

Items from the Tenant Only meeting held on 17/9/19

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**1. Equality and inclusivity of Customer Services**

There is still significant concern about the overall move in the council towards online communication. It was felt this discriminates against people with disabilities and those who cannot afford computers.

Although there are sometimes other methods of contact, these tend to be slower and less effective. Also, if you ring you are sometimes told that what you need to do is to fill out an online form. There is often no option to fill out a paper form.

It was agreed to raise this at the Tenant Disability Group as well as the Area Panel.

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

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Response from: Anna Spragg, Equalities Manager, Communities, Equality & Third Sector- T: 01273 291343

There is not an overall move in the council towards online communications. We are committed to working in partnership with customers to ensure council services are inclusive and accessible to everyone. We have developed Our Customer Promise, a set of commitments based on customer feedback aimed at ensuring we are doing the best we can for our customers. As part of this we recognise that customers have different needs with regards to communication. Though many people prefer online communication as a quicker and more convenient method, we appreciate that it will not be appropriate for everyone. Therefore, we offer customers different ways to contact us and access our services. Where a customer has specific needs, our aim is to work with them to find the best ways to communicate.

In additions, the council part funds a digital inclusion charity, who support people to get access to the internet not just for council services but for things that may help them- such as online shopping for those who have reduced mobility. Further information, including a case study about this can be found here: <https://www.citizenonline.org.uk/digitalbrightonhove/>.

We also provide free resources to support residents to get online should they wish to – this includes free digital support sessions and free paces to access

the internet in Brighton & Hove. Further information can be found here:  
<https://digitalbrightonandhove.org.uk/>

We are fully committed to ensuring our services are inclusive and accessible for everyone, including the ways we communicate. Feedback from residents who identify any situations where this is not happening is really helpful as it supports us continually to improve. If a resident has experience with a council service where alternative communications has not been offered, we would like to know about it so we can understand and address the situation. We would encourage residents to provide feedback to our services if they're not accessible.

Thank you for raising this concern. We really value your feedback and want to get this right every time.

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## ***2. Rats at Clarendon & Ellen***

At the last Area panel in September, residents argued that if a problem with rats was exacerbated by building works then the council has the responsibility to sort this out.

The council policy on this needs to be clear and it has been requested that this is included in the next area panel.

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Response from: Hilary Edgar, Housing Services Operations Manager, Income, Involvement & Improvement – T: 01273 293250 & Glyn Huelin, Head of Housing/ Repairs & Improvement – T: 01273 293306

Within the council's pest control policy residents, including council tenants, are responsible for meeting the cost of the majority of treatments to individual properties.

If a pest control officer finds that an infestation has originated from the common parts of a council managed block, the council will fund the necessary treatment.

There is flexibility in the policy for the council to fund treatments to individual properties when a number of flats in the block are similarly affected.

The council is working to address issues with residents and has agreed that some areas require blocking up.

If there are any further issues, please give any feedback through Mears or P & I Enquiries.

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### **3. What will help us to build strong Residents' Associations**

The following points were raised in discussion:

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- Associations can appear a bit dry and formal. Would having a different format and title help- for example 'Friends of...?'
- Associations need to be open and friendly, in publicity and at meetings.
- There needs to be more varied and imaginative ways of involving people, including looking at options for using skype and online communication (in addition to meetings). There needs to be an open discussion about what the possibilities are and how these could be implemented.
- How to get people involved is a major issue- it's often the same few people who come along. It was agreed that more discussion, support and sharing of experience around this issue would be useful.
- A lack of progress with issues that residents raise discourages involvement and demoralises participants. Getting action would encourage people to get involved.
- Community Engagement officers (CEOs) could have more of a role as residents' advocates, helping them to get action and progress issues. This would involve a more active role in making sure items raised at residents' meetings got an adequate response that moved things forward.
- It's important that residents' voices are heard and acknowledged. There's a lot of frustration because issues seem to disappear or get side-lined. Good communication would make difference, even if the outcome isn't always exactly what you wanted.
- Make meetings and events more fun!
- People will get involved if there's an issue that concerns them. How do you a) find out what these issues are and b) raise them in a clear and constructive way?
- Publicity about the association activities could do with a re-vamp and be more dynamic and lively.
- A re-assessment of areas covered by individual associations would be helpful – looking at options to make them bigger or smaller.

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A re-assessment of areas covered by individual associations would be helpful – looking at options to make them bigger or smaller. It was noted that the Resource Centre can help with publicity design and ideas as well as looking at ways of increasing involvement and other aspects of running a Residents' Association. Contact Kate on

01273 606160 / [kate.page@resourcecentre.org.uk](mailto:kate.page@resourcecentre.org.uk) for more information.

It was agreed this is a useful discussion that needs to be ongoing and to report back on the issues raised at Area Panel

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Response from: Sam Warren. Manager Community Engagement team, Communities, Equality & Third Sector, T: 01273 298621

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*Item on the agenda for discussion, reply to North on similar issues.*

The Community Engagement Team is a new service that supports all residents within the city to be involved in any council service. Whilst the team have maintained their work with tenants groups, Area Panels and Service Involvement Groups, we are also working with a range of community groups, working on Neighbourhood Action Plans, supporting the development of volunteering and Neighbourhood Hubs.

As a team we are very keen to engage more residents in all areas of the councils work. In order to do this we have recently recruited a new administration worker and replaced the Estate Development role as this will enable the CEO's to get out onto our Estates and into the communities to do more face to face work with residents and community groups.

In relation to Area Panels and resident only meetings we are keen to involve as many tenants as possible, currently the structure and terms of reference for Area Panels state that only reps are able to participate fully in meetings and any other tenant would need to be an observer, it would be interesting to open this up to welcome more people. We are especially keen to ensure that all the tenant structures are more representative of the whole community including involving more young people, BME and LGBTQ residents in decision making. I welcome working with all groups and Area Panels to look how we open up participation. If you have ideas or thoughts

on how we can engage more residents please do contact me directly on [Sam.warren@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:Sam.warren@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

#### ***4. Weeding and grounds maintenance***

Concerns were raised about the deteriorating state of public areas on the estates. It's difficult to have pride in the place you live when the upkeep is increasingly neglected.

Clarendon & Ellen and Conway Court were given as an example of this; benches are unusable because of overgrowing trees and weeds are rampant. It's reaching the point of a Health & Safety issue.

It was agreed that lack of grounds maintenance is a city-wide issue, although some areas seem to be receiving more services than others

It was agreed to raise these concerns at area panel and ask for a report on the grounds maintenance services in different areas

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Response from: Sarah Carlisle, Operations Manager, Cityparks Operations,  
T: 01273 294327

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I would say that Clarendon & Ellen are not great examples of typical Grounds Maintenance service – access being severely restricted due to the building works and of course that has left sites untended for over a year. Because Cityparks staff could not access or it wasn't safe to do so. This will result in overgrown shrubs, long grass and weeds. This will take time to catch up. The laying of shingle under shrub areas has affected maintenance as machinery cannot be used near this. There is also a builders' bag left on site and near the shingle.

Cityparks are contracted to deliver 10 cuts per year (or equivalent maintenance), All areas under my remit where we have had full access are on target and last year we fulfilled this contract.

Annual pruning was carried out at every Housing site within contract that we were able to access.

The Glyphosate ban is now in place, therefore weeds in hard standing will be an issue everywhere around the city. I have requested my staff to spend an equal amount of time that they would have spent spraying using appropriate weed removal techniques; this is an issue that will be ongoing and we are looking into alternatives.

Tree pruning is not within the contract with Cityparks.

All sites vary tremendously- some have an exceptional level of obstacles: washing lines, ponds, gates, garden furniture and trampolines. Some have high levels of dogs' faeces and litter. Sites like Elizabeth Court are accessible, with no obstacles and the grounds maintenance team can drive directly to it. On other sites, access is difficult due to parking and new fences and gates. The team has to negotiate these so it takes longer to carry out the work. All sites are on rotation and get the same amount of attention; my Team leader report weekly on what has been achieved and this is shared with Housing Managers.

The city is split between two Operations Managers; I am responsible for Hove and West central Brighton and refer specifically to the areas within my remit.