

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 42

Brighton & Hove City
Council

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

3.00pm 26 SEPTEMBER 2011

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Wakefield (Chair); Duncan, Farrow, Jarrett, Mears, Peltzer Dunn, Pidgeon, Randall and Robins

Tenant Representatives: Ted Harman (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), David Murtagh (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Trish Barnard (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Jean Davis (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Stewart Gover (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Heather Hayes (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Tina Urquhart (West Hove & Portslade Area Area Housing Management Panel), Beverley Weaver (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Chris Kift (Hi Rise Action Group), Muriel Briault (Leaseholders Action Group), Tom Whiting (Sheltered Housing Action Group) and Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network)

PART ONE

25. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

25A Declarations of Substitute Members

25.1 Councillor Jarrett declared that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Summers. Councillor Mears declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Wells.

25B Declarations of Interests

25.2 Councillor Randall, Heather Hayes and Ted Harman declared a personal interest in any discussion on the LDV as they are Board Members of Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes (the Local Delivery Vehicle).

25C Exclusion of the Press and Public

25.3 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

25.4 **RESOLVED** – That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting.

26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 26.1 *Elections at Area Panels* – Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 16.14. This stated that it was necessary to talk to 70 organisations. However, in Item 36 - Establishing a Tenant Scrutiny Panel – paragraph 3.8, it stated that there were 72 associations. Councillor Mears asked for clarification on how many organisations officers were communicating with. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion replied that the numbers of organisations did vary from time to time, and it would have been more accurate to say *around 70*. Councillor Mears stressed that there needed to be work carried out with tenants to ascertain exactly how many organisations there were who should be consulted. The Chair agreed to this course of action.
- 26.2 *Satisfaction Survey* – Councillor Robins referred to paragraph 24.31. He stressed that he was asking if the contractors were the right people to be asking if people were satisfied or not. He was not asking if they were paid for saying people were satisfied.
- 26.3 Ted Harman questioned the satisfaction responses. If for example, only one fifth of residents completed the survey, then the percentage only reflected the views of a minority of tenants.
- 26.4 Stewart Gover referred to paragraph 24.39. There had been a discussion at the Housing Centre about the Satisfaction Survey. It appeared that the 95% satisfaction rating came from a 25% collation. If 25% were satisfied, then there may have been double the number who were not satisfied.
- 26.5 *Fire Doors* – Jean Davis referred to paragraph 24.25. She reported that she had been visited by an officer who had stated that Mears Ltd had not been doing their job. He had promised to get back to her. She had heard nothing. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that Mark Dennison, Contract Compliance Manager had visited Jean to discuss the problem with fire doors. He would check with Mark to see what action he was taking.
- 26.6 Tom Whiting reported that there was a schedule of works planned for fire doors.
- 26.7 Heather Hayes reported that fire doors had been fitted to Elwin Court. Frail and elderly people would not be able to open the doors. They were too heavy and stiff. Some of the doors needed attention. She asked for action to be taken. The Chair asked officers to ensure action was taken.

- 26.8 Chris Kift reported that he had difficulty opening fire doors. He had raised the matter with his Occupational Therapist, who was looking into the matter. He hoped that the problem would soon be resolved.
- 26.9 *Legal Position regarding re-charging leaseholders for improvements* – Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 24.36 – He thanked the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion for the information he had given on this matter. However, Councillor Peltzer Dunn still felt that it was a grey area. Some improvements might weaken the council's position in asking for a re-charge (for example, providing a damp course to a property that had never had a damp course before). He considered that the leaseholder should not have to rely on appealing against the council's decision.
- 26.10 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee Meeting held on 5 September 2011 be agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the amendments.

27. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes Limited (the Local Delivery Vehicle).

- 27.1 The Chair explained that she had no communications for this meeting as it was a full agenda. However, she invited Ted Harman to speak about recent developments with the LDV.
- 27.2 Ted Harman reported that on Friday 23 September, the leases for Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes Limited were approved and signed in London. The LDV was finally open for business.
- 27.3 The Chair welcomed this good news and congratulated LDV Board members and Cllr Mears for getting the project off the ground. She recognised the work of the previous administration
- 27.4 Councillor Randall also thanked Councillor Mears for her work on this project along with councillors and tenants on the LDV Board. He thanked them all and particularly thanked the officers who had worked on the project. He hoped that the work of the LDV would be of benefit to everyone in the city.
- 27.5 Stewart Gover also thanked Councillor Mears for thinking of the project. The Board was a council inspired, arms length organisation and was not like any other RSL.
- 27.6 Tom Whiting congratulated councillors previous and present. The Board was now open for business. He had been assured that there would be a good standard of communication with Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes Ltd. The Chair agreed that she would expect that to happen.
- 27.7 Councillor Mears thanked officers but particularly wanted to thank the tenants. They had kept their nerve and seen this through. She would watch developments with interest, particularly with regard to funding. She stressed that profits should be invested in the housing stock.

28. CALLOVER

- 28.1 The Chair asked the Committee to consider which items listed on the agenda it wished to debate and determine in full.
- 28.2 **RESOLVED** - That all items be reserved for debate and determination.

29. PETITIONS

- 29.1 There were none.

30. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 30.1 There were none.

31. DEPUTATIONS

- 31.1 There were none.

32. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 32.1 The Committee considered a letter from Councillor Mears in which she expressed the view that there had been a lack of openness and transparency in the attitude of the administration towards council tenants. She expressed concern about the decision to delay the elections for the area panels due to the introduction of an "innovation group". She further expressed concern about a decision to replace the Council's Homemove Magazine with a largely internet-based service for property bidding.
- 32.2 Councillor Mears referred to a recent letter sent to tenants which had caused many concerns. She considered that the matter of delaying Area Panel elections should have been raised at the Area Panel meetings. Councillor Mears considered that there were equality issues to consider. There appeared to be no choice in this matter.
- 32.3 Councillor Mears stated that it appeared tenants were being sidelined. She referred to an email sent to councillors earlier in the afternoon regarding rent reviews from 7 October. She was concerned at the way issues were being communicated.
- 32.4 Chris Kift agreed that the letter to tenants about changes to the Area Panel elections should not have been sent out. However, since that time, tenants had discussed this matter. Having carried out research, it appeared that nothing had changed. He did not think that there would be a lack of choice. Tenants had received apologies about the letter.
- 32.5 The Chair stated that she was very happy to receive any suggestions. She shared the concerns expressed. The council was a large organisation and occasionally a letter could be sent out which caused concern.
- 32.6 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the delay of the elections to Area Panels. He was very perturbed by the unilateral action taken. He had questioned the legality of this

action at the last meeting. The Senior Lawyer had advised him on the legal position after the meeting. He gave a copy of the email to the Chair.

- 32.7 Tom Whiting stated there had been a failure of communication but he considered that that the matter had now been sorted out to some extent.
- 32.8 Chris Kift stated that at the City Assembly last year it had been agreed that in future the Area Panels would elect city wide groups for a two year period. This would allow time for representatives to gain expertise. He could not see the delay in the elections to be a great problem. Meanwhile, elections were taking place where there were vacancies due to retirement. There had been a lot of discussion about this matter at the Area Panels as well as the City Assembly.
- 32.9 Ted Harman stressed that although the proposal had taken place last year, the policy should not have changed half way during the year.
- 32.10 Stewart Gover agreed with Ted. The matter had been discussed at the four Area Panels and been voted on at the City Assembly. The matter should now be presented to all four Area Panels for formal ratification.
- 32.11 At this point the Chair suggested that it would be helpful if the tenants could get together and put all these concerns onto one or two pages of A4.
- 32.12 Beverley Weaver stated that she had been a tenant for 10 years. There had been an election every year. At the City Assembly she had voted for elections every two years. She had not expected this to take place this November.
- 32.13 Chris Kift stressed that no-one was trying to stop the elections. They were being postponed for a three month period to enable an Innovation Group to be set up. He stressed that it was essential to encourage new people to participate in the tenants' movement.
- 32.14 The Chair stated that tenants were concerned that people were leaving the tenant movement and that there was a need for new people to become involved. There was no hidden agenda. Rumours could circulate which led to misunderstanding. She encouraged tenants to talk to the administration if they had concerns.
- 32.15 The Chair thanked Councillor Mears for presenting her letter.
- 32.16 **RESOLVED** – That the letter be noted.

33. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 33.1 There were none.

34. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

- 34.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place regarding the progress made in the delivery of the Housing Services Improvement Plan and proposals

for the next phase of the programme. The improvement programme was the way that the council managed and organised work to improve services.

- 34.2 The Senior Project Manager explained that Phase One of the programme was detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the report and had been successfully completed. There would be many opportunities for residents to be involved in Phase 2 of the programme.
- 34.3 Chris Kift spoke about improvements in St James's House. The block now had a Resident Liaison Officer and an on site manager. All workmen had high visibility jackets. There was a regular newsletter and coffee mornings were organised. Everyone knew when major works would take place. Mears Ltd were getting things right.
- 34.4 Councillor Mears was please to note the key priorities set out in 3.6, which she felt followed on from the work of the previous administration. Councillor Mears had some concern at the range of projects set out in paragraph 3.7. She stressed that not everyone had access to the internet and that it was necessary to engage with all tenants in the city. With regard to the Accommodation Strategy, Councillor Mears made the point that should some of the housing offices close, it would then be necessary to be clear with tenants where they could communicate with officers. She asked if it was known how many staff would be leaving. Meanwhile Councillor Mears was concerned that the number of apprenticeships was not being achieved. It was set in the contract to look for 200 apprenticeships. There were currently 25. A clear plan needed to be brought back to HMCC.
- 34.5 The Chair thanked Councillor Mears and stated that the administration were actively encouraging apprenticeships. She asked the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion to answer the question about staff.
- 34.6 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion replied to explain that it was too early to tell how many staff were leaving. There was a voluntary severance scheme in progress. There would be no impact in terms of front line services. The aim was to improve services and access for tenants.
- 34.7 Councillor Randall thanked Councillor Mears for raising the matter of internet access. This matter would not be forgotten. It was a matter of concern and it would be followed up. Meanwhile, there would be apprenticeships and training through the partnership with Mears Ltd and Brighton and Hove Seaside Community Homes. Councillor Randall also wished to see apprenticeships extended to businesses in the city such as firms of lawyers and architects.
- 34.8 Councillor Randall stated that in future there would be more hubs in buildings such as libraries and officers would spend more time on estates rather than in offices.
- 34.9 Ted Harman made the point that although tenants were getting on well with officers on the group, there were still issues with shoddy work. Workers were letting companies and the council down. He was not happy with a door which he had fitted on Friday. He had lodged a complaint.

34.10 The Chair replied that she would be holding regular meetings with Mears Ltd and she would raise this matter. Meanwhile she made a formal proposal to add a further bullet point to 3.7 of the report, with regard to apprenticeships, learning and skills as follows:

- Provision of Apprenticeship and Training through the city partnership with Mears Ltd and Brighton and Hove Seaside Homes.

34.11 Councillor Farrow expressed concern about residents' involvement. Less than 40% of his residents had access to social media. There was a need to work with different residents. With regard to carbon reduction, he was all in favour of solar panels but noted that there were plans to fit panels in a further 1,600 properties. He asked what happened to other tenants who did not have access to cheaper electricity. That was an equality issue.

34.12 The Chair replied that solar panels and cheaper electricity would be discussed on item 39. of the agenda.

34.13 Stewart Gover referred to paragraphs 3.6, tackling inequality and 3.7 residents' involvement. Urgent section 20 work needed to be carried out and there were a whole group of residents who received massive bills.

34.14 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the progress made in Phase 1 and the preparations for Phase 2 of the Improvement Programme be noted.

(2) That the following bullet point be added to paragraph 3.7 of the report.

- Provision of Apprenticeship and Training through the city partnership with Mears Ltd and Brighton and Hove Seaside Homes.

35. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

35.1 The Committee considered a report of Strategic Director Place which concluded the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group's (TCMG) current round of work on the Resident Involvement Strategy and presented the revised and recommended document.

35.2 The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement thanked the Tenants' Compact Monitoring Group and the wider tenant movement and participation officers for the production of the strategy. A shorter summary would be available once the strategy was endorsed. The strategy would be a live document.

35.3 The Committee received a presentation from members of the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group.

35.4 Ann Ewings spoke about Objective 1 (Provide a wide range of opportunities for residents to be involved in their housing). She stressed the importance of communication by such methods as posters and more modern methods such as Facebook, Twitter, and texting. Meanwhile in order to help more tenants to become involved in the tenants' movement it was necessary to gain their confidence and help them develop skills. The Resource Centre provided training and guidance. Ann stated that tenant only meetings were very effective and there was a need to publicise the City Assembly better.

- 35.5 Muriel Briault explained that in her area, it was necessary to have social items in a newsletter in order to engage interest. Therefore newsletters had recipes, poetry and pet stories. More serious matters could also be added. It was important to be approachable when communicating with tenants.
- 35.6 Muriel went on to present objective 2 (Develop a framework for agreeing local offers and priorities with residents). Tenants wanted to concentrate on locally based issues. There was a need to get more residents to put their views forward. When tenants had decided on their priorities these should be carried out. For example, tenants wanted to make sure that what they requested from the Estate Development Budget could be done. They wanted more help before bids went in. They wanted housing officers to visit people more regularly.
- 35.7 Where areas did not have an association, tenants wanted to be able to represent them so they were not left out. Tenants wanted more staff presence at local meetings and activities. There needed to be better co-ordination between different working groups.
- 35.8 Muriel stated that her wish was to get more leaseholders involved. Those that were involved wanted to make a difference in their local area. Issues in Muriel's area of Portslade included grass cutting on banks, anti social behaviour, play areas for the children and bus shelters. Muriel stressed that people in Portslade felt left out. They wanted more information about the Housing Centre, and how it could help people in Portslade. They hoped the strategy would change that by involving all the areas equally.
- 35.9 Linda Shaw presented Objective 3 (Involving residents in the development of housing policy and the design and delivery of housing services).
- 35.10 Linda explained that she had been involved in the tenants' movement for about 20 years. In order to get more involvement tenants and leaseholders needed to feel that consultation was genuine and not just a paper exercise. Whilst looking for new people it was necessary to keep hold of people already involved. Involving residents in the direct testing of services encouraged the maintenance of a constant level of performance.
- 35.11 Linda stressed that there needed to be a clear process for enquiries or complaints, and involvement in all aspects of budget setting. People with a financial background might want to get involved. They would need training but could be of great help. There needed to be a code of conduct that encouraged mutual respect. For example the Leaseholders Action Group had moved from confrontation to collaboration with positive results. It was important to provide more choice over the services delivered and to compare performance with other Local Authorities.
- 35.12 It was recognised that some people might be excluded from the consultation process due to language and culture. The dynamics of the estates was changing and there was a need to engage with BME residents. Tenants wanted to be more creative about how they engaged. Questions to ask were how to get more people to use the online services and social media. The more information was shared about consultation and resident involvement the more the process had credibility.

- 35.13 The Chair stated that comparing performance with other local authorities and involving tenants in all aspects of budget setting was key.
- 35.14 Faith Matyszak presented Objective 4 (Involve residents in monitoring and scrutinising performance in delivering housing services). Faith stressed that one of the issues tenants and leaseholders would like was a scrutiny panel. Tenants wanted new people sitting with more experience representatives to scrutinise work, and training to enable tenants to have the skills to scrutinise and judge performance.
- 35.15 Tenants wanted to decide on the information collected and to be able to collate their own information. They wanted to decide what to present to other tenants and leaseholders, and to present their work to the city.
- 35.16 In addition to work already carried out tenants wished to develop how performance reports were monitored, and decide how annual reports were presented. They wanted a link with the regulators' website so they were able to compare standards of achievement and compare the city with other organisations of a similar size.
- 35.17 Faith stated that in her personal experience some elderly people struggled with reading English and other languages. There needed to be a way of telling everyone what tenants were doing. For example a pictorial page in news letters.
- 35.18 Faith suggested encouraging more young people to become involved by utilising the computer. There could be a game in which young people could be asked to design a solution to housing and environmental issues and to discuss issues such as fly tipping, anti social behaviour and their neighbourhood. Faith suggested running a competition about housing by young people. A prize could be given to the winner and a donation to their club or charity.
- 35.19 The Chair thanked Ann, Muriel, Linda and Faith for their presentations. She thought the suggestion of developing a game for young people was an innovative and brilliant idea. Schools and youth clubs could have a competition to come up with an idea for a game. Faith stressed that young people needed to be encouraged.
- 35.20 Stewart Gover mentioned a visit he had made to the Crew Club. He had been very impressed and had never seen a club like it.
- 35.21 Ted Harman thought the report was good and thanked everyone for taking part.
- 35.22 Tom Whiting thanked the Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement and everyone who presented the report.
- 35.23 The Chair also thanked the Head of Customer Access and Business Improvement and the tenants who had worked on the report.
- 35.24 Councillor Randall stated that the report demonstrated that tenants were a valuable resource. There was a need for better communications and a need to include ethnic monitoring. He too thanked officers and residents involved in presenting the report.

35.25 **RESOLVED** - That the Resident Involvement Strategy be endorsed.

36. ESTABLISHING A TENANT SCRUTINY PANEL

- 36.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which described how, and why, a tenant scrutiny panel was being developed as a requirement for registered social landlords and outlined the proposed model and timetable for introducing it to Brighton & Hove.
- 36.2 The report followed the development of the Resident Involvement Strategy and outlined proposals for involving tenants and leaseholders in the further development and implementation of the scrutiny arrangements. Paragraph 3.10 of the report set out how tenant scrutiny could operate in Brighton & Hove. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion stated that a further report would be brought to the HMCC early next year.
- 36.3 Councillor Mears made the point that scrutiny panels scrutinised decisions that had already been taken. She supported any tenant involvement in housing but was concerned that the report did not say if the HMCC or Area Panels would continue. With the HMCC and the Area Panels tenants had the opportunity to have their say before decisions were taken. She wanted assurance that HMCC and Area Panels would continue.
- 36.4 The Chair replied that HMCC and the Area Panels would remain. In addition, there could be involvement at scrutiny level. There was no intention of watering down the current mechanism of tenant involvement.
- 36.5 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that scrutiny could take place both before and after decisions were made.
- 36.6 Councillor Mears stated she would be reassured if the minute stated that there would be no watering down or change in the structure tenants set up. She considered that it would have been helpful to have this set out in the report.
- 36.7 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 3.7, third bullet point (power to effect change). He considered this to be ultra vires. It was not for any councillor or committee to abdicate legal responsibility. This was not legally correct.
- 36.8 Tom Whiting suggested that the sentence should be changed to “power to *recommend* change”.
- 36.9 The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion accepted Councillor Peltzer Dunn’s comments. He had been quoting the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH). He accepted Tom’s suggestion was more appropriate for a local authority.
- 36.10 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 4.2 and asked when the innovation group would be established. The Chair replied that the process was commencing in September 2011. The intention was to take this matter to the Area Panels in September and October.

- 36.11 Stewart Gover was pleased that the scrutiny process had been re-introduced. An important consideration would be who convened the Panel and how it was convened.
- 36.12 **RESOLVED** - the progress made towards establishing a tenant scrutiny panel, and the timetable for involving tenants in its further development, be noted.

37. CUSTOMER ACCESS PHASE 3 - CUSTOMER SERVICE & ACCESS STRATEGY FOR HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION

- 37.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which updated members on the review of customer access arrangements for the Housing Management Service and presented the Housing & Social Inclusion Customer Service and Access Strategy for consideration.
- 37.2 The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement presented the report and asked members to comment upon the Customer Service and Access Strategy that was presented with the report as Phase 3 of the Customer Access Review.
- 37.3 Chris Kift stated that he had looked at the hub in Bartholomew House. He had found it easy to access and it was comfortable, welcoming and very cheerful. However, he had noted that there were a lot of empty spaces and people waiting to be seen by a member of staff.
- 37.4 Councillor Robins referred to recommendation (3) in relation to Victoria Road Housing Office. He asked what was meant by "best future use". The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion replied that a decision had been made at Cabinet in March 2011, under the previous administration, to market the Victoria Road Housing Office. The proposal was to re-locate the office to the newly refurbished Portslade Town Hall which was just across the car park. Staff were looking to work with residents to ensure a smooth transition to the new hub.
- 37.5 Councillor Robins stressed that this proposal would involve taking away car park spaces. He stated that there was no bus route to the office and he asked how residents could be expected to get to the office if there was no car parking.
- 37.6 The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion stated that he could not comment about the car park but accepted that Councillor Robins had made an important point. Many residents to the west of the city wanted face to face access in other areas of the city as well as Portslade. There were plans to allow these residents additional access to an office in the Hangleton & Knoll area.
- 37.7 Chris Kift made the point that not everyone had cars. There was no car parking at Lavender Street or Oxford Street. He had been able to get to the Portslade office recently. If he had been able to get there in a wheelchair, then most people would be able to get there.
- 37.8 The Chair shared Councillor Robin's concerns. The office was not on a bus route.

- 37.9 Tina Urquhart expressed concern about access to the office without a car. She had not heard about the proposal before.
- 37.10 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that the decision to market the property had been taken in March 2011. It might be a long time before the property was marketed. The report was flagging it up. The council wanted to involve tenants on refurbishment to Portslade Town Hall.
- 37.11 Councillor Mears expressed concern with the emphasis on social media in the report. She felt that the council should ensure that it communicated with residents who could not, or did not want to access the internet.
- 37.12 David Murtagh referred to the free paper sent out with the Brighton & Hove Leader. He stressed that the Leader was not delivered to certain areas of the city. However, he reported that communication with council officers had improved in Moulsecoomb.
- 37.13 Trish Barnard questioned how the proposals could be communicated to people who did not speak English. The Chair replied that the council were aware of this issue and did have access to interpreters.
- 37.14 Councillor Mears referred to the proposed move of the Manor Place Housing Office. The office was currently in a level area in the lower part of Whitehawk. She was concerned that moving the office to Whitehawk Library could cause problems. The twitten leading to the library was icy in winter and elderly people would find have difficulty accessing the office.
- 37.15 The Chair explained that she had held discussions with the bus company regarding the possibility of getting a bus re-directed to the library. She was also talking to the Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement regarding access. The aim was to find solutions to these issues.
- 37.16 Beverley Weaver stated that she was very concerned about the proposal for the Portslade office. She asked if the service would be the same after the move. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reaffirmed that issues regarding the move would be addressed. Meanwhile, the strategy would provide more time for officers to spend on the estates.
- 37.17 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the section of the strategy titled "Optimising existing channels". The figures quoted underlined the need for balanced change. It would be helpful to have a more detailed report to a future meeting.
- 37.18 Barry Kent referred to table 1, "Transaction costs for different channels." He asked how officers could put a value on communication. The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement explained that the table was not just about cost. The idea was to show that the cost of dealing with customers face to face was high. If the internet was used it would save money and officers could use the reserve to help people who needed face to face contact.
- 37.19 Councillor Pidgeon made the point that although the needs of disabled people had been discussed, he had not heard any discussion about the needs of totally blind people. He

questioned how many blind people would want to walk through a library to get to the housing centre.

- 37.20 The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement stated that officers had thought about residents with a range of disabilities. She mentioned that BrowseAloud was used by people who were blind/short sighted. The technology allowed print on the screen to talk back to users.
- 37.21 Councillor Pidgeon made the point that most people went blind between the ages of 65-70. He considered that they were too old to use a computer.
- 37.22 Jean Davis mentioned that Beryl Snelling would love to come to the meetings of HMCC, but was unable to attend as there were no wheelchairs in Hove Town Hall. The Chair stated that this matter would be investigated. She felt that it should be considered in relation to the council's equalities policy. She thanked Jean for raising this matter.
- 37.23 Councillor Jarrett raised the issue of elderly people and the use of computers. He reported that Age Concern had run pilots regarding the use of computers. There had been a significant uptake, and this needed encouragement. There was a wide range of related technology used by people with sensory and visual impairments.
- 37.24 Councillor Pidgeon explained that he had had to deal with a blind person for 44 years. He stressed that not all people could cope with the technology. The Chair thanked Councillor Pidgeon for raising this issue and suggested meeting with him to discuss the issue further.
- 37.25 Chris Kift mentioned that he used to be an IT tutor. One of his students was 86 years old. He had gained basic qualifications. Another student was a war veteran who had lost his eyes. He had got on well and had received a Braille certificate.
- 37.26 The Chair thanked Chris but stressed that Councillor Pidgeon's point was that not everyone could use the internet.
- 37.27 **RESOLVED** - (1) That the Customer Service and Access Strategy be approved.
- (2) That members' comments on the strategy be noted, and that it be further noted that key areas for action within the strategy include:
- (a) Promotion and support for customers to use more effective methods for accessing housing information and services in line with council-wide 'Improving Customer Experience' work and our corporate Channel Shift Strategy.
- (b) Consultations with staff on staffing structure to support proposed new customer access arrangements and service improvement.
- (c) Consideration of opportunities for further office moves and best future use of some housing offices – notably Manor Place Housing Office and Victoria Road Housing Office.

38. ALLOCATIONS POLICY

- 38.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which asked members to consider a review of the Allocations Policy including consultation with the city. A further report would then be brought back to HMCC and the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting with final proposals, following the consultation.
- 38.2 The current Housing Register Allocations Policy was implemented in early May 2011. Under the new policy, Care leavers were not automatically awarded priority for housing, but were assessed for housing depending on their housing need in the same way as other applicants are assessed. The Children & Young People's Trust, care leavers and their representatives had raised concerns over the new approach and, in the view of the Council's significant responsibilities as Corporate Parent, this report proposed a further review of the Allocations Policy.
- 38.3 In undertaking the review, officers wanted to use the opportunity to consult on the anticipated changes to allocations following the Localism Bill.
- 38.4 Councillor Mears stated that the Children and Young People's Trust had a duty of care to care leavers. She considered that the proposal of taking care leavers out of CYPT and into the housing allocation to be a budget shift. There was a funding issue that needed to be addressed. Tenants needed assurance and needed to be aware of the budget configuration. Councillor Mears stated that there were no financial implications detailed in the report. The report did not state what would happen to the CYPT budget. Tenants needed to totally understand what was being proposed.
- 38.5 The Lead Commissioner Housing explained that when the full consultation document was released it would include all relevant information, including financial information. Councillor Mears replied that that information should have been supplied for today's meeting.
- 38.6 Councillor Randall stressed that the current report was asking for an in principle recommendation. He hoped that the proposals would show the success rate of young people who had tenancies. The responsibility for young people would be maintained.
- 38.7 Stewart Gover considered that the Committee had no right to make any recommendations today. There was not sufficient information as to what was ring fenced and what was not ring fenced. There was no information about budgets. He commented that the reasons people were put into care could vary and that some had been involved in anti-social behaviour.
- 38.8 The Chair stated that she had worked with children who had left care, and most were very pleasant individuals who needed a chance in life.
- 38.9 Ted Harman agreed with Stewart Gover and Councillor Mears. The Committee had not heard the full facts or figures.
- 38.10 Councillor Randall stated that there were 483 children in care in the City. 43 were under the age of 1 year due to their parents being involved in substance misuse. A great number of these children came from the city's estates. The council had a duty of care.

He noted the concerns raised but stressed that a report would come back to the HMCC with all the facts and figures and recommendations.

- 38.11 The Lead Commissioner Housing stressed that the report in front of members was saying that there would be a 12 week consultation process. It was asking members to be involved in that process. During that period, members would be given a host of information. No decision would be taken today; it was simply the start of the process.
- 38.12 Councillor Mears considered it was insulting to bring a flimsy report to the HMCC. There could have been a more detailed report for consultation. Children in care, came under the responsibility of the CYPT. There was still a need to see the funding implications on the CYPT.
- 38.13 Tom Whiting suggested changing recommendation 2.1 to add “for final approval” at the end. Chris Kift concurred. After a discussion over wording it was agreed to change the recommendation to “That the HMCC consider and commend for approval to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting the undertaking of a Review of the current Allocation Policy. Following the review, proposals would be brought back to HMCC and Housing CMM for final approval”.
- 38.14 The Lead Commissioner Housing stated that there would be a 12 week consultation process. A detailed report would come back to HMCC for discussion before being submitted to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting.
- 38.15 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the undertaking of a Review of the current Allocation Policy be commended for approval to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting. Following the Review, proposals will be brought back to HMCC and Housing CMM for final approval.

Note: Councillor Mears asked for her name to be recorded as not agreeing to the above recommendation, as she was not happy with the process.

39. HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY INVESTMENT OPTIONS - INSTALLATION OF SOLAR PANELS TO COUNCIL OWNED HOMES

- 39.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which reported that the Council had the opportunity to install solar PV panels onto its Council-owned residential properties. This had arisen out the Government’s Feed-in-Tariff incentive scheme. Housing Commissioning had been working with tenants, the procured Energy Managing Partner (Climate Energy) and other local authority partners to investigate and maximise home energy efficiency investment options for tenants and residents from Feed-in Tariffs (FITs). The recommendations in the report were agreed by Cabinet on 22 September 2011.
- 39.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn pointed out that there were a number of instances where there was a mix of tenants and leaseholders in a block. He asked if paragraph 1.3, bullet point 5 (allow some Council tenants to lower their fuel bills) was open to all residents of blocks. The Head of Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing replied that it was the intention to share the benefit throughout the block.

- 39.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 7.2 of the report “Approval is required now to realise the benefits of CO2 reductions and the provision of free or cheap electricity to tenants who may be living in, or at risk of, fuel poverty”. He considered that all tenants living in a block should benefit and that there was a lack of equality in this statement. The Head of Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing replied that there could be a mechanism to distribute the money more widely across the city.
- 39.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if all residents within these properties would benefit from cheaper electricity. The Lead Commissioner Housing replied that the feed in tariffs were split into two. Panels on a roof provided cheaper rates. Meanwhile, the Government guaranteed a further amount of money to the local authority to invest in the scheme. Everyone who lived in the block would get an equal share of the benefit. A discussion was taking place with the company to see if the pooled amount could be recycled and targeted to people in greatest need.
- 39.5 Councillor Robins asked if solar panels were tried and tested, and maintenance free. The Chair confirmed that it was tried and tested technology. The Lead Commissioner Housing explained that the solar panels were not maintenance free, but the government was guaranteeing the funding over 25 years. The scheme was underwritten by the government. It was an opportunity to tackle fuel poverty, especially amongst the most deprived estates and families.
- 39.6 Councillor Jarrett informed the Committee that the technology was about 50 years old. Technology was evolving and maintenance was low. Cleaning might be an issue but the panels would create a significant amount of electricity. There would be a slight degradation after 15 years. It was very stable, very reliable technology which should give long, ongoing benefit to residents.
- 39.7 Chris Kift believed that there was a need to start work on this project. Solar Panels placed on St James’s House would generate electricity all day, due to the position of the block.
- 39.8 Councillor Mears stated that she was pleased to see the administration carry on an initiative started by her administration. She was concerned at paragraph 3.2 in relation to overcladding projects. She was disappointed to see Essex Place removed from the list which she considered was a backward step.
- 39.9 **RESOLVED** - (1) That it is noted that Cabinet on the 22 September agreed the following recommendations.
- (a) That Cabinet approves a capital programme budget up to a maximum of £15.0 million for Solar Photovoltaic Panels on council housing stock to be financed through unsupported borrowing in the Housing Revenue Account, which will only be drawn against subject to the approval of the Strategic Director for Place and the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to proceed with the scheme.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director for Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to approve the planning, supply, installation and maintenance of the panels via an approved framework agreement and a call off contract or contracts under an approved framework agreement.

- (3) That Cabinet notes the outcome of the initial options appraisal undertaken by Climate Energy, indicating that there is an outline business case to support delivery of a solar photovoltaic scheme across the council housing stock and to meet strategic housing and other council priorities, including private sector housing renewal, reducing fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions.
- (4) That Cabinet notes the procurement exercise to establish the Solar Bourne framework agreement undertaken by Eastbourne Borough Council with involvement from partners in the BEST consortium, and that the costs identified through the above procurement further support an outline business case as indicated by the initial options appraisal work.

40. HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 1)

- 40.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Housing & Social Inclusion which set out the first quarter (April to June) performance report for Housing & Social Inclusion for the financial year 2011-2012. It adopted a new format for presenting information more clearly than before, and also reported on the service pledge commitments agreed for service areas.
- 40.2 The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement presented the report and highlighted some of the achievements.
- 40.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn welcomed the new way of reporting. He referred to paragraph 3.1.1 in the report. The % of rechargeable repair debt collected was 4.52%. However the target was 20%. He asked why this figure was so poor. The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement explained that debt arose when some residents moved out of properties leaving damage and unauthorised works. Officers were trying to put different measures in place to stop people who had caused damage from moving out of properties. The money was difficult to collect from people on housing benefits. Officers were trying to stop the damage happening in the first place. Meanwhile, it was stressed that the figures were for the first quarter and officers were working hard to prevent a build up of debt.
- 40.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn accepted the explanation and suggested that the figure should say "not year end".
- 40.5 Councillor Mears remarked that she could not see any reference to asbestos removal. She also noted that the report did not have detail about rent collection across the city.
- 40.6 The Chair confirmed that asbestos removal would be added to the next performance report.
- 40.7 Stewart Gover reported that performance had been discussed at a meeting with Mears Ltd this morning (26/9/11). The only matter that he argued about was the satisfaction rate. A 95% satisfaction rate was recorded from a response of 25%. It could be said that 70% were not satisfied. He had asked for this matter to be sorted out.
- 40.8 Ted Harman referred to tenant satisfaction with repairs in paragraph 3.3.0 of the report. He stressed that not all tenants were satisfied. The report did not state how many

people were surveyed. The same applied to percentage of repairs completed right first time.

40.9 The Chair suggested that raw figures should be put in an appendix in the future.

40.10 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report and the above comments be noted.

The meeting concluded at 6.27pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of