

Brighton and Hove City Council

Housing Committee

Agenda Item 24 (b)

Member Questions for 28 September 2022 Housing Committee.

Question 1:

Councillor Meadows to Chair of Housing Committee

Housing Repairs figures

At the last meeting of this Committee the Chair presented the following housing statistics for May 2022:

- a) Empty homes (210)
- b) Repairs backlog (9,608)
- c) Capital cost of accumulated repairs (£1.5m)
- d) Lost rent from empty homes (£1.343m, exceeding the void rent lost budget of £636,000)
- e) Average re-let time (177 days)

Can the Chair update these figures for a-e to the latest available? With void rent lost currently running at more than double what has been budgeted for this item, can the Chair advise the number of the current empty homes that would need to be filled in order to bring this back within budget.

Councillor Meadows

Question 2:

Councillor Barnett to Chair of Housing Committee

Estate inspections and council offices

The Council's Housing Officers used to conduct fortnightly ward inspections of the council's housing estates, which the ward councillors also attended. In my ward these inspections used to take place on Tuesday mornings, every fortnight. They were always in the diary - sometimes the Housing Department had to cancel but not very often.

These inspections were warmly welcomed by the residents and helped resolve issues promptly that had emerged on the estates and put a human face to the council's housing department.

Then in 2018 the then Labour Council decided to change all this and bring in Field Officers instead under its new policy and the regular estate visits immediately stopped.

The Field Officers policy has failed housing and left residents in the council's estates feeling completely disconnected from the council.

The problem is that field officers have responsibilities for seven areas, not just housing: including parks, seafront services, community safety, planning enforcement, environmental health and noise nuisance. There is a sense that currently Field Officers are more focused on people dropping cigarettes in the city centre than visiting the housing estates to engage with issues there.

Under the Field Officer policy a disconnect between the council's housing department and housing tenants has opened up. Not only have the regular estate visits from housing officers stopped but housing tenants and leaseholders are now no longer able to visit the housing offices as they used to before the pandemic as these offices are not open, which has put up another barrier.

We recently heard that estate inspections might be starting up again and that there was one in Portslade.

Can the Chair advise:

- a) Are estate inspections being brought back?
- b) When will the Council's Housing offices fully reopen again for residents so that people can walk in and see someone as they did before the pandemic?
- c) Does he accept the Field officer policy has failed Housing?
- d) How many of the seven FTE field officer equivalent positions are currently filled and what proportion of their time is currently allocated to housing?

Councillor Barnett

Question 3:

Re Knoll House

Cllr Nemeth to Chair:

"Please provide an account of the situation from a housing perspective following what was ultimately an eviction by Brighton & Hove City Council of 37 residents of Knoll House in Wish Ward."

**Cllr Robert Nemeth
Wish Ward**