

Items from North Area ROM 27th June 2019

1. Field Officers

The response to the Area Panel was discussed. There was concern that the role of Field Officers is more limited than residents originally thought it would be and they are never seen out and about on the estates.

Hollingdean Residents Association has made repeated attempts to invite them to a meeting but never receive a response.

The meeting supported the question put forward by the East Residents Meeting to the East Area Panel:

- 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?

Action:

2 stars (👏 👏)

The meeting agreed to raise this at the Area Panel to request a response on above two questions. 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.

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.

1. Drains at 68-70 Godwin Road and overall system

This issue was raised at the West Residents meeting 16/4/2019. A response was given at the Area Panel on 4/6/19. (At 18/6/19 the drains had still not been cleared). Several points of concern were raised:

- a) It is worrying that there was no record of the original complaint. Complaints were made monthly, using the online form. Every time this was done an email was also sent to Pat Liddell, to keep her informed. The absence of any record of the on-line complaints indicates that the system for reporting repairs is not working properly.
- b) There was confusion about whether or not the drain was the responsibility of highways or housing. The resident then had to follow this up with Highways as well as Housing. If there is a central repairs number, shouldn't this be sorted out by the repairs line?
- c) When a complaint is lodged, the person making it is not told when it has been actioned or kept informed of progress.
- d) The original item raised an overall concern which was not addressed. When residents asked for regular maintenance of drains in order to prevent blockages and reduce the risk of flooding they were told (Area Panel 16/10/18) that this was not necessary as any issues would be rectified as soon as they arose.

As this does not appear to be the case, it was agreed to ask at Area Panel:

- a) what is being done to improve the system
- b) for a reconsideration of the original proposal that regular maintenance would provide residents with the best and most efficient service.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Glyn Huelin, Head of Housing Repairs & Improvement/ Business & Performance Team. T: 01273 293306

Thank you for your question and please accept my apologies for how much time it has taken to progress this issue. When Mears or the council's Housing team receive complaints about block gullies/drains in the road, we should sign post the customer to the Roads & Highways Team's online form "Report a blocked rain gully or drain". I'm sorry this didn't happen in this case but we will ensure this happens in future.

For background it may be helpful for residents to know that this particular drain is not on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land and therefore Mears would not attend as the drain is on Highways land. Generally all drains in the curtilage of council housing are on HRA land, drains in the road are Highways and sewers outside the curtilage of the property are managed by Southern Water.

I completely understand that this may not be straight forward for residents to identify and so the Housing team should investigate this in the background and follow up with the relevant service – in this case the council's Roads and Highways team.

The team has had a number of reports for 68-70 Godwin Road and had their contractors visit on the 5th June 2019 and found the pot blocked. This has now been passed to their infrastructure team to consider how to best resolve this issue. This has been listed along with other sites to be considered, assessed and possibly put forward within the next yearly or next 5 year plan.

The Roads and Highways Team say rain water gullies are the drains in our streets that most often run at the edge of the road, covered by grills. Sometimes they get blocked with leaves or litter, which can cause surface flooding.

The Council has changed the way it approaches Highway gully cleaning and it now has a continual programme of gully cleaning that leads to all gullies being cleaned on either a twelve-month or eighteen-month cycle. This programme adopts a risk-based approach to make use of the funding available for such work. This approach does make full and efficient use of the available funding but does not allow for ad-hoc cleaning in response to individual requests due to both the additional cost of responding to such requests and also the problems of diverting the gully cleansing contractor's resources from their set programme.

There is an Annual and Five Year Programme of Highway Drainage Improvements and the Head of Transport Projects & Engineering determines any short-term priorities to reflect the concerns of the local community and to agree the position of such schemes within the above programmes. The Highway Drainage Improvement Programme is prioritised on the following basis but not in this order:

- o Improvements to the safety of users of the Public Highway;
- o Improvements to the operational efficiency of the Public Highway;
- o Reduce the Highway Authority's liabilities to other landowners;
- o Locations in areas identified to be at high risk of flooding;
- o Schemes of a strategic nature;
- o Cost and ease of implementation;
- o Local concerns and Member interest.

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to improve the existing Highway drainage system to a point where it will cater for extreme rainfall events, extreme rainfall events are becoming increasingly frequent, and this is attributed to climate change. The Council's planning policies are aimed amongst to help reduce the burden of new development on the drainage system however there are difficulties with the existing drainage capacity. It is also worthwhile noting that Southern Water manages the public drainage system into which the Highway drainage frequently discharges and in many locations, the sewers are at capacity. Much of the sewer system carries both foul (sewage) and surface water (rain water) and connecting more gullies to the sewers results in sewage being discharge further downstream in extreme rain fall events and so Southern Water understandably frequently reject applications from the Council to connect more gullies in these circumstances

I hope this information is helpful for residents.

2. Door entry system at Ingram Court

This issue was raised at the West Residents meeting 16/4/2019. A response was given at the Area Panel on 4/6/19

The response said that *'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'*.

However, work has started on a new door entry system at Lovegrove. Some residents were not aware of the planned work until it started. This raised two issues:

- a) Why did the promised consultation not happen effectively at Lovegrove?
- b) When promises are made at Area Panel and then not carried through it undermines confidence in the whole Area Panel system.

Ingram Court Residents' Association will be following up on this, but it was also felt it should be raised at Area Panel.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Glyn Huelin, Head of Housing Repairs & Improvements/
Business & Performance Team. T: 01273 293306

Thank you for your question.

As you have indicated the council has been reviewing our engagement processes for a range of works including planned programmes, door entry systems and door replacements. This has followed feedback from residents that we were not engaging effectively about changes and works that had an impact on tenants and leaseholders.

The replacement work for Lovegrove Court has been undertaken this was because this work was already in progress before the new engagement processes were introduced. In particular leaseholder consultation notices were sent out on 9th January 2019 and 3rd April 2019 so further early engagement was not appropriate for these projects.

All future and current main entrance door and door entry system replacements at blocks have been consulted with the new consultation process of receiving pre-engagement letters.

I hope this information is helpful and answers your question.

3. Field Officers

There is some confusion about the role of Field Officers.

The response to a question raised by North Area (Residents' question time, Area Panel agenda June 6th 2019) says that:

- a) The Field Officer team carries out enforcement action only on behalf of other council departments.
- b) Field Officers can be contacted on 01273 291485 or at fieldofficers@brighton-hove.gov.uk

It isn't clear when and why residents should contact Field Officers directly, as they can only action items raised by other council departments.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Brett Stacey, Field Officer Manager. T: 01273 291552

Residents can use the contact details given above to request information which relates to any issue which is currently under investigation by the Field officer team. Residents should continue to report any new concerns to the responsible council department using the information on the council's website.

4. Don't Walk By

The Council's recently launched 'Don't walk by' policy aims to encourage residents to immediately report issues and problems as soon as they become aware of them.

It was agreed that this is a good policy, and one that Resident Association representatives are in the forefront of implementing.

It was noted that this policy will only succeed if a) there is a clear, accessible and people-friendly way to report issues and b) reporting issues leads to action.

Problems with the system that residents have encountered are:

- If you phone, you are often put into a queue, with no indication of how long you will have to wait.
- You don't get to communicate with the person responsible for that area.
- You don't get any feed-back on how your complaint has progressed – it can feel that it disappears into a void.
- If there is no action as a result of the complaint, you have to go through the whole process again. People lose faith in the system, and the motivation to report issues.
- If the issue you have raised can't be resolved, you are not told why.
- Increasingly the only way to report issues is on-line. This discriminates against lots of people who do not have access to computers. Residents have been told they can go to the library, but this clearly discourages immediate reporting of problems.

It was agreed that if the Don't Walk By policy is going to work, residents' experience and feed-back on how the system works needs to be taken on board, and the system improved in the light of these comments.

A discussion about this was requested for the Area Panel.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Janet Dowdell, Tenancy Services Operational manager

T: 01273 293191

We are pleased residents agree this is a good policy and thank them for taking time to feedback on their experiences with reporting issues to us.

When we launched the policy we aimed to provide as many contact methods as possible to enable staff and residents to report issues easily in the method they choose. To do this we have tried not to add confusion by providing too many different routes into the service. Following this feedback we have added additional information to help understanding around where to report issues against different team contacts so that it reaches the correct part of our service without delay. See below:

How to report

Online:

- Complete a [Report a problem](#) form on the Council website
- [Join the Housing Facebook page & report non urgent issues](#)
- [Follow @BHCCtenants on Twitter for service updates](#)

By email or telephone:

Email: housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk **For reporting of ASB & tenancy related issues. Fencing issues and Car parks and garage enquiries**

- Telephone: 01273 293030
- Email: BHCC.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk **For reporting repairs to aerials, central heating, chimneys, external doors, drains and covers, flooring & walls.**
- Telephone Freephone 0800 052 6140 (24hrs) or 01273 294409
- Email: estatesserviceteam@brighton-hove.gov.uk **For reporting emergency sharps, lock changes, graffiti removal in communal ways, fly tipping on housing land, repairs to communal lights.**
- Telephone: 01273 294769
- Email: seniorshousing@brighton-hove.gov.uk **For reporting repairs please contact Housing customer services number as displayed.**
- Telephone: 01273 293030

By post, address all enquiries to:

Housing Centre
Unit 1 Fairway Trading Estate
Eastergate Road

Below are answers to

- If you phone, you are often put into a queue, with no indication of how long you will have to wait.

Response: The response time for calls to the Housing Customer Service team (01273 293030) is good, with the average waiting time in June being one minute. The Housing Customer Service team is increasingly receiving contact from residents by email and web enquiries, particularly for non-urgent queries and again response times to this form of contact is very good, with the team replying to the majority of queries in one working day. The council's telephony system does not have the facility to advise callers of where they are in the queue, if their call is not immediately answered. The current telephony contract is coming to an end and this is one of the features that we are looking to include in the future.

Mears telephony systems do not state how long a caller has to wait as this is dependent on how long the existing calls take to end, however the Repairs Helpdesk telephony system does indicate where the caller is in the queue e.g. "you are 2nd the queue". The average call wait time for the month of June for the Repairs Helpdesk was 52 seconds.

- You don't get to communicate with the person responsible for that area.

Response: If you are reporting a tenancy related issue and it needs to be managed as a case, the issue will be allocated to one of our Housing Officers working out of the area teams or our Complex Cases Team. If allocated, you will be provided with the Officer name and direct contact details and they will maintain contact with you until the case is closed. This guidance is aimed at reporting communal issues on Housing land and the service doesn't have area based officers for this.

- You don't get any feed-back on how your complaint has progressed – it can feel that it disappears into a void.

Response: When reporting a repair, you should be given a job reference number, if not please ask for it. For an update, please call the Repairs Helpdesk quoting the job reference number. Unfortunately Mears do not have resources to call residents to provide updates on the vast number of communal repairs carried out.

- If there is no action as a result of the complaint, you have to go through the whole process again. People lose faith in the system, and the motivation to report issues.

Response: If you are not satisfied with the Repairs Service, please follow the agreed Process for Resident Representatives to Resolve Repairs Issues.

- If the issue you have raised can't be resolved, you are not told why.

Response: As above, if you have a job reference number you can make enquiries to Mears about any reports you make to the service for a repair. When managing requests for funding under the new Environmental Improvement Budget, we have introduced a process which includes direct feedback on projects being considered. The projects coming from our new Environmental Improvement Meetings will also follow this process and results will be posted on the website.

- Increasingly the only way to report issues is on-line. This discriminates against lots of people who do not have access to computers. Residents have been told they can go to the library, but this clearly discourages immediate reporting of problems.

Response: We provide details of the many different methods of accessing our service and although for many, email is the most straightforward we understand that this will not be the case for all residents. We ensure all methods of accessing the service are managed by staff but some receive high levels of demand, and this can sometimes lead to a delay in our ability to respond quickly.

5. Equality and inclusivity of customer services

It is becoming more and more difficult to contact customer services unless you do this on line. It was agreed that this is discriminatory and not good practise in terms of the council's commitment to equality and inclusivity.

Alternative options need to be available so everyone is able to access the services.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Tracie James, Housing Customer Services Manager. T: 01273 293212

I am sorry to hear that some residents are having difficulties in contacting Housing Customer Services. We want our residents to have a choice of methods to contact us; they can ring us, email, send a tweet or a Facebook message.

We're keen to encourage people who can, to report on line, but this is just one method of contact and it allows residents who are unavailable during working hours, to contact us. We are currently replying to emails and on line form requests within 24 hours.

On average we receive approximately 3000 phone calls a month and in June had an average telephone answering time of 1 minute 16 seconds. Housing Customer Service is currently exceeding the Council customer promise for contact.

However, there may be times when many people call us at the same time, which means waiting times will increase. We are currently looking into how we can introduce a queuing system, so people will know how long they may have to wait; this means if they phone at a busy time they can decide whether to wait or phone later.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

6. Rubbish clearance at Clarendon & Ellen

There has been a reduction in the number of rubbish bins at Clarendon & Ellen. At Livingstone, for example, bins have been reduced from 11 to 2. These are supposed to be collected every day, but this doesn't happen. Rubbish then piles up around the bins and becomes a health and safety issue.

The bins have also been relocated on to a public road, leading to them being used by people not living at Clarendon & Ellen and compounding the problem.

Measures need to be taken to ensure that City Clean carry out their contractual duties properly.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

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Response from Lynsay Cook, Head of Business Support & Projects, T: 01273 292448

The bins in the Clarendon and Ellen Estate have not been reduced. The refuse and recycling bins in the surrounding area had to be moved, as they were a fire risk due to their location against the buildings. A City Clean Team Leader has met with Housing Officers and tenants to talk over what we are proposing to do with the bins. At the moment the bins have been moved from away from the building and placed in two car parking spaces towards the road. We are currently waiting on delivery of new communal bins, which are the larger bins around the city. Once these bins have been installed they will be collected frequently, starting with collections every day until we can gauge how many collections are required to avoid overflow. In the interim we are trying to arrange for the crew usually emptying on a Thursday, to also do so on a Monday, to reduce the amount of waste that is being blown into the street

7. Rats at Clarendon & Ellen

There is a major rat problem at Clarendon & Ellen. In Ellen Street, there is a rat hole in the public garden against the bedroom wall of one of the houses. A resident has videoed 6 rats coming in and out of this hole.

A number of concerns were raised:

- Calls to the 293030 line resulted in the suggestion that a supervisor came out to look at the situation in a couple of weeks' time. A quick response is needed when dealing with a vermin problem; this is a health and safety issue.
- Individual residents have been told that they are responsible for the cost of pest control. This is unreasonable when building work and uncollected rubbish have helped create, and then added to the problem.
- Residents have been told that if the problem is 'outside' then the council will pay costs, and if it is 'inside' the resident is responsible. This is a difficult distinction to make as rats move between areas and residents can be experiencing a problem in their homes which is caused elsewhere.

It was agreed to raise this at Area Panel and ask for a) quicker response times when vermin problems are reported and b) clarification of the reasoning about when the council or the resident are responsible for payment.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Tracie James, Customer Services Manager T: 293212

This case was raised as "urgent" with Mears but the contractor advised this can take up to 20 days for action to be taken.

Generally, if rats are in the resident's property, it is the responsibility of the resident to deal with the problem; this is stated in the Tenancy Handbook. If the problem is in the communal area, then the council takes responsibility for dealing with this.

Response from P&I

Thank you for your question. In this case our sub-contractors, Betapest, have carried out a 3-stage rat eradication treatment to the communal garden area which backs onto the property and Mears returned on 19th July to repair the wall and fill in two holes where the rats were coming from.

As a general rule, it is the tenant's responsibility to deal with pests inside their home, and some can be dealt with themselves. However, some pests need specialised treatment and it is essential to get professional advice on how to deal with them safely without damaging the environment. The council's Pest Control Team offers advice on all types of pests. They treat rats, mice, cockroaches, wasps and fleas. You can contact them on 01273 294266.

In summary, individual properties are usually responsible for paying for the eradication of pests however, for communal properties or cases affecting multiple homes the council will raise jobs when pests are reported for infestations to the common ways, affecting a number of dwellings or where there is a structural impact, such as in this case with the rats in the communal gardens.

I hope this information is helpful.

8. Report back on major works at Clarendon & Ellen

Major works, including replacing windows, doors and roofs, have been taking place at Clarendon & Ellen since May 2019. Resident representatives were told there would be a survey done on each flat before work started, but this hasn't happened. Instead standard work is being carried out across all properties.

Residents asked for an explanation of why the individual surveys have not taken place.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Ella Warde,
Partnership & Resident Liaison Officer/Business & Performance Team.

Thank you for your question which we have followed up with the Major Projects team at Mears.

Mears have confirmed that prior to windows being fitted, every property had a survey completed by our contractors, Lee Sullivan. As part of this the windows were measured and photographs were taken, prior to ordering the new window.

We can also confirm that no other surveys are being carried out to individual flats and apologies if there has been any misunderstanding.

If there are specific items that residents feel need to be considered or further surveys are needed please let us know through our enquiries team at Pandlenquiries@brighton-hove.gov.uk

9. Upkeep of gardens

A lot of properties in the Knoll area have gardens which are not being maintained. There does not appear to be any enforcement of tenancy requirements to keep your garden tidy.

It was agreed to ask for information on what action the council takes to ensure gardens are properly maintained.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Jake Woollard, Housing Officer, Complex Case Housing Team
T: 01273 291937

Untidy Gardens Project Brief - Hangleton Summary

July 2019

The untidy gardens project has been in full operation since the beginning of January 2019. The project has been led by Housing Officer, Jake Woollard and assisted by two new Housing Apprentices.

Hangleton

The number of untidy garden cases in Hangleton that have been allocated to the team since the start of the project is 62 (as of the date of this brief).

By writing to, visiting and otherwise positively engaging with tenants, the number of cases the team has managed to address, resolve and close currently stands at 38, which is just over 61% of the overall untidy garden cases raised in Hangleton.

Here are some before and after examples of one of the team’s recent cases in the Hangleton area:



This particular garden was entirely dealt with by the tenant after the team sent several letters and conducted multiple visits.

The team will continue to carry out inspections in Hangleton for the duration of the project. As part of these inspections, we will monitor all existing cases, as well as identify any new cases along the way; however, if you wish to raise any specific issues, please do so by emailing

Housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk

10. Age restricted blocks

Philip Court was built as a block for over 50's. Residents moved into the block on this understanding, and were given to believe this would continue. The adult children of some residents were unable to move into Philip Court with them. At some stage, with no consultation or even notification to residents, the over 50's status of the block was removed.

It was noted that Clarke Court and other blocks in the city have also lost their over-50's status, and that this is an issue of city-wide concern.

Philip Court Residents' Association would like the block to still be designated as over 50's and are asking for the council to re-introduce this.

The following points were raised for Area Panel:

- Why were residents not consulted or informed about the change to Philip Court and other block's over 50's status?
- Why was the over-50's status removed?
- Will Brighton & Hove City Council commit to a policy of re-introducing over 50's blocks? If the impediment to doing this is central government regulations, B&HCC should lobby for these to be changed, so they can implement a policy requested by their residents.

Action: III for West agenda setting meeting and all Area Panel agendas

Response from Lorraine Bourton, Housing Manager- rehousing
T: 01273 293217

Thank you for your enquiry about age restrictions in council properties.

The age restriction has not been removed from Philip Court. We would not however, advertise a property for re-letting with the age restriction if the property had a mobility rating as the latter takes priority.

Residents Question Time

Items from East Resident Only Minutes 20/06/19

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?

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.

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 3rd 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 3rd 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.

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.

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 as 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.

2. Decent Homes Standard

The Housing Management Performance Report presented to the Area Panel on 3rd 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?

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

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

Items from the Central Tenant Only meeting held on 26/6/19

1. How can we deal quickly and effectively with local upkeep and environmental issues?

It was agreed that there is no effective procedure for identifying and resolving building and environmental problems at an early stage. Small issues become big ones, and persistent small problems generally make people's homes and environment more difficult.

It was felt that despite an increase in personnel – Field Officers, Community Engagement Officers – there were no improvements in this area. It was also felt that the 'Don't Walk by' policy is not working effectively, as people generally do not report problems. Estate Inspections had been a past attempt to address this, but were also not entirely successful.

It was agreed that a review was needed to look at procedures for identifying and sorting out building and environment problems, as they arise.

Action: III to agenda setting meeting for Area Panel

Response from Janet Dowdell / Tenancy Services Operational Manager / Housing Services / 01273 293191

'Don't walk by'

We are pleased residents agree this is a good policy and thank residents for taking the time to provide feedback on their experiences with reporting issues to us.

When we launched the policy we aimed to provide as many contact methods as possible to enable staff and residents to report issues easily in the method they choose. To do this we have attempted to avoid confusion by providing too many different routes into the service. Following this feedback we have added additional information to help understanding around where to report issues against the different team contacts so that it reaches the correct part of our service without delay. See below –

How to report

Online:

- Complete a [Report a problem](#) form on the Council website
- Join the Housing Facebook page & report non urgent issues
- Follow @BHCCtenants on Twitter for service updates

By email or telephone:

Email: housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk **For reporting of ASB & tenancy related issues. Fencing issues and Car parks and garage enquiries**

- Telephone: 01273 293030
- Email: BHCC.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk **For reporting repairs to aerials, central heating, chimneys, external doors, drains and covers, flooring & walls.**
- Telephone Freephone 0800 052 6140 (24hrs) or 01273 294409
- Email: estatesserviceteam@brighton-hove.gov.uk **For reporting emergency sharps, lock changes, graffiti removal in communal ways, fly tipping on housing land, repairs to communal lights.**
- Telephone: 01273 294769
- Email: seniorshousing@brighton-hove.gov.uk **For reporting repairs please contact Housing customer services number as displayed.**
- Telephone: 01273 293030

By post, address all enquiries to:

Housing Centre
Unit 1 Fairway Trading Estate
Eastergate Road
Brighton
BN2 4QL

Below are answers to specific queries -

- If you phone, you are often put into a queue, with no indication of how long you will have to wait.

Response: The response time for calls to the Housing Customer Service team (01273 293030) is good, with the average waiting time in June being one minute. The Housing Customer Service team is increasingly receiving contact from residents by email and web enquiries, particularly for non urgent queries and again response times to this form of contact is very good, with the team replying to the majority of queries in one working day. The council's telephony system does not have the facility to advise callers of where they are in the queue, if their call is not immediately answered. The current telephony contract is coming to an end and this is one of the features that we are looking to include in the future.

Mears telephony systems do not state how long a caller has to wait as this is dependent on how long the existing calls take to end, however the Repairs Helpdesk telephony system does indicate where the caller is in the queue e.g. "you are 2nd the queue". The average call wait time for the month of June for the Repairs Helpdesk was 52 seconds.

- You don't get to communicate with the person responsible for that area.

Response: *If you are reporting a tenancy related issue and it needs to be managed as a case, the issue will be allocated to one of our Housing Officers working out of the area teams or our Complex Cases Team. If allocated, you will be provided with the Officer name and direct contact details and they will maintain contact with you until the case is closed. This guidance is aimed at reporting communal issues on Housing land and the service doesn't have area based officers for this.*

- You don't get any feed-back on how your complaint has progressed – it can feel that it disappears into a void.*

Response: *When reporting a repair, you should be given a job reference number, if not please ask for it. For an update, please call the Repairs Helpdesk quoting the job reference number. Unfortunately Mears do not have resources to call residents to provide updates on the vast number of communal repairs carried out.*

- If there is no action as a result of the complaint, you have to go through the whole process again. People lose faith in the system, and the motivation to report issues.*

Response: *If you are not satisfied with the Repairs Service, please follow the agreed Process for Resident Representatives to Resolve Repairs Issues - please find attached.*

- If the issue you have raised can't be resolved, you are not told why.*

Response: *As above, if you have a job reference number you can make enquiries to Mears about any reports you make to the service for a repair. When managing requests for funding under the new Environmental Improvement Budget, we have introduced a process which includes direct feedback on projects being considered. The projects coming from our new Environmental Improvement Meetings will also follow this process and results will be posted on the website.*

- Increasingly the only way to report issues is on-line. This discriminates against lots of people who do not have access to computers. Residents have been told they can go to the library, but this clearly discourages immediate reporting of problems.*

Response: *We provide details of the many different methods of accessing our service and although for many, email is the most straight forward we understand that this will not be the case for all residents. We ensure all methods of accessing the service are managed by staff but some receive high levels of demand, and this can sometimes lead to a delay in our ability to respond quickly.*

