residents. Other contractors have said that cheap repairs to the systems are viable.*

The problems with Knightguard have been clearly flagged up by tenants, but their contract has just been renewed for another four years despite this

Response

We have attempted to respond to the specific issues raised in this question below and have identified where additional information would be helpful for us to answer more fully. We are planning a report to Area Panels, Leaseholder Action Group and Housing & New Homes Committee to consider our strategy for the future delivery of Mechanical and Electrical service contracts. The concerns raised here and in resident meetings will be factored into these discussions, this report and then future projects.

In terms of what systems and doors are installed there are a number of factors that need to be considered, moving forwards we are committed to doing this openly with tenants and leaseholders at the early stages of looking at a project. These will include the condition of systems, availability of spare parts should a fault develop and the security requirements of each block. We agree that a “one size fits all approach” is not suitable and we will work with residents to engage on particular solutions for each block.

We recognise there is a need to improve engagement on these and other projects and the service is developing processes and monitoring to ensure this is in place for future projects.

Galvanised metal conduit is being installed with all new door entry systems. The current system has been designed to future proof repairs in a fully rewirable system, as many current systems are not. Based on recent feedback we will be reviewing options for containment on future projects and will seek to engage with residents about the type of conduit used.

Every effort is made to carry out repairs to a serviceable system to avoid the cost, inconvenience and time frames to replace a system. Many of the door entry systems in council properties are at the end of its serviceable life span, with many parts being obsolete. A Contract Manager from the council's Mechanical & Electrical team oversees all works and any replacement of a system would only proceed with the council's approval

The original four-year contract was extended after a thorough review by a Procurement Manager in the council, independent of the day to day running of the contract, this extension is for two years. Further arrangements for this contract will be detailed in the report on future delivery of Mechanical & Electrical Service Contracts detailed above.

Miles Davidson, Housing Sustainability Manager & Interim Mechanical & Electrical Team Manager, Tel: 01273 293150

Support during installation of new kitchens

The installation of new kitchens can require a lot of preparation work for residents, clearing rooms and moving furniture. Some tenants are not physically able to do this work themselves, but it is difficult to get help and nothing is offered.

It was agreed that a system should be set up where support is automatically offered to tenants unable to do this work themselves.

Response

Thank you for this enquiry. Mears are responsible for kitchen repairs, refurbishment and replacement work. In large-scale jobs, a kitchen designer will visit the tenant to agree designs and arrange for the storage of their white goods, usually within the property or for them to be moved around the kitchen as work takes place.

Where a tenant needs assistance to remove their belongings eg the contents of kitchen cupboards, pictures etc, Mears will contact the Housing Customer Service team, who will then discuss potential sources of help with the tenant, so that this is done by the time work is due to start. In some cases a tenant's family or friends will help, in others the council will provide support through the Tenancy Sustainment Team.

Mears and Housing Customer Services have recently been reminded of the options that are available to help tenants in these circumstances.

Marcus Richardson, Surveyor & Contract Manager, tel: 01273 293070

Rubbish bins at Hampshire Court

The bins at Hampshire Court have been replaced with large wheelie bins, which are parked in the turning bay at the entrance to the Court. Residents are not happy with this as:

- a) The new wheelie bins block access for emergency vehicles and are a fire hazard*
- b) Some residents have to walk quite a distance to the bins. This is difficult if they have a disability or are unable to walk easily. As a result rubbish gets left in doorways.*
- c) Residents have been told by CityClean that the cleaners will take rubbish to the bins for residents unable to do this themselves. It was agreed that it is not appropriate to ask the cleaners to do this – they are already very busy and are not paid by CityClean.*
- d) The change was implemented without proper consultation or information to residents and with just 3 days' notice. The only information was a notice at the entrance to each block.*

Hampshire Court Residents Association requested a meeting with CityClean to discuss this. There was no response, so the issue was raised with the local MP, and CityClean then offered a meeting. They are currently waiting for confirmation of dates.

Barry Hughes and Martin Cunningham will attend this meeting and report back to either the agenda setting meeting or the Area Panel, depending on when the meeting is held.

Response

I am sorry that the change of bin location at Hampshire Court has caused difficulties for residents. I have now met with residents about this and they provided some constructive suggestions on how changes can be made to the way City Clean operatives remove rubbish, to make it safer for them and enable a return to the previous arrangements for storing rubbish.

I am working through these suggestions with operational staff and will let residents know the outcome of these discussions, when completed. In terms of the specific points raised above, I can advise:

- Access for emergency vehicles – Grant Ritchie, Health & Safety Business Partner, has visited the site and advises that the space available meets the national guidance in the Building Regulations for access for firefighting appliances. There is no specific advice for other vehicles, however the

general understanding is that if a fire tender can use the space a smaller vehicle such as an ambulance can be accommodated.

- Location of the bins - The bins are located as close to Hampshire Court as is possible. Assisted collections are available for residents who are unable to take their rubbish to the bins. This is within an Estates Cleaner's job description and something that they do in other estates across the city.
- Notifying residents about changes - Notices were put up to notify residents that the bin rooms would be closed and containment provided in the turning circle. We were not able to provide longer notice of the changes due to health and safety risks as two of our staff had sustained accidents whilst collecting from Hampshire Court.

Melissa Francis, Head of Operations, City Clean Tel: 01273 292929

Estate Development Budget (EDB) bids for refuse/recycling bins

Bids of £3,500 were put forward to the EDB for new and replacement refuse and recycling bins. There was general agreement that this wasn't a suitable use of the EDB, as City Clean has responsibility for the provision of refuse and recycling bins. This should not be paid for from the Housing Revenue Account.

Response

There were three bids to the 2019/20 Estates Development Budget for bins; at Wellington Road, Highcroft Lodge and Holmstead. The bids were for additional bins or ones of a different design to the bins already in place.

City Clean provides bins at a site when a new service is being introduced or the bin is damaged in the course of collection; in other situations, it is the landlord's responsibility to fund replacement bins. Housing is no different from private landlords in this respect and so the Housing Revenue Account is used to fund bins, where needed or requested by residents through the EDB.

Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, tel: 01273 293250

Damp and black mould in tenants' homes

Several examples were given of problems with damp and black mould in tenants' homes in Coldean and Moulsecoomb.

This is adversely affecting tenant's health and causing damage to their personal property. It is especially prevalent in homes that are overcrowded.

When tenants contact Mears the standard response is to paint the affected area with fungicide, which doesn't resolve the root cause of the problem.

Individual tenants experiencing this problem can request a Surveyors Report to ensure there is a more thorough investigation into the problems of damp and black mould and potential long-term solutions.

Response

When a tenant reports mould in their home we arrange for an operative to investigate and apply anti-fungal treatment if deemed necessary and paint the affected areas. We ask that the operative also reports if further works are required or if a Supervisor's visit is recommended.

The operative would normally leave a 'Combating Damp' leaflet with the tenant if the problem is mainly condensation. If it is more than this, the case would be referred to the Damp Manger/Supervisor to attend.

The Damp Manager/ Supervisor will then assess the property with a damp meter and make recommendations for remedial work. They would look for the causes of the issues to determine whether they were likely to be from external damp ingress or the tenant's lifestyle.

If the works are deemed to be more extensive than a responsive repair, we would request an independent damp specialist, such as Cavitytech to attend to undertake a survey and specify works if required.

If the situation is deemed to be lifestyle or overcrowding, we would also assess whether the installation of a mechanical ventilation system could improve the situation.

Nigel French, Surveyor & Contract Manager, Tel: 01273 294506

Field Officers

The Field Officers have now been trained and it was expected that they would be out working on estates by now, but Associations have not had any contact with them or seen them. They have a distinctive dark red uniform so should be easy to spot.

In the meantime, the local environment on estates is deteriorating.

In Moulsecoomb a lot of the shrubs are becoming overgrown, making it difficult for people to use the pavements and twittens (examples were given from Goodwood Road, Staplefield Drive, Selsfield Drive and Birdham Road). There are also tenants with a build-up of rubbish in their gardens and no action is being taken (two examples were given from Goodwood Road).

Hollingdean Residents Association have made four attempts to contact the Field Officers about an urgent matter, but have not been able to get through to them and have not heard back (see item 12).

It was agreed to put this forward for discussion at the Area Panel. The following information is requested:

- a . A report of work done by the Field Officers since December 2018.*
- b . Details of when Field Officers will contact Residents Associations.*

Response

The Field Officer team carries out enforcement action only on behalf of other council departments. These departments pass complaints made to them to the Field Officer Team for investigation and resolution.

Over 1200 complaints have been received from across the city since the team was set up and all have received a consistent response wherever they originated.

The Field Officer Team is available to answer queries from all members of the community but does not carry out planned liaison with community groups. The team has, however, attended resident association meetings, in response to requests from them.

The Field Officer Team can be contacted directly on 01273 291485 or by email on FieldOfficers@brighton-hove.gov.uk.

Information on overgrown highways should be reported to:
highwayobstructions@brighton-hove.gov.uk or on 01273 292929

Information about messy gardens in tenanted properties should be reported to:
Housing.CustomerServices@brighton-hove.gov.uk or on 01273 293030

Brett Stacey, Field Officer Manager, tel: 01273 291552

