

Items from the Tenant Only meeting held on 11 August 2015

1. ***Parking and driving on grass verges***

Action: The meeting agreed to ask for further discussion on this issue at the next Area Panel, with a request that officers bring some proposals of possible action that could be taken to resolve this ongoing problem.

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

Housing appreciates that grass verge parking is a problem across the city and that time was spent on this matter at the last East Area Panel in July. However the Area Panels purpose is to discuss the Housing Revenue Account and this cannot be used on the highway.

The Highways Asset and Maintenance Manager stated at the meeting that tarmac cannot be used on grass verges as the city is a flood zone and while Highways could maintain 'grasscrete' verges once installed, they have no funding available to install it.

Bollards have been used to prevent grass verge parking in some parts of the city and the Estates Development Budget has been used where the grass verges are part of Housing land. Highways can supply and install a wooden bollard for £72 if services are not affected.

We passed this enquiry onto Stuart Wilson the Highways Asset and Maintenance Manager to see if he has anything to add to this response, however with all council budgets being stretched there is no easy solution to this problem.

2. 20mph Speed Limit

The meeting discussed the 20 mph speed limit and felt it was having limited impact, and possibly increasing pollution as drivers are driving in a lower gear.

Action: It was agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and ask for the results of the recent measurement of average speeds on 20mph roads.

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

While we appreciate the speed limit is important to people the Area Panels are about the use of the Housing Revenue Account and this is not a housing matter. We have passed your request to David Parker the Head of Transport Projects. Councillor Davey is the Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Urgency Sub-Committee.

3. Community Development Workers

The meeting agreed that Community Development Workers make a very important contribution to strengthening local communities and felt that a lot of the achievements in local areas would not have been possible without the support and expertise of Community Development Workers.

There was concern that when the council is looking for budget cuts they may feel that community development is a soft target. It was felt that this would not be effective in the long term as community development work provides good value for money and saves the council a lot of money in the long run.

Action: The meeting agreed to raise this at the Area Panel and ask for a commitment that funding for Community Development work be maintained beyond the current budget period.

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

Housing appreciates that community development is an important resource for communities, however the Area Panels can only influence decisions relating to the Housing Revenue Account and not the council's General Fund. I have passed your request onto Sam Warren who commissions community development in the city.

4. Reinstatement of the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC)

The meeting discussed the proposal from the Central Area Residents Meeting that the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee be re-instated.

Action: It was agreed that this should be put forward to the Area Panel meeting as follows:

It is proposed that the new Council administration reinstate the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC) and that this is discussed at all of the next Area Panels.

Response: Ododo Dafe, Head of Income, Inclusion and Improvement, T:- 01273 293201

Thank you for raising this question. Also it is a good example of a response that should feed through to all Area Panels as it will be of citywide interest, or that tenants wish to be on the agenda of each of the panel meetings.

In response, it is important for me to initially outline that the decision regarding the abolition of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee(HMCSC), was not one that was taken by the then Housing Committee, and neither was it taken on party political grounds. The matter was discussed at the all-party Constitutional Working Group, and the decision was made at the May 2014 Policy & Resources Committee – which did take into account feedback from the Area Panels which in the majority wanted to keep HMCSC.

In case it helps, I have set out here some of the reasons that the change was made:-

1. HMCSC was unique - there was no other sub-committee in the council. It didn't make decisions but served a useful advisory role at the time when the Council had an executive system with only one Executive Councillor making decisions. Whereas in the current cross-party committee system, the Sub-Committee stood out as an arguably extravagant and outdated way to achieve limited consultation with a limited number of tenants – particularly when other methods were available.
2. There was significant duplication and overlap between the Area Panels and HMCSC, with both providing a forum for tenant consultation and for tenant representatives and councillors to jointly debate matters.

3. Housing, and the council generally, needed to make efficiencies in time and costs in order to meet the increasing demands made upon services – for example by higher numbers of vulnerable tenants, and as a result of welfare reforms. These conditions still exist today and are ever more important – particularly with additional changes to welfare reforms that will affect almost 70% of tenants. HMCSC required significant staff and financial resources which are more effectively used to meet tenants’ needs.
4. On the matter of costs, the following paragraphs also appeared in the report to Area Panels in March 2014:-

“...Costs are important, particularly as public funds are involved – with council rents being significantly subsidised by tax payers. There is also the issue of officer, councillor and tenant time involved in a process that is duplicated.

Any savings that can be made in these austere times is helpful to tenants in the round as the money is reinvested into housing services. There is a big demand for social housing, with an equally large responsibility on the council to provide value for money services, exercise prudence, and invest in meeting that demand.”
5. Tenants’ views could and still can be effectively represented in the consultation section of committee reports for decision making - arguably in more ways and with greater ease than for any other group of people in the city receiving council services. In addition, as with the other council committees, if residents wish, they can make deputations to the committee or submit a letter for response.
6. Housing is now one service with different and overlapping ‘customers’ or service users across the city who are not solely council tenants – for example people on the housing waiting list, home owners, private sector tenants, people in need of adaptations, homeless households. Yet only council tenants attended HMCSC.
7. There still exist a range of other ways that tenants are involved, for example Service Improvement Groups, Area Panels, City Assembly and through the Tenant and Resident Scrutiny Panel.
8. The tenants’ indicative vote was rarely used at HMCSC, and feedback from Area Panels is currently able to provide decision makers with a broader feedback base and differing perspectives.
9. Area Panels may take on more of a ‘neighbourhood governance’ role in the future and will want to increase their collaborative working style with communities and be able to increasingly influence decisions in a variety

of other ways, and possibly through a number of committees, not solely Housing.

Following the Policy & Resources Committee, work was also carried out with Area Panel representatives and officers to look at how Area Panels could be further strengthened, with an example of an outcome from that being that Blue Page items are now placed at the beginning of the agenda.

A review of resident involvement is due to take place towards the end of this calendar year, and all aspects will be considered for potential further areas for improvement.

5. Major Improvements Work

At the Area Panel meeting in July residents from Woodingdean were informed that window replacements in their area are not included in the current 5 year major improvements / planned maintenance plan, and that it is not yet clear whether they will be in the next 5 year plan.

Action: It was agreed that the following questions be raised at the next Area Panel meeting:

- a. Could full details of the major improvements/planned maintenance current 5 year plan be provided to residents so they can see what work is planned in their area?**
- b. Could clarification be provided on whether leaseholders are obliged to have work done, and whether this varies for different types of work (eg could they opt-out of window replacements that affect just their property, but not roof replacements which affect a whole block)?**
- c. If tenants have faulty windows, what can they do if there are no plans for window replacements in their area?**
- d. Who is responsible for preparing the 5 year plan - is it the City Council or Mears?**

Response: Martin Reid, Interim Head, Property & Investment – T:- 01273 293321

- a. Could full details of the major improvements/planned maintenance current 5 year plan be provided to residents so they can see what work is planned in their area?**

Please see attachment for planned maintenance details for this financial year. Other planned programmes have not yet been finalised but you can get information from the council's website page: <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/housing/council-housing/investing-your-homes-programme-improvement-works>. Please note this programme is provisional and subject to change. This is based on need and dependent on budget, leasehold consultation and planning permission where applicable.

- b. Could clarification be provided on whether leaseholders are obliged to have work done, and whether this varies for different types of work (eg could they opt-out of window replacements that affect just their property, but not roof replacements which affect a whole block)?**

Both the council's and leaseholders' responsibilities are determined by the lease. The council are obliged to keep in repair the exterior and structure of the building and this includes all windows in the block. Leaseholders are

obliged to contribute a share of the cost of repairing or replacement of any or all windows even if the works are carried out solely on tenanted flats.

Leaseholders are protected in law and any costs incurred have to be fair and reasonable. The type of work, e.g. roof repairs, does not vary these responsibilities nor is there any provision to opt out of the obligations of the lease. However, all of the above and any work or improvements being proposed on blocks are always subject to the statutory leasehold consultation rights. In this, the council are obliged to formally consult with leaseholders regarding any works being proposed and all leaseholders have a legal right to object.

We understand that some leaseholders will undoubtedly face difficulty with payment for large major works charges. We have tried to set out all the ways that we can help or advise with a number of payment options (or in some cases grants or assistance) especially for resident leaseholders. We include information on what is available in our 'Major Works' leaflet which accompanies the consultation notice.

c. If tenants have faulty windows, what can they do if there are no plans for window replacements in their area?

As previously stated, they should report all repairs in the usual way and contact the Repairs Helpdesk: 0800 052 6140

d. Who is responsible for preparing the 5 year plan - is it the City Council or Mears?

It is the Council (Property & Investment Team) who identify asset management / investment priorities which are agreed with Members as part of our capital programme.
