

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**  
**HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE**

**3.00pm 28 MAY 2013**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor Randall (Chair); Councillor Farrow (Opposition Spokesperson), Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Kennedy, Pidgeon and Wilson

**Tenant Representatives** David Murtagh (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Trish Barnard (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Jean Davis (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Roy Crowhurst (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Keith Cohen (Hi Rise Action Group), Tony Worsfold (Leaseholder Action Group), Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network), Charles Penrose (Sheltered Housing Action Group), Rita King (North & East Area Housing Management Panel) and Robert Spacie (North & East Area Housing Management Panel)

**PART ONE**

**1. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

**1A Declarations of Substitute Members**

1.1 Councillor Barnett declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Mears.

**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 **RESOLVED** - That the Minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee held on 26 March 2013 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

### 3. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

#### Tom Gillham

- 3.1 The Chair reported that Tom Gillham would be leaving the council and starting a new job with the Circle 33 Housing Association. Benjamin Ben'Okagbue would be acting up in place of him. The Chair thanked Tom for all the work he carried out and wished Benjamin good luck in his new role.

#### David Murtagh

- 3.2 The Chair reported that this would be David Murtagh's last meeting as a member of HMCSC as he was now a member of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel. The Chair thanked David for all the work he had carried out over the years.
- 3.3 Councillor Farrow proposed a vote of thanks to David. This was seconded by the Chair and agreed by the Sub-Committee.
- 3.4 David Murtagh informed members that he had enjoyed working with everyone on the Sub-Committee and had seen good results.

### 4. CALL-OVER

- 4.1 **RESOLVED** - That all items be reserved for discussion.

### 5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

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

### 6. ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE

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

### 7. HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 AND END OF YEAR 2012/13

- 7.1 The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Executive Director – Environment, Development & Housing, which covered Quarter 4 of the financial year 2012/13 and as requested, year end performance. It also included benchmarking figures for the 2011/12 financial year, which were attached as Appendix 2. The report incorporated changes suggested at previous meetings, including specifying whether an indicator is a Service Pledge as 'Yes' or 'No' rather than abbreviating, and the inclusion of figures from the same quarter last year. The report was presented by Ms Dafe, the Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement

Rent collection and current arrears/Empty home turnaround time

- 7.2 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 4.0.1, Percentage of rent collected as proportion of rent due each year. The third sentence read “We are taking a proactive approach to supporting our tenants with paying their rent in the light of the introduction of Welfare Reforms from April 2013 onwards”. Councillor Farrow asked if this included the bedroom tax. He was concerned that intimidating letters had been sent out to tenants.
- 7.3 The Chair stated that a letter had been sent out to tenants to start the process. The letter had been redrafted by the Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement and was not frightening. This letter would be circulated to all members of the Sub-Committee. The process had been used by all housing associations and usually resulted in tenants coming to an agreement to pay any arrears in small amounts.
- 7.4 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 4.0.2, Total former tenant arrears. He was concerned at the second sentence which stated “This is a fairly good result considering the reduction in the number of staff working on former tenant debt...” Councillor Farrow was concerned about staffing resources and wanted to see sufficient staff to deal with the job.
- 7.5 The Chair stated that debt was only written off in exceptional circumstances. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement informed members that resources had been redirected to deal with some of the preventative work. However, in the long term there would be a need to increase staff resources. She agreed that debt was written off in exceptional circumstances. However, there might be circumstances where people were contacted to settle arrears.
- 7.6 The Chair asked officers to report back on how much debt had been written off for the next meeting.
- 7.7 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 4.05, Percentage of rent collected as a proportion of rent due each year by area. He asked if there was any information on why there was a variation between areas. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement explained that historically there was far more deprivation in the east of the city, as opposed to areas such as Portslade. This was possibly due to the concentration of one bedroom flats and people with different problems. The Chair asked for this matter to be investigated.
- 7.8 David Murtagh referred to paragraph 4.1, Empty Property Turnaround time. He had noticed that properties were being let when they had not been completely finished. Work had continued after the new tenant had moved in. The end result was not good.
- 7.9 James Cryer, Mears Ltd confirmed that properties should only be let to new tenants when any work required had been completed. He would be able to investigate specific premises if he was given details.
- 7.10 Barry Kent stated that as a resident assessor he had visited properties in Portslade and Queens Park which had a number of things wrong with them. The Chair stated that he would meet with Mr Cryer about this issue.
- 7.11 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to 2.63% (Actual year end 12/13, tenants with more than seven weeks rent arrears). This did not explain the cash amount. The Head of

Income, Involvement & Improvement explained that officers followed a previous style of reporting on this figure but could provide the cash amount in the future.

- 7.12 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if the figure £531,636 (Actual year end 12/13, total former tenant arrears) related to 12/13 or money from previous years. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement explained that this was the total arrears in rent loss from former tenants.
- 7.13 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked how much was collected from leaseholders each year. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement replied that 88% was collected in 11/12 and 83% was collected in 12/13. Councillor Peltzer Dunn queried these figures. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement replied that Councillor Peltzer Dunn would receive a written answer. There would be more detail in the next performance report.
- 7.14 Councillor Peltzer Dunn mentioned that a number of empty properties were being given over to Seaside Homes. He asked if this could be carried out in smaller batches.
- 7.15 Councillor Barnett asked about the average let time. She stated that a property in Hangleton had been worked on for six months. She asked if anyone was checking the work being done in the course of a day.
- 7.16 James Cryer, Mears Ltd stated that he wanted work to be completed as soon as possible. He would investigate Councillor Barnett's query.
- 7.17 Roy Crowhurst declared an interest in the discussion as a board member of Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes. He explained that batches for Seaside Homes were governed by the Santander tender. There had to be seven or more properties at any one time.
- 7.18 Councillor Peltzer Dunn queried why it took so long to decide whether properties should be transferred to Seaside Homes. The Head of Property & Investment replied that there needed to be a minimum of five batches. Officers were looking to see if there could be smaller batches as an interim. This would need to be agreed by the surveying partners and Santander. The Chair asked to be kept informed about this matter.
- 7.19 Councillor Peltzer Dunn queried the figure of 18.1% in section 2.0 Rent Collection and current Arrears. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement replied that she would revise this figure.
- 7.20 The Chair stated that the seven week rent arrears figures were encouraging. There was also an encouraging improvement on the turnaround of empty homes. He noted the points made regarding the quality of work and would talk about this matter to James Cryer, Mears Ltd.

#### Property & Investment

- 7.21 Robert Spacie asked about current electric certificates in all council properties. James Cryer replied that there were decency standards around electrical testing. There were 265 more to carry out. He wanted to achieve 100% by December 2013.
- 7.22 Councillor Farrow referred to average time to complete routine repairs (calendar days) under 4.2. He considered the target too high and suggested a more realistic target of 10. Councillor Farrow referred to the 95% target for tenant satisfaction with repairs. He was not happy with the way this information was collected.
- 7.23 The Chair concurred. It was difficult for someone to voice an opinion if the contractor was there.
- 7.24 Councillor Farrow referred to percentage of repairs completed first time and asked how this information was collected. He was concerned with the target for cancelled repair jobs (under 10%). He suggested 5% would be appropriate. Many tenants worked and it was essential that everything was done to ensure jobs were not cancelled. Councillor Farrow suggested a meeting should be arranged between the Chair, Opposition Spokespersons and James Cryer to discuss these matters. This was agreed.
- 7.25 The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement informed members that the targets would be reviewed before the next report. Meanwhile data could be collected in a way which was unbiased.

#### Estate Service

- 7.26 Councillor Barnett referred to the emergency removal of graffiti. When she had phoned about this matter she was told it could only be removed as an emergency if the graffiti was considered racial. She asked if this was correct or whether all graffiti should be removed. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement explained that staff tried to remove all offensive graffiti within 24 hours. This included racial graffiti. The Chair stated that all other non offensive graffiti was removed within 7 days.
- 7.27 Councillor Farrow asked how information was collected. It was stated that 98% of cleaning tasks had been completed. Councillor Farrow had heard that some tasks were missing. He queried the year end figure of 20 areas of graffiti removed in seven days.
- 7.28 The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement explained that with regard to cleaning tasks more information could be included for the next performance report. Meanwhile graffiti on HRA land was removed by Housing. City Clean removed graffiti on highway land. City Clean had a longer target time.

#### Anti-Social Behaviour

- 7.29 The Chair referred to the number of new cases of anti-social behaviour. The fourth quarter was high and a cause for concern.
- 7.30 The Head of Tenancy Services stated that a new computer system allowed officers to understand and monitor anti-social behaviour. A new performance framework was being set up and a report on this subject could be submitted to a future meeting. The Chair stated that that would be very helpful.

- 7.31 Councillor Barnett considered that instead of providing neighbours with sheets to fill in for three months, tenants needed to know from the start that anti-social behaviour was unacceptable. The Senior Lawyer stressed the need to gather evidence before cases could go to court.
- 7.32 Councillor Farrow expressed concern for tenants with disabilities and mental health problems. It was difficult for them to report problems with neighbours. There was a need to show a duty of care and protect them from victimisation.
- 7.33 The Head of Tenancy Services replied that officers did not underestimate these concerns. Officers were trying to take a more assertive approach, balanced with the need for evidence. A report would be brought back to the meeting.
- 7.34 The Chair remarked that the Tenant Scrutiny Panel could be asked to investigate this matter.
- 7.35 David Murtagh informed members that he was on a working group looking at anti-social behaviour. He considered that graffiti should be classed as anti-social behaviour.

#### Sheltered housing

- 7.36 Robert Spacie referred to the performance indicator “provision of at least one social activity per week in 21 of our 23 schemes.” He asked for an explanation. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement explained that officers wanted there to be a social activity in all sheltered housing schemes where this was possible.
- 7.37 Councillor Barnett noted that there were 887 sheltered residents. She asked if this included residents in Housing Association sheltered housing. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement replied that the 887 residents were in the council’s 23 schemes.
- 7.38 Charles Penrose stated that there were one or two places which did not have social events. Stonehurst Court had no place for events. He would like to see them joining a nearby scheme which had events.

#### Appendix 2

- 7.39 Councillor Farrow expressed concern about the benchmarking groups. He would have liked the city to have been included in a larger group to achieve better standards of benchmarking. He asked for this to be investigated. Councillor Farrow was disappointed in paragraph 2.2.2 (comparatively poor performance against percentage of appointments). He considered this was not a reasonable explanation of the council’s performance and he asked for this to be investigated.
- 7.40 James Cryer replied that Brighton & Hove was more punitive about appointments than other organisations.
- 7.41 **RESOLVED** (1) That the report and above comments be noted.

## 8. ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS 2013

- 8.1 The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment, Development & Housing which informed members that the annual report for the year ending 31 March 2013 had been produced with the involvement of tenants and leaseholders. The report was presented by Ms Dafe, Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement. Members were asked to comment on the report.
- 8.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn raised a query about two phone numbers for tenancy queries. The Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement replied that there was one number for repairs (Mears Ltd) and another for other enquiries. Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted that there were five other phone numbers quoted in the report for different areas of work.
- 8.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if a copy of the gas certificate had been sent out to all the tenants. It was confirmed that this had been sent to tenants.
- 8.4 Councillor Farrow congratulated officers on the work carried out on the Annual Report. He referred to paragraph 4.1, Community Engagement and Consultation. Councillor Farrow stressed the need to consult more generally with tenants. He suggested having a general survey.
- 8.5 Councillor Farrow referred to page 2 of the Annual Report, Performance Highlights. He considered that the third bullet point needed clarification.
- 8.6 The Chair stated that the use of red behind white type caused difficulties for people with sight problems. The general trend for more diagrams and less text was to be welcomed.
- 8.7 Councillor Barnett referred to page 4 of the Annual Report in relation to developing a new pet policy. There had recently been an excellent event in Hangleton involving the RSPCA. She asked if this had been rolled out across the city. The Neighbourhood Manager explained that the pet policy would be rolled out across the city.
- 8.8 Councillor Kennedy referred to the use of the apostrophe on page 5 of the Annual report. This should read *residents'* association. This section also referred to be-be guns which should read BB guns.
- 8.9 **RESOLVED** – That the above comments on the 2013 annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2013, as attached at appendix 1, be noted. The annual report would be published and distributed to all council tenants and leaseholders in the summer edition of *Homing In* following formal approval of the Housing Committee on 19 June 2013.

## 9. MOBILITY SCOOTER STORAGE

- 9.1 The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from Robert Keelan, Neighbourhoods Housing Manager. Slides of the presentation were circulated to members.

- 9.2 The presentation informed members about the existing mobility scooter stores and provided information about the licensing, management and pricing of stores and areas being looked at for future stores.
- 9.3 Robert Spacie stated that he had a number of concerns about this issue. There were two storage places at Laburnum Grove. Sheltered housing had tried to get two more sites. Tenants were now being told that EDB money was required to convert areas for scooter storage. Mr Spacie stated that Laburnum Grove Residents' Association was against scooter storage. At the moment the two storage areas were not being charged. He asked if there were plans to charge in the future.
- 9.4 Mr Spacie considered that scooter storage was a matter of choice. He had great concerns about the health and safety aspects of some of the scooters inside Laburnum Grove. He accepted the need for scooter storage but was concerned for the safety of current residents.
- 9.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn stated that there was a distinction between residents who absolutely needed a scooter and others who had one by choice. He felt uncomfortable about the proposals. The number of fires on the estates was very low. If a store was not near to a building it could result in some people being confined to their block. Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if voids under staircases could be adapted for scooters.
- 9.6 Barry Kent remarked that more tenants might need a power scooter in future. He made the point that not all people who used scooters were disabled. Some were elderly or found walking difficult.
- 9.7 Jean Davis informed the Sub-Committee that she lived at Leach Court where some floors had 4 scooters. She was concerned about fire safety. She considered that the proposals were a good idea.
- 9.8 Rita King asked for Dudeney Lodge included in the scheme.
- 9.9 Roy Crowhurst informed members that he lived in Woods House Sheltered Scheme, where there was no-where to store mobility scooters. However, at the end of Woods House there was an empty public toilet. He asked if this part of the building could be used for mobility scooter storage.
- 9.10 David Murtagh stressed that EDB money was meant for tenants. It was not for the council to decide what to do with this funding. There was a need to consult with tenants first.
- 9.11 Rosie Wakley, Project Manager stated that EDB money was not being spent. There were some spaces that were being used without a licence agreement in place. This should not have happened. There was a need to submit a report to the Housing Committee in order to agree to collect this money via rents.
- 9.12 Currently different spaces were available for use for mobility scooter storage. Correct procedures were in place with regard to fire safety. Some internal spaces could be used, however many spaces were not suitable. Under stairs storage did not meet fire regulations.



- 9.13 Spaces were being provided in the most suitable areas within a limited budget. There was a need to consider the best use of funds with the biggest impact.
- 9.14 The Project Manager noted the request for storage at Dudeney Court but stressed that it was unlikely that this would be possible at the moment. However, there would be storage in the near vicinity of Dudeney and Nettleton. The request to adapt the Woods House toilet into storage would be investigated. Meanwhile, a pool scooter was already available.
- 9.15 David Murtagh asked if the Project Manager had investigated using garages for scooter storage. The Project Manager replied that two garages had been knocked together at Clarke Court for this purpose.
- 9.16 The Chair stated that Leach Court had an influx of scooters. He asked if the list of buildings/areas for scooter storage was flexible enough. The Neighbourhood Manager replied that the list was under constant review. There was a need to review blocks where people were not able to store scooters in their flats.
- 9.17 **RESOLVED** – That the presentation be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.27pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

