

## Residents Question Time

### Items from East Resident Only Minutes 20/06/19

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#### 1. Field Officers

People are concerned that the Field Officers are not responding effectively to problems that arise on estates. An example was given from Robert Lodge, when a group of men were outside drinking and causing a disturbance. The issue was reported but no known action was taken and the complainant didn't receive any feedback about whether any action had been taken.

Action: 3 stars (III)

It was agreed to raise this at the Agenda Setting meeting and request the following information:

- What percentage of the Field Officer's service costs are covered by the Housing Revenue Account?
- What percentage of the Field Officer's work takes place on Council housing estates?

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#### Response from Brett Stacey, Field Officer Manager

T: 01273 291552

The Field Officer Team responds consistently to all requests for service regardless of the tenure of the property. It is a developing service and the effectiveness of the service is being constantly improved as a result of feedback received from the public. The team welcomes suggestions for specific improvement where shortfalls can be identified.

ASB in a communal area is not within the Field Officer remit and should be reported to the Police or to Housing Customer Services. No record of any correspondence relating to this incident can be found, without the date of the incident or the identity of the reporter an effective search of our records is not possible.

The Housing Revenue Account contributes 17.1% of the costs of the Field Officer service. 24% of the all of the service requests dealt with by the Field Officers in the first quarter of 2019/2020 were related to Housing Revenue account property. In addition to this the Field Officers will be delivering a new innovative way to bring about neighbourhood improvements on behalf of Housing. Housing officers worked with Field Officers to review the service delivery model for estate inspections and developed a new approach to gather ideas and suggestions of residents via an on-line survey. Our Field Officers will hold local community meetings with residents, Councillors and service providers to review the results of the survey for each area. The first meetings are planned for August 2019 and the Environmental Survey went live on the website on 27 May 2019.

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## 2. Communication

There has been a marked deterioration in communication between Council officers and residents' reps. The following examples were given:

- a. A new bench for Craven Vale was agreed by the Estate Development Bid Panel and the Residents Association provided details about the exact location. When the Residents Association asked when the bench was due to be installed they were told the concrete base had already been laid. They checked the area and found that it was in the wrong place. They informed the contractor and asked them to ensure that the bench be placed in the location originally agreed. A few days later the bench was installed in the wrong place. This error could have been avoided by the contractors contacting the Residents Association before starting the work.
- b. At the Area Panel meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June Martin Reid, Assistant Director of Housing, committed to contact Woodingdean Residents Association and arrange a walk about of their area to identify possible EDB bids. Two weeks later, the Woodingdean rep has still not heard from Martin Reid's office.
- c. At the Area Panel meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June Chris El Shabba arrived ready to chair the meeting, as Mary Mears thought she would not be able to attend. Chris had spent two hours going through the agenda and preparing for the meeting. When the meeting started those present were advised that Nicole Brennan would chair the Area Panel. It transpired a separate meeting had been held that afternoon to make this decision. This caused a lot of tension in the meeting which meant that issues were not discussed as effectively or as constructively as they should be.
- d. Due to recent events, we have had feedback that some residents are experiencing a sense of disempowerment especially when officers take a lead role rather than supporting residents to be the decision makers. Residents would like to remind the officers to be mindful of 'taking over' even when the intentions are good this can be very disheartening for genuine partnership working between the council and resident groups.

Action: 3 stars (III)

It was agreed to raise this at the Agenda Setting meeting and request that procedures are put in place to ensure that agreements on communication with Residents Associations be carried out consistently.

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**Response from Sam Warren, Community Engagement Manager,**

**T: 01273 296821**

The Community Engagement Team are working with the all tenant and leaseholder groups and council services to try to ensure that where possible residents are able to influence and lead change or if this is not possible or appropriate residents are always informed and consulted within a reasonable timeframe. We acknowledge that on a number of occasions this has not been to the standard it could have been and will be working on this through the Involvement and Empowerment Group.

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*Area Panel items from East Residents Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> June 2019*

**Response from Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis**

**Monitoring Officer and Executive Lead Officer, Strategy Governance and Law,**

**T: 01273 291500**

The original terms of reference of Housing Area Panels stated that the Chair of an Area Panel would be appointed by the Housing Committee and, in the absence of such an appointment, the position should fall to a Member of the Administration. In a report to the Policy & Resources Committee in 2014, reference was made to the preference of tenants that the Ward Members for the Area should vote for the Chair, but this did not form part of the formal recommendations that were approved. The position therefore remained unchanged. There is however some difference of opinion in Area Panel members on how the process should work

Given the lack of clarity on the position, it was agreed by Group Leaders (the Leaders of the three political groups in the Council) that the matter be referred to the Constitutional Working Group for a review. This will happen in the coming month or two. It is proposed to bring the recommendations to Housing Area Panels before a decision is made by the Council on any changes to the constitution of the Area Panels.

In the meanwhile, pending the review, it was agreed (in line with the original terms of reference and usual custom and practice) that the Chair is appointed by the Housing Committee and, if no appointment is made by the committee, one of the ward Members who is a member of the administration should share the Panel.

**Response from Martin Reid, Assistant Director of Housing,**

**T: 01273 293321**

Abraham has provided the text on the issue of the decision over who decides who Chair's the meeting. Also, the referral to the Constitutional Working Group of this process as it relates to all Area Panels for review owing to the ambiguity over what residents felt the process was following a previous (2014) review and what is actually in the Constitution.

Head of Communities and Equality, Emma McDermott, and I have discussed and by way of follow up on the last meeting we also propose that I, along with Emma and / or Community Engagement Manager Sam Warren, offer to meet with East Area Panel resident reps prior to the next Panel (on 2 September) to follow up on any remaining issues of concern regarding how they were informed of the advice on Chairing arrangements at the last meeting. I would be happy to discuss if any issues arising or any further advice or input would be of use.

I apologise for the delay in organising the Woodingdean walk around with the Residents Association, however I can confirm that this is now happening on 15 August 2019.

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### 3. Decent Homes Standard

The Housing Management Performance Report presented to the Area Panel on 3<sup>rd</sup> June stated that 100% of homes meet the Decent Homes Standard (page 67, item 4.9). However, most properties have not been inspected since the large scale survey of kitchens and bathrooms was carried out more than 5 years ago. It is therefore possible that several properties have fallen below the Decent Homes Standard, particularly in relation to their kitchens and bathrooms.

Action: 3 stars (III)

It was agreed to raise this at the Agenda Setting meeting and request the following information:

- What action can be taken by tenants who believe the condition of their home may fall below the Decent Homes Standard?

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#### **Response from Glyn Huelin, Head of Housing Repairs & Improvement**

**T: 01273 293306**

Thank you for your enquiry. I have included some background information on the decent homes standard which might be helpful.

This information is also available online at <https://new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/how-we-invest-your-council-homes>

We make sure all of our council homes meet our Brighton & Hove standard. This means that our homes will:

- meet the current standard for housing set by the government
- be in a reasonable state of repair
- have reasonably modern facilities
- be warm and comfortable
- include any additional items agreed with tenants

For kitchens and bathrooms this means that at least one of the kitchen or bathroom should meet the government standard for age and condition.

The following planned works and gas boiler installations have been completed over the last three months (from April to June 2019) to maintain the Decent Homes Standard:

- 92 new kitchens
- 31 new bathrooms
- 5 new doors fitted
- 91 new window installations
- 71 properties rewired
- 18 new roofs installed
- 181 new gas boilers installed.

In order to continue to improve the information we hold about the condition of properties we are undertaking a Stock Condition Survey over the next few months. This will involve surveying 20% of the council housing stock internally and will help to inform future programmes. Once this has been completed we will update residents and share our future programmes.

Following on from this, we will continue to survey 20% of the stock each year through in house staff.

Residents can also report decent home issues to Mears 0800 052 6140 or 01273 294409 or email [bhcc.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk](mailto:bhcc.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk)

If residents have particular concerns about condition and would like a surveyor to visit please contact our Property & Investment team at [Pandlenquiries@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:Pandlenquiries@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

