

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

4.00pm 1 SEPTEMBER 2010

GREAT HALL, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Caulfield (Chairman); Allen, Barnett, Fryer, Mears, Pidgeon, Randall and Simpson (Opposition Spokesperson)

Tenant Representatives: Stewart Gover (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), Ted Harman (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Heather Hayes (North & East Area Housing Management Panel), David Murtagh (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Beverley Weaver (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Muriel Briault (Leaseholder Action Group) and John Melson (Hi Rise Action Group)

Apologies: Councillor Simson, Beryl Snelling (Central Area Housing Management Panel), Tom Whiting (Sheltered Housing Action Group), and Barry Kent (Tenant Disability Network).

In attendance: Faith Matyszak MBE, Laundry Facilities Group, Valerie Paynter, Clarendon & Ellen Residents' Association.

PART ONE

17. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

17A Declarations of Substitute Members

17A There were none.

17B Declarations of Interests

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

17C Exclusion of the Press and Public

17.3 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.

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

18. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

Welcome to the meeting

- 18.1 The Chairman welcomed members to the additional meeting of the HMCC, which had been convened to specifically look at the draft annual report to council tenants and leaseholders for the year ending 31 March 2010. The meeting was being held now in order to meet the timetable to send a copy of the summary report to all council tenants and leaseholders at the end of September.
- 18.2 The Chairman was pleased to see so many of the tenant and leaseholder representatives who had contributed to the annual report. Their photos and quotes could be seen on the display boards in the meeting room.
- 18.3 The Chairman stressed that it was a real strength of the report that tenants and leaseholders had played such a big part in producing the report. The full report had been circulated in black and white and colour versions of the summary report had been circulated at the meeting. A gap had been left in the draft report for a photograph of the meeting, to illustrate how HMCC had scrutinised the final drafts before they are signed off. A photographer was in attendance at the meeting and would be taking photos.

Energy Company Investment Opportunities

- 18.4 The Chairman reported that one of the key strategic priorities outlined in the City-wide Housing Strategy 2009-2014 was to improve housing quality, and to ensure that residents were able to live in decent homes suitable to their needs.
- 18.5 The council's strategic goals under this priority included, reducing fuel poverty, minimising CO2 emissions and improving tenants' homes ensuring they are of high quality and well maintained. Increasing investment opportunities were opening up with energy companies to: (i) help deliver efficiency work on the city's housing stock, (ii) open up potential funding routes for future investment in the council's housing, and (iii) reduce energy costs to tenants and residents.
- 18.6 These potential opportunities arose from: (i) the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP), established to target home energy efficiency and renewable energy measures at areas that have been identified as having significant levels of low income households; (ii) feed in tariffs – where energy companies pay for supply generated by installation of solar PV measures on council owned/tenanted properties and residents benefit from reduced fuel bills; (iii) ESCO (Energy Services Company) options to capture benefits of energy generation for the city and its residents.

18.7 The Chairman reported that an existing working group would be used to consider these energy company investment opportunities; in particular, to assess and maximise potential investment opportunities arising from this emerging work with energy companies and to ensure the council meet its goals of improving energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty for the benefit of tenants and residents. Martin Reid, Head of Housing Strategy and Development would be leading this piece of work.

19. PETITIONS

19.1 There were none.

20. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

20.1 There were none.

21. DEPUTATIONS

21.1 There were none.

22. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

22.1 There were none.

23. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

23.1 There were none.

24. ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS 2010

24.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Housing, Culture & Enterprise which explained that the regulatory framework for social housing which came into effect on 1 April 2010 required "Registered providers" (including council landlords) to publish an annual report for their tenants containing a self assessment of their performance against the standards set by the Tenants Services Authority (TSA).

24.2 A full and a summary report had been produced with the involvement and scrutiny of tenants and leaseholders, in line with the plan and timetable agreed with the Housing Management Consultative Committee on 14 June 2010. This followed discussions with the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group in April and presentations to tenants and leaseholders at the City Assembly and the Area Housing Management Panels in May and June.

24.3 The Housing Stock Review Manager introduced the report and explained that over 100 comments had been received back on the consultation draft report which had been sent to all tenant and resident associations and groups and made widely available for comment in July. Tenants and leaseholders had also been involved in assessing how the council meets the TSA's standards through questions at the City Assembly and Area Panels, questionnaires circulated to associations and on the consultation web portal and one-off focus groups of tenants on the tenant and leaseholder involvement database, particularly those not active in the formal tenant participation structure, younger tenants

and tenants from black and minority ethnic groups. Their feedback and comments were included in the report and reflected in the assessment and commitments to improve performance. In addition, 34 tenants' representatives were quoted in the report on what the resident groups they are involved with had achieved in 2010. The "Homing In" Tenant Editorial Board had also commented on the draft report. This input from tenants and leaseholders demonstrated that residents were fully involved in all aspects of the housing service.

- 24.4 Due to the length of the report, in order to meet all the TSA's requirements, a summary report had been produced to send to all tenant and leaseholders with "Homing In" at the end of September. The full report would, once approved be sent to all tenant and resident associations, the TSA and any tenant or leaseholder who wants a copy. The Housing Stock Review Manager expressed her thanks to all tenants and leaseholders who took the time and trouble to give their views and contribute to the report.
- 24.5 The Assistant Director, Housing Management informed the Committee that he welcomed the opportunity to promote the Annual Report and hoped that members agreed that it had been a good year with much solid progress. It had been a year in which the council had listened to residents, and in which a new repairs partnership had commenced. The council had worked with residents to have a three year programme to provide improvements to homes.
- 24.6 The Assistant Director informed members that Mystery Shopping was making a difference and he was pleased to report that there had been increased value for money in 2010, with the cost of managing tenants' homes reduced from £18.58 per property per week in 2005/6 to £17.03 in 2009/10. It had been a record year in terms of income collection. Overall, the report showed that the council was performing well and that this was recognised by residents.
- 24.7 The Assistant Director stated that the report also recognised that there were areas that needed to be improved. There had been feed back from residents that showed that procedures could take a long time; the council was now looking at ways in which to simplify procedures. Some residents had questioned whether the council was meeting expectations in customer services, and had also questioned the quality of the services. The Assistant Director was pleased to say that the council knew where it needed to improve, and was now better at listening to tenants. The council was determined to provide the best service possible and would work with residents to produce local service specifications. These would come into effect on 1 April 2011.
- 24.8 The Assistant Director extended his thanks to Carol Jenkins, Housing Stock Review Manager, for leading on the production of the Annual Report. He also thanked staff within the Housing Management Service for their hard work. Finally, the Assistant Director thanked all the tenants' representatives and members of the Housing Management Consultative Committee and hoped that they agreed that it was a good and honest Annual Report. He welcomed their feedback.
- 24.9 The Chairman added her thanks, in particular to Carol Jenkins who had made an enormous effort to ensure that as many tenant representatives and leaseholders had been included in the report as possible. Both positive and negative comments had been included in the report.

- 24.10 Stewart Gover commented that it was a very good report, which asked as many questions as provided answers. He referred to Section 2 of the Summary Report (Quality of Accommodation) stating that insulated cladding had been put on two high rise blocks and questioned the quality of the work.
- 24.11 John Melson reported that, although he had some concerns about the contract, he had no fears that the render would fall off as it was all one thin panel of wire mesh and was firmly anchored. In the long term, the cladding would provide savings. It cured the damp problem and the building was much warmer.
- 24.12 Councillor Randall considered the Annual Report to be a good piece of work and the best of similar reports he had seen. It had been well produced and reflected the improvements in the service. He stressed the importance of customer involvement and noted that 54% of Brighton & Hove City Council tenants surveyed in 2008 were satisfied that their landlord took tenants' views into account. Councillor Randall stated that he would like to see some targets that could be revisited next year. He asked officers how far work had progressed on works to be carried out in 2010/11 to improve the quality of accommodation.
- 24.13 Councillor Randall referred to the section of the report that dealt with adaptations. He stressed that things could still go terribly wrong with this service, with people waiting unacceptably long periods for adaptations. The Annual Report did not reflect these problems.
- 24.14 Councillor Randall referred to the section in the report on Tenure, and specifically the reference to financial health checks with new tenants. He asked for details of the training given to staff in the Housing Income Management Team, to carry out this work. He suggested that there needed to be stronger links with the Credit Unions.
- 24.15 Finally, Councillor Randall suggested that the Annual Report and other publications should in future have the stamp of approval from tenants as was the practice in some other local authorities.
- 24.16 The Chairman agreed that adaptations was an issue and reported that a number of team members had moved from Adult Social Care to Housing. She hoped people would soon see a big improvement, now that the service was being streamlined. Meanwhile, the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group had asked for representatives from the Credit Union to attend the City Assembly in November 2010.
- 24.17 The Assistant Director, Housing Management commented on staff training with regard to financial health checks. He explained that the council did provide specific training for staff carrying out financial health checks. He agreed that there was scope for closer working with the Credit Unions. With reference to the STATUS Survey of tenants 2008, the Assistant Director referred to the government's announcement that the STATUS Survey would not continue. It might therefore be more difficult to compare satisfaction of tenants of different landlords in this way; however the council would continue to monitor satisfaction and have targets.

- 24.18 Councillor Fryer considered the Annual Report to be excellent. She asked if there was going to be an Annual Report each year and whether the Audit Commission had said anything negative about the council's performance in its reports, as well as the positive comments quoted in the annual report. Councillor Fryer commented that the number of sheltered tenants who had completed a survey in February-March 2010 seemed low (39). She noted that the table in the report on Repairs and Maintenance Performance showed that the council was under performing on urgent repairs and over performing on routine repairs. She suggested that the balance needed to be addressed. Councillor Fryer asked for an update on the recycling of furniture and more information about the new electricity contract.
- 24.19 The Assistant Director replied that it was a requirement of the current regulatory framework to produce an Annual Report to tenants by 1 October each year. Although the future of the Tenant Services Authority was under review the Government had indicated it wanted the regulatory framework to continue. The Audit Commission's recent review of the repairs contract had been positive and there would be a full report to a future HMCC once the Audit Commission's report had been finalised.
- 24.20 The Assistant Director acknowledged that it was not a large number of responses from sheltered housing tenants. Tom Whiting had been unable to attend the meeting but had sent a message that he supported the Annual Report and specifically supported the aspects of the report that dealt with sheltered housing.
- 24.21 The Assistant Director reported that the council was now performing well in urgent repairs in 2010/11. The council was looking to recycle furniture with a local social enterprise in the autumn. Savings on the electricity contract had been reported to Cabinet earlier this year, in a report on the HRA.
- 24.22 John Melson informed the Committee that he thought the report was much better than he expected. He was surprised that there was no mention of how hands on John Barradell was in the community. There was also no mention of scale of allowances for tenant and resident associations in the report.
- 24.23 John Melson referred to the fire safety comments in the report. He mentioned that a candidate in the elections had sent out an email challenging the safety of high rise flats with regard to fire safety. Mr Melson mentioned that every flat had a smoke detector and a fire alarm. He had circulated a draft fire safety and evacuation plan for Essex Place as an example of the effective way the council, together with the Fire Service, was addressing fire safety. He asked for the comments of the candidate to be disowned.
- 24.24 The Chairman replied that the issue of fire safety could be clarified at the Central Area Housing Management Panel on 9 September. Councillor Mears agreed it would be appropriate to have a debate at the Central Area Housing Management Panel and for that debate to be reported back to the HMCC.
- 24.25 Ted Harman mentioned that the Asset Management Panel had decided that work should not be carried out if contractors did not have the right equipment. David Murtagh informed the meeting that he considered the Annual Report to be a good report, and asked if tenants were aware of Ted's comment. He considered that workers were getting away with a lot. The Chairman agreed that the Asset Management Panel had

- spent a long time specifying what should be expected in the contract. It would be helpful if future area panels could be made aware of standards set out in the contract.
- 24.26 David Murtagh asked if resident assessors were looking at building work. The Chairman confirmed that this was the case. The Assistant Director reported that there would be a further meeting on Turning the Tide on 17 September.
- 24.27 Councillor Simpson complemented all those who had produced the report. It was very clear that tenants had been deeply involved in the report and the comments had been balanced. With regard to setting targets, Councillor Simpson considered that tenants, residents and councillors would have to be rigorous because there would be a lack of comparable data from other local authorities if the Tenant Services Authority was discontinued. The Audit Commission was also to be disbanded. The council would need to be clear what was required of the service and meet the targets that were set.
- 24.28 With regard to fire safety in high rise blocks, Councillor Simpson had read the email concerned and did not interpret it in the same way as John Melson. The candidate had raised concerns with fire officers. Councillor Simpson was happy with the fire safety policy that had served the council well so far.
- 24.29 In relation to the comments about the TSA and Audit Commission, the Chairman stated that she thought the council had enough internal checks in place.
- 24.30 John Melson raised concerns about the way post inspections of work were carried out. He had had an inspection half way through work being carried out. The Asset Management Panel needed to investigate this matter and streamline the work.
- 24.31 Stewart Gover reported that there had been a useful meeting with Mears the on 31 August. He expressed concern about a member of staff in Highways taking money from the HRA through issuing parking tickets to contractors' vehicles delivering parts. The Chairman said this matter would be investigated.
- 24.32 John Stevens asked for clarification about the number of adaptations for disabled or elderly tenants each year. He also asked whether there were mystery shoppers out of hours. Martin Reid commented that there were 525 adaptations in 2009/10 and 487 the year before. There were slightly more minor adaptations than major. Major adaptations took longer and were more complex. There were 60 cases waiting at any one time. The council was now making sure it carried out more preventative work and was working more effectively. The Assistant Director reported that with regard to out of hours work, there had been two reports on mystery shoppers. The second showed an improvement in response time. Officers were working on the out of hours service.
- 24.33 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to approve the annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2010, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, for distribution to the Tenant Services Authority and council tenant and resident associations and to all council tenants and leaseholders who request a copy.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to approve the summary annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2010 attached as Appendix 2 to the report, for distribution to all council tenants and leaseholders.

The meeting concluded at 5.13pm

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of