

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE

3.00pm 29 MAY 2012

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Wakefield (Chair); Councillor Farrow, Hawtree, Jarrett, Mears, Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Pidgeon 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), Stewart Gover (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Keith Cohen (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), David Avery (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Roy Crowhurst (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), John Melson (Hi Rise Action Group), Tony Worsfold (Leaseholder Action Group), Tom Whiting (Sheltered Housing Action Group) and Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network)

Apologies: Jean Davis (Central Area Housing Management Panel)

PART ONE

1. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

1A Declarations of Substitute Members

1.1 Councillor Hawtree declared that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Duncan. Councillor Mears declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Wells. Keith Cohen declared that he was attending as a substitute for Heather Hayes. Dave Avery declared that he was attending as a substitute for Tina Urquhart. Roy Crowhurst declared that he was attending as a deputy representing West Hove & Portslade (vacant post).

1B Declarations of Interests

1.2 There were none.

1C Exclusion of the Press and Public

1.3 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.

1.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

2. MINUTES

2.1 It was noted that Councillor Mears should be added to the list of those attending the meeting.

2.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee Meeting held on 30 April 2012 be agreed and signed as a correct record subject to the amendment above.

3. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

Successful City Assembly

- 3.1 The Chair thanked everyone who made the council tenants' and leaseholders' City Assembly on 19 May such a great success. It was another fantastic day of tenant representatives and residents working together with councillors and officers to improve the housing service. The Chair noted that councillors from all political parties were present and that this had been appreciated by the tenants and leaseholders who had attended.
- 3.2 There was an excellent attendance, and use of the crèche, live webcast and social media was again a success. The City Assembly had been webcast to libraries where there had been live tweets from residents.
- 3.3 There had been an update on the government's changes to Housing Benefit and Council Tax from April 2013. Housing Benefit and Housing departments would be working closely together to identify those tenants likely to be affected by the changes and to offer a range of options, support and advice.
- 3.4 The main focus of the day was a presentation from tenant members of the Innovation Group, which had been looking at how the council could increase and improve resident involvement.
- 3.5 After lunch, residents all had an opportunity to have their say on the Innovation Group's recommendations. There were excellent discussion groups on:
- a menu of ways residents can get involved
 - support and training
 - a code of conduct for resident representatives and
 - the structure of resident involvement and working groups.
- 3.6 The Innovations Group would now be carrying out further wide consultation before bringing final recommendations to Area Panels, HMCSC and then Housing Committee in September.

- 3.7 The webcast and copies of all the presentations were all available on the City Assembly page of the council housing website.

Visit to see major work progress on the Bristol Estate

- 3.8 The Chair reported that the previous week, she visited Bristol Estate to have a look at the progress being made on the major refurbishment of seven of the low rise blocks on the estate. Good progress had been made with replacing windows, roofs, and providing insulated cladding. New solar photo-voltaic panels would help to reduce service charges for the common way electricity as part of the council's commitment to tackling fuel poverty.
- 3.9 As well as improving the structure of the building, the estimated carbon saving from the external insulation system had been calculated as 6,800 tonnes over 30 years or 226 tonnes per year in total, with the solar panels likely to produce an annual generation of over 3100 kilowatt hours on each block.
- 3.10 Over the coming months the Chair looked forward to visiting more of the major projects that the council would be rolling out across the city to improve homes.

Apprentices

- 3.11 The Chair was pleased to report that Mears Ltd and the Council held two successful recruitment fairs at City College early this month for the next round of 20 apprentices that would start their training in September. 123 applicants attended the two days to express an interest in the 20 places available. The Repairs Partnership had currently delivered 37 apprenticeships, with 8 due to graduate this Summer. Mears Ltd and the Council had been working closely with City College to improve the pathway into apprenticeships to make this an option available to those without any previous qualifications. The Chair stated that it was great to see this joint work help to provide such an excellent training and employment opportunity for local people, many of whom also lived in council housing.
- 3.12 John Melson was pleased to note the work being carried out on the Bristol Estate. As far as he was aware, none of the blocks had a damp proof course. With regard to apprenticeships, he stressed that Mears Ltd were committed to having 200 apprentices. He asked when this target figure would be achieved.
- 3.13 Councillor Robins asked for information about the length of apprenticeships and whether they received a skills card on completion.
- 3.14 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion replied that Mears were committed to achieving 20 apprenticeships a year. With 20 more recruited in September 2012 the total would be 57. This would be behind their target of 60. The apprenticeships lasted three years. Year one involved attendance at City College. Year 2 involved completing NVQ level 2 working at Mears. Year 3 was completed solely at Mears. The question relating to a skills card would need to be investigated.
- 3.15 Councillor Mears stressed that Mears Ltd were committed in their contract to achieving 200 apprenticeships. She asked for reassurance that the Head of Housing and Social

Inclusion was chasing Mears Ltd to ensure that the figure was achieved. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that the primary way the council managed the contract with Mears Ltd was through the Strategic Core Group. Mears Ltd would need to achieve their target of 200 over 10 years.

- 3.16 Dave Murtagh commented that the Strategic Core Group were disappointed that there was little uptake by women and girls. Councillor Mears stated that there was not enough publicity about the apprenticeship scheme in schools. It was necessary to go to the schools at an earlier stage. The Chair agreed that it would be a good idea to talk to children and young people in schools and to advertise the scheme in places attended by women and young girls.

4. CALL-OVER

- 4.1 The Chair asked the Committee to consider which items listed on the agenda it wished to debate and determine in full.

- 4.2 **RESOLVED** - That all items be reserved for debate and determination.

5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- 5.1 There were no petitions, written questions or deputations.

6. ISSUES RAISED BY COUNCILLORS

- 6.1 There were no petitions, written questions, letters or notices of motion from councillors.

7. THE NEW COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE

- 7.1 The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from the Head of Legal & Democratic Services. The presentation set out the background to governance changes in Brighton & Hove, the proposed committee structure and what the practical issues were for housing.
- 7.2 Members were informed that the final decision on housing strategy, the Allocations Policy and the HRA were reserved for full Council. All items of corporate budgetary or corporate policy implications had to be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee after being considered at Housing Committee. The Housing Committee would make decisions on functions not reserved to Council or the Policy and Resources Committee. The Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee was an advisory body. In addition there would be the Housing Area Panels and the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.
- 7.3 Councillor Farrow commented that the presentation was describing complex issues and he suggested that it would be useful to have the information in the form of a briefing paper to members of the Sub-Committee. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that he was happy to write a briefing paper.

- 7.4 John Melson concurred with Councillor Farrow. Meanwhile, he was concerned to hear that the powers of the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee would be the same as the HMCC. His understanding was that the Sub-Committee would only retain the indicative vote for tenants and the councillors' vote would be substantive.
- 7.5 The Head of Legal & Democratic Services confirmed that that was the case. The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 stated that only councillors had the right to vote, with a few exceptions.
- 7.6 Councillor Peltzer Dunn stated that he could not understand why councillors voted at a consultative meeting. He felt that the result of the consultation should be reported to the Housing Committee, where councillors would vote having taken account of what had been said at the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee.
- 7.7 The Head of Legal & Democratic Services confirmed that the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 stated that no-one could vote at a Committee or Sub-Committee unless they were a councillor. It would be against the legislation for tenants to vote and councillors to refrain from voting. Other options could be to change the status of the Sub-Committee to make it a Forum. However, this might be viewed as a demotion. He further confirmed that if members refrained from voting, a motion failed.
- 7.8 The Head of Legal & Democratic Services suggested that if there were strong views about the current arrangements, the matter could be looked into at the six month review of the council's constitution.
- 7.9 David Murtagh expressed the view that nothing had changed from the HMCC. If councillors agreed not to vote and left tenants to have an indicative vote it would solve the problem.
- 7.10 Councillor Robins questioned councillors' role at the HMCSC if they were to abstain from voting.
- 7.11 John Melson considered that councillors should exercise their function and vote. However, he felt that councillors were not aware of the amount of hard work carried out by tenants' representatives.
- 7.12 The Chair considered that there needed to be a proper debate and discussion about this matter at a future meeting, in order to agree a solution.
- 7.13 Roy Crowhurst referred to Neighbourhood Councils. He stressed that all the tenants present had been elected as tenant representatives. He questioned whether anyone had asked people in the City if they wanted Neighbourhood Councils. He also pointed out that the pilots had been carried out in areas where there was a large amount of council housing.
- 7.14 The Head of Legal & Democratic Services explained that Neighbourhood Councils were still at a pilot stage and there had been some consultation.
- 7.15 Councillor Mears expressed concern at the two areas chosen for the pilot. They were similar areas with social housing. She considered that the two areas did not reflect the

city and would create an imbalance. Councillor Mears also stressed that the HRA was ring fenced. Any funding for pilots should come from the general fund. She wanted to be reassured that no money was coming out of the HRA to fund Neighbourhood Councils.

- 7.16 The Chair confirmed that no HRA money has been invested in Neighbourhood Councils.
- 7.17 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed members that he would look at the issues raised. The meeting could be modified as was considered appropriate. However, he did have reservations about removing councillors right to vote.

8. HOUSING SERVICES THE CITY DESERVES

- 8.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which provided further details regarding the restructuring of the Housing & Social Inclusion Service in order to further improve customer service, increase support for vulnerable residents and provide a platform for meeting the council's current and future Challenges. The changes taking place reflected improvements the wider council was making under the banner 'A council the city deserves' and were therefore under the heading 'Housing services the city deserves'.
- 8.2 The Head of Tenancy Services presented the report and informed members that the report was for noting as there had already been a consultation process.
- 8.3 Councillor Mears referred to the financial implications. She stressed the need for the Sub-Committee to see a budget breakdown of the savings. Councillor Mears asked if any work had been carried out to monitor the result of the move from Manor Place Office to the Whitehawk Hub. She stressed that it would be important to monitor visitor numbers to see if they had improved.
- 8.4 The Head of Tenancy Services agreed that it would be important to monitor visitor numbers. She reported that the savings had been made from deleting management grade posts. This money would be invested back into front line posts. The savings were made by people leaving through the voluntary severance scheme or by people being redeployed.
- 8.5 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion confirmed that total savings of £146,000 had been achieved following consideration of redeployment.
- 8.6 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 3.31 relating to the single phone number commencing in autumn 2012. He was concerned that part of the service was to be launched before the phone number was introduced. The Senior Project Manager explained that officers were planning to introduce the phone number in September/October 2012. A little more work was required to ensure this service was effective.
- 8.7 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the consultation process set out in paragraph 4 of the report. He reminded members that the City Assembly in November 2011 had been consulted. He asked whether the views of the City Assembly were reflected in the report.

- 8.8 The Head of Tenancy services confirmed that the views expressed at the November City Assembly were very important. There had been four breakout groups which had expressed slightly different views. The groups had stressed the importance of investment in improving people's homes, and investment for those in financial difficulty.
- 8.9 The Head of Tenancy Services gave a specific example of how officers changed their thinking as a result of this feedback. Officers were planning to invest in fencing, but were told this was not a priority for tenants. They were told that matters such as extensions, tackling damp and overcrowding were more important.
- 8.10 John Melson referred to paragraph 3.14. He made the point that there were a large number of debt agencies and charities and it would be easier to refer residents to them rather than create a whole new team to provide support in the way suggested in the report. Mr Melson was concerned that the teams were expanding unnecessarily. The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion explained that it was the intention to provide help to people in additional difficulties. He suggested that it would be helpful to have a report to a future HMCSC meeting which focused on future welfare reforms. The Chair suggested that there could be a report on the impact of welfare reform upon council tenants.
- 8.11 The Head of Tenancy Services stressed that the small team would be co-ordinating a proactive approach of helping people in financial risk.
- 8.12 Mr Melson referred to paragraph 3.19. He questioned why there would be two roles of Neighbourhood Team and Community Wardens. The Head of Tenancy Services explained that the Community Warden role would be deleted, but the functions that the Community Wardens currently undertake would continue through the work of the new neighbourhood team.
- 8.13 Mr Melson referred to Appendix 1 – New Housing and Social Inclusion Structure Chart which referred to a Travellers Liaison Team. He asked why travellers were getting special attention as opposed to other cultures/ethnicities. He considered that people should all be treated the same. The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion explained that council services were for everyone and for all ethnicities. However, travellers came to the city and the council had an obligation to travellers and the settled community. The team on the structure chart was a small team of 2 Traveller Liaison Officers and an administration officer.
- 8.14 Councillor Farrow stated that he was broadly in favour of the changes to be implemented. However he considered that they were not radical enough. He was in favour of a flat management structure. This would lead to more money being made available for services. The Head of Customer Access and Business Improvement agreed that there was the potential for future savings in the staff structure.
- 8.15 Councillor Farrow expressed concern about the change from Community Participation Officer to Resident Involvement Officer. He considered that there would not be the links with associations. The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement stressed that residents would continue to be supported.

- 8.16 Councillor Jarrett considered the report to be very good. With regard to money advice, he stressed that voluntary organisations were seeing an increased demand and were seriously overstrained. They were also under financial stress.
- 8.17 Roy Crowhurst asked how the changes impacted on sheltered housing. The Head of Tenancy Services explained that sheltered housing was not directly affected. She was still the head of service.
- 8.18 David Murtagh was supportive of the changes and stressed that under the current system, being allocated a particular housing officer could cause problems if they were not in the office and no-one else was able to answer a specific query.
- 8.19 The Head of Housing & Social Inclusion reported that officers were in the process of finalising changes. He considered that there would be many improvements for the housing service.
- 8.20 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the changes detailed in the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.02pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of