

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

**3.00pm 22 JULY 2008**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillors Caulfield (Chairman); Davey, Fryer, Mears, Simpson (Opposition Spokesperson), Simson, Wells, Marsh and Smart

**Tenant Representatives:** Muriel Briault (Leaseholder Action Group), Stewart Gover (North & East), Ron Gurney (West Hove & Portslade), Ted Harman (Brighton East), John Melson (High Rise Action Group), Charles Penrose (Sheltered Housing Action Group), Beryl Snelling (Central), John Stevens (Tenant Disability Network), Heather Hayes (North & East), Chris Kift (Central Area Housing Management Panel) and Faith Matyszak MBE (Brighton East)

**PART ONE**

**1. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

**1a Declaration of Substitutes**

**1a.1 Councillor**

Marsh  
Smart

**For Councillor**

Allen  
Harmer-Strange

**1b Declarations of Interest**

1b.1 There were none.

**1c Exclusion of Press and Public**

1c.1 The Committee 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 Schedule 12A, Part 5A, Section 100A(4) or 100 1 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

1c.2 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

- 2.1 In response to a query from John Stevens the Assistant Director noted that a report on damp in council owned homes was being prepared and would be reported to a future meeting.
- 2.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2008 be approved and signed by the Cabinet Member.

**3. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS**

- 3.1 The Chairman welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of the Housing Management Consultative Committee, outlining her vision for Housing Management, including priorities that:
- i) Tenants would continue to be at the heart of the service
  - ii) Housing Management would be a '3 star' service
  - iii) Improvements stemming from recent consultation would be evident.
- 3.2 The Chairman noted that projects providing new kitchens and bathrooms had begun and a project upgrading properties in the Albion Hill area of the city had just concluded.
- 3.3 The Chairman explained that in response to demand from tenants, there would be a greater focus on tenancy enforcement.
- 3.4 The Chairman concluded that she welcomed recent comment about Succession Policy and that there would be an emphasis on protecting and being more sensitive to tenants who were dealing with bereavement.

**4. CALLOVER**

- 4.1 **RESOLVED** - All items were reserved for discussion.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

- 5.1 There were none

**6. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

- 6.1 There were none

**7. PETITIONS**

- 7.1 Charles Penrose presented the following petition signed by 770 sheltered housing residents concerning the retention of scheme managers.

*'We the undersigned believe that Scheme Managers are absolutely essential for Brighton & Hove City Council Sheltered Housing schemes. We call on Brighton & Hove City Council to retain the present system of Scheme Managers.'*

*We are extremely concerned to hear that Scheme Managers are going to be replaced*

*by floating support. People live in Sheltered Housing because they need support and security, and floating scheme managers cannot provide this at a sufficient level.*

*Scheme Managers should not be an optional extra – they are absolutely vital. A Scheme Manager not only improves the quality of people’s lives but can also prolong their lives.*

*We are amongst the most vulnerable people in society, and our lives should not be put in danger through cost-cutting measures. We urge all Sheltered Housing tenants to sign this petition and to encourage families and carers to give us their support.’*

7.2 The Chairman accepted the petition noting her intention to visit every sheltered housing scheme in the city. She added that a report was being prepared on the issue and that the concerns of petition would be incorporated.

7.3 **RESOLVED** – That the petition be noted.

## **8. DEPUTATIONS**

8.1 There were none

## **9. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS**

9.1 There were none

## **10. NOTICE OF MOTION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL**

10.1 There were none

## **11. MATTERS REFERRED FOR RECONSIDERATION**

11.1 There were none

## **12. REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

12.1 There were none

## **13. SHELTERED HOUSING FOCUS GROUP UPDATE**

13.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adult Social Care & Housing concerning work of the Sheltered Housing Focus Group. The group had examined issues raised by tenants concerning council owned sheltered housing in the City (for copy see minute book).

13.2 Councillor Mears noted the concerns about communication and the need to respond to such.

13.3 The Chairman accepted that work was needed to improve customer services. This included improved communications. She noted the success of the recent ‘roadshow’ that visited sheltered housing schemes.

- 13.4 The meeting debated the merits of the roadshow and agreed that it was a good idea and asked if it might continue. It was noted that the event might benefit from a broader audience. Tenant Representatives asked if Carers might be able to attend and Councillors asked if Ward Members might be alerted to the events for information.
- 13.5 John Melson hoped that some positive action might result from the communications that had been heard.
- 13.6 Councillor Simpson noted the potential security risks for people living in sheltered accommodation, particularly in relation to shared spaces like common rooms and the possibility for theft from insecure areas. The Chairman noted that this issue had been debated by the Sheltered Housing Action Group and the work would be undertaken around this issue.
- 13.7 **RESOLVED** – That the progress of the Sheltered Housing Focus group to date be noted and that a full report on the conclusions of the Focus Group be brought back to the committee in September.

#### 14. ALLOCATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS FOCUS GROUPS UPDATE

- 14.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adult Social Care & Housing providing an update to the progress made thus far. The report recommended that a further updated report, including implementation of proposed policy changes, be considered in detail by the respective working groups prior to a final report being brought back to Housing Management Consultative Committee in the autumn (for copy see minute book).
- 14.2 The Chairman commended the report and thanked those involved in its preparation; she requested that it be shared with all Councillors for information.
- 14.3 John Melson requested that disabled people needing adaptations due to sub-standard accommodation should be decanted with no wait. The Chairman noted that this issue would be considered as part of the final report.
- 14.4 John felt that the 750K budget was inadequate and that the funding ought to be from the General Fund rather than the Housing Revenue Account. The Director noted the pressures on the budget and suggested that it could be examined during the budget setting process. The aspiration was that all properties should be 'homes for life' but the budgetary situation was difficult.
- 14.5 John Stevens was pleased to learn that an underspend of 138K from the Adaptations budget had been rolled forward and incorporated into the current budget.
- 14.6 Councillor Mears noted the limited impact of the budget and suggested that there might be alternatives to simply providing adaptations; she suggested that there might be merit in examining alternative housing options for those in severe need.

- 14.7 In response to a query from John Melson about the budget underspend the Assistant Director reported that the entire budget had been committed. The underspend did not mean that there was not enough demand, but rather that it had not been possible to complete all the budgeted works in a single financial year.
- 14.8 The Assistant Director informed the Committee that Officers were looking to deal with adaptations in a more systematic way and were considering options such as designating entire blocks for adaptation or offering concierge and extra care in some buildings.
- 14.9 Stewart Gover noted that, contrary to assurances otherwise, he was aware of properties that were having adaptations removed. The Assistant Director offered to investigate the specific case.
- 14.10 In response to queries from Ted Harman the Chairman explained that the newly developing Adaptations Policy would consider the issue of feedback and communication with tenants. She also commented that the newly compiled register of adapted properties would help tackle some of the issues in relation to the length of time it currently took to provide adaptations.
- 14.11 The Committee were concerned about delays incurred due to the lack of Occupational Therapists. The Director was aware of a national shortage and was working with local teams to address the issues. Chris Kift noted a visible improvement since the appointment of his Occupational Therapist and commended the better communications.
- 14.12 **RESOLVED** –That the progress to date be noted and that a full and final report be brought to the Housing Management Consultative Committee in Autumn 2008 to amend the Allocations Policy and incorporate an Adaptations Policy.

## 15. HOUSING GREEN PAPER OPTIONS STAGE 1 REPORT

- 15.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adult Social Care & Housing concerning the council's review of options in the Government's Housing Green Paper. With the support of external financial and legal expertise from Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) and Trowers & Hamlins (Trowers), the detailed assessment of options for meeting the council's strategic objectives and development of a proposal for the council to set up a viable Local Delivery Vehicle (LDV) that meets these objectives had been completed (for copy see minute book).
- 15.2 The Chairman commended the input of all those involved in preparing the report. She noted the huge opportunities it offered for the council and the financial benefits that it could bring.
- 15.3 The Chairman noted a request from Councillor Randall to speak to the report and invited him to address the meeting.
- 15.4 Councillor Randall was concerned about tenant input and involvement in regard to the LDV. He suggested that the LDV Board should consist of at least one third Tenant Representatives.

- 15.5 Councillor Randall commented that some authorities were tackling the issue in different ways; he noted the use of Community Land Trusts and Co-Operative models.
- 15.6 The Chairman thanked Councillor Randall for his comments and supported an ongoing commitment to tenant involvement. She recognised the need for sustainable and deliverable development, noting the current 'credit crunch' and potential for fuel poverty.
- 15.7 The Chairman was keen to ensure wide input and ownership of the scheme and noted the strong links with the newly established Cabinet Committee on Sustainability. She concluded that the LDV was only one of a series of potential solutions and that, where appropriate it might be of benefit to use Land Trusts or Co-Ops.
- 15.8 Councillor Marsh supported the commitment to tenant involvement and the comments of Councillor Randall in relation to using the various models available to the council. Councillor Marsh suggested that the newly emerging 'Citywide Assembly' might be interested in commenting on the Green Paper.
- 15.9 Charles Penrose asked what the implications were for Sheltered Housing. The Chairman explained that there could be positive benefits for Sheltered Housing and that residents would be consulted as plans developed. There was potential to re-invest in Sheltered Housing and improve facilities.
- 15.10 Councillor Simpson was concerned that the report had only been available for a short while to Members and that there were many issues that the Labour Group would have liked to have been briefed on prior to the meeting.
- 15.11 The Chairman commented that the report had been debated by the Adult Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Panel and that the Leader of the Labour Group had been aware of its content. She was keen to ensure that Members were involved.
- 15.12 Stewart recognised the need to allow for 'enquiring voices'. He noted that there was a pool of expertise and experience from within the local tenant movement and noted a general feeling of anticipation across the city. He felt that confidence in the proposed trajectory was immense and that this energy should be capitalised.
- 15.13 Councillor Fryer commented that the reason that this option was being pursued was because Government would not allow the council to borrow money or build its own housing stock. She was pleased to note that the LDV was one of a number of options being considered.
- 15.14 In response to a series of questions from Councillor Fryer the Chairman explained that; responsibility for repairs and maintenance remained with the council, the 106 leased properties would be from temporary accommodation, therefore there would be no change to their current Tenancy Agreement. The rent levels of the properties in question should not be significantly affected.

- 15.16 The Chairman continued that it could be possible to build new properties, buy existing ones or take over mortgages from owner occupiers in difficulties. The length of the lease would be 125 years in order to attract the funding required.
- 15.17 In response to a series of queries from Councillor Marsh the Chairman explained that; the composition of the board and the involvement of tenants would be debated during the second phase of the project. The potential empty 393 HRA properties would have the same security of tenure as regular stock and were being identified by officers as they became available. The Chairman stressed that that it might not be necessary to utilise all 393 properties and that this figure merely represented the maximum number that the council were legally able to make use of.
- 15.18 The Chairman noted that communications to the wider tenant community would be through conventional routes including the Area Panels, 'Homing In' and the Tenant Conference.
- 15.19 Councillor Mears emphasised the importance of settling the consequences of the Stock Options process and the determination of the Administration to deliver an excellent service whilst recognising the request of tenants to retain the council as its landlord.
- 15.20 John Melson supported the proposals being made and hoped that all parties would work together to make it a reality rather than use the opportunity to 'play politics'. He appreciated that this was the start of a wider process and hoped that regular briefings would be available for all interested parties so that everyone could learn together.
- 15.21 John suggested that a separate body should be set up specifically for Housing to ensure that the options being considered were subject to rigorous and appropriate scrutiny. Councillor Mears noted that this request had been made previously and that consideration of it could be part of the six month review of the new constitutional arrangements.
- 15.22 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the progress of the project, which aims to deliver key strategic housing and corporate priorities and generate funding for investment in the HRA, be noted.
- (2) To recommend that the Housing Cabinet Member approves to proceed to the proposed development and finalisation phases of Stage 2 of the review and authorises the Director of Adult Social Care and Housing to take all steps necessary to progress the work.
- (3) That it be noted that any decision to implement the finalised proposals will be made by Cabinet and the Committee and to note the provisional outline timetable to set up any asset-backed LDV, as outlined in section 3.17 of the report.
- (4) That the proposed consultation arrangements with tenant and leaseholder representatives be noted prior to Cabinet taking any final decision to establish a Local Delivery Vehicle, as outlined in section 4 of the report.

*Tenant Representatives unanimously indicated that they supported the recommendations.*

**16. TENDER FOR A CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF A SECURITY WHEEL CLAMPING SERVICE WITHIN BRIGHTON & HOVE**

- 16.1 The Committee considered a report of Director of Adult Social Care & Housing that requested comments on a proposal to request permission to tender for a contract to provide a secure clamping service for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) managed car parking and garage areas let to licence holders. Permission was also sought that other directorates who would benefit from clamping on their land, for example office car parks, could use the service (for copy see minute book).
- 16.2 The Chairman invited Councillor Randall to take the seat vacated by Councillor Davey. Councillor Davey had to leave the meeting for personal reasons.
- 16.3 The Chairman noted that the Car Parks and Garages Working Group would remain in place to help monitor the contract.
- 16.4 Councillor Randall asked if it would be possible for 'orphan' spaces, (those with no clearly designated responsibility) to be adopted.
- 16.5 Councillor Marsh asked if clamping vehicles in parking bays was the best solution. She reasoned that this might not be of benefit to the bay tenant as the illegal occupant might take longer to remove the offending vehicle.
- 16.6 John Melson noted that problems with illegal parking in and around Hereford Court and Wiltshire House had been reduced by the use of clamping. There remained issues with tenants parking in the wrong spaces, but the situation was much improved. John commended the work of the Car Parks and Garages Team.
- 16.7 Stewart echoed the praise of the Car Parks and Garages Team. He suggested the use of parking permits for larger estates so that underused car parks could be let to non-residents. Head of Housing Management offered to investigate.
- 16.8 In response to a query from Councillor Simson, the Head of Housing Management noted that there was a thirty minute delay for visitors to high-rise blocks and a fifteen minute delay for low-rise, this to enable visitors to obtain visitors permits from those that they were visiting.
- 16.9 Chris Kift asked if the car park at the rear of St. James' House, currently gated, could be included in the clamping contract and have the gate removed.
- 16.10 The Chairman noted that the service had the potential to expand and adopt other areas.
- 16.11 Officers offered to investigate the use of the two car parking spaces at Woburn Court that were often illegally occupied by visitors to the neighbouring public house.
- 16.12 John Melson noted that a release fee of £125.00 was unaffordable to many tenants. Head of Housing Management noted that this had been debated by the Working



Group and could be re-examined.

- 16.13 John Stevens noted that some tenants abused their car park spaces by sub-letting them to others. Head of Housing Management was aware of some small scale abuse and would take action where evidence was provided.
- 16.14 The Committee discussed the potential for zoning areas of the city and provision for disabled drivers. The Chairman suggested that this might be an issue that the Tenant Conference could debate.
- 16.15 **RESOLVED** – (1) That tendering for a Security Wheel Clamping Service within Brighton & Hove, enabling services to commence on 31 January 2009, be endorsed.
- (2) That the comments of the Housing Management Consultative Committee are recommended to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting for approval.

**17. HOUSING STRATEGY 2008-2013; HEALTHY HOMES, HEALTHY LIVES, HEALTHY CITY**

- 17.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adult Social Care & Housing concerning the development of a draft Housing Strategy and draft specialist housing strategies relating to Older People, the city's BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities and the city's LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans) communities. Development of these strategies began in 2007 to replace the previous Strategy that was developed in 2001 and updated in 2004 (for copy see minute book).
- 17.2 The Chairman thanked the Officers for their work in preparing the report.
- 17.3 John Stevens asked if there would be a strategy for disabled persons or for ex-service personnel. The Housing Strategy Manager noted that these would be examined in future, but did currently cut across many existing policies.
- 17.4 John Melson noted that age and disability were not necessarily linked and that one could be disabled at any age.
- 17.5 Councillor Simson welcomed the strategies, but was concerned to note the challenges that had been faced in engaging with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.
- 17.6 Councillor Randall commented that 'lifetime homes' ought to translate into 'lifetime neighbourhoods' and that it was also important to offer strategies for families and the provision of family housing.
- 17.7 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the progress on the development of the city-wide Housing Strategy 2008–2013 and the consultation undertaken to date, be noted.
- (2) To engage Housing Management Consultative Committee and tenant representatives in detailed consultation / review of the draft Housing Strategy, Older People's Housing Strategy, BME Housing Strategy and LGBT Housing Strategy.

**18. HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

- 18.1 The Committee considered a report of Director of Adult Social Care & Housing concerning the attainment of performance targets set by members and/or Cabinet and reporting on general policy initiatives underway to improve performance within Housing Management responsibilities (for copy see minute book).
- 18.2 The Chairman was pleased to note the improvements in performance and thanked Officers for their work in achieving these goals.
- 18.3 Councillor Simson was pleased to note the improvements in empty property turnaround times but did not wish this to hamper the lettable standard.
- 18.4 Councillor Simson was concerned to note the percentage of tenants refusing properties due to 'not liking the area' having made a bid. She wondered why the bid had been made in the first place and if tenants were feeling under pressure to bid. The Chairman had asked the Lettings Team to investigate this and they had reported that the incidents were mainly due to viewing properties with shared facilities.
- 18.5 Councillor Simpson echoed the sentiments of Councillor Simson in respect of tenants feeling under pressure to bid. The Assistant Director noted the concerns and felt that Officers should encourage tenants to bid, but that this should not make tenants feel pressurised.
- 18.6 Councillor Randall noted that the neighbourhood was as important as the property being let. He noted that Rotterdam had created a safety index of all its estates and wondered if there might be benefit in doing something similar in the city. The Chairman agreed that expanded information about the neighbourhood would be a good idea.
- 18.7 Policy & Performance Manager offered to provide information to John Melson about the number of applicants and refusals.
- 18.8 Chris Kift noted that he had just been through the bidding system and had found it very stressful; viewing properties with other potential tenants added an element of competition which was awkward. The sheer lack of properties, even for a 'Band A' rating was frustrating and the poor information provided by the Letting Officer compounded a very stressful situation.
- 18.9 Councillor Randall asked if a financial assessment was made with tenants at the letting stage. Identifying potential problems for tenants at the start of their tenancy could bring benefits in the long term and reduce overall debt.
- 18.10 Councillor Randall noted that the issuing of Notice Seeking Possession (NOSP) for rent arrears was very high compared to the national average. He recognised that this represented a lot of work for the department but that it did save money in the long term.
- 18.11 In response to a query from John Stevens about emergency repairs and Carelink the Chairman suggested that refer this to the Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring

Group.

- 18.12 Councillor Marsh noted that Adult Social Care & Housing had the largest amount of sickness leave. The Chairman noted that she, along with the Director and Assistant Director would be tackling this issue directly.
- 18.13 The Director noted that she was sponsoring a pilot scheme in respect of sickness absence. The issue was a sensitive one and she would be dealing with it as a priority and tackling the issue from the perspective of managing attendance.
- 18.14 John Melson noted there had been a marked improvement in cleaning services and paid tribute to Hilary Edgar and her team for the positive results of some pilot schemes.
- 18.15 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the report be noted.

## 19. EXTERNAL ENVELOPE REPAIRS TO SOMERSET & WILTSHIRE HOUSE 2008

- 19.1 The Committee considered a report of Director of Adult Social Care & Housing regarding the authorisation of delegated authority to award a contract for repairs to the external envelope of Somerset & Wiltshire House (for copy see minute book).
- 19.3 Councillor Mears was pleased to note that whilst scaffolding was erected it would be used to facilitate the carrying out additional minor repairs and inspections.
- 19.4 Charles Penrose noted concerns from residents of Somerset Point about previous electrical works and the difficulties poor work had caused. Councillor Mears and the Chairman noted that this was not acceptable and that there would be a greater emphasis on the letting and monitoring of contracts.
- 19.5 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the Housing Management Consultative Committee note that the Cabinet Member for Housing will be requested to authorise that the Director of Adult Social Care & Housing be given delegated powers to approve the award of the contract for external envelope repairs to Somerset & Wiltshire House, following financial due diligence and cost comparisons of the tenders offered under mini competition from contractors on the LHC external envelope repairs framework, following consultation with the Cabinet member for housing.
- 19.6 In closing the meeting the Chairman noted information from Chris Kift that a 'Facebook' site had been created by Tenant Representatives with colleagues from Jersey. She commended the initiative and hoped that it would bring dividends.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

