

# Questions from Residents

## Items from the West Resident Association Meeting 3/4/18

### Ramp markings

*The yellow paint used on ramps and to mark out hazards such as the edge of steps does not show up at night. This makes it difficult and dangerous for people to negotiate at night.*

*It was proposed that:*

- a) luminous paint that is easily visible at night is used for all future work*
- b) present markings are re-done in a suitable paint (3\*)*

**Response: Perrin Horne, Customer Services Manager, Property & Investment, tel: 01273 294641**

BHCC uses reflective fluorescent paint in the circumstance described above. If current markings are a Health & Safety concern they should be reported to Mears by email at [BHCC.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk](mailto:BHCC.repairs@mearsgroup.co.uk) or by calling freephone 0800 052 6140 or local number 01273 294409.

### Key safes

*The outside of buildings are increasingly cluttered with redundant key safes. These never get removed when they are no longer in use.*

*It was proposed that an audit is carried out of key safes, to see what is in use and what isn't, and that redundant safes are removed.*

*For agenda setting and all Area Panel agendas. (3\*)*

**Response: Chloe Mclaughlin, Estates Service Manager, tel: 01273 391072**

This process has been piloted already in the city and can take between 6 and 8 weeks to complete. Initially all residents in the block are contacted for details to identify individual key safes and their locations. Residents are then notified of the new re-positioning. In some cases, key safes could not be identified to a particular

resident or where an individual resident had not responded to the original letter, home visits and telephone calls were made to clarify the situation.

Currently there is a record of some installations and where relevant, Care Link is notified of the new locations.

Any association wishing their key safes to be re-positioned can contact the Estates Team at [EstatesServiceTeam@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:EstatesServiceTeam@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or on tel: 01273 294769

### 3\* Items from the Central Residents Only meeting 12/4/18

#### Recycling problems

*It was agreed that more education is needed to ensure that recycling facilities are used properly. It was suggested that thought is given to ways of doing this, with the aim of improving the take-up and efficiency of the service. (3\*)*

**Response: Elizabeth Barr, Assistant Business Support Manager, City Clean, tel: 01273 292929**

City Clean can help by making sure that signage is correct on the waste containers. This will help residents know what goes in which container. If representatives would like to let City Clean know which property/area this is for we can check the signage. We would also be happy to send a member of City Clean to local association meetings or to an Area Panel meeting.

The council's website provides information on what can be recycled, how to check collection days and report missed collections.

This may be a suitable project for the Tenancy & Neighbourhood Service Improvement Group or one association – the Resident Involvement Team will be able to support this, if residents are interested.

Drug paraphernalia is reported to the estates team and is cleared as a priority. The telephone number in the preamble to this question relates to drug paraphernalia found on and around the highways. For needles etc found in blocks of flats or general Housing land, please contact the Estates Service on tel: 01273 294769

spaces have been applied for as per the current policy. Information on car parking spaces currently available to rent can be found on the Brighton & Hove website. Housing customer services are happy to advise on spaces, please contact us at [housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or on tel: 1273 293030.

### **3\* Items from the East Residents Only Meeting 28/3/18**

#### **Rent and Council Tax payments**

*The meeting acknowledged the written response submitted to the Area Panel on 19<sup>th</sup> February. Housing can no longer accept payments at Post Offices via the Cooperative Bank system and there are many Paypoint locations across the city. However, the Paypoint locations are not always where tenants and residents need them to be.*

*Many older people go to the Post Office every week to withdraw their pension and then immediately pay all their bills. This means they don't have to walk around with unnecessary cash in their purses and wallets. Now that they cannot pay their rent at the Post Office, they have to walk around the town or their local area with cash on them. Many people feel very vulnerable to being robbed in this situation, and the recent attack on a 90 year old resident has exacerbated these fears.*

*The meeting agreed to re-submit this matter to the Area Panel with a request that Housing take the two following actions:*

- *Investigate whether all Post Offices in council housing areas could have a Paypoint so residents can pay their rent and council tax*
- *Investigate what solutions other local housing authorities have found to assist residents who still need to pay their rent and council tax in cash (3\*)*

#### **Response: Lynn Yule, Housing Income Manager, Telephone: 01273 293240**

Thank you for this follow up enquiry and request following one made to the last round of Area Panels on the topic of withdrawal of rent payments at post offices.

I am sorry to hear that there are some tenants who feel vulnerable as a result of the rent payment method they currently use; I am sure that a suitable solution can be found.

Other local housing authorities and social housing landlords have a range of payment options similar to Brighton & Hove City Council. For several years, many of these organisations have discouraged cash payments, particularly over the last decade with public sector spending cuts and the need to achieve efficiencies, because cash payments are the single most expensive way to pay for rent.

While all housing organisations encourage payment by direct debit as it is the most cost effective way to pay, some also incentivise these payments, for example by giving a one off discount when the arrangement is made, and a small number have insisted that all new tenants have to pay by that method only.

Direct debit payments provide efficiency advantages for us as a landlord and higher guarantees that rent due will be paid. For tenants, the advantages of direct debit

payments include peace of mind that the rent will be paid on the due date, not having to go anywhere to do it, not having to think about it, not having to carry cash (as you highlight), and the certain knowledge that if the rent goes up or down then the payment will change after the tenant has received written notification of this.

Having said the above, residents who only have a Post Office Card Account are not able to benefit from direct debit or standing order payments, because this type of account is not a transactional account. The Government assesses that across the country 15% of all benefit claimants and pensioners have a Post Office Card Account, but it has been encouraging everyone who is able to, to open a **current** bank account instead, so that they can benefit from transactional services such as direct debits, standing orders and having a debit card on which goods and services can be paid for using money in the person's account without the need for them to withdraw any cash.

It is worth noting that the Government was going to withdraw all Post Office Card Accounts in 2015, but now has a contract for these accounts until at least November 2021. It has also been for this reason that social landlords have been keen to encourage tenants to pay their rent using more cost effective rent payment methods that are sustainable into the longer term.

While we do not assume that all older people want to operate using cash, we are aware that some people do not want to be on the internet.

The minimum solution that we are therefore keen to assist tenants with, is eradicating the need for them to feel vulnerable carrying cash around by helping them get the support needed to open up a transactional current account. In this way, tenants who do not want to use the internet still have the options of paying through their bank or in a shop that accepts PayPoint payments or simply by paying by telephone.

We have contacted the Post Office to ask if there are any plans for branches in the city to have PayPoint outlets and whether this is something they would consider. However, the Post Office does not offer PayPoint as one of its payment options so there is no chance of any local Post Offices introducing this method of payment. There are around 150 PayPoint outlets in the city, including at both Asda stores and at 22 Co-ops; details of these can be found at [www.paypoint.com/en-gb/consumers/store-locator](http://www.paypoint.com/en-gb/consumers/store-locator) or from the Housing Customer Service team at [housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or 01273 293030.

We would like to offer solutions to all tenants whilst removing the need to carry cash and therefore the need to feel vulnerable. If you are aware of older people who are still using cash only please do ask them to contact the Housing Income Management Team at [housing.incomemanagement@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:housing.incomemanagement@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or 01273 293224. In this way we will be able to offer individualised support to tenants, possibly referring them to the Money Advice Plus service if they need more detailed and independent advice.

## Training

*Residents from around the city were asked to identify courses they would like to attend at Trafford Hall, the National Communities Resource Centre. They have now been advised by the Resident Involvement Team (RIT) that some local training is going to be arranged in-house instead.*

*Those who have previously attended training at Trafford Hall felt that it was of a very high quality and they really benefitted from networking with other tenant activists from around the country.*

*They felt that this was an unnecessary money saving exercise by the RIT.*

*The meeting agreed to submit this matter to the Area Panel, with the proposal that the RIT reconsider the possibility of funding residents to attend training at Trafford Hall. (3\*)*

**Response: Hilary Edgar, Housing Services Operations Manager, Telephone: 01273 293250**

Trafford Hall was funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government to provide low-cost training for tenants of local authorities and housing associations in England, under the Tenant Futures programme. The programme has been scaled back in recent years and no courses are currently advertised for 2018/19.

Although we have supported a handful of residents to attend these courses in the past we are keen to provide training locally. This is not, in itself, a cost cutting exercise, although generally better value for money can be achieved by providing training this way. The courses at Trafford Hall cost £15 and the majority of cost to Housing was on delegates' travel expenses. Holding courses locally means that we have more input to course content and can ensure that information is given about local contacts and resources. It also provides an opportunity for residents from different parts of the city to come together and share good practice.

The Resident Involvement Review identified a need for more training and under the Learn Create Innovate banner in 2017/18 we provided training on writing a blog, social media, permaculture/growing projects, communications, how the Housing Service is structured and how to contact it. We will be running some of these courses again this year and adding in ones on tackling social isolation, accessing council services and how to represent your community.

We also arranged for one representative from each panel area to attend the Chartered Institute of Housing conference in Brighton earlier this year.

We welcome suggestions from residents on training they would like us to provide and feedback on how those who have attended courses put their learning and new knowledge into practice.

A similar question was asked by Resident Inspectors earlier in the year about attending inspector training at Trafford Hall. It turned out that Trafford Hall hadn't provided this training for the last couple of years. If the Resident Inspectors would still like training I would encourage them to raise this through the Home Group and we will provide tailored training within the city.

## **Mears' Repair Service**

*Janet gave three examples of poor service from Mears and their lack of coordination with other contractors.*

- a . *She called Mears early one morning because the lock broke on her door, meaning that she couldn't lock it. The door had been fitted by Anglia less than 3 years ago and was still under warranty. She was told somebody would be out within 24 hours. This meant she had to arrange for somebody to come and sit in her house whilst she went out to work. By 6.30pm nobody had arrived so she called the out-of-hours service, who initially said they had no record of the job. They did eventually find it and a worker came out to carry out a temporary repair. She was then given an appointment for a week later for the repair to be done properly. When the worker came out this time he said that he was just going to measure up and couldn't actually do the repair. She has now been told that Anglia will come out, but 16 days later the repair still hasn't been done.*
- b . *A resident in Bexhill Road had a burst pipe in her bathroom during the cold weather. The ceiling came down and the electrics were affected. She phoned Mears and they took 5 hours to get there, despite her being in the house with young children and faulty electrics. When they came out they were unable to repair the electrics and she was left without electrics for 5 days.*
- c . *New windows are being fitted in Foxdown Road. The work was all completed by December 2017 except for one house where there is believed to be asbestos. The tenants have now been waiting months for their home to be inspected to confirm if there is asbestos present and whether they can have their new windows fitted.*

*There is concern that Mears are not operating in the best interests of Brighton & Hove City Council or tenants in the following ways:*

- *The maximum time for the completion of emergency repairs has changed from 4 hours to 24 hours*

- *Mears don't have a dedicated out-of-hours team for Brighton & Hove, but have one team covering the whole region from Portsmouth, to Eastbourne to Horsham - this delays the time it can take for work to be done.*
- *People feel that Mears may be leaving Emergency repairs to be done by the out-of-hours service as they get paid more for these jobs.*

*The meeting agreed to raise this matter at the Area Panel with a request that Housing take the two following actions:*

- *Clarify when the maximum time for the completion of emergency repairs was changed from 4 hours to 24 hours*
- *Explain what action is being taken to hold Mears to account for its poor responses to emergency call-outs. (3\*)*

**Response: Perrin Horne, Customer Services Manager, Property & Investment, tel: 01273 294641**

Thank you for sharing these three examples from Woodingdean. Resident representatives are reminded of the three step process to report, and escalate, repair issues. This is designed to help reps. get a quick response to queries they receive and to help them deal with enquiries they get from their association members. A copy of the process is attached at the end of these responses.

In terms of the questions raised based on these examples, I can advise:

### **Emergency repairs**

Mears are, and have always been, contracted to attend to 'Emergency' priority repairs within 24 hours. This doesn't always mean that the repair is completed within this time, but the emergency issue will be 'made safe' so that the repair can go ahead after the emergency situation has been addressed. This has not changed. All other repairs are raised as a 'routine' and will be responded to within 20 days. This is also unchanged.

### **Contract Monitoring**

The council's Business & Performance team in Property & Investment monitor Mears' emergency response times and they are performing very well. We have no issues where Mears have not attended to a reported emergency out of timescale.

### **Fly tipping by Mears**

*Mears have been bringing rubbish from one house they are working on and dumping it in the garden of a house near Kipling Avenue. This makes the area very unsightly.*



*The issue of Mears leaving rubbish in the gardens of properties they are working on has been raised before and there is an agreement that rubbish should be removed within a day. It seems that this is not happening consistently.*

*The meeting agreed to raise this matter to the Area Panel with a request that Housing clarify what Mears obligations are regarding the removal of rubbish from properties they are working on. (2\*)*

**Response: Perrin Horne, Customer Services Manager, Property & Investment, tel: 01273 294641**

Mears aim to remove rubbish from properties on the same day or if this is not possible, the following day. Any examples of issues should be referred using the tenant representative repairs' process attached.

### 3\* Items from the North Residents Only Meeting 5/4/18

#### City Clean

*The meeting felt that there are still a lot of problems with the service provided by City Clean. Although the bad weather had made things difficult for a couple of weeks this could not be used to explain failures that have been going on for much longer.*

*The following examples were given:*

- In Elwyn Jones Court the bins were overflowing because they had not been collected. When this was reported they were told that it was a problem in the whole of Patcham.*
- The recycling bins at Nettleton Lodge and Dudeney Court were not collected for 4 weeks.*
- In Southmount, Hollingdean, the rubbish and recycling wasn't collected for weeks. City Clean have an arrangement with Des, chair of the Residents Association, for him to unlock the shed when they are due to come out. On one occasion somebody had re-locked the door, but on another it was definitely unlocked, but the City Clean workers said it was locked and didn't collect the rubbish or recycling.  
They then collected the recycling, but said the rubbish was piled too high and so they couldn't take it. This left the Residents Association having to complain again to get this resolved.*
- A tenant in Birdham Road gets an assisted collection – one day City Clean walked into his garden, looked at his bin, then left again without emptying the bin.*
- When recycling days were changed some people received notification and some didn't. Examples were given for North Moulsecoomb and East Central Moulsecoomb areas.*

*The meeting decided to request the attendance of City Clean at the next Area Panel to address residents' concerns.*

*In particular, the following issues need to be clarified and addressed:*

- The council have made a commitment not to cut funding for refuse and recycling collections. Has this commitment been kept, and if so, why is the level of service not being maintained?*
- Residents would like to see more staff employed on permanent contracts and are concerned by the growing number of temporary agency staff. They do not know the area well enough to carry out their job adequately, and do not give value for money. What is the Council's policy on this?*

- *Residents are concerned by the use of long contracts, such as the 25 year contract given to Veolia. This means the contractors have little incentive to provide a good service to residents. What is the Council's policy on length of contract? (3\*)*

**Response: Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, tel: 01273 293250**

Damian Marmura, Head of Operations, City Clean is attending the North Panel Housing and will address point one above at its meeting on 22 May 2018 and other issues raised by residents. This will include feeding back on the recent walkabout he had with members of the East Central Moulsecoomb Tenants' and Residents' Association.

In terms of the other two points we have been given the following information:

### **Employment contracts**

The council's Head of Human Resources advises that the Council's recruitment policy supports the employment of permanent staff where possible, and really only the use of fixed term or other temporary staff if necessary for business / operational reasons, or sometimes as a redesign of service is planned.

### **Contract durations**

The council's Procurement Manager for City Services & Infrastructure advises : 'Procurement policy on length of contact is dictated by the budget allocation for that particular service or goods that we are procuring, procurement will also factor in possible future market innovations as with software solutions etc. Collaboration with other agencies around economies of scale is also considered when procuring similar services and or shared services when deciding the length of a contract. So it's not a one size fits all scenario.

With PFI projects like the Veolia contract, the contract length is considerable because the provider has to make significant financial investments usually up front, as with the cost of the waste transfer site at Peacehaven (£160M) so the contract length for this contract was designed so the provider could eventually recoup their considerable financial investment, and then allow for some profit to be realised, remembering they are commercial organisations and have to address their own financial stability & profit to their stakeholders.

The Veolia PFI contract was initially let for 25 years back in 2003 but has since been extended by another 5 years to allow for the above. As for the contractor Veolia not having incentive to provide good services to residents, I would imagine that the Veolia contract manager has a relationship with our BHCC contract manager at City

Clean. That contract manager will be monitoring the performance of the contract and will have at his or her disposal an agreed service level agreement, and key performance indicators built into the contract which will help them to monitor the contract and provide them with quarterly management information about the success of the contract.

If residents have issues that they need addressed, I would suggest they contact the City Clean contract manager to highlight those issues, then he or she can highlight them to the contractor'.

## **Estate Inspections**

*There are concerns that Estate Inspections are not happening regularly and the tasks specified in the inspections are not being followed up effectively by officers. When inspections are carried out a list of issues and actions is produced, which is on the council website at: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/housing/council-housing/estate-inspections>*

*However for most issues a letter is sent to a resident about an issue, but there is no evidence that officers then follow this up with a visit to ensure that matter has been resolved.*

*It is believed that the new Field Officer team of seven workers (due to commence June 2018) will have some responsibility for Estate Inspections and enforcement and it is hoped that this will improve the follow up of issues identified on Estate Inspections.*

*The meeting agreed to submit this to the agenda setting meeting for the next Area Panel. It is requested that the process for following up issues identified on Estate Inspections be investigated and clarification be given on how this will change when the Field Officer team comes into effect. (3\*)*

**Response: Michael Raywood, Housing Manager – North Housing Team, tel: 01273 290674**

Thank you for your enquiry, now that I have had opportunity to investigate the matter I can confirm the following:

For 2018 all estate inspections for the council's north housing area have been completed. If however an inspection has to be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions or staff sickness it is rescheduled at the earliest date.

During an estate inspection various repairs and maintenance issues are reported to the relevant teams. Also, any if any aspects of tenancy breach is identified the Housing Officer will contact the tenant to address the issue. If there is persistent or significant breach of tenancy such as overgrown or untidy gardens the council will

raise a case for a Housing Officer to investigate and identify the necessary course of action. In some instances, this may result in tenancy enforcement such as seeking an injunction, or as in many cases it will result in identifying the necessary support. This can be a challenging and time consuming aspect of intervention due to a variety of complex issues that may be identified during a visit, such as vulnerability and lack of finance. In such cases an officer will endeavour to explore various options to bring about a remedy.

At this juncture I am unable to comment on how the Field Officer Team will affect the way in which estate inspections are carried out and remedial works reported, however Housing Panels will be updated on this when the information is available.

I hope that this information helps with your enquiry if however you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

