

Items from Tenants Only Meeting held on Tuesday 16/12/14

1. Information in 'Homing In' Magazine

The meeting felt that the magazine is used to promote the Council in a good light, but:

- a. *does not give recognition to the time that tenants and residents spend helping to improve their areas and putting forward ideas for improvements.*
- b. *Homing In stated that 98% of repairs are completed on time but the figure presented to the Area Panel was lower. There was concern that these statistics are not a true reflection of the repairs service received by tenants.*

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and responses be requested for the following two items:

a. Clarification be given on the input of tenants' and Residents' reps into the content of the 'Homing In' magazine

b. Mears to be asked to give an explanation of the discrepancy in the figures presented in Homing In and at Area Panel meetings.

Response a. from Adrian Ashwell - Senior Marketing Officer- T – 01273 293034

Response b. from Janine Healey- Performance Manager- T: - 01273 293314

a. The content of *Homing In* comes from across housing management teams and other relevant public services and is aimed at providing a mix of relevant information and stories to tenants and leaseholders - including resident involvement, nearly all of which focus on the work of tenant and resident representatives. The Tenant Editorial Board meet go through and agree content for every issue.

b. The 98% figure in the Winter 2014 edition of *Homing In* states "98% of appointments made and kept by contractor" this covers the period of April to June 2014. The article does not give a "% repairs completed in time" figure. These are two different things that we monitor and cannot be compared.

The performance report that goes to Area Panel does give a result for "% repairs completed in time". This is provided as two figures – one for emergency orders which have to be fixed in 24 hours, and another result for routine orders which have a target of 20 working days to be fixed. For April to June 2014 these results were 99.57% for emergencies and 99.69% for routine orders.

The performance report that went to Area Panels in December 2014 related to a different period, this being July to September 2014. The results were "97.71% (rounded up to 98%) of appointments made and kept by contractor".

These results are based on responsive repairs that have been completed during the period. The completion dates are provided electronically for those operatives that use a PDA (handheld computer device) or on paper job sheets or e-mail for other operatives and sub-contractors.

Regular audits are carried out by Property & Investment on the data which is provided to BHCC by Mears, which produces these results. The results of these audits are monitored by Partnership Group and Core Group, where resident representatives are involved in scrutinising performance results.

Note: If residents or Cllrs are still unclear about the published results, I am happy to meet and talk through the various reports either as a group or individually.

2. City Assembly

The meeting felt that the new Hove venue for the November City Assembly was not suitable as:

- *it was not big enough,*
- *had inadequate disabled access, and*
- *the seating arrangement meant that people had to turn in their chairs to face the front of the room.*

There was also concern that the attendance at the November City Assembly was about 1/3 less than the attendance in May.

Action: It was agreed that this would be raised at the Area Panel, with the proposal that residents be consulted on the venue for future City Assemblies.

Response from Becky Purnell - Resident Involvement Manager- Tel: 01273 293022

The City Assembly was planned by residents at the City Assembly sub group of the Involvement & Empowerment Service Improvement Group. The group met monthly between June and November and undertook a number of visits to potential venues for the City Assembly. As explained by the Chair at the City Assembly residents chose Clarendon Villas as the venue. This was based on links to public transport, layout and value for money. The group is meeting in January to review last November's City.

3. Lift at Laburnum Grove

At the last North Area Residents' meeting the problems of the lift in Laburnum Grove were discussed and a 'blue pages' response was given by James Deamer of the Contract Compliance Team

The meeting was very dissatisfied with the response for the following reasons:

- a. *The issue of possible contamination of the water that is sitting in the lift pit was not addressed, and the consequent possibility that contaminants could infect residents of Laburnum Grove if they become airborne. As there is often a smell near the front door it can be assumed that some of the water (or contaminants) are already airborne.*
- b. *The only option being considered to drain the water is a sump-pump, whereas a drain may be more effective.*
- c. *The lift sometimes stops between floors and residents can't get out.*
- d. *The residents of Laburnum Grove should not be expected to wait until 2016-17 for their lift to be renewed, given the health and safety risks involved, and the lift renewal should be brought forward.*

As the residents of Laburnum Grove are elderly, disabled and vulnerable, the meeting felt that this issue needed to be dealt with urgently.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel meeting and the following action be proposed:

- a. ***That a water sample be taken from the lift pit and tested for Legionnaires disease, Salmonella, and other diseases that are carried in animal faeces.***
 - b. ***The possibility of fitting a drain be considered, to drain away the water in the pit.***
 - c. ***The lift replacement be brought forward to 2015-16***
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Response from Kevin Wilson – BHCC M&E Gas Engineer - T: 01273 294649

- a. Adrian Day, Building Services Engineer for the Mechanical & Electrical (M&E) Team at BHCC states that the water in the lift shaft is not in an environment to cause any form of contamination. However, a water sample has been arranged to be taken by Hertel during week starting 19/01/15.
- b. A pump or equivalent is currently under feasibility investigation by M&E Team.
- c. Replacing the lift itself would not rectify the current issue as the water ingress is coming from outside. We believe the water sample will be negative and negate any Health and Safety issues. Installing a pump to remove the water will help temporarily until the cause is found and repaired.
- d. If points A & B conclude satisfactory the lift replacement will remain as it is on the current programme.

e. If points A & B conclude unsatisfactory then further considerations will be made.

4. Regular repairs and spare parts

- a. *Ray Goble said that when the lifts break down at Elwyn Jones Court the contractors usually come out within 1-2 hours and fix them. However, recently they did not have the right part and the lift wasn't fixed for 3-4 days.*
- b. *He also reported that when his son moved into a Council property in Whitehawk the boiler needed fixing and they had to wait 5 days for parts, despite it being a model of boiler that is fitted in thousands of Council properties.*

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and ask if Mears keep some spares in stock, or if they work entirely on a system of 'just-in-time' ordering

Response from James Deamer – BHCC M&E Lift Engineer - T: 01273 295994

- a. The M&E team are unsure what the problem is in this matter. During the short wait for the spare part the lift remained in service.

The contract we have with 'Liftec' states the engineers should attend within 2 hours which was the case. The reason the spare part took 3-4 days to acquire was the fact the lift is 30 years old with obsolete components.

Every endeavour is made to repair lifts across the city within a reasonable timescale. All tenants are assisted and contacted as and when a lift is out of action for any length of time. The lift replacement programme for the city is revised and updated regularly as the programme is being accelerated once a lift is replaced.

Response from Kevin Wilson – BHCC M&E Gas Engineer - T: 01273 294649

- b. Van stocks are determined, monitored and measured by contractors using automated computer based programmes.

The reports are run on a monthly basis from the previous months workload which the supervisor analysis to determine if stock needs to be increased or decreased. The reports run a traffic light system which indicates:

- 1) Which parts are used from van stock
- 2) Which parts are not used from van stock
- 3) Which parts are not used from van stock but cannot be carried due to size, weight etc.

The report also shows the frequency of parts used. With all the information collated the supervisor can establish if stock needs to be removed, replaced or added to.

All van stocks are physically checked on a monthly basis by the supervisor to insure they are up to date.

Non van stock replacement parts are stocked at local merchants and are available for same day collection.

Any parts not available “off the shelf” are usually available on a 24hr delivery service however delays may occur with out of stock parts for which temporary heating will be supplied.

5. Window replacements in Haig Avenue, Coldean

Mears informed residents, at a meeting of Lewes Road Consortium, that they would be fitting replacement windows in Haig Avenue in November/December 2014. The Residents' Association then publicised this information in their newsletter.

However, the work was delayed and residents were not advised of the delay. Heather raised this at the Lewes Road Consortium (LRC) meeting on 10th December and was promised that the officer responsible for the windows programme would contact her, but this hasn't happened, and local residents still haven't been advised of the delay.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and the Council be asked to:

- a. Write a letter of apology to the residents of Haig Avenue**
 - b. Consider how they can improve their communication with reps**
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Response from Phil Ludwig Mears Planned Works Manager. T: 01273 574343

At the LRC meeting in August it was reported that the best estimate at that point is that windows would be started in Coldean in December, but it was made clear that this was subject to change. The following programme was distributed at the time which indicated the area would get windows between Sep 2014 and April 2015. Surveys are now under way in the area and windows should start to be fitted in February 2015 which is broadly in line the timescales that we have previously indicated. Haig Road specifically has been surveyed but will need to through a leasehold consultation prior to fitting.

(See attached file: Window replacement programme 14 -17 basic.pdf)

Dave Martin, Contract Manager for windows, has had both telephone conversations and email contact with resident representative Heather Hayes to update her.

6. Closure of Housing Offices

Oxford Street Housing Office has been closed due to structural defects. When this decision was made a letter was sent to tenants who pay their rent at the office, but not to other tenants. As a result, Coldean reps have had several enquiries from tenants about how they can contact the Council when they need to.

Coldean residents have been advised to use the Lavender Street office, and that if they can't get there they should phone up.

The meeting was concerned that:

- a. Increasingly residents are not able to meet Council officers face-to-face, and that people often need this in order to be able to resolve any problems they have.*
- b. The Lavender Street office is due to close early in 2015 and no alternative provision has been made.*

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and propose that the Selsfield Drive office be re-opened, or the closure of Lavender Street office delayed whilst the future of the Oxford Street office is being decided.

Response from Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager T: - 01273 293250

Oxford Street Housing Office closed with only a few days' notice on 27 November 2014. During this period all residents across the city who had used the cash desk in that office in the previous six months were contacted by letter and given advice on alternative payment methods. This was followed up by a text message to all residents living in the areas managed by the Oxford Street Housing Office and the former Selsfield Drive Office. Information was also available on social media and the council's website.

At the beginning of December the Housing Customer Service team set up a new contact point in the Customer Service Centre at Bartholomew House. There is now a Housing Service Adviser there from 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday for face-to face general housing enquiries; this is in addition to the three remaining housing offices at Lavender Street, Whitehawk Hub and Victoria Road.

The cash desk at the Lavender Street Housing Office will be closing on Friday 20 February, following a decision made at Housing Committee in November 2013 to close all cash desks. Lavender Street Housing Office will still be operating as usual for general enquiries and interviews after this date. We are currently writing to all tenants who use this office to let them know that this service will no longer be available and giving them information on other ways to pay their charges.

Any resident with queries about how to pay their rent or who have a housing enquiry should be advised to contact the Housing Customer Service Team on tel: 01273 293030.

7. Kitchen and bathroom lights

Many of the kitchen and bathroom lights in sheltered housing require special bulbs and tools to replace them. The Council have told residents that they should not replace the bulbs themselves, but should call Mears to send someone out to do it. Recently, when residents from Elwyn Jones Court phoned Mears they were told to go and buy a bulb from B&Q and fit it themselves. They have then had to have a long discussion with the Mears' staff, explaining that they aren't able to do this.

This is thought to be a problem in many of the sheltered blocks.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel, to ask Mears to ensure that their staff are familiar with the procedure for replacing bulbs in sheltered accommodation.

Response from Delia Hills Mears Resident Liaison Manager: – 01273 574354

I am very sorry to hear that a resident in sheltered accommodation was told this, as although light bulbs are usually tenant's responsibility this is not the case for residents living in sheltered accommodation. Mears have recently recruited new call handlers in the Call Centre Team and they are currently learning a large amount of information and new processes.

Unfortunately, as I am sure you will understand some mistakes are unavoidable during their learning period. Today, I have reminded all team members to raise a job for light bulb replacement for all sheltered residents.

8. Asbestos in Council buildings

Following the discussion about asbestos in Laburnum Grove, Peter Hartley stated that, by law, there should be an asbestos register for all public buildings, and this should be made available to residents if they request it.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at Area Panel, and ask where the asbestos registers for all residential Council blocks are kept and how they can be accessed by residents.

Response from BHCC - Brett Wells Property & Investment Health & Safety:- 01273 296676

You are correct in stating that it is a requirement of the landlord to hold an asbestos register for our buildings and we do. All of our sheltered schemes have a copy of the asbestos register held with the scheme manager. For blocks that do not have a scheme manager we hold the register and can make available if requested.

9. Solar energy at Laburnum Grove

The Council is planning to install 35 MegaWatts of solar panels on a flat roof at Laburnum Grove. This is intended to run the communal heating for the block.

The Council said that they would have no objection to the Residents' Association also putting forward a proposal for solar panels that would lead to cheaper bills for residents.

The Residents' Association are interested in pursuing this and requested an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) for the building three months ago, which would enable them to calculate the Feed in Tariff. However, this has still not been provided by the Council.

They put together a proposal to install an array of solar panels at an estimated cost of £25,000 and wanted to submit a bid to the Estate Development Budget for this, but were told that they could not submit a bid as the cost was too high.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at Area Panel and ask:

- a. Why has there been a delay in providing the EPC**
- b. Why they were not able to submit an EDB bid for this project**

Response from Alex Fox BHCC Project Manager for Property & Investment Team (P&I): - 01273 290773

There appears to some confusion at Laburnum Grove. To my knowledge no-one from P&I has agreed Solar Panels for any heating systems.

A 35 MW photovoltaic system would be approximately 140,000 panels which is not possible. To my knowledge no-one from P&I has agreed to supply an EPC and certainly not on the basis of calculating a 'Feed In Tariff' because it is not possible to do that from an EPC.

The council has already installed a 3.25kw Solar Photovoltaic system that feeds the landlord supply and the electricity it generates goes towards the communal lights, fire alarm system and lifts etc. This will hopefully result in a reduced charge to residents for the communal electricity which will have greater benefit in the future should fuel prices rise as expected.

I was given the EDB bid to review by Mears and spoke to Keith. Laburnum Grove were informed at the EDB Panel that an EDB bid for this would not be accepted as this work is not feasible. I explained what we have already installed and explained the technical implausibility of one system feeding many supplies (i.e. each flat).

Another factor is that there isn't enough roof space for the number of flats at Laburnum, including flat roof. It was requested to use the flat roof space which is a good size, but as landlord we have taken the decision not to install on flat roofs anywhere across the city

because of the potential implications of repairs, replacement, life-spans, water ingress and structural issues. Flat roof systems are possible, but they are not as suitable as pitched.

I am sorry this is not the response you may have hoped for, but none of what has been requested is possible.

10. Estate Development Budget

Heather reported that in 2014 the Resident Involvement Officer put forward a bid for the Youth Club in Coldean without consulting the Residents' Association.

In Lindfield Court the fire exit has been condemned by the Fire Service and needs some essential work to be done on it, but the Association has been advised to apply to EDB for the money for this.

There was concern that EDB money is being used for essential work, rather than its established purpose of enhancing and improving local areas.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and ask for clearer guidelines on what work can be done under the Estate Development Budget.

Response from Becky Purnell – Resident Involvement Manger – Tel:- 01273 293022

Becky apologised to Heather about the Coldean Youth Club bid last year and has ensured that this year's bid will be run past the association this time.

Lindfield Court was visited by Brett Well's Housing's Health and Safety Manager and he identified that the area outside the side fire exit door is difficult to walk across if you are a person with mobility problems and this needs addressing.

Keith Dadswell who does manage the Estates Development Budget programme for Mearsdid visit to price up the works but the Estates Development Budget will not be used for this.

Response from Peter Huntbach – Older People's Housing Manager – Tel:- 01273 293248

One of the fire exits at Lindfield Court leads out onto a small patio with a grass bank slope beyond this. It is unclear as to why there was no pathway provision put in place when the scheme was built in 1989. There are other fire exits in the scheme that do not present the same issue. We are reviewing our fire risk assessments (and programme of works resulting from these) and can consider this issue as part of this process.

We are not aware that the fire service has condemned this fire exit and can investigate this claim further. We acknowledge the view that this is more essential work and less estate improvement work and accept that the Estate Development Budget may not be the best way of addressing this issue.

11. Area Panel agenda setting

At the North Area Panel on 8th December there were 13 agenda items, and the items from the Residents' meeting were 11th on the agenda. When the Residents' meeting items were reached there was no time for discussion and three of the officers had already left.

The meeting felt that residents' reps should have some input into the agenda setting process, and they do for Lewes Road Consortium.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and the following proposals be made:

- a. That Residents should be involved in the agenda setting process for Area Panel meetings.**
- b. The items from the Residents' meetings should be higher up the agenda**

Response from Becky Purnell- Resident Involvement Manager- T:- 01273 293022

The resident Strengthening Area Panels task and finish group is meeting six times and producing a report that will go to the Area Panels. It has been suggested that regular agenda time be put aside for items from residents and that the Resident Vice Chair will have a role in ensuring that resident area / city – wide items raised at the resident / tenant only meetings are added to the agenda. Another suggestion is that the “Blue Pages” be higher up the agenda.

