

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE

3.00pm 11 FEBRUARY 2014

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Randall (Chair); Councillor Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Farrow (Opposition Spokesperson), Davey, Mears, Wilson and Bowden

Tenant Representatives Roy Crowhurst (West Hove & Portslade Area Housing Management Panel), Charles Penrose (Sheltered Housing Action Group), Chris El-Shabba (Brighton East Area Housing Management Panel), Ron Gurney (Ingram Crescent RA), Heather Hayes (Coldean TRA), John Melson and Jason Williams

PART ONE

33. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

33(a) Declarations of Substitute Members

33.1 Councillor Bowden declared that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Kennedy

33(b) Declarations of Interests

33.2 Mr R Crowhurst, as a board member of Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes, declared an interest in item 46.

33(c) Exclusion of the Press and Public

33.4 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.

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

34. MINUTES

34.1 The Sub Committee considered the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2013.

- 34.2 Councillor Farrow referred to item 28, which was a report on Annual Review of Repairs Partnership 2012/13, and asked when an interim report on how effective the proposed action plan had been would be provided. Officers advised that there was a report at this meeting, Item 40, which would provide some information. The next review of the Repairs Partnership would take place in April 2014, and so a report would be provided later in the year.
- 34.3 Councillor Mears referred to Item 25, which was a report on Sustainable Tenancies Strategy (Welfare Reform), and asked when a report on the review of the closure of Manor Place would be provided.
- 34.4 Officers agreed that a report would come to a future meeting.
- 34.5 **RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee held on 29 October 2013 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

35. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 35.1 The Chair welcomed Barry Hughes and Jason Williams to the meeting. Barry Hughes had been elected to represent the North & East Area Housing Management Panel at this meeting, and Jason Williams had been elected to represent Central Area Housing Management Panel.

The Chair noted that at the meeting today there would be a presentation on Tenancy Fraud. As a supplement to that item, he said that he had been advised of a number of incidents of fraud. In one case a council tenant had tried to advertise their property for rent by placing an advertising board outside, and in another a family had moved out of a property leaving behind a radically altered and dangerous property. The Authority would be taking the appropriate action against both of those tenants. Mears had agreed to inform the Council if they came across a property where there was concern over tenancy fraud, which would then be investigated.

The refurbishment of the Villas in Preston Road had now been completed. The Chair said it was a fantastic development and thanked all those involved in the development of the property.

The Chartered Institute of Housing would be holding their annual conference in the city in March. The Chair said he would be speaking at the conference.

Mears had recently introduced a new way for tenants to provide feedback on work they had carried out. There had been some concern that tenants were being asked to complete a satisfaction questionnaire and then hand it to the people who had just undertaken the repairs, and so a new method had been introduced which allowed people to complete and return the survey by post. To encourage people to respond, all those who sent back a survey would be entered into a £50 prize draw. Mears advised that 127 responses had been received. At the meeting the draw to select the winners was taken. The Chair randomly selected two responses, and the winners lived at Turton Close and Wolseley Road.

36. CALL-OVER

36.1 **RESOLVED** – That all items be reserved for discussion

37. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- 37.1 (a) There were no Petitions
(b) There were no Written Questions
(c) There were no Deputations

38. ISSUES RAISED BY COUNCILLORS

- 38.1 (a) There were no Petitions
(d) There were no Written Questions
(e) There were no Letters
(f) There were no Notices of Motion

39. HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2 2013/14

- 39.1 The Sub Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment Development & Housing, on Housing Management Performance Report Quarter 2 2013/14. The report was presented by the Head of Income Inclusion & Improvement, Housing.
- 39.2 Councillor Farrow thanked officers for the report but was concerned that some of the figures weren't accurate. Paragraph 4.2 showed that 99.03% of tenants were satisfied with the repairs undertaken but he had been informed that not all tradespersons were handing out survey cards for the customer to complete, and therefore the response couldn't be accurate. He also noted that 98.26% of homes met the required standard for Decent Homes, and questioned whether that figure was correct. Mr Melson also questioned the high level of satisfaction of repair work undertaken, and said that people would not always give an honest response if they had to return a satisfaction survey direct to the person who had undertaken the work. Mr Cryer (Mears) said that he accepted the concerns about the surveys and that was why the company had introduced a pilot scheme whereby customers could return their survey by post. In addition Brighton & Hove City Council were introducing a scheme whereby selected volunteers from the Home Group would make phone calls and get responses direct from tenants to ensure the level of satisfaction recorded was accurate. With regard to Decent Homes, the figures provided in the report had been collated by the Council on APEX (an asset management system). The council kept records of all housing stock which showed when key building elements such as kitchens and bathrooms were installed. The standard of all properties was constantly monitored. Some tenants had said that they didn't want a new kitchen or bathroom installed, which is then recorded as having met the standard, in line with government guidance.

- 39.3 Councillor Mears was concerned that the Housing Stock Condition survey was being undertaken by Mears, as it would be difficult for a contractor to survey their own work. The Chair agreed and suggested to officers that the survey should be undertaken by an independent body. The Head of Property and Investment, Housing, said that the survey undertaken was a 'normal' survey and not a Housing Stock Condition one. Councillor Mears said that she was aware of a tenant at Rosehill Court who had received a letter from Mears saying a Housing Stock Condition survey would be undertaken. The Head of Housing said she look would look into the matter.
- 39.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted that the average time take to complete routine repairs had increased 50% over the same quarter last year and asked why that was. Officers informed him that the categorisation of repairs had changed; urgent repairs which were their own category were now categorised as 'emergency repairs'. In order to allow emergency repairs to be prioritised and to provide residents with flexibility of appointment time and any further works which may be required (such as ordering parts or multiple trades) the target for routine repairs to be completed was 20 working days.
- 39.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked whether the 'percentage of appointments kept by contractor' included appointments missed because the tenant was not at home, and whether the 'cancelled repair jobs' included cancellation by the tenant. Officers advised that the appointments kept related only to the contractor, but the cancelled jobs included cancellation by both the tenant and the contractor.
- 39.6 Councillor Wilson noted that 93.93% of repairs to lifts were restored on the same day as the contractor was called out, and asked how long it took to repair the remaining lifts. Officers said they didn't have the information at the meeting but would provide it later.
- 39.7 Ms Hayes raised a question about repairs, and asked why it took two contractors to undertake a straightforward job; recently two people came to repair a wall socket. Mr Cryer suggested it could have been an apprentice as Mears currently had four electrician apprentices.
- 39.8 Councillor Farrow referred to Appendix 2 to the report and said he was concerned at the level of those in arrears with their rent following the changes to Housing Benefit. Officers advised that the figures in the report were correct as of end of September 2013 and the numbers had changed since then. In particular the 'percentage of under occupying council households who are in arrear at month end' had decreased from 77% to 72%; the 'percentage increase in arrears of under occupying household since 1 April' had increased from 44% to 52%; and the 'percentage increase in arrears of all current tenant arrears since 1 April' had increased from 29% to 52%. The Chair added that the number of tenants affected by the changes had reduced from 947 to 749 and the figure was expected to reduce further. The reduction had been achieved through a number of measures including the Tenant Incentive Scheme to move properties and through mutual exchanges.
- 39.9 The Chair asked for officers to prepare a report provide a report for the next Housing Committee meeting providing further information on this matter.
- 39.10 **RESOLVED** – That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee note the report.

40. THE BRIGHTON & HOVE PROPERTY STANDARD

- 40.1 The Sub Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment Development & Housing, on Brighton & Hove Property Standard. The report was presented by the Performance Manager, Property and Investment Team, Housing. The Chair confirmed the report had already been presented to the Area Panels.
- 40.2 Councillor Davey noted that tenants would have the choice of coloured tiles when a bathroom or kitchen was installed and asked if previously the only option was white tiles. Officers advised it was. Ms Hayes asked when the option to have coloured tiles would be agreed, and was advised it would be for the Housing Committee to decide at its meeting in March 2014. Mr Melson asked whether there would be an additional charge for tenants who selected colour tiles and was advised there wouldn't be.
- 40.3 Mr Melson asked that consideration be given to extending flooring in kitchens to go from wall to wall and not just up to cabinets. If cabinets had to be removed the flooring would then have gaps. Officers advised that when installing a kitchen the base units could not be laid onto vinyl and therefore any flooring needed to be laid after the cabinets had been installed.
- 40.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Housing Management Consultative notes the following recommendations which will be considered by the Housing Committee at its meeting on 5 March 2014:

(1) That all residents be offered additional choice of coloured wall tiles, when having a kitchen or bathroom installed.

(2) That all residents be offered additional choice of kitchen cupboard doors and handles when having a new kitchen installed.

(3) That all individual sheltered homes with a street entrance be offered an external security light, when upgrading the electrics to that property.

(4) That all sheltered housing schemes with communal lounges have a hearing loop installed when upgrading electrics to communal areas.

(5) That a change in policy is agreed to allow tenants who have installed their own kitchen or bathroom to have the other room modernised by the council, if it is old or in disrepair (as per the age and condition requirements of the governments DHS).

(6) To run a six to twelve month pilot enabling all 1 bed ground floor flats that become empty and require a bathroom replacement, to be considered for the installation of a level access shower instead of a bath.

41. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2014/15

- 41.1 The Sub Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment Development & Housing, on Housing Revenue Account Budget 2014/15. The report was presented by the Principal Accountant, Financial Services.
- 41.2 The Chair informed the Sub Committee that the proposed charge for storage of mobility scooters had been reduced from £4 per week to £3 per week.

- 41.3 Councillor Peltzer said he was supportive of the reduction of charges, but felt it was iniquitous to make any charge for the storage of scooters. He also felt that charging for lighting of communal ways was wrong and felt that the Authority, as landlord, had a legal duty to provide safe access to buildings. He suggested that as this report had already been considered by the Housing Committee it would have been useful to have had an extract of the Minutes of that meeting to accompany the report. Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked how many people were likely to want to store their scooter and was advised it was around 100.
- 41.4 Mr Crowhurst asked whether the revenue from the storage of mobility scooters would go to the HRA. The Chair advised it would.
- 41.5 Mr Melson said he did not support the contribution of £145k for discretionary grants. He was also concerned at the proposed charges for mobility scooter storage etc and believed that selecting certain things for an additional charge was wrong; He said he felt that tenants had not been fully consulted on the proposed charges.
- 41.6 Councillor Mears said that she could not support the proposed budget as she felt that the changes suggested would lead to an increase of management costs, and could not agree to a contribution of £145k for discretionary grants.
- 41.7 RESOLVED** - That Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee note the proposed draft 2014/15 revenue budget reported to Housing Committee on 15 January 2014, for recommendation that Policy & Resources Committee:
- (1) Approves and recommends to Council the budget for 2014/15 as shown in Appendix 1 according to the final year of rent convergence to be confirmed by government in its rent restructuring guidance for 2014/15.
 - (2) Approves individual rent increases and decreases in line with rent restructuring principles as determined by the Government and detailed in paragraphs 3.12 to 3.16, and according to the final year of rent convergence to be confirmed by government in its rent restructuring guidance for 2014/15.
 - (3) Approves the changes to fees and charges as detailed in Appendix 2.
 - (4) Approves the new service charges outlined in Appendix 2 including the phased

42. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CAPITAL PROGRAMME

- 42.1 The Sub Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment Development & Housing, on Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme. The report was presented by Head of Property & Investment, Housing, with additional advice from the Principal Accountant, Housing.
- 42.2 Councillor Mears asked for clarification of the amount of capital receipt from Seaside Homes being received by the HRA, as it was still not clear in this report. Officers confirmed that since November 2011 receipts for the lease premium of £11.8m had been received by the HRA to fund investment in Decent Homes work. Also, that the HRA has received £1.2m capital receipt for refurbishment works where this work was carried out prior to leasing to Seaside Homes and that, where the works were carried out post-lease, a receipt of £6.2m was due to the General Fund. The actual receipts are recorded in the Council's statement of accounts. Officers advised that current forecasts

mean that the Council is still on track to receive lease premium payments of £17.2m for investment in Decent Homes work, with total receipts (including refurbishments fees) of £28m, from Seaside Homes as properties are leased over in batches over the 5 years.

- 42.3 RESOLVED** – That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee note the HRA Capital programme for 2014-2017 reported to the Housing Committee on 15 January 2014, for recommendation that Policy & Resources Committee approves and recommends to Council the HRA capital programme budget of £28.876m and financing for 2014/15 as set out in the report.

43. LETTABLE STANDARD

- 43.1 The Sub Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment Development & Housing, on Housing Revenue Account Budget 2014/15. The report was presented by the Performance and Improvement Officer, Housing.
- 43.2 Councillor Mears asked when the Resident Assessors had begun working and how many assessors there were. Officers advised that there were seven assessors, who had been in place for just over a year.
- 43.3 Mr Melson referred to Appendix 1 and asked why if a property had been surveyed using the decent homes survey, the cost of any work identified would not come out of the Decent Homes budget. Officers said it would depend on the amount of work being undertaken. If it was major works it would come out of the Decent Homes budget, but if it was only minor work such as replacing a door it would come out of the Empty Property budget.
- 43.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee note the recommendations.

44. SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW UPDATE

- 44.1 The Sub Committee considered a report of the Executive Director Environment Development & Housing, on Sheltered Housing Review Update. The report was presented by the Older Persons Housing Manager.
- 44.2 Councillor Mears asked how many self funded tenants would have to pay the new service charge, and was advised it was around 100 people.
- 44.3 Mr Penrose asked for assurance that this report would be presented for the next meeting of the Sheltered Housing Action Group on the 12 March 2014. The Chair confirmed it would.
- 44.4 Ms Hayes asked if the Authority had any plans to provide further sheltered housing. The Chair said there was, and cited the Brooke Mead development.
- 44.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to Appendix 1 and asked if the information related to tenants or residents of Brighton. Officers confirmed it was related to residents in the Authority's sheltered housing.

44.6 **RESOLVED** – That the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee note the report.

45. HOUSING TENANCY FRAUD

45.1 The Corporate Fraud Manager provided a verbal update on Housing Tenancy Fraud. He advised that the team had been set up last June following the enactment of the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act. Based on national figures it was estimated that there could be between 240 and 360 council tenants in the city committing fraud. Each case of tenancy fraud had an average estimated value of £18,000.

45.2 Councillor Farrow thanked the officer for the presentation and asked how many properties had been recovered since the fraud team had been set up six months ago, and was advised that it was ten. Councillor Farrow felt that given the very high number of people on the waiting list for social housing, more resources should be directed to tackle fraud.

45.3 Councillor Bowden asked whether the Authority would recover any profit a tenant had made from sub-letting their home. Officers said each case would be considered on its merits and money could potentially be recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act, but that course of action was time consuming and not appropriate in every case.

45.4 The Chair was pleased that ten properties had been recovered this financial year. The potential savings of around £180,000 would enable more people to be housed. The Chair felt there was a very good argument for some of those savings to be used to enable to more work to be undertaken by the Fraud Manager's team.

45.5 Mr Crowhurst suggested that the new legislation and work of the Fraud Manager be advertised, to ensure that tenants were aware of the current law and that the Authority were actively pursuing those who were abusing the system. The Chair agreed.

45.6 The Fraud Manager was asked whether it was possible to have a council property and a second home elsewhere, and was advised that the council home must be a person's sole or main residence.

45.7 **RESOLVED** – That the presentation be noted.

46. BRIGHTON HOVE SEASIDE COMMUNITY HOMES

46.1 The Sub-Committee considered the update on Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes.

46.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted there was a discrepancy in the total number of refurbishment works not yet completed. Mr Crowhurst said that was a typo and confirmed that all properties had now been refurbished. Mr Crowhurst added that the next batch of properties to be transferred should be completed in March 2014; the majority of which would already be refurbished.

46.3 RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.55pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of