

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING
4.00pm 1 DECEMBER 2011
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL
MINUTES

Present: Councillor Wakefield (Cabinet Member)

Also in attendance: Councillor Farrow (Opposition Spokesperson) and Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson)

PART ONE

45. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

45(a) Declarations of Interests

45.1 There were none.

45(b) Exclusion of Press and Public

45.2 In accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the Act”), the Cabinet Member considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during an item of business on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present during that item, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information (as defined in section 100A(3) of the Act) or exempt information (as defined in section 100I(I) of the Act).

45.3 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting during consideration of any items on the agenda.

46. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

46.1 Councillor Farrow drew attention to paragraph 30.1, which referred to the cap on housing benefit. He asked if officers were able to report back on this matter. The Lead Commissioner Housing reported that a report would be submitted to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting in January 2012.

46.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting held on 19 October 2011 be agreed and signed by the Cabinet Member.

47. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS**Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes**

- 47.1 The Cabinet Member reported that a second batch of 42 properties were ready to be transferred.

City Assembly

- 47.2 The Cabinet Member reported that the City Assembly on 19 November had been a very successful day. There had been wider participation and diversification than ever before. Parents with young children had attended as there had been a crèche for the first time. The Cabinet Member had spoken to people who had attended for the first time and they had told her that they had enjoyed the day and wanted to get involved in the tenants movement.
- 47.3 Modern technology had been used which had made it possible for people to watch the webcast, and send messages via twitter. A number of people had watched the live stream at Robert Lodge. Councillors from all three political parties had attended.
- 47.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn concurred with the above comments and stated that Chris Kift had been an excellent chair of the City Assembly meeting. Councillor Peltzer Dunn suggested that the chair could write to Mr Kift to congratulate him on his re-election.
- 47.5 The Chair agreed to write to Chris Kift and stated that the council were very fortunate to have him as chair of the City Assembly.

48. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION

- 48.1 **RESOLVED** – That all items be reserved for discussion.

49. PETITIONS**Petition – Essex Place cladding**

- 49.1 The Cabinet Member considered the following petitions presented at Council on 20 October 2011 regarding Essex Place cladding.

(i) *"We, the undersigned, residents of Essex Place here by call on the Brighton and Hove City Council to honour the long standing promise to clad Essex Place there for cutting heating costs, reducing maintenance costs and also reducing Green House Gases protecting the environment."* Signed by 128 people

(ii) *"We, the undersigned, here by support the residents of Essex Place in their petition calling on the Brighton and Hove City Council to honour the long standing promise to clad Essex Place there for cutting heating costs, reducing maintenance costs and also reducing Green House Gases protecting the environment."* Signed by 31 people.

- 49.2 The Cabinet Member asked the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion to respond on this matter. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that in 2006 an

independent structural survey was commissioned on the high-rise homes that were managed under the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The survey concluded that although Essex Place was in reasonable condition from a concrete structure viewpoint, there was likely to be a need for some external repairs during the forthcoming 5-10 year period, and that further investigations would be required on all the elements at that time. As a result the block was added to the provisional programme, so that further surveys, and provisional budget sums, could be allocated.

- 49.3 As part of the council's ongoing commitment to deliver a long-term improvement strategy across the managed housing stock, the Housing service publish the agreed provisional programme of capital works. The current 3-year plan was published in March following cabinet approval, and included agreed programmes for 2011-12, along with provisional draft programmes for the following 2 years, subject to further surveys and financial agreements.
- 49.4 Within the provisional programme for 2012-2013, Property and Investment included the potential need for major external works to take place at Essex Place, possibly to include some insulated over cladding works, along with other required repairs, where required. All of the provisional plans were subject to further survey, and a standard visual survey was undertaken in early summer 2011 to establish what scope of works were required, and whether they were required and within what timescales. The survey report suggested that at this time there were no major issues with the concrete structural frame of the block, and that because of this, the need for insulated over cladding to rectify structural issues was not urgently required at this time. It did, however, highlight that there were some external fabric repairs required within the next few years, in particular brickwork re pointing.
- 49.5 Since the petitions were submitted to the Council, two further independent surveys had been commissioned in order to establish whether any further deterioration to the structural elements of the building had occurred. The first, a structural survey, was carried out by Curtins, a specialist in this field, and took place on Monday 7th November. The Curtins surveyor arranged to meet resident representatives including the Chair, Linda King, and Terence Pestor on site so that any specific concerns that they raised could be looked into directly during the survey, and so that they had good understanding of the survey process.
- 49.6 The findings of the survey came to similar conclusions to that of 2006. Despite some localised cracks in the structure, the concrete frame is generally considered to be in reasonable condition. The one consistent defect that was found was that the infill brickwork pointing was poor in some areas, and had deteriorated since 2006. However, the internal inspections carried out did not reveal any significant evidence of moisture ingress into flats due to this. The report recommended that the defective pointing was addressed within the current projected timescales (2012-13). There were 2 key ways this could be achieved, namely by re-pointing the existing brickwork, or during over cladding works. Either method would also reduce the likelihood of draughts coming through items such as plug sockets internally, which was a problem that several residents had raised. It was also noted by the surveyor that occupiers complained about draughts getting in and around the windows, and that the windows to the north elevation, in particular, are older than those elsewhere in the block.

- 49.7 The second survey, which was due to take place during the next few weeks, was a thermographic survey of the block. This would take place during the hours of darkness and once weather conditions (a large difference between internal and external temperatures) allowed. Once again, Curtins would discuss arrangements with resident representatives so that there would be clarity about the approach. This survey would show what the thermal performance of the flats was, where any areas of significant heat loss occurred, and also any 'cold-spots', where condensation and mould growth conditions might be more likely.
- 49.8 The provisional budgeting for 2012-13 had not at any stage been amended for Essex Place, and the current draft budgets still included provision for works to the block, subject to approvals, and the final decision on the scope and level of works that were to be undertaken.
- 49.9 Once the results of the thermographic survey were available and had been analysed, it was currently proposed that senior officers would discuss the results of both the latest surveys with residents, including at the next available residents' meeting, following the receipt of the final survey reports, if residents were agreeable to this approach.
- 49.10 Councillor Peltzer Dunn stated that he considered that the repairs should be carried out at the same time as improvements to the property. He made the point that stopping drafts could make condensation worse. He hoped it would be an inclusive programme.
- 49.11 **RESOLVED** – That the petitions be noted.

50. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 50.1 There were none.

51. DEPUTATIONS

- 51.1 There were none.

52. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 52.1 There were none.

53. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 53.1 There were none.

54. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

- 54.1 There were none.

55. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

- 55.1 The Cabinet Member considered the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee meeting held on the 7 November 2011.

- 55.2 Councillor Farrow drew attention to paragraph 52.3. He asked if there was any feedback in relation to housing officers liaising with the emergency planning officer to check the dams in Bevendean.
- 55.3 The Head of Tenancy Services explained that she was meeting with the Civil Contingencies Manager to discuss flooding plans. Councillor Farrow asked to be updated by email after the meeting had taken place.
- 55.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn drew attention to paragraph 51.3. This related to insurance cover for the council, if a tenant or leaseholder was involved in an accident after taking on work on behalf of the council.
- 55.5 The Housing Manager explained that he was still awaiting the result of the consultation to see if residents wanted to get involved in a grass cutting scheme. He assured Councillor Peltzer Dunn that if residents did want to get involved, risk assessment and training would take place to ensure safety. The insurance section was confident that they could cover residents (as volunteers) under the council's corporate policy. Plumpton College was likely to be involved in risk assessing the site and in assuring everyone taking part was risk assessed.
- 55.6 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked for an update on paragraph 53.27 regarding cash payments. The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement promised to email Councillor Peltzer Dunn the figures.
- 55.7 Councillor Farrow asked for an update on Paypoint (paragraph 53.10). The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement reported that cards had been ordered for everyone who had asked for a Paypoint Card. Not all residents had been contacted yet.
- 55.8 Councillor Farrow requested that when the decision had been made, a letter should be sent to council tenants in Whitehawk informing them that they had an opportunity to have a Paypoint Card. This request was agreed.

55.9 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes be noted.

56. COUNCIL HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

- 56.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which set out the proposed Council Housing Neighbourhood Policy. The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing required that social housing providers had a Neighbourhood Policy in relation to their housing. The policy set out in appendix 1 of the report, related to Brighton and Hove City Council's housing and its estates.
- 56.2 The Head of Tenancy Services reported that after the last Housing Management Consultative Committee, the report had been presented to the Leaseholder Action Group and had been well received.
- 56.3 **RESOLVED** - (1) That the contents of the policy and relevant policies and procedures are noted.

- (2) That the proposed Council Housing Neighbourhood Policy, as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed.

57. REVIEW OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE - COUNCIL HOUSING LAND

57.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which set out a proposed Council Housing Grounds Maintenance Policy. The policy had been developed using the key themes that residents raised in the pilot areas about how the grounds maintenance service should be delivered. The Grounds Maintenance Policy was one of a range of policies that would sit beneath the Housing and Social Inclusion Neighbourhood Policy.

57.2 **RESOLVED** - (1) That the new Grounds Maintenance Policy which has been developed by the Estate Services Monitoring Group (ESMG) be approved.

(2) That a rolling programme of site by site grounds maintenance reviews be approved.

(3) That the continuation of current arrangements with City Parks for grounds maintenance services be approved.

58. ADVERSE WEATHER POLICY 2011

58.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which set out the proposed Council Housing Adverse Weather Policy. The aim of the policy was to identify the appropriate actions that would be taken by Housing and Social Inclusion on housing land during severe weather conditions effecting employees, tenants, leaseholder contractors and members of the public. The document set out the minimum standards of service which would be provided and defined the required responsibilities. The policy also formed a part of the corporate plan and set out the provisions in the event of extreme weather.

58.2 **RESOLVED** - 1) That the Housing & Social Inclusion – Council Housing Adverse Weather Policy 2011 be approved for publication and implementation.

59. OPPORTUNITY FOR MANOR PLACE HOUSING OFFICE TO MOVE TO THE WHITEHAWK HUB

59.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion which set out a proposal to move the Manor Place Housing Office to the Whitehawk Hub. The objective of the proposal was to achieve a long term base for the Whitehawk tenancy management service that fitted within the service transformation framework of a “council the city deserves” – improving customer service, working in a more efficient office accommodation, working in more efficient and effective ways, and achieving value for money.

59.2 The Cabinet Member reported that following the Housing Management Consultative Committee, she and Councillor Powell along with the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion had been on a visit to the Whitehawk Hub. They had walked to the hub from the bus stop and back.

- 59.3 The Cabinet Member had noticed that there was a tree overhanging the pathway. Trimming the tree back would provide more light and space to the pathway. The Cabinet Member reported that the pathway had been widened and leveled, but had noticed a dip at one point which might cause a problem to people with a walking frame or stick rather than people in mobility scooters. Any further improvements that could be made would be investigated.
- 59.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to his query about cash payments detailed in the minutes of Housing Management Consultative Committee (paragraph 53.27). The Head of Customer Access & Business Improvement explained that she had asked the cashier to make a note of people calling into the Manor Road office. A maximum number of 39 people a day were calling at the office. Staff would visit residents who might have problems in making alternative arrangements for payments.
- 59.5 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that when people paid cash in the office they sometimes made multiple transactions. The statistics could therefore be misinterpreted. The figures quoted on page 93 of the agenda were the outcome of a survey. They were not a percentage of the total number of tenants, but only of those tenants who had taken part in the survey at Manor Place.
- 59.6 **RESOLVED** - That approval be given for the tenancy management housing service to move from the Manor Place Housing Office to the Whitehawk Hub.

The meeting concluded at 5.00pm

Signed

Cabinet Member

Dated this

day of