

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING MANAGEMENT PANEL: EAST AREA

7.00pm 3 JUNE 2019

THE VALE COMMUNITY CENTRE, 17A HADLOW CLOSE, BRIGHTON, BN2 0FH

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Brennan, Mears, Simson and Williams

Representatives: Rosemary Johnson (LAG Delegate), Alan Cooke (Craven Vale CA Secretary), Chris El Shabba (Robert Lodge RA), Lyn Bennet (Manor Farm T&RA) and Janet Gearing (Woodingdean TRA)

Officers: Sam Warren (Community Engagement Manager), Theresa Youngman (Contract Compliance Manager), Janet Dowdell (Tenancy Services Operations Manager), Martin Reid (Assistant Director Housing), Brett Stacey (Field Officer Manager), Emma McDermot (Head of Communities & Equality) and Keely McDonald (Community Engagement Officer)

Guests: Sarah Booker-Lewis (Local Democracy Reporter)

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 The following points were raised in the ratification of the Chair to Councillor Brennan:

- Residents were frustrated because they had not been informed on the process and that if there had not been a Housing Committee vote that the Chair of the Panel should either be the Vice Chair or the previous Chair.
- Councillors stated that there had not been any votes for the nominated members and that the Vice Chair should chair the Panel.

1.2 Martin Reid, Assistant Director of Housing, clarified the following advice given to the East Area councillor representatives from Mark Wall, Head of Democratic Services, prior to the meeting:

- There had been four nominations for both Councillors Brennan and Mears to Chair the Panel.
- In view of the equal vote, the matter was discussed at Leaders Group and the original terms of reference for the Area Panels and the report to P&R Committee in 2014 were considered.
- The Leaders Group noted that the terms of reference stated that the Chair of an Area Panel would be appointed by the Housing Committee and in the absence of such as appointment, the position should fall to a Member of the Administration.
- It was also noted that in the 2014 report reference was made to the preference of tenants that the Ward Members for the Area should vote for the Chair, but this did not form part of the formal recommendations that were approved
- It was agreed that the terms of reference should apply and therefore Councillor Brennan should be appointed as the Chair of the Panel and the ambiguity resulting

from the report in 2014 to be reviewed should be referred to the Constitution Working Group for consideration as part of its current review of the Constitution.

- 1.3 Martin Reid stated that the key actions from the points raised from residents and councillors would be to write to resident representatives to share the information detailing the election of Chair, the constitutional advice to include the 2014 report and to advise when the matter of any ambiguity will be considered at Constitutional Review Group.

2 APOLOGIES

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Brenda Murphy and Eddie Wilson.

3 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 3.1 The Chair gave the following communications:

“Anti-social behaviour is one of the most important issue for tenants of social housing. It damages lives and communities and its impact can be profound and far reaching. Our Tenancy Team work in close partnership with the Police and Community Safety Team to deal with anti-social behaviour within the city.

The team works to do all it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in our housing stock and works with new legislation that has radically altered the powers the council has to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Please let your Community Engagement Officer know if you would be interested in attending one of the Enforcement workshops being arranged by the team which share information on how they work and deal with this type of behaviour”

- 3.2 Councillor Simson requested that more information should be provided on how the Council as a social landlord would interact with residents, beyond just council tenants, to get a wider picture of the City's needs and that Woodingdean had experienced communication difficulties.
- 3.3 Ododo Dafe, Head of Income Involvement & Improvement, responded that Housing would take the lead and report to Housing Customer Services.
- 3.4 Martin Reid, Assistant Director of Housing, added that the issue would be taken to a senior level if there were a pattern of non-responses to consistent problems.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 4.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as a correct record.

5 RESIDENTS QUESTION TIME

- 5.1 1) **Estate Development Budget 2020/21**
2) **Estate Development Budget 2019/20**

- Residents asked what projects the Woodingdean area, which was predominantly independent houses which lacked communal areas, was eligible to bid for in the EDB because they could not apply for fencing.
- Martin Reid responded that Housing could meet residents to discuss this matter and to walk the estate to explore what bids could be processed. Housing had offered to do this before July, at residents' convenience, and other estates had already benefitted from this offer.
- Ododo Dafe stated that Hilary Edgar's written response to the question had mentioned a potential budget to be set up for individual fencing for tenants' homes to equitably execute projects.
- Sam Warren, Community Engagement Manager, stated that there was a group reviewing the EDB budget which would welcome resident feedback and that if the criteria was not clear enough, resulting in residents not understanding why their bids had been rejected, that they wanted to clarify this.
- In response to residents asking why fencing was not offered to tenants in arrears, Ododo Dafe responded that the Council would be happy to engage with tenants in arrears and that residents should contact Housing Customer Service or Management Team to arrange a payment plan which the residents would have to adhere to for three months to become eligible, however if the fencing was a health and safety matter then it would not be necessary.
- In response to Councillor Simson asking how the Council assessed eligibility, officers stated that it was a new process and the criteria was being designed using residents' comments and feedback.
- The Chair stated that the process should be on a case-by-case basis and that if an incident happened in future that it should be addressed, investigated and brought back to the Panel.
- In response to Ododo Dafe explaining that if a resident felt their bid had been treated unfairly that there was an appeal system and if necessary a problem would be rectified, Councillor Bell said that there had been incidences where residents were forced to wait until the following year to re-bid.
- Councillor Simson stated that fences were important to estates because they improved the environment in social areas.

5.2 3) Weeds and debris in guttering

- Residents stated that there were no recent estate visits and asked if MEARS were monitoring the estate or whether maintenance was purely based on reported incidences.
- Councillor Williams said that following an estate walk with Councillor Platts that the problems spotted had been quickly rectified and proposed that this exercise should be a regular occurrence.
- In response to leaseholders asking why operatives could not be trained with an armed hose device to gutter flat roofs to avoid using scaffolding, Theresa Youngman, Contract Compliance Manager, stated that this device could not be used if the building was above two stories because operatives would not have sight of the gutter and that there was health and safety legislation protecting the current scaffolding procedure.

6 NEW COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM

- 6.1 Emma Mc Dermot, Head of Communities & Equality, introduced the new community engagement team which pooled knowledge and skills from the Resident Involvement

Officers and the Neighbourhoods and Communities Team to create a single face for resident issues. The method of contact and frontline capacity would remain the same and the teams were funded by the HRA and the General Fund.

- 6.2 Councillor Mears stated that the HRA, which was paid for using social rents, subsidised the General Fund to ease their deficit using the HRA surplus. Similar city-wide teams, such as Field Officers, carried out other enforcement remits unrelated to Housing, whilst being largely funded by the General fund thus short-changing tenants.
- 6.3 Leaseholders said that the HRA was also funded by the leaseholder service charge and that only half of councils blocks housed leaseholders, Martin Reid responded that this issue would be directed to the LAG with a report.
- 6.4 Emma Mc Dermot responded that the amount of HRA funding to the service had not changed and the money from the General Fund had been granted through management cuts – not subsidised from other channels.
- 6.5 Sam Warren, Community Engagement Manager, stated that as the manager of the new team that they would take on residents' concerns and they would be supporting tenants on several issues in Housing that were not previously supported.
- 6.6 In response to Councillor Williams asking for funding statistics, Emma Mc Dermot stated the statistics were clear, approved by lead members and scrutinised by tenants.
- 6.7 Marin Reid commented that when the Field Officers had attended the previous Panel, HRA funding was also raised and that an action taken was to provide a spending breakdown for information which they would now duplicate for the Community Engagement Team.
- 6.8 **RESOLVED:** That the Panel agreed to note the report.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SURVEY

- 7.1 Janet Dowdell, Tenancy Services Operations Manager, introduced the environmental improvement survey which was a new pilot initiative launched for seven weeks to collate resident feedback to then bring comments to meetings and organise estate projects.
- 7.2 Councillor Simson raised concern over the existence of the survey not communicated to residents sufficiently and caused animosity regarding the survey only being only directed towards to council tenants when improvements would affect the entire estate.
- 7.3 In response to leaseholders enquiring if they would be charged a percentage of the cost of EIS projects affecting their blocks, Janet Dowdell stated that the environmental improvements were HRA funded which was also the reason that it was only council tenants and leaseholders consulted for projects however all estate residents were welcome to attend the meetings. It was further stated that leaseholders would not typically be expected to pay the cost of EIS projects.

- 7.4 Martin Reid stated that he had spent time with the LAG to improve engagement earlier in this process, beyond the statutory 30-day consultation period, and a report had been approved at committee for that agreed route.
- 7.5 In response to residents stating that all tenants, including private renters, should have a voice in what is planned for Housing land, Ododo Dafe stated that this was not planned for the first round of consultation which was to ensure that resident voices were primarily heard and apologised for the ambiguous wording on the survey.
- 7.6 In response to the Chair questioning whether residents could be provided with paper copies of the surveys, Janet Dowdell stated they would not be provided and if residents had difficulties in completing the online survey then they could either ring or visit the help desk or customer services for a member of staff to assist or manually complete the form on their behalf.
- 7.7 Councillor Mears referred to the Field Officer presentation at the previous meeting and commented on how their remit was increasingly citywide beyond Housing services, Brett Stacey informed that there the HRA budget contributed between 10-15% of the Field officer budget and they were delivering support to several Housing services with notable improvements. He added that the Fields Officers had been active for five months and the first set of performance statistics were soon to be generated.
- 7.8 Janett Dowdell stated that there were currently three meetings per month in a year's programme and once the survey was complete a report would go to the Housing Committee for review.
- 7.9 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agreed to note the report.

8 ANNUAL REPORT 2019

- 8.1 Ododo Dafe, Head of Income Involvement & Improvement, introduced the Annual Report and stated that it was presented in the same style as previous years, that all housing organisations were obliged to this commitment to tenants and leaseholders and that the report would be published in Homing In once when agreed at the Housing Committee.
- 8.2 The Chair said that the report provided a good insight and intentions on efforts to increase social value to Housing services.
- 8.3 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agreed to note the report.

9 PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE HOUSING REPAIRS, PLANNED MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL WORKS

- 9.1 Ododo Dafe, Head of Income Involvement & Improvement, introduced the report and welcomed any questions.
- 9.2 Councillor Mears claimed that the contract was costing tenants £10 million therefore tenants and leaseholders should have more say on how this money was spent high level information and consultation was necessary for them to do so. The staffing costs with the new programme were huge and needed to be reviewed.

9.3 Martin Reid stated that he would bring a budget update for these reports to future panels.

9.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agree to note the report.

10 HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT

10.1 Ododo Dafe, Head of Income Involvement & Improvement, introduced the report and stated that this was a more comprehensive end of year performance review that included an infographic sheet that summaries all nine indicators.

10.2 Councillor Mears said that she regularly raised the issue of asbestos in blocks of flats and raised concern over the asbestos reports being over simplified. Asbestos existed in many properties and that contractors did not always handle the material correctly.

10.3 Martin Reid responded that they would ensure that thorough asbestos checks were completed in future.

10.4 In response to Councillor Williams asking how asbestos registers were kept, Martin Reid stated that a register existed before any works began and contractors performed checks and that if any dangers existed that measures would be taken.

10.5 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agree to note the report.

11 CITY WIDE REPORTS

11.1 Leaseholders stated that the LAG published their minutes online and that anyone was welcome to attend the meetings.

11.2 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel agree to note the reports.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

13 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting would be the 21 October 2019.

The meeting concluded at 9.00pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of